

Television Food and Beverage Marketing to Children in Costa Rica: Is a Regulatory Policy Needed?



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BACKGROUND

- Childhood overweight and obesity is a global public health concern, affecting 21.4% and 20.8% of Costa Rican children (5-12 years of age) and adolescents (13-19 years of age), respectively¹.
- Marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages (i.e. those high in saturated fat, sugar and/or sodium) has been shown to influence children's food preferences and consumption^{2,3}.
- WHO and PAHO have recommended the restriction of this type of marketing towards children, calling on national governments to take leadership and implement actions accordingly^{4,5}.
- Little is known, however, regarding the extend of the problem (i.e. unhealthy food and beverage marketing) in Costa Rica. Therefore, the inputs that would allow the design of an informed policy are lacking.

STUDY PURPOSE

This study aimed to examine the **extent** and **nature** of television food advertisements which children are likely to be exposed to, as well as the nutrition profile of the foods and beverages advertised in Costa Rica.

METHODS

- Television data were recorded for **four weekdays** and **four weekend days**, between 6:00 am and midnight, for four channels (two national and two cable). Channels were selected based on audience measurement data and a clear focus on children (i.e. cartoon channels).
- We obtained a total sample of **576 hours of television broadcasting**, during the months of September and November 2016.
- Food and beverage ads were classified in "permitted" and "not permitted", based on nutritional criteria published by WHO (European system), following the detailed review of the nutritional labels of the promoted products⁶.
- Frequency** of announcements and **type of products** promoted per hour were compared to audience (information available for national channels only).
- According to **marketing persuasion techniques**, two major groups were identified:
 - Premium offers: contests, sweepstakes, vouchers, discounts.
 - Promotional characters: celebrities, cartoon characters, sports teams, etc.
- Also we identified: **Brand benefits claims**: Sensory based characteristics, new brand development, suggested use, etc. and **Brand healthy claims**: Health related ingredients, nutrient content, nutrient comparative, general health, etc.

WHAT DID WE FIND?

- Across all channels, **8980 advertisements (ads) were identified**, of which 20.73% were for foods and beverages (F&B).
- On average, the two national channels presented 70.9 (SD=19.2) F&B ads/day on weekdays, and 29.8/day (SD=16.2) on weekends; whereas the two cable channels resulted in a mean 57.6 (SD=16.6) F&B ads/day on weekdays and 74.6 (SD=31.8) F&B ads/day on weekends.

Figure 1. Proportion of Food and Beverage Ads for which Marketing is Not Permitted according to WHO Guidelines (%)

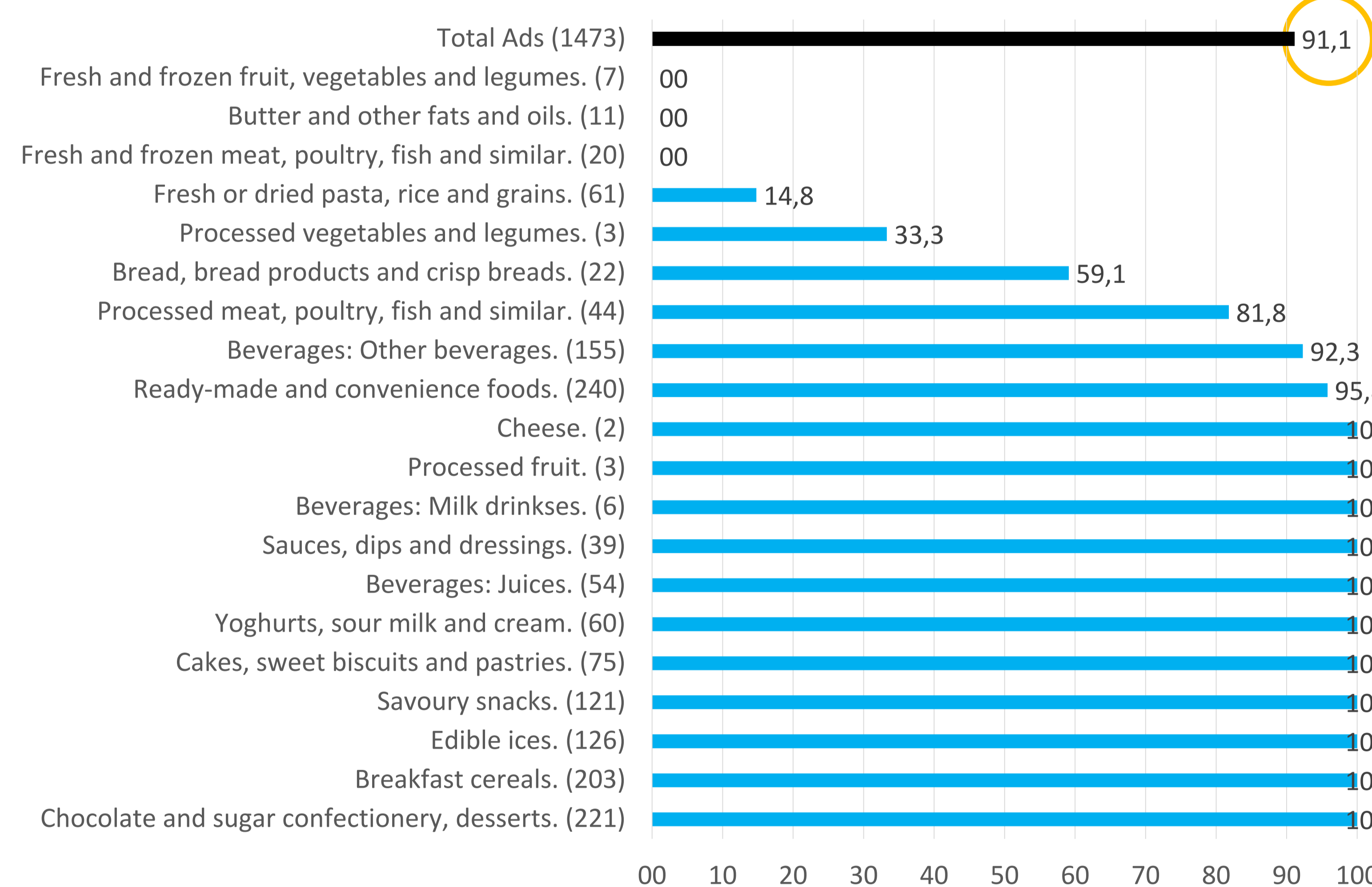
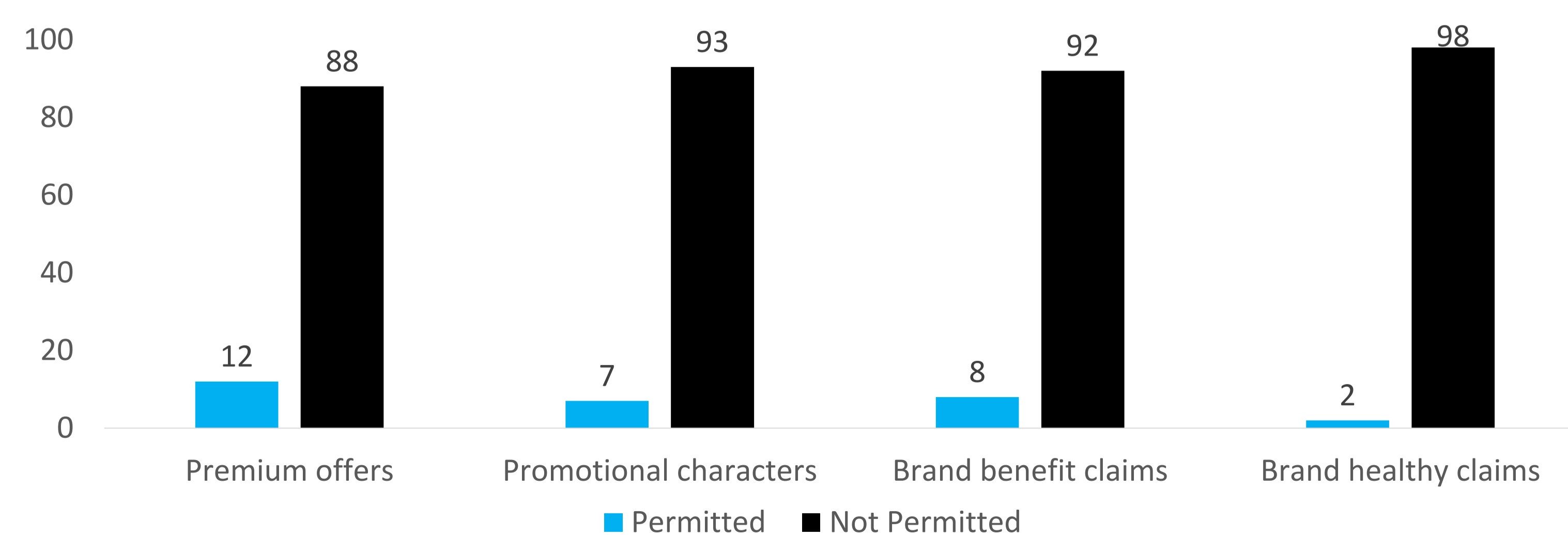


Figure 2. Presence of Persuasive Marketing Techniques in Food and Beverages according to WHO Classification (%)**

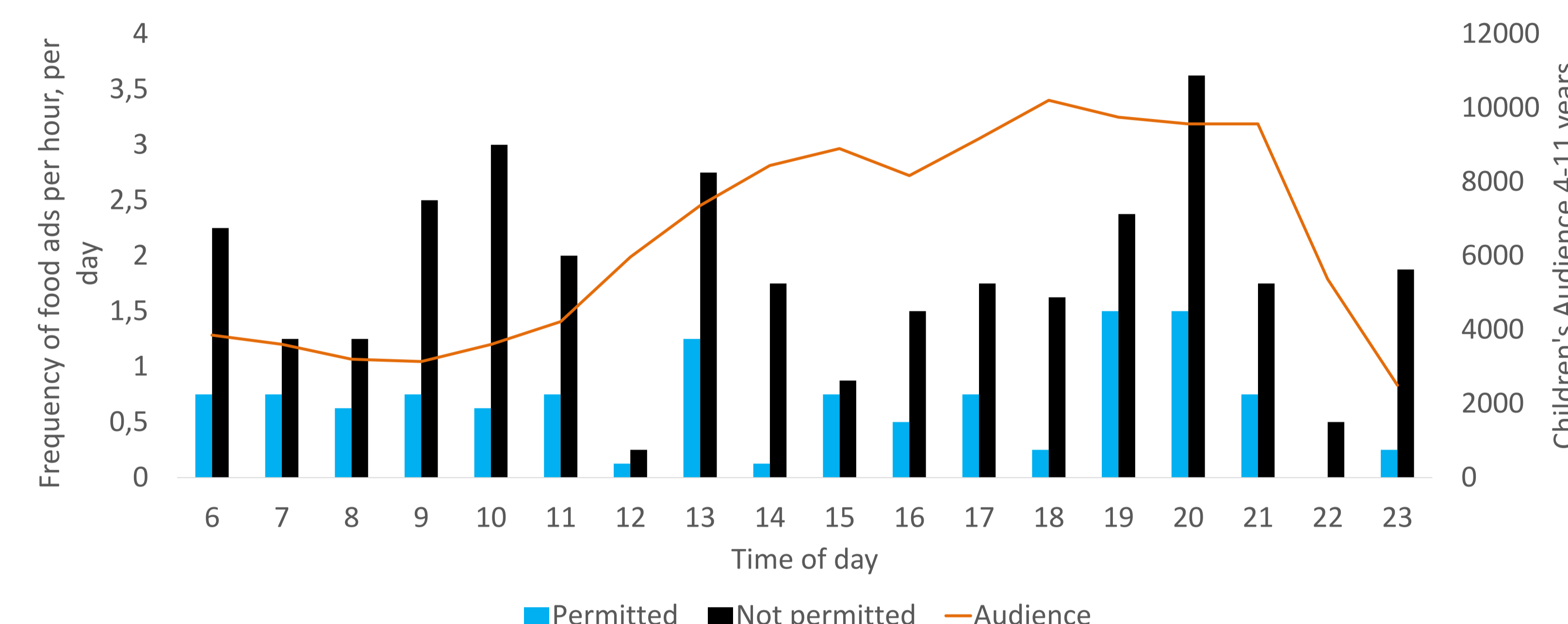


**All comparison differences were statistically significant, p < 0.05

REFERENCES AND FUNDING DISCLOSURE

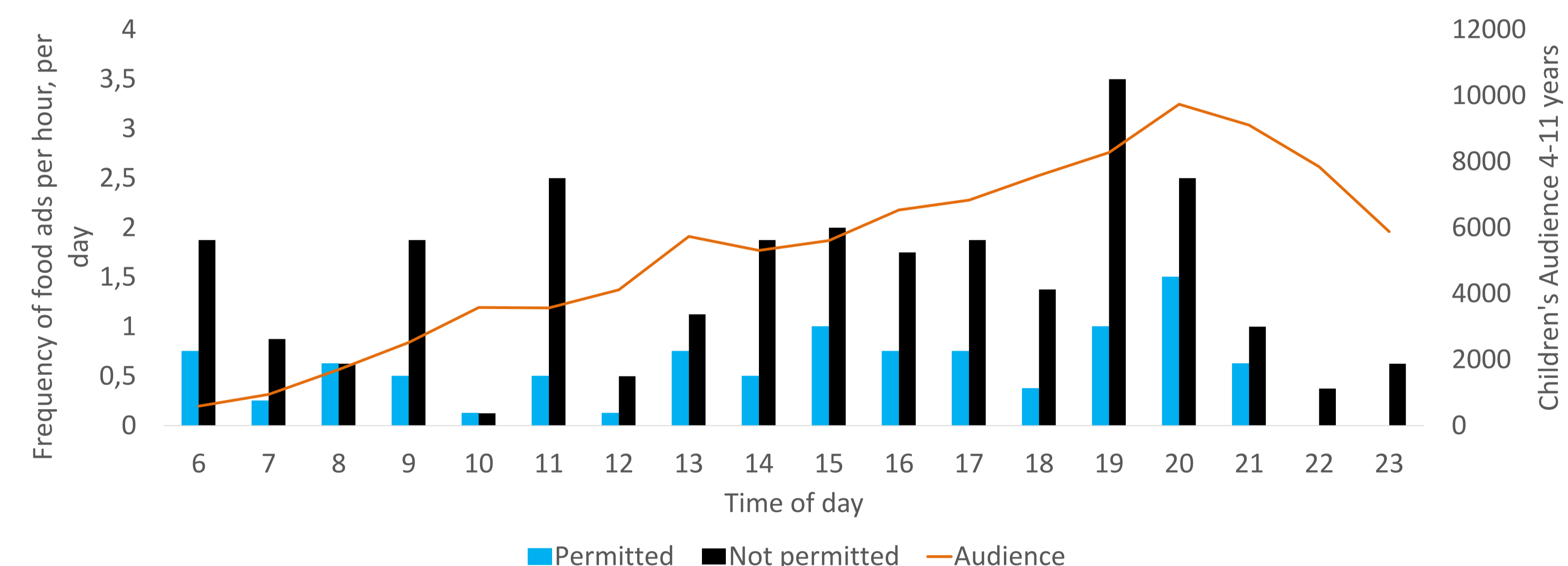
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Figure 3. Comparison of Average Food and Beverage Ads per Hour according to WHO Classification in National Channels on Weekdays*



*Children's peak viewing times were only available for national channels.

Figure 4. Comparison of Average Food and Beverage Ads per Hour according to WHO Classification in National Channels on Weekends*



*Children's peak viewing times were only available for national channels.

CONCLUSION

Children and adolescents living in Costa Rica are exposed to television marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages daily. Due to the link between food marketing, preferences and consumption, our findings help justify the need for regulatory actions by national authorities.

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