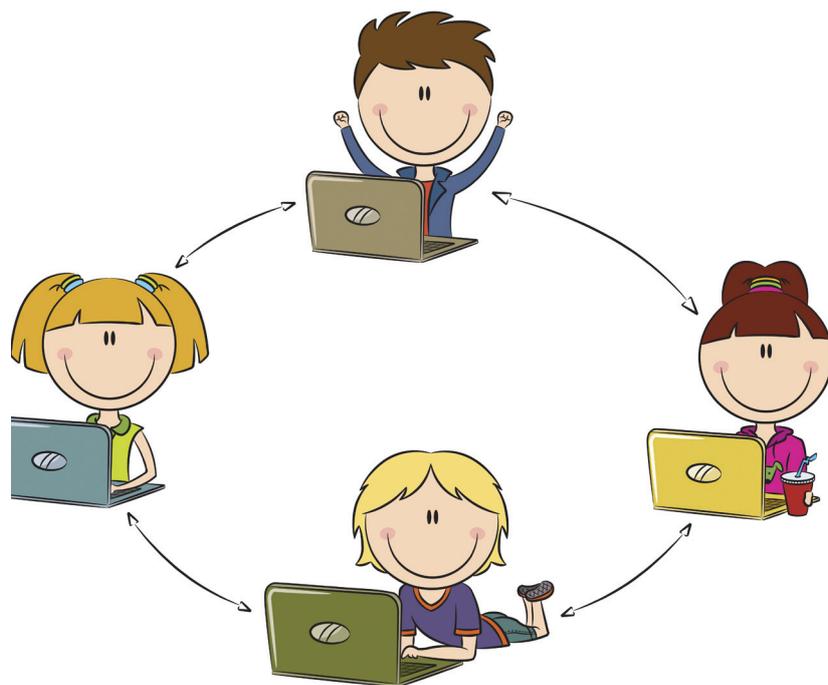


2014

EU PLEDGE SURVEY



EASA

EASA – the European Advertising Standards Alliance is the single authoritative voice of advertising self-regulation. EASA promotes high ethical standards in commercial communications by means of effective self-regulation for the benefit of consumers and business. For further information, please visit: www.easa-alliance.org.

As a non-profit organisation based in Brussels, EASA brings together national advertising self-regulatory organisations and associations representing the advertising industry in Europe.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Project Overview.....	5
Methodology.....	6
Note from the Independent Reviewer.....	7
Important Note.....	9
Executive Summary.....	9
1 Introductory Remarks	10
1.1 General Information	10
2 Findings	11
2.1 Product Promotion.....	11
2.2 Age Screening/Parental Consent.....	11
2.3 Licensed Characters/Tie-ins	12
2.4 Games/Entertainment Activities.....	14
2.5 Animations, Sound Effects and Videos	15
2.6 Toys Used as Premiums	16
3 Compliance with the EU Pledge Criteria	17
4 Breaches of Advertising Codes/Laws	19

Figures

Figure 1: Number of websites featuring age screening (N=326)	11
Figure 2: Types of age screening/parental consent (N=45)	11
Figure 3: Number of websites featuring licensed characters/tie-ins (N=326)	12
Figure 4: Main indicators for licensed characters/tie-ins considered primarily appealing to under-12s (N=22).....	13
Figure 5: Number of websites featuring games/entertainment activities (N=326)	14
Figure 6: Main indicators for games/entertainment activities considered primarily appealing to under-12s (N=29)	14
Figure 7: Number of websites featuring animation (N=326).....	15
Figure 8: Main indicators for animations considered primarily appealing to under-12s (N=28)	15
Figure 9: Number of websites featuring toys used as premiums (N=326).....	16
Figure 10: Number of websites in breach of the EU Pledge criteria (N=326).....	17
Figure 11: Elements of websites primarily appealing to under-12s (N=11).....	18
Figure 12: Number of websites potentially breaching advertising codes/laws (N=326).....	19
Figure 13: Potential breaches of advertising codes/laws (N=22).....	20

Tables

Table 1: List of participating countries/SROs	5
Table 2: List of the EU Pledge member companies	5
Table 3: Number of websites reviewed per country.....	10

Introduction

EASA was commissioned by the World Federation of Advertisers (WFA) and the EU Pledge Secretariat to review a number of food and beverage brand websites belonging to the EU Pledge¹ member companies. The goal of the project was to determine whether the company-owned websites reviewed were compliant with the relevant EU Pledge Commitment.

Compliance with the EU Pledge Commitment is determined as follows:

- The website features marketing communications;
- Such marketing communications promote food or beverage products (as opposed to a brand in general);
- Such food and beverage products meet or do not meet the EU Pledge companies' nutritional criteria;
- Such marketing communications are designed to be targeted primarily at children under 12.

In order to offer unbiased, independent and accountable results, a 'consumer-oriented approach' was drawn up by the EASA Secretariat in collaboration with the EU Pledge Secretariat and the independent reviewer of this exercise, Dr. Verónica Donoso². Advertising self-regulation experts were requested to try and think from the perspective of a child younger than 12 while reviewing brand websites and keep in mind what a child of this age would find interesting and attractive. Special attention had to be paid to specific aspects of the websites that would make them appealing to under- 12s.

¹ The EU Pledge is a voluntary commitment of leading food and non-alcoholic beverage companies to limit their advertising to children under 12 to products that meet specific nutritional standards (as defined by each company). The EU Pledge is a response from industry leaders to calls made by the EU institutions for the food industry to use commercial communications to support parents in making the right diet and lifestyle choices for their children. The EU Pledge programme is endorsed and supported by the World Federation of Advertisers.

² Verónica Donoso (PhD) is Post-doctoral researcher at the Interdisciplinary Centre for Law and ICT (ICRI), KU Leuven, iMinds. Her main areas of expertise are user experience research, children and young people's uses of new media and e-safety. Verónica has worked on a number of European and Belgian projects, including the EU Kids Online I, II and III. She also coordinated the 2nd Assessment of the Safer Social Networking Principles for the EU.

Project Overview

Experts from ten European self-regulatory organisations (SROs) were invited by EASA and the EU Pledge Secretariat to conduct the monitoring exercise in July and August 2014 in order to assess the appeal of marketer-owned websites to children under 12. The ten chosen SROs represent different systems in terms of size (big vs. small SROs), location (geographical coverage) and maturity (new vs. old systems).

Table 1: List of participating countries/SROs

Country	SRO	Date of Establishment
Belgium	JEP	1974
Czech Republic	CRPR	1994
France	ARPP	1935
Germany	DW	1972
Hungary	ÖRT	1996
Netherlands	SRC	1964
Poland	RR	2006
Portugal	ICAP	1991
Spain	AUTOCONTROL	1977
UK	CAP	1962

Self-regulation experts from SROs in France, Germany, Netherlands and the UK each reviewed 40 national brand websites of EU Pledge company members; 39 brand websites were reviewed in Poland, including where available at least two websites per company. 30 brand websites were reviewed in Belgium and 29 in Czech Republic and in Spain; in Portugal and Hungary, 20 and 19 websites were reviewed respectively. In countries where 30 or less websites were reviewed, this included, where available, at least one website per company. Corporate websites³ were excluded from the exercise.

Table 2: List of the EU Pledge member companies

EU Pledge Signatories	
Coca-Cola	Burger King
Ferrero	DANONE
FrieslandCampina	Intersnack
Mondelez International	Lorenz Snack-World
Kellogg's	EstrellaMaarud ⁴
McDonald's	KiMs (owned by Orkla Confectionery & Snacks) ⁵
Mars	General Mills
Nestlé	Zweifel Pomy-Chip
PepsiCo	Unichips-San Carlo

³ A corporate website is a general informational website operated by a company.

⁴ No products available in the market.

⁵ No products available in the market.

EU Pledge Signatories

Unilever

Quick Group

Methodology

For the markets selected for monitoring, the EU Pledge Secretariat provided EASA with a list of all products promoted by the EU Pledge member companies. The list indicated whether or not these products met the applicable nutritional criteria set out in the EU Pledge. From this, EASA compiled a list of websites that promoted products that do not meet the nutritional criteria; from EASA's list, the self-regulatory experts selected websites to review. When making their selection, reviewers were requested to take into account products popular amongst children in their country.

EASA, the EU Pledge Secretariat and independent reviewer Dr. Verónica Donoso, developed a methodology for self-regulatory experts to follow when completing a standard compliance questionnaire for each website selected. The methodology and questionnaire were developed to ensure objectivity and consistency across the project.

The questionnaire asked the self-regulatory experts if the website being reviewed contained elements, such as games/entertainment activities⁶, animations/sound effects/videos, licensed characters and toys and to decide if these were in their view primarily designed for children under 12. Reviewers then had to judge if these elements, in conjunction with the creative execution of the website (i.e. simplicity of language, use of font size and typeface, use of colours, etc.), were clearly intended to make the marketing communication(s) on the website primarily appealing to under-12s.

A number of websites contained features to screen the age of visitors to the website; the reviewers were asked to note if a website contained such features. However, this element was not considered to be sufficient to ensure compliance if the marketing communications on the website were clearly designed to appeal primarily to children under 12.

On the basis of the level of appeal of the creative execution to under-12s as well as the overall findings reported by the self-regulatory experts, EASA determined the final compliance of the websites with the EU Pledge criteria.

Beyond compliance with the EU Pledge, the self-regulatory experts also flagged any items on a website that potentially breached any applicable advertising codes or relevant legislation:

The following were taken into account:

- ICC Framework for Responsible Food and Beverage Marketing Communications;
- Relevant advertising standards and national sectoral codes;
- Relevant advertising laws.

All reviews were performed by self-regulatory experts from national SROs; EASA's role in the project was to ensure that the results were reported in a consistent manner.

⁶ A game/entertainment activity is an activity engaged for diversion or amusement. A non-exhaustive list of games/entertainment activities are: online games which are played over the Internet, games such as Casual/Social Games, Puzzles, Board Games, Role-Playing Games Show, Trivia, Card Games, Racing, Arcade, colouring sheets, activity sheets, Do it yourself activities, etc.

Note from the Independent Reviewer

This monitoring exercise attempted to assess whether company-owned websites are compliant with the EU Pledge commitment. This year's results seem quite positive compared to previous editions of this assessment. A total of 326 national brand websites containing product promotion and featuring at least one product not compliant with the nutritional criteria were evaluated. Of these, only 11 websites (3%) were considered in breach of the EU Pledge as they contained elements such as games or entertainment activities, toys used as premiums, animations, videos, sound effects designed primarily for under-12s, as well as language, text or navigation clearly intended to make the marketing communications on the website appealing primarily to children under 12.

Last year's monitoring identified more non-compliant websites, 22 in total, accounting for 6% of the sample. We must be cautious though when interpreting these results because of the differences between the samples of websites reviewed. On the one hand, the countries participating in this year's assessment are not the same and, therefore, cultural differences relating to marketing practices may play a role in the review. On the other hand, the methodologies employed differ slightly, like, for instance, criteria regarding non-complaint product promotion were further specified.

It is also interesting to observe some emerging trends. For instance, more websites were employing age-screening mechanisms (14% this year vs. 8% last year), more websites featured licensed characters (15% this year vs. 9% last year), but less websites targeted children under 12. There was also a considerable presence of games or entertainment activities on websites (22% this year vs. 24% last year), however, only 9% were considered as primarily appealing to young children, as opposed to 15% last year. A high increase in the amount of websites displaying animations was observed (60% this year vs. 21% last year), although only 9% were assessed as designed to appeal primarily to children under 12. The amount of websites using toys as premiums remained low (5% this year vs. 4% last year).

On the basis of these results, we can conclude that, in general, the industry takes measures to ensure compliance with the EU Pledge. This is particularly evident when looking at the high increase of the age-screening mechanisms present on brand-owned websites as well as the low number of websites featuring toys used as premiums. Nevertheless, it is also important to note that even though current age-screening mechanisms can be useful, especially with very young children (e.g. children who still do not know how to read), there is no evidence available demonstrating their effectiveness as gate-keepers with older children. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that age-screening is a helpful feature, but, on its own, it cannot be considered as a sufficient tool to prevent children from accessing inappropriate online content.

Another important aspect to take into consideration is the fact that even though at first glance the results of the assessment seem positive, there are still important methodological issues to consider. For instance, the fact that a website is not designed to appeal "primarily" to children under 12 does not necessarily mean that the website is not attractive to younger children at all. Furthermore, the frequent presence of animations, licensed characters and games make the results of this year's monitoring somehow worrying. In particular, a

number of borderline cases were identified. They were not considered as being in breach of the EU Pledge, however, many of these compliant websites seemed highly attractive to young children (and the general population), especially because they contained funny videos, entertaining music, animations or games that would typically appeal children younger than 12 even though their content may be targeting a 12+ audience.

The rapid evolution of digital technologies, their ubiquitous and interconnected nature as well as the fact that more and more young children (0-8 years old) are using digital technologies on an everyday basis demands the continuous review of the objectives set by the EU Pledge. As pointed out in previous editions of this monitoring exercise, it seems timely to expand the scope of this monitoring exercise to other platforms such as social networking sites, photo or video-sharing applications (e.g. YouTube) and even to downloadable applications. Nowadays, it is common for many product or brand websites to employ social media as powerful mechanism for marketing, advertising or to increase customer-loyalty. Indeed, some of the websites evaluated in this report featured hyperlinks to social media or video-sharing platforms such as Facebook, Twitter or YouTube, some of which contained features highly appealing to children younger than 12. Furthermore, apps have also become popular among very young children given the advent and penetration of mobile technologies such as tablets, and smartphones. It would be, therefore, also important to evaluate this impact.

I would like to emphasise the need of extending the scope of the assessment so as to account for a broader set of online services and platforms. If the current methodology was not updated to include these “indirect” forms of promoting products, the quality, exhaustiveness and credibility of this exercise might be at risk. As a final recommendation, I would like to stress, once again, that more reliable results would be obtained if tests with children were carried out in order to assess the appeal of specific websites (or elements thereof). The fact that the results presented in this report are based solely on the evaluation carried out by adults presents obvious limitations to the review.

Lastly, I would like to highlight EASA’s and the participating self-regulatory experts’ professionalism and dedication during the monitoring exercise. In particular, I would like to thank them for carrying out a rigorous evaluation. This is indispensable for an objective, critical and transparent assessment of a self-regulatory initiative like the EU Pledge. I would also like to stress the importance of monitoring exercises such as EU Pledge Survey; as they serve to foster the effective implementation of self-regulatory practices, while encouraging responsible marketing communication which take into account children’s vulnerabilities, needs and rights.

Dr. Verónica Donoso

Important Note

EASA, in collaboration with the EU Pledge Secretariat and independent reviewer Dr. Verónica Donoso, has taken great care to ensure that the results of this project are objective and consistent.

To do this, a detailed methodology was developed; it was then applied by all self-regulatory experts when assessing the websites. However, although it may be relatively easy to determine if a website appeals to children in general, it is much harder to determine if a website is designed to appeal primarily to children younger than twelve. As a result, the decisions of the self-regulatory experts retain an unavoidable degree of subjectivity, although it is informed by their extensive day-to-day professional experience. Readers are requested to bear this in mind.

Executive Summary

- A total of 326 national brand websites were reviewed.
- All of the websites reviewed contained product promotion and featured at least one product that was not compliant with the nutritional criteria.
- Out of the 326 websites, 11 were considered in breach of the EU Pledge as they contained elements, such as games or entertainment activities, toys used as premiums or animations, videos, sound effects designed primarily for under-12s as well as language, text or navigation clearly intended to make the marketing communications on the website appealing primarily to under-12s.
 - Ten websites contained animations, videos or sound effects that were considered to be designed to appeal primarily to under-12s.
 - Seven websites featured games or entertainment activities that were considered to be designed to appeal primarily to under-12s.
 - Five websites exhibited licensed characters that were considered to be designed to target primarily under-12s.
 - Three websites were connected to a toy that was considered to be designed to appeal primarily to under-12s.
- 13 out of the 326 websites reviewed contained items that were in breach of advertising codes or relevant advertising laws. In total, 22 problematic items were flagged by the self-regulation experts.

1 Introductory Remarks

1.1 General Information

The table below provides an overview of the number of websites that were reviewed per country. A total of 326 websites were reviewed by self-regulation experts.

Table 3: Number of websites reviewed per country

Country	Number of Websites Reviewed
Belgium	30
Czech Republic	29
France	40
Germany	40
Hungary	19
Netherlands	40
Poland	39
Portugal	20
Spain	29
UK	40
TOTAL	326

2 Findings

2.1 Product Promotion

The reviewers identified product promotion on all of the 326 websites reviewed. All websites reviewed featured at least one product that did not meet the nutritional criteria set by the companies.

2.2 Age Screening/Parental Consent

45 brand websites out of 326 reviewed contained mechanisms to screen the age of the website visitor. Methods ranged from a field where the visitor had to enter his/her date of birth to a pop-up asking whether the visitor was older than a certain age.

Figure 1: Number of websites featuring age screening (N=326)

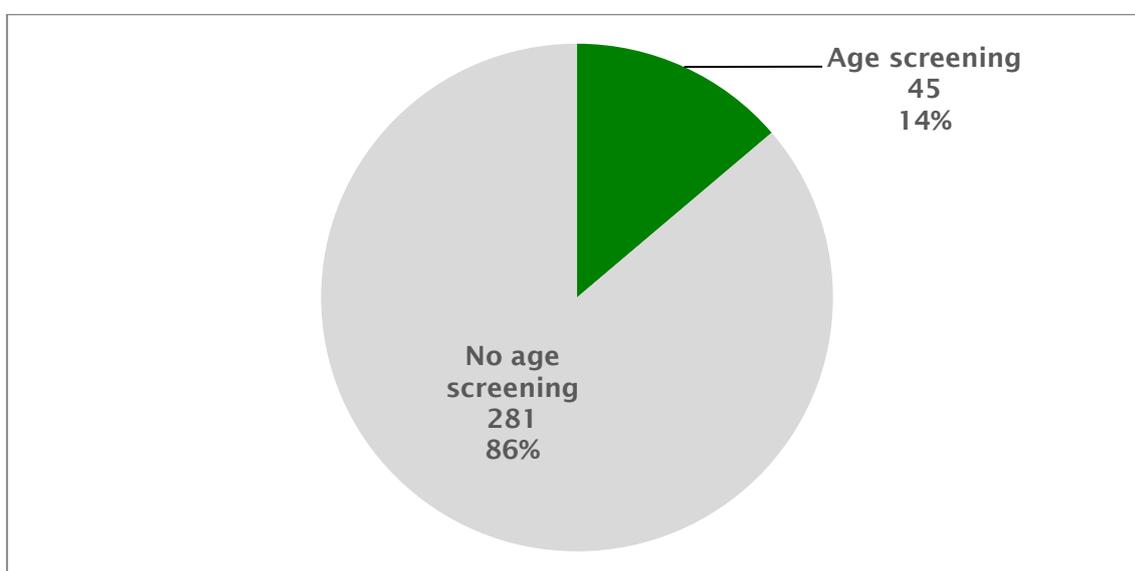
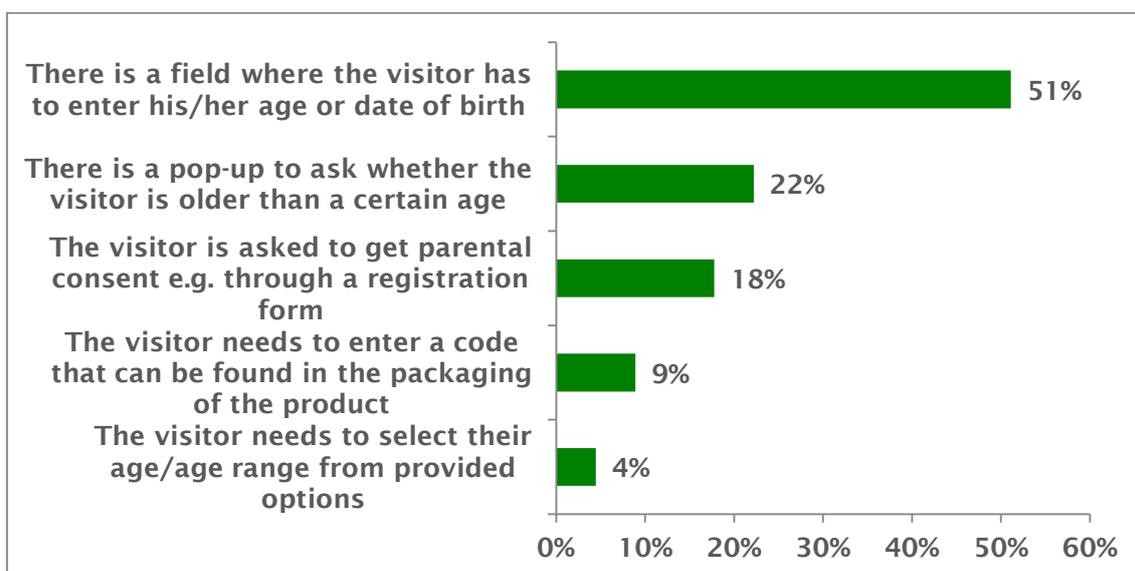


Figure 2: Types of age screening/parental consent (N=45)

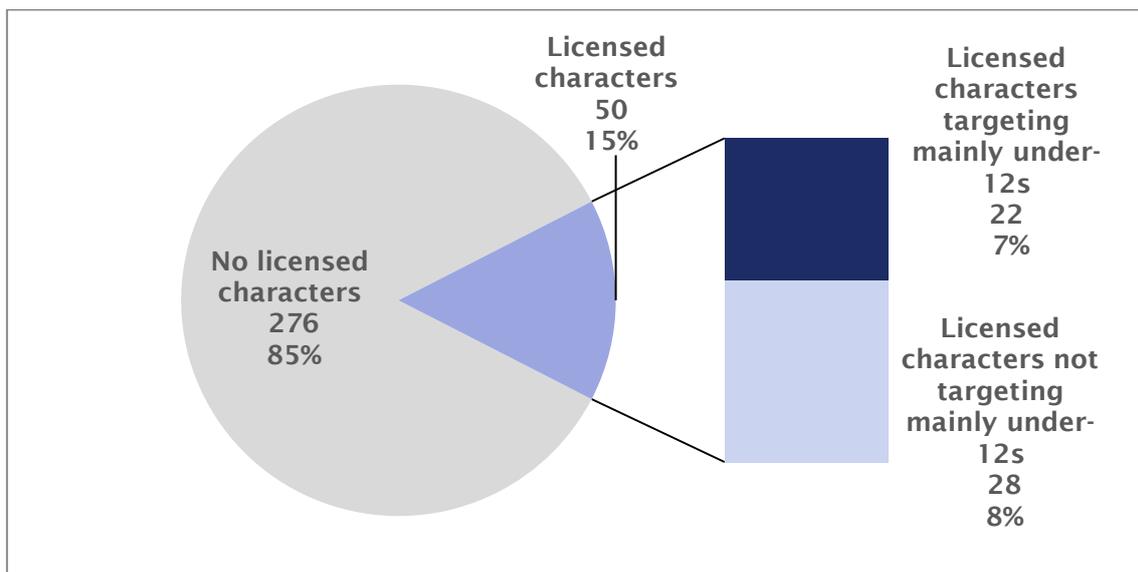


2.3 Licensed Characters/Tie-ins

The reviewers checked if the websites or the children's section(s) of the website featured "licensed characters", i.e. characters acquired externally and linked for example to movies, cartoons or sports, or if they featured movie tie-ins as a means to promote a food or beverage.

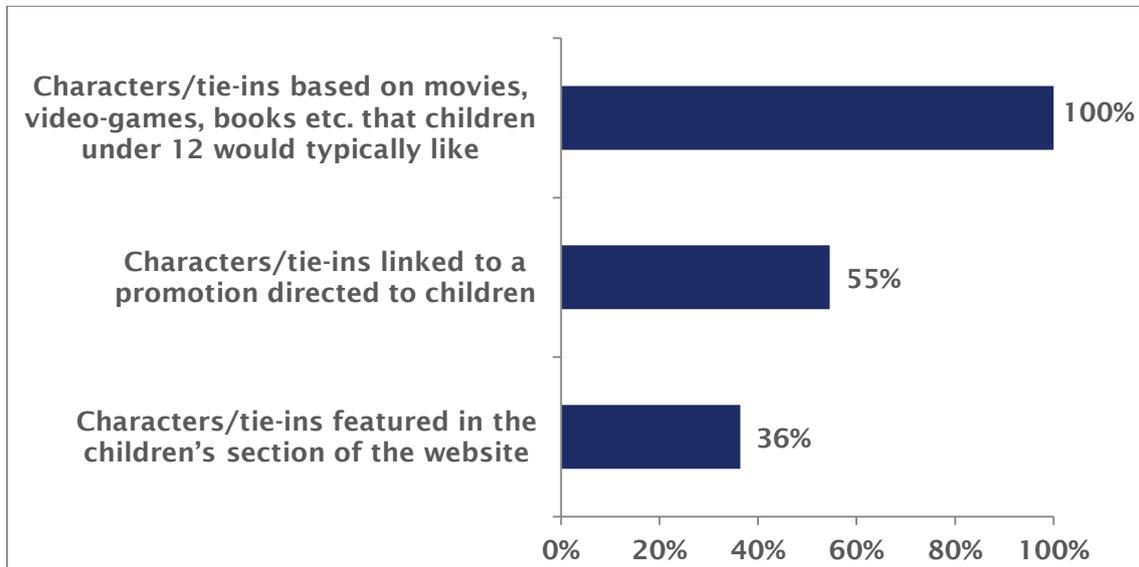
50 out of the 326 websites featured licensed characters/tie-ins and the reviewers considered that in 22 instances these characters/tie-ins were designed to target primarily children under 12. In addition, 20 of these websites used the licensed characters/tie-ins to promote food or beverages.

Figure 3: Number of websites featuring licensed characters/tie-ins (N=326)



Reasons as to why the reviewers considered the licensed characters/tie-ins to be appealing primarily to under-12s are featured in the following chart. The combination of several of these criteria is a strong indicator that the licensed character is primarily appealing to young children.

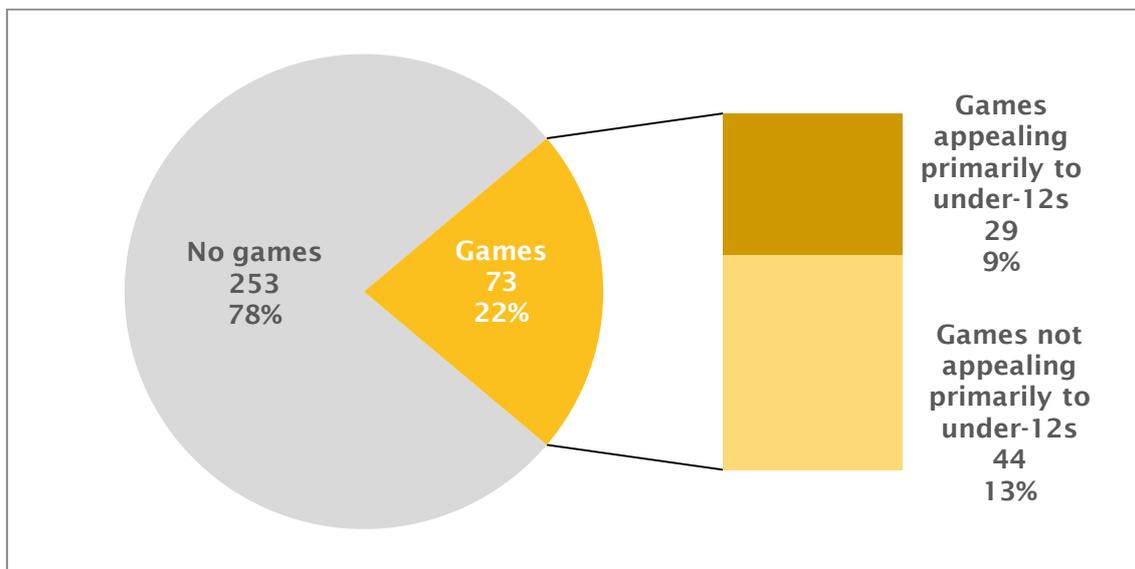
Figure 4: Main indicators for licensed characters/tie-ins considered primarily appealing to under-12s (N=22)



2.4 Games/Entertainment Activities

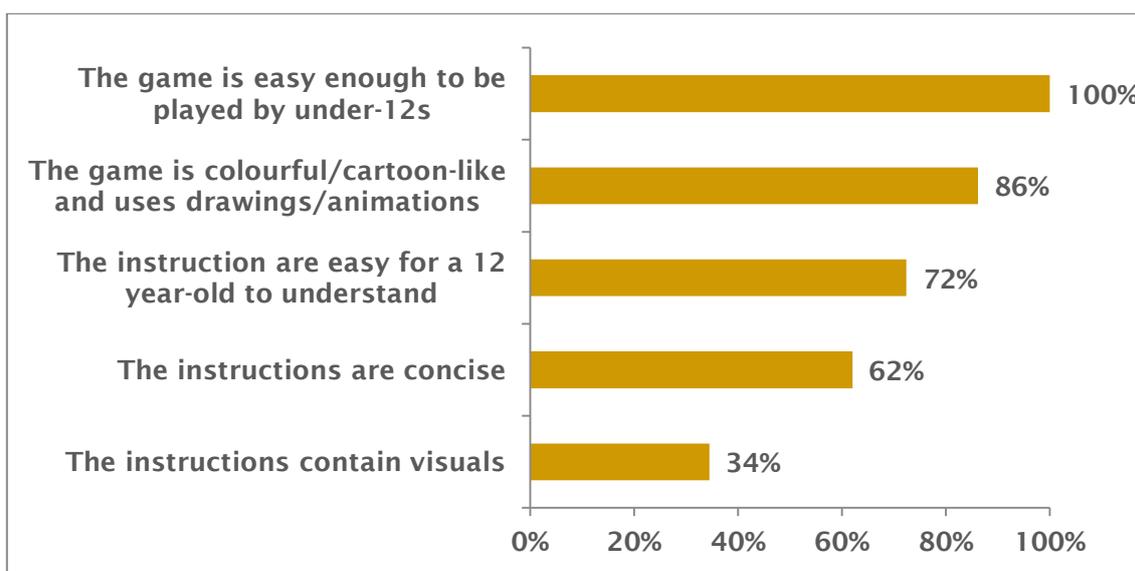
The reviewers identified games/entertainment activities on 73 of the 326 websites reviewed and in 29 instances the reviewers considered that the games/entertainment activities were designed to appeal primarily to under-12s. In addition, 18 of these websites used the games/entertainment activities to promote food or beverages to children.

Figure 5: Number of websites featuring games/entertainment activities (N=326)



Reasons as to why the reviewers considered the games/entertainment activities to be appealing primarily to under-12s are featured in the following chart. The combination of several of these criteria is a strong indicator that the game/entertainment activity is primarily appealing to young children.

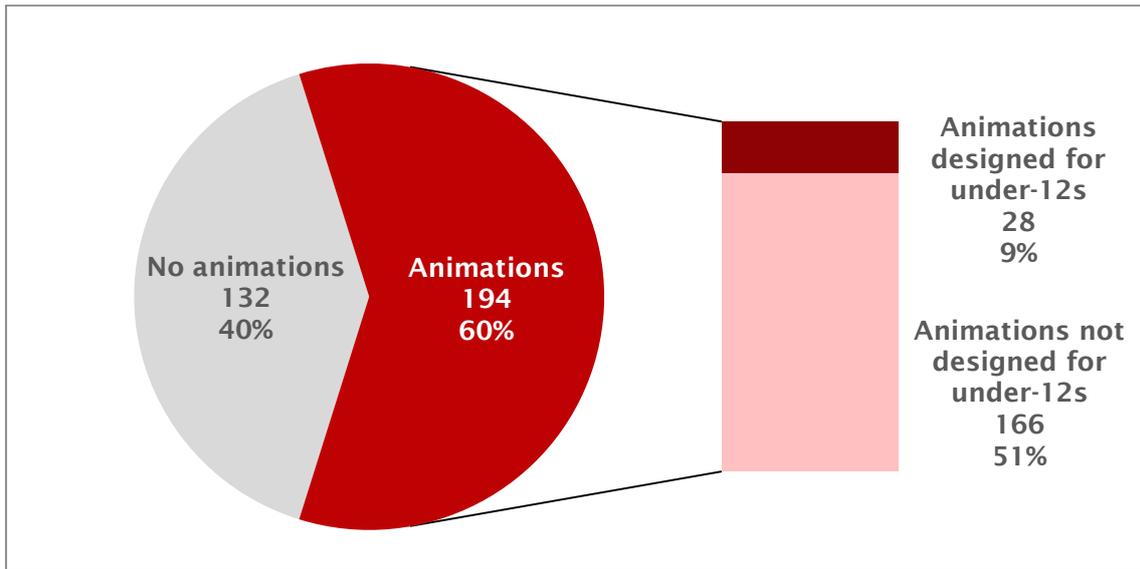
Figure 6: Main indicators for games/entertainment activities considered primarily appealing to under-12s (N=29)



2.5 Animations, Sound Effects and Videos

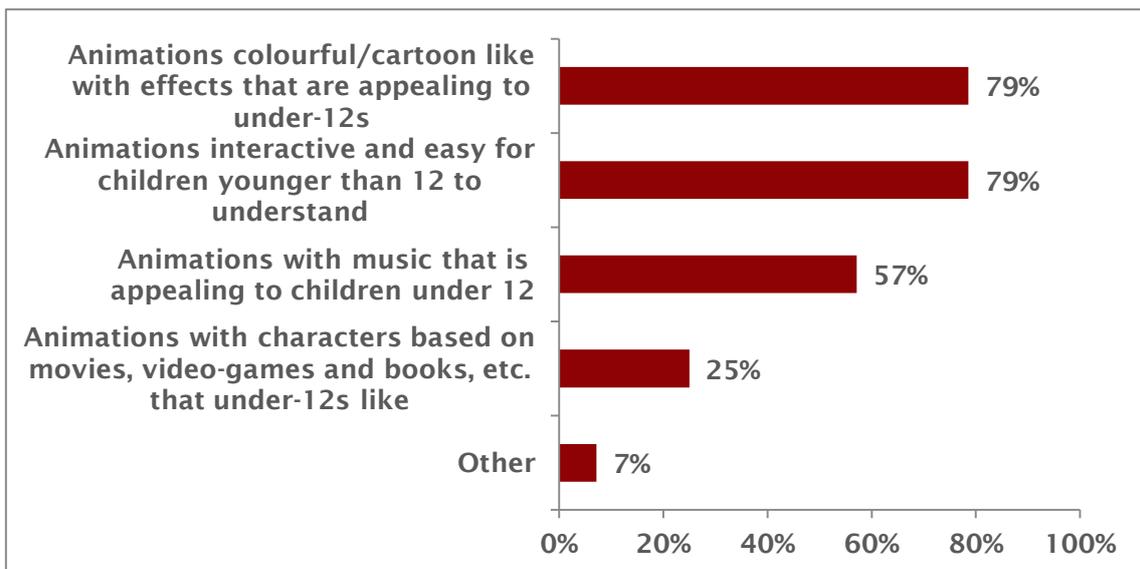
194 of the 326 websites reviewed featured animations, such as cartoons, animations depicting fantasy situations, sound effects or videos. According to the reviewers, 28 of these websites used animations, which were designed to appeal primarily to under-12s, and 22 of these websites used the animations to promote food or beverages to children.

Figure 7: Number of websites featuring animation (N=326)



Reasons as to why the reviewers considered the animations, sound effects and videos to be appealing primarily to under-12s are featured in the following chart. The combination of several of these criteria is a strong indicator that the animations are primarily appealing to young children.

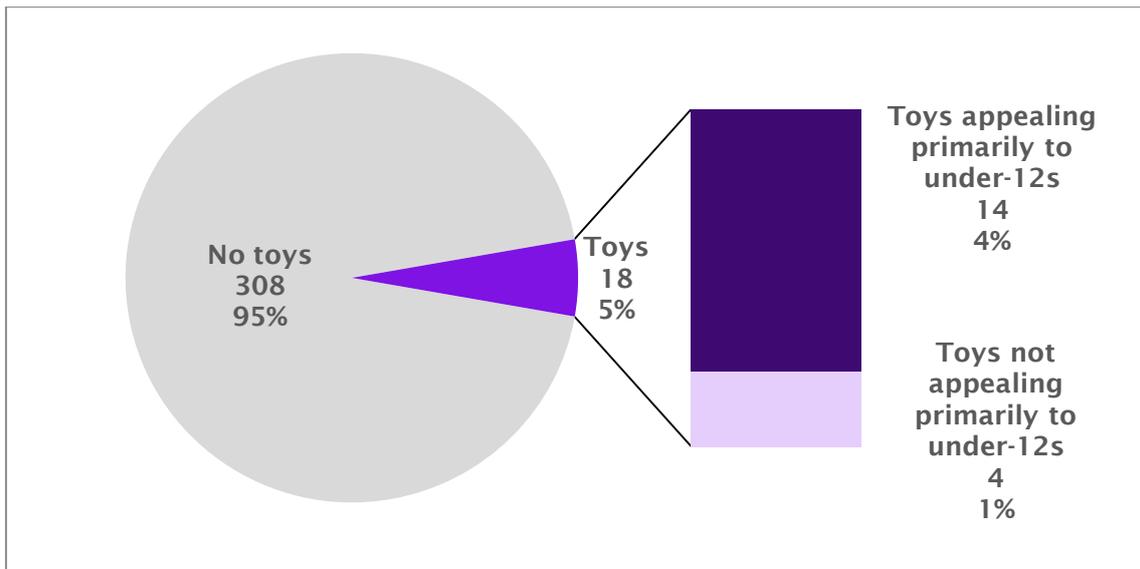
Figure 8: Main indicators for animations considered primarily appealing to under-12s (N=28)



2.6 Toys Used as Premiums

The reviewers identified 18 websites that used toys or other premiums to promote a food or non-alcoholic beverage product. Examples of toys included figures of cartoon characters, stickers, board games, soccer balls and other premiums such as watches featuring cartoon characters. In 14 of the 18 cases the toys were considered to be designed to appeal primarily to children under the age of 12.

Figure 9: Number of websites featuring toys used as premiums (N=326)



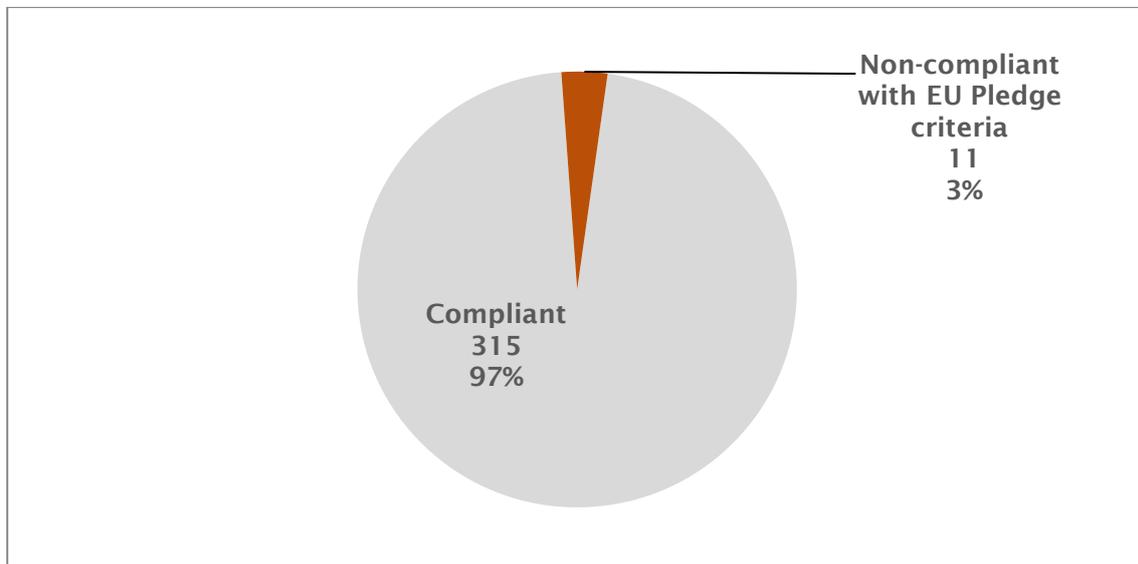
3 Compliance with the EU Pledge Criteria

11 of the 326 websites reviewed were found not to be compliant with the EU Pledge.

In order to determine whether the website was designed to target primarily under-12s, and subsequently to assess if the marketing communications were intended to appeal primarily to under-12s all of the previously identified elements had to be considered. This included the use of animations/sound effects/videos, games/entertainment activities, toys or licensed characters as well as the creative execution of the website, i.e. the overall impression of the website design (use of colours, typeface, font size, language, etc.).

Decisive factors in judging the appeal of a website to young children were the usability of the websites (i.e. ease of navigation), simplicity of language, font size, colour schemes and the level of entertainment offered on the websites.

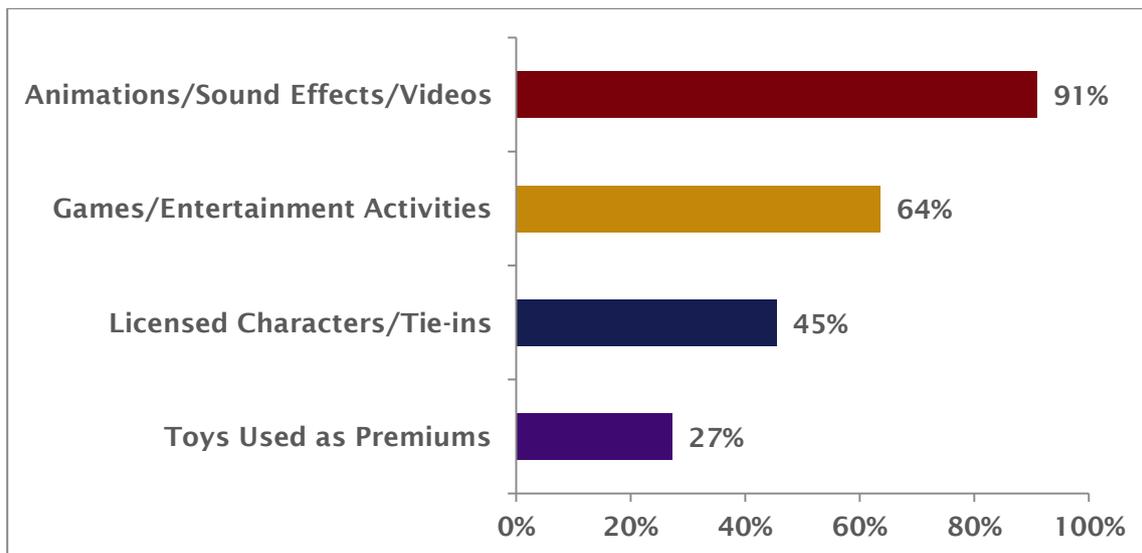
Figure 10: Number of websites in breach of the EU Pledge criteria (N=326)



Ten websites, that were considered as appealing primarily to children under 12 and therefore in breach of the EU Pledge, featured animations, while seven websites contained games designed for under-12s. Five websites featured licensed characters and three of them included toys designed for children under 12.

It is important to highlight that although the use of an age gating mechanisms does indicate the intent of the marketer to be compliant, it does not per se render a website compliant with the commitment. A case in point is one of the websites monitored this year that was considered to be primarily appealing to children under 12 despite the use of an age screening tool.

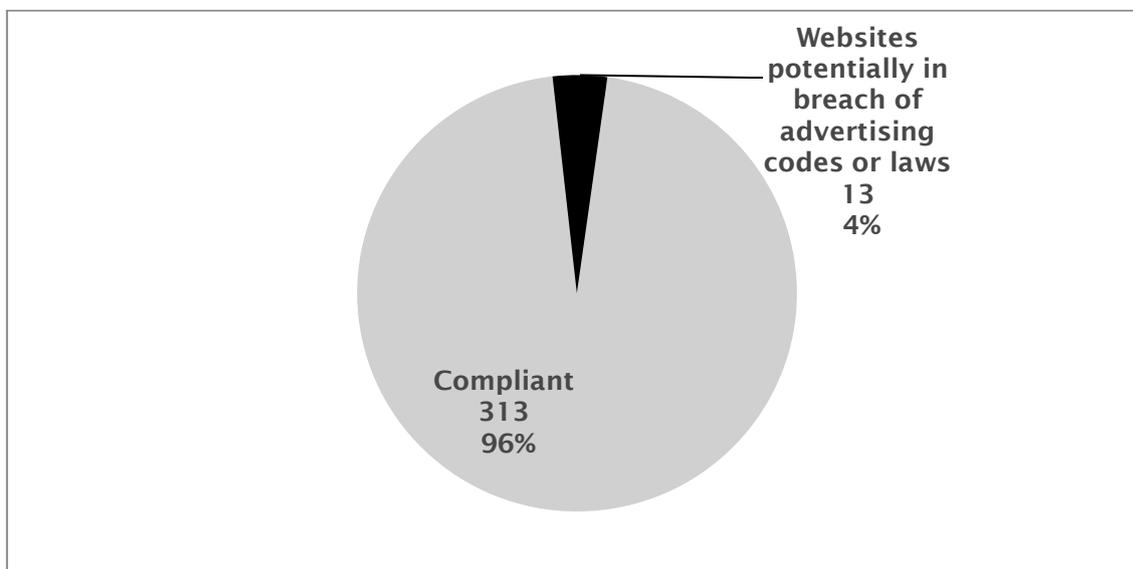
Figure 11: Elements of websites primarily appealing to under-12s (N=11)



4 Breaches of Advertising Codes/Laws

On 13 out of the 326 websites, the reviewers identified items that were considered as potentially in breach of advertising codes and/or relevant advertising laws.

Figure 12: Number of websites potentially breaching advertising codes/laws (N=326)



On these 13 websites, a total of 22 problematic items were found.

In ten instances the websites were found to be potentially in breach of advertising codes and/or laws because of the lack of the duration of sales promotions or raffles. Eight of these cases included the expiration date only in the terms and conditions section of the websites as opposed to the banner of a promotion or a raffle, while two websites did not include the duration of a sales promotion at all.

In addition, in five cases, the reviewers found sales promotions that had already expired at the time of the review.

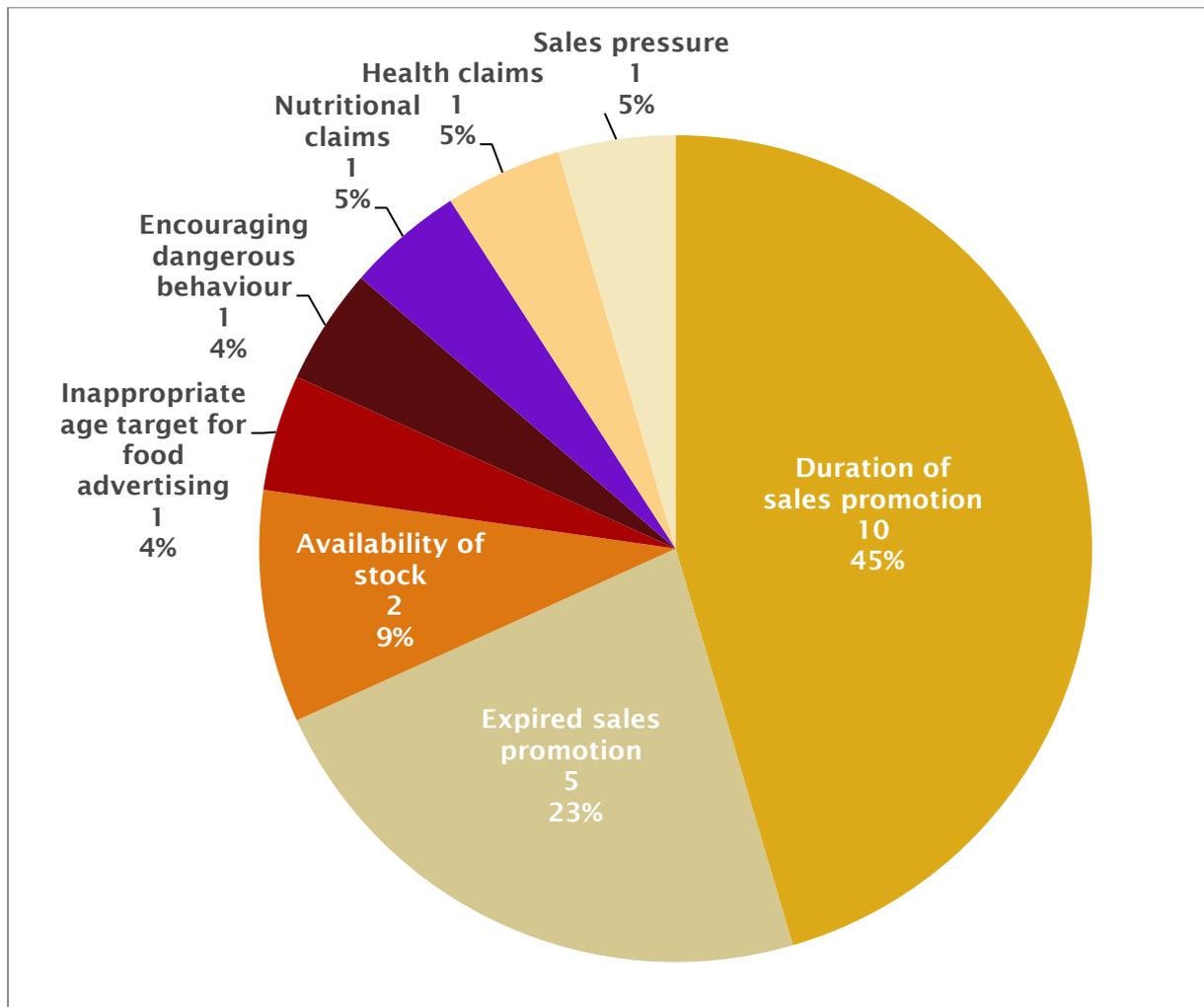
Furthermore, the reviewers flagged two websites for not specifying the number of products available for a sales promotion.

One website was flagged for potentially inappropriate age target for food advertising and were considered to be potentially in breach of the national Standards of Food Advertising Targeting Children.

On one website the reviewer identified claims that were considered as condoning or encouraging dangerous behaviour and another website used imperative verbs which according to the self-regulatory experts could make children feel compelled to buy the product.

Finally, one website contained problematic health claims and another problematic nutritional claim.

Figure 13: Potential breaches of advertising codes/laws (N=22)



On the remaining 313 websites no items were found that were in breach of either advertising codes or laws.

Notes

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