



Family Research Dynamics



FOOD
STANDARDS
AGENCY

School Councils' Communications Project *Autumn 2006*

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Executive Summary

- This consultation study with the Schools Council was focusing on understanding the awareness and knowledge of healthy eating amongst young people at primary and secondary schools. As a consequence of this understanding to identify the best route for communicating the benefits of a healthy lifestyle to young people.
- Overall all the young people at both primary and secondary school had an understanding of the key benefits of healthy eating and exercise. However their knowledge appears to be very focused on food groups, with a vague understanding about the principles of a balanced diet.
- Exercise and diet were appreciated by most young people to be relevant, primarily because these two elements impact on fitness, health and most importantly body image.
- Key influencers amongst the young people interviewed were Teachers, the school environment, Sports Coaches and with the young people at Secondary School in particular, their peer groups were also very important in relation to healthy eating, body image and lifestyle. Parents also play a key role, their influence with the young people appears to be stronger when at primary school, but still key at secondary school level since they are the primary purchasers of the food consumed within the home. As a channel for finding out more about healthy eating and exercise, the internet was identified as critical. To that end a special website for young people was sought.
- The interpretation of the importance of body image, related to the young persons' gender and lifestyle image. With boys this tended to be in two broad categories: sport and lifestyle. Key similarities across both of these typologies were key motivators of personal competitiveness and performance, within which sport offered a link to both broad groupings.
- With girls, body image and lifestyle groups were also very closely linked. The focus for girls was less competitive and more about appearance, self-image and relationships.
- Interestingly, whilst having a key significance to girls and boys on a personal level, there was a perception that much of the information that is disseminated relating to healthy eating and exercise was communicated in a dictatorial 'must do' form and as such can be ignored. In order for the information to be considered it was felt to be important to be in a form that relates to their lives and also in a form that enables the young people to appreciate the benefits make individual decisions about healthy eating and exercise.
- Therefore they sought 'easy to read', friendly information, that communicated through young people like themselves, whom they could relate to.
- At the same time there was recognition by young people that there is a need to draw their attention to the importance of reading information on healthy eating and exercise and to that end there were suggestions that sports personalities could be a good channel for communicating the information, making it credible and relevant.

- In terms of communicating with young people and making the communication relevant to their lives, it was also felt that this needed to take place within their own environment i.e. their schools, their local community and therefore, if using personalities use local contacts e.g. linking in to local sports/sports personalities.
- Specifically the consultation explored the opportunities of using magazines and magazine inserts as a channel for communicating information on healthy eating. Feedback from the young people interviewed, suggests that magazine readership could be irregular and therefore could make targeting this broad target group difficult.
- However, the idea of having a leaflet/booklet as a reference was appealing to the young people, although clearly it needed to be targeted towards the different age groups in terms of level of information as well as ensuring that the presentation of the information met the needs of young people at primary and secondary school. With consideration also to be given to targeting boys and girls differently.
- The opportunity of using local sports clubs as a vehicle for holding special events to communicate the benefits of healthy eating was also explored. Whilst the context of sport was appreciated by boys and girls across both primary and secondary schools, an event external to school was perceived to be likely to exclude those that found it difficult to get to the event due to timing and reliance upon parents to get to the event. Furthermore, the young people sought more regular contact rather than a one-off event.
- In summary, therefore, there was a perceived need by the young people to understand more about the benefits of healthy eating and exercise. In order to communicate this information the young people sought its delivery to be relevant to their personal development needs as boys and girls. Also to relate to their lives, which are centred on school, their family (parents) and their local community.
- The opportunity was defined as a need for regular communication and information, being delivered through credible channels: schools, parents and community - which was for these young people interviewed embodied within the area of sports. Sport relates across the board, to girls and boys and has obvious links to health as well as being able to tap into their different lifestyle needs e.g. sporting; body image; celebrity/personality driven etc.

Introduction

Sample

- Eight schools were visited during this autumn round of the School Councils' meetings. These included 3 secondary schools and 5 Primary schools.
- Each school council meeting included a representation of all the year groups and also a mix of boys and girls.
- The location of the schools ensured that we achieved a geographic spread and a mix of young people living in urban and rural areas, as well as a good socio-demographic mix.

Process

- Before attending each of the school council meetings a questionnaire was distributed to each school, requesting that a representative sample of young people be asked to complete this.
- Within the questionnaire were questions relating to current readership of magazines, their use of the internet in relation to researching healthy eating and who they saw to be the key influencers in a healthy eating lifestyle.
- 500 questionnaires were completed.

Objectives

- The objectives of this round of the School Councils' meetings were:
 - To understand awareness of healthy eating and lifestyles
 - To explore whether there are different typologies/attitudes to healthy eating
 - To understand how the young people might expect to find out about healthy eating and lifestyle.
 - To identify the key influencers in a healthy eating/lifestyle,
 - To explore magazine readership amongst the young people.
 - To evaluate the effectiveness of developing an information booklet along the lines of the Sugar insert.
 - Further to understand whether local sports events could be effective as a channel to deliver information on healthy eating/lifestyle.

Awareness of healthy eating

1. Awareness Healthy Eating and Exercise

- a. It is noted that all the schools involved were themselves interested and internally promoting healthy eating/lifestyle, so there could be a bias within the sample recruited into the School Councils consultation process.
- b. However, there was a high level of awareness amongst the young people interviewed in both primary and secondary schools.
- c. All the children at Primary and Secondary Schools had a good understanding of foods that are healthy foods to eat.
- d. With some limited knowledge about nutrition e.g. the role of protein and calcium, vitamins etc.
- e. Their understanding appears to be specific to food groups e.g. 5 fruits and vegetables a day
- f. Only a few of the young people interviewed understood the principles of 'balancing' their diet.
- g. Exercise was understood by young people because it has a relationship with fitness, health and body image:
 1. At primary school, exercise was perceived to be an integral part of their school lives.
 2. Whereas at Secondary School level the young people are starting to make curriculum choices and their pre-disposition to sport could be a key driver to participation.
 3. There was some indication that the girls in secondary schools often give up sport at secondary age.

2. Differences between Boys and Girls

- a. Boys attitudes to healthy eating were divided into two key typologies:
 1. Those that are sporty and who sought to eat healthily to improve their competitiveness and performance within a sport.
 2. The other group was linked to lifestyle, which in turn could be sub-divided dependent upon friendship groups within schools. Their relationships with healthy living were driven by their lifestyle and body images sought as well as the influence from their own peer groups.
- b. Girls attitudes were also split into two key typologies:
 1. Those girls concerned about being slim, which was often defined as 'normal' i.e. not being too skinny nor too fat – there was a perception amongst many of the girls that it is possible to be unhealthily slim – driven in part by media coverage on catwalk models. Other key motivators were those relating to appearance, having healthy skin and hair.
 2. Girls were also divided into 'Lifestyle' groups, defined by the image they sought – 'girlie', 'trendy' etc. and also the influence of their friends and peer groups.

Awareness of healthy eating

3. Relevance

- a. An interesting perspective on the relationship of healthy eating and lifestyle with young people was that it was generally perceived as something they 'must do'.
- b. Messages received on healthy living were seen to be delivered as dictatorial messages, rather than there being a process of information tapping into their emotional needs.
- c. The information and awareness of healthy eating/lifestyle was driven by information and actions from their schools and their parents, rather than from themselves seeking to understand the importance and benefits.
- d. As a consequence, the idea of 'healthy living' was not necessarily seen as an integrated part of their lives.
- e. The concept was more relevant to girls and in discussions they were more able to articulate and discuss the concepts of healthy eating/lifestyle.
- f. It was less engaging to boys, although understood to be important to their competitive and performance motivations.

Information Needs/Sources?

4. Information Sources

- a. The role of parents in supporting and directing healthy eating is very important with the children at primary school, with all the children involved in the discussions claiming that it is their parents who would be key influencers. Teachers and Schools were also seen to be most important.
- b. For those young people at Secondary School Parents were important in enabling healthy eating at schools in providing healthy choices at school – parents because they provide the food choices at home and are responsible for buying the foods and schools because lunchtime food choices are key – for some young people they seem to have their main meal at school as well. However school appears to play a more dominant role as they children get older.
- c. Young people from secondary school appear to be likely to influence their parents in healthy eating and likely to be a two way relationship – although clearly for some, cost seen as a possible barrier.
- d. Across both Primary and Secondary Schools, the Key information sources were identified as the Internet, their Parents, Teachers and Sports Coaches and Peer groups.
- e. Feedback from the questionnaires completed by the young people, identified that within the Primary Schools, they listed these information sources in the following order:
 1. Internet
 2. Parents
 3. Teachers
 4. Sports Coaches/PE Teachers.
- f. In Secondary schools the order was slightly different, with Teachers and Peer groups being more important compared with the feedback from the Primary Schools:
 1. Internet
 2. School/School teachers
 3. Parents
 4. Peer Groups
- g. From a marketing and communications perspective this clearly identifies that reaching young people may need to consider the different influencing channels of parents, schools, the internet and other young people themselves.

5. What would you like to know about healthy eating?

- a. This was an interesting question when posed to young people, since there was a sense from the young people that they knew quite a lot of information already.
- b. However, clearly they were unsure as to whether they knew enough and needed to find out more.
- c. Consequently they sought information from schools and their parents to signpost them towards their information needs.

Information Needs/Sources?

6. Motivations to find out more about healthy eating/lifestyle

- a. Since many of the young people perceived the information being delivered as directives, they did not feel they necessarily had the information on the benefits of healthy eating/lifestyles to enable them to make choices and decisions about their food and exercise choices.
- b. The young people sought more information on the benefits to themselves.
- c. The delivery of the information was also perceived to be important to all the young people:
 1. With boys feeling that they would be more motivated by information coming from role models and in particular there was an expectation that these personalities would be linked to sport.
 2. Sporting personalities would also link into the boys' emotional needs of performance and competitiveness.
 3. Girls on the other hand were more motivated by their body image and personal development, although interestingly these were not felt to be especially motivating when delivered through famous film and music celebrities.
 4. Interestingly Sport was also perceived to be synonymous with healthy eating/lifestyles and to that end sporting personalities could also play a role in engaging and motivating girls to understand the benefits of healthy eating/lifestyles.
 5. Girls are motivated by messages that seek to tap into their emotional needs for an understanding and insight into these specifically relating to self/body -image and confidence.

7. Relevance to their lives

- a. In order to engage and motivate, information on healthy eating/lifestyles was felt only likely to engage if it relates to the lives and worlds' of the young people.
- b. Aspiration is a key element, although aspiration is in relation to their worlds and not unobtainable lives, such as celebrities.
- c. The young people in both primary and secondary schools, were most motivated by young people that are older than themselves, but still relevant to their life stage and personal development over the next few years beyond their current age and stage.
- d. The local community and school environment were also seen to be key aspects of their lives and a key point of reference and influence to their lives and their worlds.
- e. Therefore to inform and engage young people in the areas of healthy eating/lifestyles, it will be important to demonstrate empathy around their personal issues relating to their lifestyle and life stages.
- f. Communicating this information through a familiar form of reference will be key – their schools and local community were seen to be central to this.

Magazine Readership

8. Key feedback from questionnaire/discussions

- a. Feedback from the questionnaires submitted by the Primary Schools, suggests that the purchasing of magazines and comics for young children is irregular.
- b. Although there is borrowing and sharing taking place amongst friends.
- c. Parents are buying as an occasional reward/treat, with generally no claimed purchasing by the children themselves.
- d. Feedback from the Secondary Schools suggests that whilst readership is claimed, it is irregular and the cost of magazines generally means that they're not regularly purchased and read by young people.
- e. There was a sense also, across both the young children in the primary and secondary schools, that there was little loyalty towards specific titles.
- f. This therefore suggests that the magazine/comic market as a communications channel is likely to be very hit and miss as a medium in reaching the target market.
- g. The questionnaires confirmed that there is a wide readership of magazines/comics and whilst there are some more popular ones, cannot pinpoint specific ones.
- h. Generally the principle of 'gossip' and fashion for girls appears to be the right approach.
- i. Sport for boys is relevant but there is a wide variety and interest in sport, which does appear to split into those actively participating in sport and those for whom sport is a lifestyle issue e.g. skateboarding, surfing etc. biking, extreme sports.
- j. Generally music magazines were reported to have the widest readership and were accessed by boys and girls.

Magazine Readership

9. Specific Titles

- a. Amongst the boys in primary schools, the interviews were specifically seeking to explore readership of Match and 4-4-2 amongst the younger boys. In those sampled there was limited readership of these titles reported.
- b. Amongst the girls in Primary schools, readership of Bliss and Sugar were specifically explored and it emerged that readership was taking place, albeit at a limited level, but skewed towards the girls at the top end of the ages in the primary schools.
- c. At secondary schools, readership of Zoo, Nuts and Loaded were also explored. Again reported readership was low, although it was clear that there was readership taking place where older siblings/friends were purchasing the magazine.
- d. For boys at secondary school, readership was aspirational for Zoo, Nuts and Loaded. Readership for Match and 4-4-2 was seen to be for boys at primary school age.
- e. Girls at secondary school were asked to comment on their readership of Cosmo, Now and Heat. Once again very limited readership was reported, with a perception amongst the younger girls that these were magazines targeted towards the older 6th Form girls and adults.
- f. Bliss and Sugar had a very limited appeal amongst girls at secondary school, with a perception of being targeted towards the younger girls – mostly those just entering secondary school in Year 7.

Response to Sugar Insert

10. Format

- a. The idea of a leaflet/booklet with information relating to healthy eating was very appealing to both boys and girls.
- b. This concept appealed across all the age groups within primary and secondary schools.
- c. It appealed not just as a source of information but as an item that could be kept and read in their own time. Also as a regular source of reference.
- d. It was however felt to be important to have a web-site to support an information booklet since:
 1. There was an expectation that if certain issues were to be explored in more depth, the web-site would give or signpost the young people to more in-depth information.

11. Presentation

- a. Overall the insert gave the impression of being dominated by text, which was perceived as a barrier to readership since it looked:
 1. Complex and difficult to read
 2. Certainly for the younger children at primary school it was seen to be 'for older children'.
 3. Also visually the domination of text can cue a perception that the content is 'boring', 'hard work' and implies 'learning' and therefore does not engage or motivate readership.
- b. The young people across all ages sought a more pictorial presentation.
- c. With younger children they sought the use of a more comic style/ cartoon approach illustration, since this relates to 'their worlds' and their interests at a younger age.
- d. Whilst older children (from about the age of 10 years) sought more real life images and the use of real children – like themselves, but older to tie in with their aspirational values.
- e. Overall the most effective page for both boys and girls was the one relating to exercise:
 1. It demonstrates a good balance of pictures and words
 2. It was easy to understand across all the age groups
 3. It was interpreted as information/demonstration, which was cued by the informal and relaxed presentations style of the pictures and limited amount of text.
 4. Also, the girl featured in the article was viewed as 'normal' and 'aspirational' as the girls felt she was more like them.

Response to Sugar Insert

12. Colour

- a. The dominance of the pink used within the Sugar insert cued 'girlie' and can polarise relevance, depending on whether the girls identified themselves as 'girlie' or categorised themselves within a different typology.
- b. There was a perception that the use of pink biases the targeting of the magazine towards the younger girls, which in the context of the positioning of the insert within Sugar was felt to be appropriate.
- c. Younger and older boys quite clearly identified the use of pink as being a cue to say 'this is for girls' and when probed for their preferred colours, they identified, dark blues, blacks, vivid greens and reds.
- d. Interestingly for older boys, the use of pink was seen to be less polarising and more acceptable.

13. Tonal

- a. There was some feeling amongst both boys and girls that the themes within the insert could be perceived as too dictatorial, with the tone and language being interpreted as 'you must do'. For example the use of the word diet implies 'you must do this' 'strict' and adhering to specific rules.
- b. Also, interestingly for girls the use of film and music celebrities could cue 'not for me', since it was seen to be targeting older girls/adults.
- c. In addition to this the use of celebrities can cue fashion and faddy diet associations, which were interpreted by most girls as negative images.

Response to idea of local sporting events

14. Sports events as a communication vehicle

- a. There was a positive response from boys and girls to this idea because of the perceived relevance of sport to healthy eating/lifestyles.
- b. Sport taps into boys' performance achievement goals, which worked across all typologies of boys.
- c. Sport appeals to girls because of the 'healthy' as well as 'lifestyle' associations.

15. Attending an external event (to the school environment) however has limited appeal

- a. Primarily because it was felt that not everyone will be able to or want to attend.
- b. Also there was a perception that just having a one-off event would be limiting, since there was a feeling amongst across all the ages and genders that in order to become more aware of healthy eating/lifestyle issues that it would not be communicated on a regular basis.
- c. External events were also felt to rely too much upon parents having the time and commitment to enable their children to attend.
- d. Also all children sought the involvement in 'their world', which was seen to be within the school environment: curriculum delivery in the classroom, school canteens, school sports days etc.

16. Single sport

- a. For boys the ideas of focussing on one sport either football or rugby was alienating.
- b. Girls claimed that sport, especially football and rugby weren't 'just for boys' and that girls these days are interested and involved in these sports as well.
- c. For both girls and boys, the involvement in their local community sport of excellence was perceived to be engaging and felt to relate to 'their worlds'
- d. Across the schools involved there were clear community differences, with some focussed on Rugby, some on Football, other schools where for example their location put them by the sea, surfing and extreme sports appeared to be more relevant.

Summary and Implications

17. Attitudes to Healthy Eating/Lifestyles

- a. All the children across the ages within both primary and secondary schools demonstrated a good knowledge of the components that make up a healthy eating/lifestyle.
- b. However there appears to be a great reliance upon parents and schools to signpost them and direct them towards enacting the principles of healthy eating/lifestyle.
- c. The internet was perceived to be a key information source and as such likely to be a route for independent learning.
- d. However the motivation for investigating the issue of healthy living and lifestyle was limited.
- e. Barriers to exploring the concept of a healthy diet and lifestyle appear to be linked to the perception that the whole area is presented as a 'must do' from parents and schools.
- f. Also, there is a perception that much of the information presented is not seen to relate to the worlds of the young people, which appear to revolve around their school and local community.
- g. The opportunity to engage young people to make active choices and to consider the impact of a healthy diet/lifestyle on their lives is seen to be through the presentation of information that taps into their needs and life stage.
- h. The needs of the young people are diverse in the sense that boys and girls have a different set of needs, which in turn are evolving and changing as the children progress through Primary school and through their Secondary years.

18. Magazine Readership

- a. Amongst this sample of young people, comic/magazine readership was reported to be irregular.
- b. Also magazine readership was also reported to be quite diverse, with a wide range of titles being read, with little claimed loyalty to a specific title.
- c. It also emerged that magazines can be quite tightly targeted towards certain age groups, with Match and 4-4-2 being seen to be for younger boys, primarily primary school age and Zoo, Nuts and Loaded being aspirational among secondary school boys, but ultimately targeted towards older boys/young adults.
- d. With girls Sugar and Bliss were identified as being for the older girls at primary school and the youngest girls at secondary school. With magazines such as Cosmo and Heat being for much older girls and young adults.
- e. Music magazines were expected to have a wider appeal to the young people.

Summary and Implications

19. Role of an information leaflet

- a. Recognising how healthy diet and lifestyle can impact on the physical and social wellbeing means that there was a high level of interest amongst boys and girls about receiving more information on healthy eating/lifestyle
- b. The approach of a leaflet as a source of information is liked.
- c. The Sugar insert, as presented was perceived to be informative but potentially not very engaging due to the heavy text content. It was felt that something visually more eye-catching with messages that are targeted towards tapping into their emotional needs would be more engaging.
- d. Younger children (primary school) and younger children in secondary schools found that it was too copy intensive which could alienate readership
- e. The celebrity focus not liked – they wanted information from young people like themselves. Aspirational people were generally felt to be young people like themselves but a few years older
- f. Girls rejected the stick thin model approach – clearly they have received ‘messages’ that this is not healthy or normal
- g. Younger children need more of a cartoon/fun focus – pictorial presentation of the information.
- h. The back page relating to exercise motivating as it is easy to read, easy to do and the girl looks real and ‘normal’ (not too thin and not too fat).
- i. Boys clearly thought the approach to be too ‘girlie’ and pink – they sought lifestyle/sports and music approach and rejected celebrities although they claimed they would embrace sports personalities
- j. For girls and boys sports personalities were more credible as celebrities – don’t look so fashionable and also have bodies that are more realistic. Eating healthily and exercise is perceived to be more in tune with this type of role model were sought– fashionable celebrities more associated with fad diets and unhealthy eating.
- k. The idea of having a leaflet that they could take home to their parents was also considered to be very motivating to the children as it was viewed to be important that their parents are informed and involved in their goals towards healthy eating/lifestyle.

Summary and Implications

20. Girls Vs Boys - Leaflet

Girls

- a. In summary, girls sought greater relevance through the use of girls slightly older than themselves, to enable them to feel that they understood their needs and were relevant to their lives.
- b. Sporting personalities were identified by girls as aspirational and appealing since the sport is associated with healthy eating/lifestyle. However the use of female sports personalities was preferred since there was an expectation that they would more likely to understand their needs.
- c. The tone of the leaflet for girls to be about communicating the benefits of healthy eating, by relating the benefits to their emotional needs of body image, healthy hair and skin etc.

Boys

- d. Their interest in healthy eating/lifestyle is more latent as it doesn't fit with their male image of themselves and their relationships with their peer group.
- e. However there is an interest, which is in relation to the competitive and performance context of 'their worlds'
- f. Sporting personalities for boys relate to the concept of healthy eating/lifestyle but mostly because of the competitive and performance associations with sport.

21. Use of local sporting events

- a. The idea of a local sporting event was appealing in one sense because sport was seen to be linked to healthy eating/lifestyle.
- b. However an external, one-off event was not perceived to be highly motivating since there was a perception that not everyone would be able to attend and it would only be a snapshot in time.
- c. The young people sought the idea of the sports personalities and events going into their schools on a regular basis to engage and motivate them to regularly consider the issues around healthy eating/lifestyle.
- d. A single sport could be alienating, but local sports personalities, ideally male and female, were felt to be more likely to engage.
- e. Interestingly there was a perception that it would be good to have this approach to raise awareness and to then engage young people in the idea; to then signpost them towards reading information leaflets produced and to also then self-direct learning through internet research, ideally through a web site supporting the overall programme.

Development approach?

22. Role of communications

- a. In order to engage young people more actively in the idea of healthy eating/lifestyle, it emerged that there is an opportunity to consider combining different aspects. In particular:
 1. Raising awareness
 2. However recognising the need to engage young people
 3. Which can also be achieved through developing relevance to their worlds
 4. This ultimately over the longer term could influence behavioural change.
- b. Relevance can be achieved by considering the differences between boys vs. girls; younger vs. older.
- c. As well as linking into and entering into the worlds of the young people, within their schools and local community.
- d. Rather than a one-off event, it was felt to be important to communicate/disseminate information on an ongoing basis – rather than a one-off booklet – a series of information sheets to be disseminated, targeted towards different age groups.
- e. Alternatively, especially for the primary school children, linking in with school sports – local sports personalities visiting schools to talk was seen to be very motivating.
- f. Some feeling that information booklets/sheets are interesting but in order to read young people felt they would have to have their attention drawn to them – so maybe a sports personality could attend school – give talks – hand out leaflets – once attention drawn to these then young people thought they might be more interested to read.
- g. Within the school environment, the school canteen area was also seen to be a key area – all the schools visited appear to be very interested and focused on healthy eating and school canteens clearly trying to provide healthy options.
- h. Information to take home to parents also considered to important to involve parents. Secondary school children saw this as an opportunity to help them inform their choices and decisions with their parents.
- i. In order for self-directed learning to take place, it was felt that a web site for children and parents could be developed, possibly with links through school web sites.