

Attempts to tackle childhood obesity – low sugar chocolate appears not so “wow”some



The food industry has been very much in the Government’s line of sight over the past few years as a way to tackle the increasing health concerns from rising levels of obesity in children, giving manufacturers the target of a 20% cut in sugar in snacks by 2020. However, whilst there is generally common consensus on the fact that action is needed, and that food producers and retailers have a part to play in this, the underlying causes are complex and the subject of differing views. It is no surprise then that there is a variety of opinions amongst even the experts on what should be done to tackle the problem. In addition, it seems that not all seemingly good ideas work in practice, as illustrated by the relative failure of Nestle’s Milkybar Wowsomes.

Nestle brought out their low-sugar version of the iconic Milkybar in March 2018, heralding the use of a new technology which created “hollow” sugar crystals, resulting in a 30% reduction in sugar as against the original. Initial enthusiasm for the process led some to predict this would see Nestle gaining a market leading position in low-sugar products, a growing market. However, the public weren’t keen on the product leading Nestle to withdraw it earlier this year after weak sales.

Other big names in food have taken different approaches to try to appease the anti-sugar lobby, as well as staying on the right side of regulators like the Advertising Standards Authority, with for example Unilever announcing this month that it would stop aiming the advertising of its products towards children – limiting the use of cartoon characters and of social media stars and celebrities who primarily appeal to children under 12 to promote the ice creams and lollies sold under its Wall’s Ice Cream brand.

It remains to be seen whether the problems with Wowsomes were down solely to the taste of this particular bar or whether there are other factors at play. The public can be very sensitive to changes in the taste of its favourite



confectionary and on the whole sales of lower sugar confectionary alternatives have yet to catch up with the enthusiasm for them from governments and pressure groups.



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