



Trends in Television Food Advertising to Young People: 2013 Update

May 2014

AUTHORS:

Cathryn R. Dembek, MBA
Jennifer L. Harris, PhD, MBA
Marlene B. Schwartz, PhD

Summary

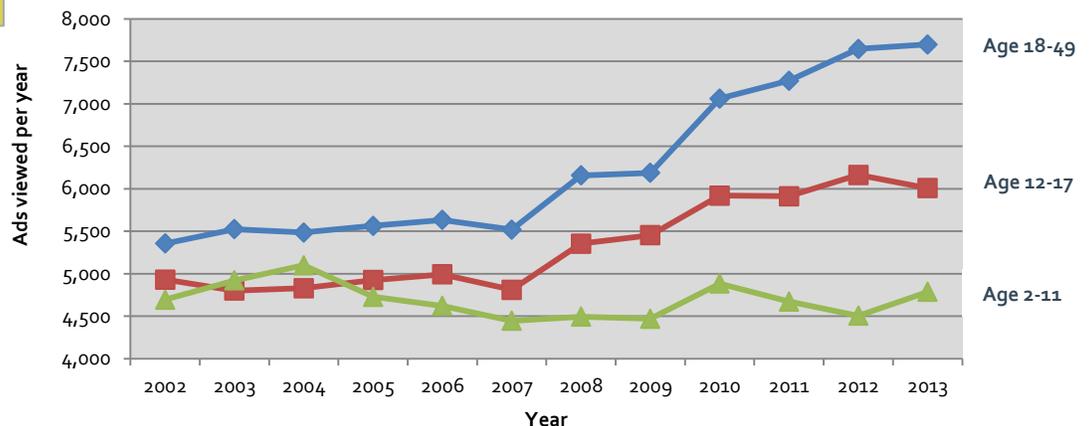
In this brief, we document changes in the total number of food-related TV ads viewed by children and adolescents from 2002 to 2013. We also examine changes in categories of foods and beverages advertised since 2007, when the Children’s Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI) food industry self-regulatory program – designed to “shift the mix of advertising primarily directed to children”¹ – was implemented. However, since then, the total number of food and beverage ads viewed by children has increased by 8% and advertising to adolescents increased 25%. In addition, youth saw more ads for candy, carbonated beverages and fast food in 2013 versus 2007, while ads for healthy product categories represented less than 5% of food ads viewed. These findings demonstrate that industry self-regulation has not resulted in meaningful improvements in TV food advertising to youth. For more information about the methods used, please see *Trends in television food advertising: Progress in reducing unhealthy food marketing to young people*.

The amount of food and beverage advertising to children under 12 on TV peaked in 2004 at 14 ads viewed per day. However, since the CFBAI was implemented in 2007, ads viewed by children increased by 8%, averaging 13.1 ads per day in 2013.

Total Exposure to Food and Beverage Advertising on TV

Figure 1 shows changes in the total number of food, beverage and restaurant advertisements viewed on TV by children (ages 2-11), adolescents (ages 12-17) and adults (ages 18-48) from 2002 to 2013.

Figure 1. Total TV food and beverage advertising exposure by age: 2002 to 2013



Source: Nielsen 2014

In 2013, adolescents viewed on average 16.5 food ads per day on TV, an increase of 25% compared to 2007.

TV food and beverage advertising viewed by children peaked in 2004, at an average of 14 ads viewed per day. From 2004 to 2007, food advertising to children declined by 13%. However, since the CFBAI was implemented in 2007, children’s exposure to food ads has increased. In 2013, children viewed on average 13.1 food ads per day, an increase of 6% over the previous year and 8% more than 2007.

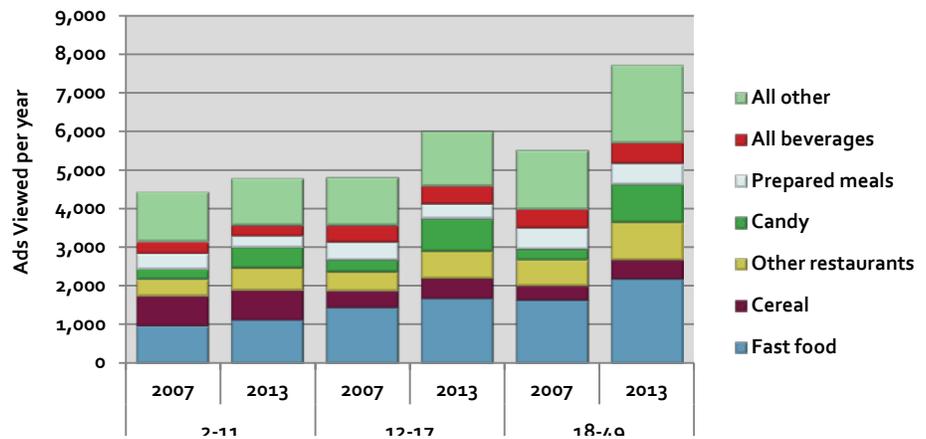
On the other hand, food advertising to adolescents increased sharply from 2007 to 2010 after remaining relatively constant from 2002 to 2007. In 2013, adolescents viewed on average 16.5 food-related ads per day, a 25% increase and an additional 3.3 ads per day compared with 2007. However, since 2010, food advertising to adolescents has leveled off somewhat, with a 3% decrease in exposure from 2012 to 2013. Adults’ exposure to food advertising on TV has continued to steadily increase from 2007 to 2013.

Exposure by Major Food Categories

While the number of TV food ads viewed by children, adolescents, and adults increased from 2007 to 2013, the categories of foods and beverages advertised most frequently remained fairly constant (see Figure 2). Individuals in all age groups continued to see more ads for fast food restaurants than any other food and beverage category, representing 23% of food-related ads viewed by children and 28% of ads viewed by adolescents and adults in 2013.

Across all age groups, fast food restaurants represented approximately one-quarter of all food-related ads viewed on TV.

Figure 2. Total food and beverage advertising exposure by category



For children, cereal remained the second most-frequently advertised category at 16% of food-related ads viewed, while cereal ranked fourth in foods advertised to adolescents (9%). Candy ranked second in advertising to adolescents (14% of ads viewed) and fourth for children (11%). For both age groups, advertising for other restaurants (not fast food) ranked third at 12% of ads viewed.

In 2013, children's exposure to ads for juices, fruit drinks and sports drinks reached its lowest level since 2002, a 14% decrease compared to 2007.

On the other hand, children's exposure to ads for candy products doubled from 2007 to 2013, while ads viewed by adolescents increased by 172%.

Children and adolescents continued to see the fewest ads for primarily healthy categories, including bottled water and fruits and vegetables, and advertising for these products declined from 2011 to 2013.

Prepared meals and beverages ranked fifth and sixth in food-related categories advertised most to children and adolescents.

Reductions in the number of ads viewed for some primarily unhealthy food categories reflect a few positive changes from 2007 to 2013 (see **Appendix Table 1** and **Appendix Table 2**). The number of ads for sweet snacks viewed by children declined by 35%, although ads to adolescents increased somewhat. In addition, ads viewed for prepared meals decreased 28% for children and 19% for adolescents. In 2013, children's exposure to ads for juice, fruit drinks and sports drinks reached its lowest level in the past decade, a 14% decrease compared to 2007. However, for adolescents, the number of ads viewed for these beverages was 19% higher in 2013 higher compared to 2007, although exposure declined 34% from 2011 to 2013.

On the other hand, marked increases in exposure to advertising for several primarily unhealthy categories offset these positive trends.

- Most notably, from 2007 to 2013 exposure to candy ads more than doubled for both children and adolescents, an increase of 270 ads viewed per year by children and an additional 535 ads, or 1.5 ads per day, viewed by adolescents.
- Previously reported declines in the number of cereal ads seen by children in 2011 were reversed in 2013. At 2.1 ads per day, children viewed 16% more cereal ads in 2013 than in 2011, comparable to the number of ads they viewed in 2007. Adolescents' exposure to cereal ads increased by 19% from 2007 to 2013.
- Exposure to ads for crackers and savory snacks increased by over 50% for children and adolescents from 2011 to 2013, continuing increases in advertising to children from 2004.
- Although exposure to ads for carbonated beverages remained considerably lower compared to 2004, these ads have increased somewhat in recent years. In 2013, children and adolescents saw 22% and 15% more ads, respectively, compared to 2007.
- Children and adolescents saw 15% to 16% more fast food ads in 2013 compared to 2007, although exposure did not increase from 2011. However, advertising for other restaurants continues to increase. In 2013, children viewed 32% more of these ads versus 2007, and adolescent exposure increased by 42%.

Children and adolescents also continued to see few ads for primarily healthy categories (i.e., bottled water, fruits, and vegetables), and those numbers have declined in recent years. In 2013, ads viewed for bottled water decreased 30% for children and 52% for adolescents compared to 2007. In 2013 versus 2011, children saw 3% fewer ads for fruits and vegetables and adolescents saw 13% fewer, partially offsetting the increase in advertising for fruits and vegetables reported in 2011. On the other hand, ads viewed for dairy products increased for all youth. Compared to 2007, children saw 86% more of these ads and adolescents saw 60% more.

Conclusions

In 2013, children saw 8% more food-related ads on TV than they saw in 2007, the first full year that CFBAI pledges were in effect. Therefore, food industry self-regulation has not resulted in reductions in the total number of food-related TV ads viewed by children under 12. At the same time, food advertising to adolescents increased by 25%, suggesting that companies may have stepped up advertising to this older, but still vulnerable, group of children.²

Furthermore, the mix of food-related product categories advertised to children and adolescents has not improved. Fast food restaurants remained the most advertised category, representing approximately one-quarter of food ads viewed by young people. In addition, since 2007, advertising for fast food and other unhealthy food categories has increased. Most notably, From 2007 to 2013 candy advertising to children doubled and candy advertising to adolescents increased by 2.7 times. Advertising for some healthy food categories, including fruits and vegetables and other dairy, has increased substantially since 2007, but healthy food categories still comprise less than 5% of food and beverage products advertised to youth.

Children and adolescents continue to view on average 13.1 and 16.5 food-related ads on TV every day, primarily for nutrient-poor products that contribute to poor health. Although the amount of food advertising on children's programming appears to have declined in recent years,³ the food industry has failed to make meaningful improvements in the amount and types of products advertised to young people on TV overall.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

REFERENCES

¹Council of Better Business Bureaus. The National Partner Program. About the Initiative. <http://www.bbb.org/council/the-national-partner-program/national-advertising-review-services/childrens-food-and-beverage-advertising-initiative/about-the-initiative/>.

²Harris JL, Schwartz MB, Heard A. (2014) Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity. Older but still vulnerable: All children need protection from unhealthy food marketing. http://www.yaleruddcenter.org/resources/upload/docs/what/reports/Protecting_Older_Children_3.14.pdf.

³Powell LM, Harris JL, Fox T. (2013). Food marketing expenditures aimed at youth: Putting the numbers in context. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 45(4), 453-461

For previous Rudd Reports on trends in television food advertising to young people and detailed methods for analyses of Nielsen data, please visit www.YaleRuddCenter.org/marketing.

APPENDIX

Appendix Table 1. Change in average number of ads viewed by category for children (2-11 years)

Category	Ads viewed per year			Change in ads viewed: 2013 vs.		
	2007	2011	2013	2004	2007	2011
Food and beverage products*	3,036	2,983	3,087	-20%	2%	3%
Cereal	772	666	773	-21%	0%	16%
Candy	266	438	536	35%	101%	22%
Prepared meals	420	298	303	-1%	-28%	2%
Sweet snacks	431	297	281	-56%	-35%	-5%
Yogurt	178	271	221	8%	24%	-18%
Juice, fruit drinks, sports	189	261	162	-49%	-14%	-38%
Crackers and savory snacks	121	105	160	9%	32%	53%
Other dairy	43	70	81	12%	86%	16%
Carbonated beverages	57	65	70	-51%	22%	8%
Bottled water	55	28	38	128%	-30%	35%
Fruits and vegetables	22	34	32	651%	50%	-3%
Restaurants	1,410	1,689	1,700	36%	21%	1%
Fast food	973	1,124	1,121	23%	15%	0%
Other restaurants	437	565	580	70%	32%	3%
Total food, beverage and restaurants	4,446	4,672	4,787	-6%	8%	2%

Appendix Table 2. Change in average number of ads viewed by category for adolescents (12-17 years)

Category	Ads viewed per year			Change in ads viewed: 2013 vs.		
	2007	2011	2013	2004	2007	2011
Food and beverage products*	2,883	3,663	3,636	14%	26%	-1%
Cereal	443	483	529	14%	19%	9%
Candy	311	684	846	112%	172%	24%
Prepared meals	478	400	388	46%	-19%	-3%
Sweet snacks	310	322	331	-7%	7%	3%
Yogurt	129	200	176	68%	36%	-12%
Juice, fruit drinks, sports	235	426	281	-12%	19%	-34%
Crackers and savory snacks	118	132	206	40%	75%	56%
Other dairy	61	93	98	3%	60%	6%
Carbonated beverages	124	130	142	-52%	15%	9%
Bottled water	70	50	34	1%	-52%	-33%
Fruits and vegetables	22	42	36	472%	67%	-13%
Restaurants	1,928	2,249	2,370	46%	23%	5%
Fast food	1,437	1,616	1,673	33%	16%	4%
Other restaurants	492	633	697	89%	42%	10%
Total food, beverage and restaurants	4,811	5,912	6,007	24%	25%	2%

Appendix Table 3. Change in average number of ads viewed by category for adults (18-49 years)

Category	Ads viewed per year			Change in ads viewed: 2013 vs.		
	2007	2011	2013	2004	2007	2011
Food and beverage products*	3,221	4,483	4,562	32%	42%	2%
Cereal	378	474	505	34%	33%	7%
Candy	287	750	972	184%	239%	30%
Prepared meals	554	593	551	45%	-1%	-7%
Sweet snacks	301	393	408	24%	36%	4%
Yogurt	148	227	210	126%	42%	-7%
Juice, fruit drinks, sports	273	481	334	-3%	22%	-31%
Crackers and savory snacks	128	171	227	47%	77%	33%
Other dairy	112	154	166	17%	49%	8%
Carbonated beverages	129	142	173	-36%	34%	22%
Bottled water	72	53	29	-30%	-59%	-44%
Fruits and vegetables	43	75	66	386%	55%	-12%
Restaurants	2,298	2,788	3,137	54%	37%	13%
Fast food	1,628	1,937	2,169	45%	33%	12%
Other restaurants	670	851	968	81%	45%	14%
Total food, beverage and restaurants	5,519	7,271	7,699	40%	40%	6%