

Increasing disparities in food-related advertising targeted to Black youth

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Restaurants, food and beverage companies (food companies) increasingly target Black consumers with advertising for their least nutritious products, primarily fast food, candy, sugary drinks, and snacks. Greater exposure to food-related ads by Black youth compared to White youth likely contributes to or exacerbates diet-related health disparities affecting communities of color, including obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

Since our first targeted marketing report was published in 2015, food companies with the most targeted advertising have launched or expanded corporate responsibility commitments to support health and wellness. But this research shows that they have not improved their targeted advertising to support the health of Black children and teens.

The research

Researchers analyzed 2017 Nielsen syndicated market research data to identify food-related TV advertising on Black-targeted TV networks (where Black consumers make up the majority of the audience), and exposure to all food-related TV ads by Black and White youth, including children (2-11 years) and teens (ages 12-17 years). Researchers also reviewed companies' public statements about their targeted marketing practices. The report examines 32 restaurant, food, and beverage companies that spent at least \$100 million on advertising in 2017 and/or participated in the Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI) industry self-regulatory program as of December 2017, including the 236 most highly advertised brands from these companies. These 2017 findings were compared to data from 2013 reported previously.

Disparities between Black and White youth in exposure to all food-related TV ads grew over the past five years

Black teens viewed
17.1 ads/day

White teens viewed
7.8 ads/day

In 2017, Black teens viewed 119% more food-related TV ads than white teens, compared to 70% more in 2013

Key findings

Food-related ads on Black-targeted TV programming continue to almost exclusively promote unhealthy food and drinks

- Fast food and other restaurants accounted for 50% of Black-targeted TV ad spending in 2017.
- Brands in other unhealthy categories—candy, sugary drinks, and snacks—accounted for another 36%.
- Brands in the healthiest product categories—100% juice, plain water, nuts, and fruit—represented just 1% of ad spending on Black-targeted TV.
- Total food-related advertising spending on Black-targeted TV increased by more than 50% from 2013 to 2017, compared to a 4% reduction in total TV ad spending.



At best, these advertising patterns imply that food companies view Black consumers as interested in candy, sugary drinks, fast food, and snacks with a lot of salt, fat, or sugar, but not in healthier foods. Not only are these companies missing out on a marketing opportunity, but they are inadvertently contributing to poor health in Black communities by heavily promoting products linked to an increased risk of obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure.

- Shiriki Kumanyika, PhD, MPH
Council on Black Health
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Disparities between Black and White youth in exposure to all food-related TV ads grew between 2013 and 2017

- In 2013, Black children and teens viewed 70% more food ads than their White peers.
- In 2017, these disparities grew to 86% more ads viewed by Black children and 119% more for Black teens compared to White children and teens.

Nearly all companies in this analysis increased their ad spending on Black-targeted TV from 2013 to 2017

- PepsiCo, Yum! Brands, and Domino's increased Black-targeted ad spending by more than 30%.
- Five companies contributed 45% of ad spending on Black-targeted TV: PepsiCo, Hershey, and Yum! Brands (Taco Bell, Pizza Hut, KFC), Domino's Pizza, and Roark Capital Group (Arby's) fast-food restaurants.

In 2017, candy, sugary drink and unhealthy snack brands disproportionately advertised to Black teens.

- Compared to White teens, Black teens saw 2.4 times as many TV ads for sugary drink and snack foods and 2.6 times as many candy ads in 2017.
- Black teens viewed 2.5 times as many TV ads from Hershey's and PepsiCo.

From 2013 to 2017, disparities in food-related advertising viewed by Black youth compared to White youth have grown and companies continue to primarily target advertising for unhealthy products to Black youth.

Recommendations

Key industry stakeholders including food and beverage manufacturers, restaurants, grocery retailers, and media companies, should improve their targeted marketing practices:

- CFBAI companies can address loopholes that allow them to continue to target marketing of unhealthy products to children, including raising the age of children covered by pledges to at least 14 years old. These improvements would have the greatest benefits for Black youth.
- Media companies should establish nutrition standards for products advertised to youth, including on Black-targeted programming, to align with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
- Food and beverage companies should expand corporate health and wellness initiatives to address disproportionate marketing of unhealthy products to communities of color.

Public health advocacy campaigns should encourage companies to improve marketing that disproportionately targets Black youth, and explore opportunities to engage youth of color in campaigns to address targeted food marketing as a social justice issue.

The full report, *Increasing disparities in unhealthy food advertising targeted to Hispanic and Black youth*, Harris JL, Frazier III W, Kumanyika S, & Ramirez A, is available at www.uconnruddcenter.org/targeted-marketing. Click [here](#) for examples of targeted advertising campaigns from companies included in this report.

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