

Trends in Television Food Advertising to Young People: 2015 Update

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AUTHORS:

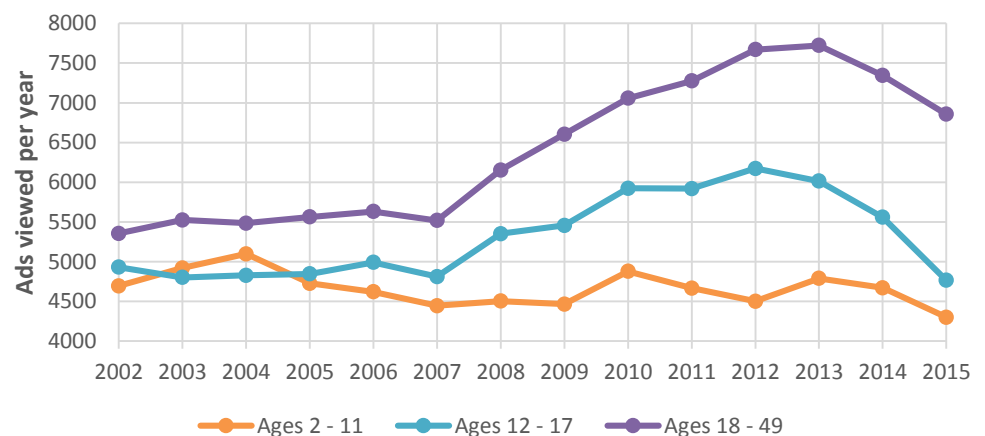
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Introduction

In this brief, we document trends in food-related TV advertising viewed by children and adolescents from 2002 to 2015, specifically focusing on changes in 2015 compared to 2014. We also examine changes in categories of foods and beverages advertised since 2007, the year the Children’s Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI) food industry self-regulatory program was implemented.

Total exposure to food and beverage advertising on TV

Figure 1 shows changes in total TV food, beverage, and restaurant advertising viewed by children (ages 2-11), adolescents (ages 12-17) and adults (ages 18-49) from 2002 to 2015.



Source: Nielsen 2016

Individuals in all age groups viewed less total food-related TV advertising in 2015 than in 2014, continuing a downward trend first observed from 2013 to 2014. Food, beverage, and restaurant TV advertising to children and adolescents decreased by 8% and 14% respectively, from 2014 to 2015. Adults also saw 7% fewer ads in 2015 versus 2014. Compared to 2007 – the year that the CFBAI self-regulatory program was implemented – children saw 3% fewer ads and adolescents saw an equal number of ads.

All age groups viewed less food-related TV advertising in 2015 than in 2014. For the first time, children viewed slightly fewer ads than they had in 2007, when the CFBAI was implemented.

Notably, 2015 was the first year that children and adolescents *did not* view more food-related advertising on TV than they had in 2007. However, children continued to view on average 11.8 food-related ads daily in 2015, and adolescents viewed on average 13.1 ads.

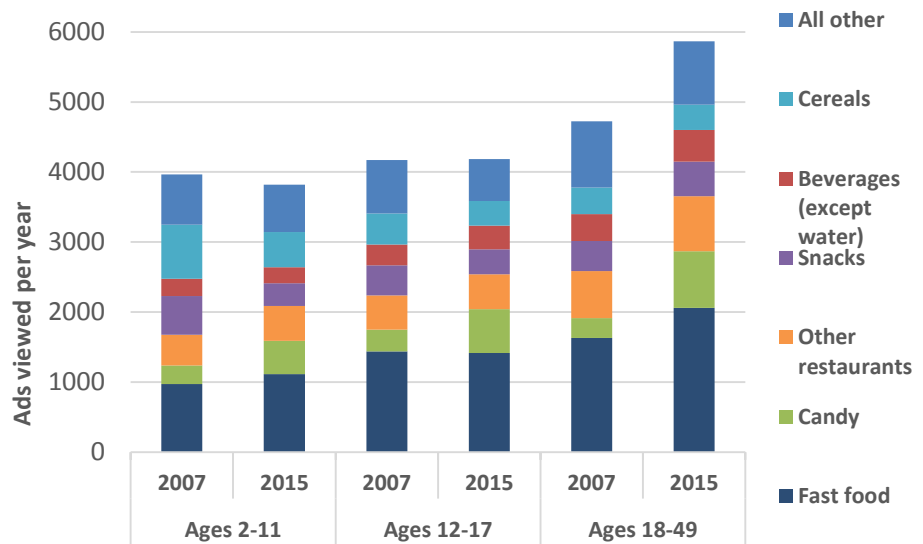
Changes in exposure by major food categories

From 2014 to 2015, the distribution of food-related TV ads across major categories did not change. Individuals in all age groups continued to see more ads for fast food restaurants than any other food category, representing 26% of food-related ads viewed by children and nearly one-third of ads viewed by adolescents (see **Figure 2** and **Appendix Tables**). Cereals remained the second most advertised category to children, followed closely by other (not fast food) restaurants and candy (each represented 11% to 12% of ads viewed by children). Candy remained the second most frequently advertised category to adolescents (13% of food-related ads viewed), followed by other restaurants (10%).

Fast food remained the most advertised food category across all age groups – nearly one-third of all food-related ads seen by youth in 2015.

Cereal and candy remained the second most frequently advertised categories to children and adolescents, respectively.

Figure 2. Total food-related TV advertising exposure by category.



Source: Nielsen 2016

Notably, from 2014 to 2015 TV advertising viewed by children and adolescents declined for all primarily unhealthy categories,¹ with one exception: children viewed 23% *more* ads for carbonated beverages. Children and adolescents also viewed more ads for three primarily healthy categories: yogurt, other dairy, and fruits and vegetables. However, these three categories combined represented just 9% of food-related ads viewed by children and 8% of ads viewed by adolescents.

Compared to 2007, the number of food-related ads viewed by youth in 2015 also reflects some positive changes. During this time, children’s exposure to cereal ads declined by 35%, exposure to sweet snack ads went down 51%, and children saw 26% fewer ads for juice, fruit and sports drinks. Similarly, adolescents viewed 21% fewer cereal ads, 34% fewer ads for sweet snacks, and 22% fewer juice, fruit and sports drink ads. From 2007 to 2015, children’s exposure to ads for crackers and savory snacks decreased by 6%, but adolescents’ exposure increased by 28%.

Since the CFBAI began, children's exposure to ads for fruits and vegetables on TV has more than doubled, yet they remain the least advertised food category to youth. Children see less than one of these ads weekly.

Marked increases in youth exposure to TV ads for healthier product categories also occurred from 2007 to 2015. Children viewed 27% more yogurt ads in 2015 versus 2007, and adolescents viewed 34% additional yogurt ads. Youth exposure to other dairy ads nearly tripled during this time due to significant increases in advertising for cheese, dairy milk, and dairy-free nut milks. From 2007 to 2015, children's exposure to TV ads for fruits and vegetables more than doubled, and adolescents viewed 68% more of these ads. Yet fruits and vegetables and bottled water remained the least advertised food-related product categories, with young people viewing less than one TV ad for each of these categories weekly.

These results also demonstrate continued cause for concern. Youth exposure to ads for some primarily unhealthy food categories has increased since CFBAI implementation. Children saw 79% more candy ads in 2015 compared to 2007, and adolescents' exposure doubled. During this time, candy advertising to children overtook advertising for sweet snacks and prepared meals, with children viewing on average, more than nine candy ads per week in 2015, compared to five per week in 2007. Compared to 2007, children also saw 60% more ads for carbonated beverages in 2015; whereas adolescents' exposure remained relatively constant – increasing by 1% from 2007 to 2015. Similarly, children saw 14% more fast food ads in 2015 than in 2007, but adolescents saw 1% fewer fast food ads.

Furthermore, from 2007 to 2015 exposure to ads for bottled water declined by 19% for children and by 52% for adolescents. In total, ads for the overall healthiest product categories (yogurt, other dairy, bottled water, and fruits and vegetables) represented just 10.2% of food-related ads viewed by children and 8.4% of ads viewed by adolescents in 2015; up from 6.7% and 5.9% in 2007, respectively.

Conclusion

2015 marked the first year since CFBAI implementation that children viewed fewer food-related TV ads than they viewed in 2007. However, this reduction was small (just 3%), and the change in the mix of foods advertised to children – as promised by the CFBAI when first implemented² - has not occurred. Fast food restaurants remained the most advertised category, and youth exposure to ads for carbonated beverages and candy has increased by more than 50% compared to 2007. Although there have been substantial increases in advertising for healthier food and beverage categories since 2007, including yogurt, other dairy, and fruits and vegetables, these categories remained the least advertised to youth. These findings may partially reflect declines in TV viewing overall.³ Furthermore, youth are likely viewing additional ads on mobile platforms such as cell phones and tablets. Despite food industry promises, TV food advertising to youth continues to encourage the consumption of foods and beverages high in calories, fat, and sugar.

Despite the small decline in food-related TV ads overall, the mix of advertised food categories has not improved. Fast-food and other restaurants, candy, cereals and snacks continue to represent more than three-quarters of ads viewed by children and adolescents.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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REFERENCES

1 For more detailed nutrition information on the food categories discussed in this brief see:

- Cereal FACTS: Limited progress in the nutrition quality and marketing of children's cereals (2012). www.cerealfacts.org/media/Cereal_FACTS_Report_2012_7.12.pdf
- Fast Food FACTS: Measuring Progress in Nutrition and Marketing to Children and Teens (2013). www.fastfoodmarketing.org/media/FastFoodFACTS_Report.pdf
- Sugary Drink FACTS: Sugary drink marketing to youth: Some progress but much room to improve (2014). www.sugarydrinkfacts.org/resources/SugaryDrinkFACTS_Report.pdf
- Snack FACTS: Evaluating snack food nutrition and marketing to youth (2015). www.uconnruddcenter.org/files/Pdfs/SnackFACTS_2015_Fulldraft03.pdf

2 Better Business Bureaus [BBB] (2016). *About the Initiative*. www.bbb.org/council/the-national-partner-program/national-advertising-review-services/childrens-food-and-beverage-advertising-initiative/about-the-initiative/.

3 The Nielsen Company (2015). Kids' Audience Behavior Across Platforms. <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/reports/2015/kids-audience-behavior-across-platforms.html>

For information about the methods used in this analysis, please see our previous report: *Trends in television food advertising: Progress in reducing unhealthy food marketing to young people*. Available at UConnRuddCenter.org/resources/upload/docs/what/reports/RuddReport_TVFoodAdvertising_2.10.pdf

For more information about food marketing to youth, please visit UConnRuddCenter.org/food-marketing

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 2015 vs.		
	2004	2007	2014	2015	2004	2007	2014
Foods and Beverages*	3,847	3,036	2,874	2,690	-30%	-11%	-6%
Cereals	973	772	613	503	-48%	-35%	-18%
Candy	397	266	549	476	20%	79%	-13%
Prepared Meals	306	420	281	234	-24%	-44%	-17%
Yogurt	204	178	221	225	10%	27%	2%
Sweet Snacks	637	432	272	213	-67%	-51%	-22%
Juice, Fruit, and Sports Drinks	316	188	151	139	-56%	-26%	-8%
Other Dairy	72	43	68	124	72%	189%	83%
Crackers and Savory Snacks	147	121	130	114	-23%	-6%	-13%
Carbonated Beverages	141	57	75	91	-35%	60%	23%
Bottled Water	16	55	62	45	178%	-19%	-28%
Fruits and Vegetables	4	22	39	45	1025%	105%	17%
Restaurants	1,252	1,410	1,797	1,611	29%	14%	-10%
Fast Food Restaurants	911	973	1,206	1,113	22%	14%	-8%
Other Restaurants	341	437	591	498	46%	14%	-16%
Grand Total	5,099	4,446	4,671	4,301	-16%	-3%	-8%

*Includes all packaged food and beverage categories
Source: Nielsen 2016

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 2015 vs.		
	2004	2007	2014	2015	2004	2007	2014
Foods and Beverages*	3,200	2,883	3,283	2,850	-11%	-1%	-13%
Candy	400	311	784	624	56%	101%	-20%
Cereals	464	443	422	350	-25%	-21%	-17%
Prepared Meals	266	418	300	232	-13%	-44%	-23%
Sweet Snacks	356	310	294	206	-42%	-34%	-30%
Juice, Fruit, and Sports Drinks	318	235	236	182	-43%	-22%	-23%
Yogurt	105	129	170	173	65%	34%	2%
Other Dairy	96	61	87	159	66%	161%	83%
Crackers and Savory Snacks	147	118	162	152	3%	28%	-6%
Carbonated Beverages	295	124	133	125	-58%	1%	-6%
Fruits and Vegetables	6	22	36	37	517%	68%	2%
Bottled Water	33	70	45	34	2%	-52%	-24%
Restaurants	1,629	1,929	2,276	1,915	18%	-1%	-16%
Fast Food Restaurants	1,260	1,437	1,620	1,416	12%	-1%	-13%
Other Restaurants	369	492	655	499	35%	1%	-24%
Grand Total	4,829	4,812	5,558	4,765	-1%	-1%	-14%

*Includes all packaged food and beverage categories
Source: Nielsen 2016

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 2015 vs.		
	2004	2007	2014	2015	2004	2007	2014
Foods and Beverages*	3,453	3,221	4,237	4,013	16%	25%	-5%
Candy	342	287	943	812	137%	183%	-14%
Cereals	375	378	415	361	-4%	-5%	-13%
Prepared Meals	380	554	424	339	-11%	-39%	-20%
Sweet Snacks	328	301	369	280	-15%	-7%	-24%
Juice, Fruit, and Sports Beverages	346	273	288	251	-27%	-8%	-13%
Carbonated Beverages	269	129	163	236	-12%	83%	44%
Yogurt	93	148	206	233	151%	57%	13%
Crackers and Savory Snacks	154	128	195	218	41%	70%	12%
Other Dairy	143	112	158	200	40%	78%	26%
Fruits and Vegetables	14	43	57	63	350%	47%	10%
Bottled Water	42	72	73	32	-23%	-55%	-56%
Restaurants	2,032	2,298	3,107	2,844	40%	24%	-8%
Fast Food Restaurants	1,496	1,628	2,173	2,058	38%	26%	-5%
Other Restaurants	536	670	934	786	47%	17%	-16%
Grand Total	5,485	5,519	7,344	6,857	25%	24%	-7%

*Includes all packaged food and beverage categories
Source: Nielsen 2016