

Trends in Television Food Advertising to Young People: 2016 Update

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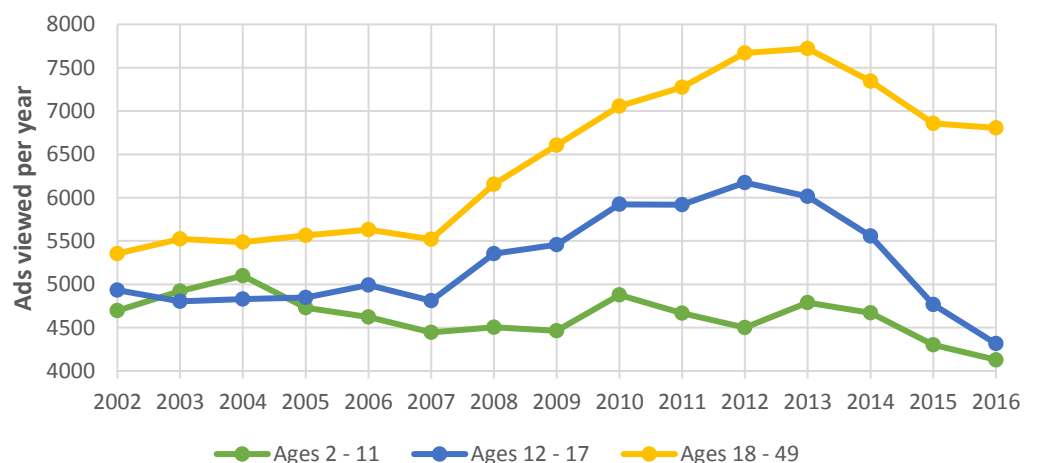
Introduction

This brief documents trends in food-related TV advertising (i.e., ads for food, beverages, and restaurants) viewed by children and adolescents from 2002 to 2016, focusing on changes from 2015 to 2016. It also examines changes in categories of food and beverages advertised since 2007, the year the Children’s Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI) food industry self-regulatory program was implemented to “shift the mix of advertising primarily directed to children.”¹

Total exposure to food-related advertising on TV

Children and adolescents viewed fewer food-related TV ads in 2016 than in 2015, continuing the downward trend that began in 2013 for children and 2012 for adolescents. From 2015 to 2016, food, beverage, and restaurant advertising to children decreased by 4%, and by 9% for adolescents. Compared to 2007 – the year the CFBAI self-regulatory program was implemented – children saw 7% fewer ads and adolescents saw 10% fewer.

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 2016.



Source: Nielsen 2017

Children and adolescents viewed less food-related TV advertising in 2016 than in 2015. Children also viewed 7% fewer ads in 2016 than in 2007, the year the CFBAI was implemented.

However, children still viewed on average 11.3 food-related TV ads daily in 2016, and adolescents viewed on average 11.8 ads. On the other hand, adult advertising exposure remained nearly unchanged from 2015 to 2016—decreasing by just 1%. Furthermore, compared to 2007, advertising to adults increased by 23%.

Changes in exposure by major food categories

From 2015 to 2016, changes in children’s exposure to food-related TV ads varied by category, with increases for some categories and declines for others (see **Appendix Table 1**). Children’s exposure to ads for carbonated beverages and juice/fruit drinks/sports drinks increased by 19% and 38%, respectively. By comparison, their exposure to yogurt and bottled water ads decreased by 26% and 38%, respectively. Children also viewed fewer ads for candy (-20%), sweet snacks (-14%), cereals (-3%) and fast food restaurants (-2%) in 2016 than in 2015. Notably, children’s exposure to ads for fruits and vegetables increased by 23%, but these products represented just 1% of all food-related TV ads viewed by children in 2016.

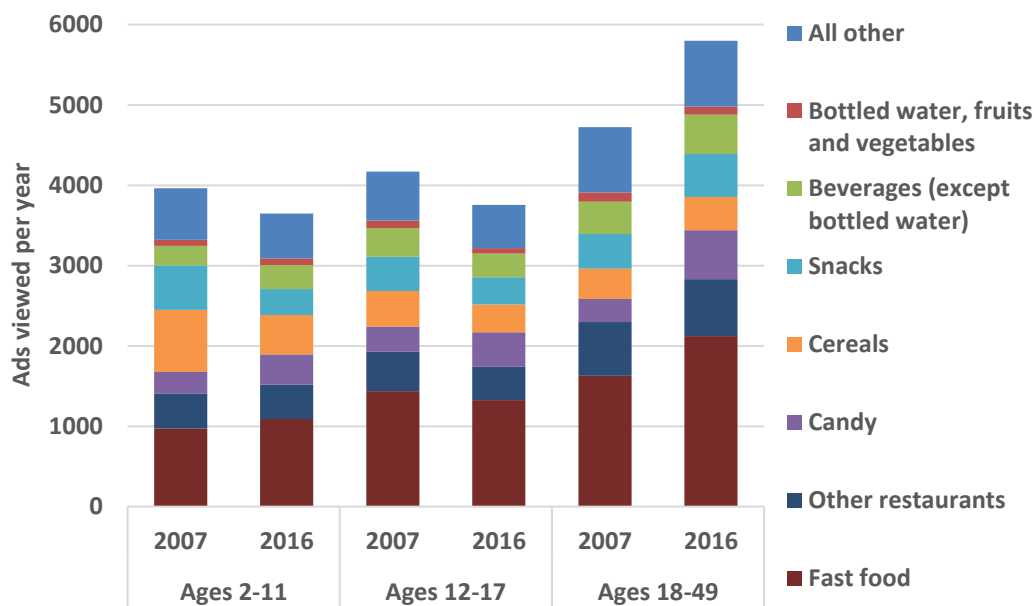
Changes in adolescents’ exposure to food-related TV ads showed similar but less robust trends for most categories (see **Appendix Table 2**). There were a few large declines from 2015 to 2016, including ads for candy (-32%), bottled water (-23%), yogurt (-20%) and other restaurants (-17%). However, most categories had small increases or decreases. Adolescents viewed fewer ads for sweet snacks (-9%), carbonated beverages (-6%), fast food restaurants (-6%) and juice/fruit drinks/sports drinks (-2%), while exposure to ads for other dairy (including cheese and milk) and prepared meals increased by 4% and 1%, respectively. The largest increase in exposure for adolescents was for fruit and vegetable ads (+6%).

Overall, there were few changes in the proportion of food advertisements viewed by category from 2015 to 2016 (see **Figure 2**). Fast food remained the most advertised category to individuals in all age groups, representing 26% of food-related ads viewed by children and 31% of ads viewed by adolescents. Cereals remained the second most frequently advertised category to children (12% of food-related ads viewed), followed by other (not fast food) restaurants (10%) and candy (9%). For adolescents, candy remained the second most frequently advertised category (10% of food-related ads viewed), followed by other restaurants (10%) and cereals (8%).

Children viewed 19% more TV ads for carbonated beverages in 2016 than in 2015, while adolescents viewed 6% fewer ads.

Fast food remained the most advertised category – 26% of all food-related ads viewed by children in 2016 – followed by cereals, other restaurants, and candy.

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



Source: Nielsen 2017

Notable improvements in children’s exposure to food-related TV ads from 2007 to 2016 include a 57% decrease in ads for sweet snacks and a 37% decline in cereal ads. Children’s exposure to fruit and vegetable ads more than doubled.

Compared to 2007, there have been some positive changes in food-related TV ads viewed by children and adolescents. Children’s exposure to sweet snacks ads decreased by 57%, while exposure to ads for cereals and prepared meals each decreased by 37%. Adolescents also viewed 39% fewer sweet snacks ads, 22% fewer cereal ads, and 44% fewer prepared meals ads. Furthermore, children’s exposure to TV ads for fruits and vegetables more than doubled (+151%), and nearly tripled (+190%) for other dairy products from 2007 to 2015. Adolescents’ exposure to TV ads for other dairy products more than doubled (+170%), and their exposure to fruit and vegetable ads increased by 79%. Overall, ads for the healthiest product categories (yogurt, other dairy, bottled water, and fruits and vegetables) combined represented just 9% of food-related ads viewed by both children and adolescents in 2016. This compares to 7% of food-related ads viewed by children, and 6% of ads viewed by adolescents in 2007.

However, other changes in child and adolescent exposure to ads for some food and beverage categories raise concerns. Compared to 2007, children’s exposure to TV ads for candy and fast food increased by 43% and 12%, respectively. Since 2010, children’s annual exposure to candy ads has exceeded their exposure to ads for sweet and savory snacks/crackers combined.

Despite improvements in the amount and types of food-related TV ads viewed by children and adolescents, primarily unhealthy categories continued to represent more than 75% of ads viewed in 2016.

Conclusion

Since the CFBAI was implemented in 2007, there has been some notable progress in the amount and types of food-related TV advertising viewed by children and adolescents. Total exposure to advertising for both age groups has declined. Ads for bottled water, cereals and sweet snacks declined at the highest rate, and these categories accounted for a smaller percentage of food-related ads viewed by children and adolescents in 2016 than in 2007. In addition, TV ads for fruits and vegetables and other dairy represented a larger percentage of ads viewed in 2016 than in 2007, although ads for the healthiest product categories (also including bottled water) represented just 9% of food-related ads viewed by both children and adolescents in 2016.

On the other hand, children's exposure to TV ads for some primarily unhealthy categories, including candy, beverages (excluding water), and fast food restaurants, increased from 2007 to 2016. These categories each accounted for a larger proportion of food-related ads viewed by children in 2016 than in 2007. Adolescents' exposure to candy ads also increased during this time. Ads for primarily unhealthy food categories still represent more than three quarters of food-related ads viewed by children and adolescents. While some progress has been made to improve the amount and types of food-related TV ads viewed by children and adolescents, there is still considerable room for improvement.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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REFERENCES

1 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/

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: http://www.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 2016 vs.		
	2004	2007	2015	2016	2004	2007	2015
Foods and Beverages*	3,847	3,036	2,690	2,614	-32%	-14%	-3%
Cereals	973	772	503	490	-50%	-37%	-3%
Candy	397	266	476	381	-4%	43%	-20%
Prepared Meals	306	420	234	264	-14%	-37%	13%
Juice, Fruit, and Sports Drinks	316	188	139	192	-39%	2%	38%
Sweet Snacks	637	432	213	184	-71%	-57%	-14%
Yogurt	204	178	225	167	-18%	-6%	-26%
Crackers and Savory Snacks	147	121	114	137	-7%	13%	21%
Other Dairy	72	43	124	125	73%	190%	0%
Carbonated Beverages	141	57	91	108	-23%	90%	19%
Fruits and Vegetables	4	22	45	55	1,279%	151%	23%
Bottled Water	16	55	45	28	73%	-50%	-38%
Restaurants	1,252	1,410	1,611	1,516	21%	8%	-6%
Fast Food Restaurants	911	973	1,113	1,089	20%	12%	-2%
Other Restaurants	341	437	498	427	25%	-2%	-14%
Grand Total	5,099	4,446	4,301	4,129	-19%	-7%	-4%

*Includes all packaged food and beverage categories

Source: Nielsen 2017

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 2016 vs.		
	2004	2007	2015	2016	2004	2007	2015
Foods and Beverages*	3,200	2,883	2,850	2,573	-20%	-11%	-10%
Cereals	400	311	624	428	7%	38%	-32%
Candy	464	443	350	347	-25%	-22%	-1%
Prepared Meals	266	418	232	235	-12%	-44%	1%
Sweet Snacks	356	310	206	188	-47%	-39%	-9%
Juice, Fruit, and Sports Drinks	318	235	182	178	-44%	-24%	-2%
Other Dairy	96	61	159	166	72%	171%	4%
Crackers and Savory Snacks	147	118	152	151	3%	28%	0%
Yogurt	105	129	173	138	31%	7%	-20%
Carbonated Beverages	295	124	125	118	-60%	-5%	-6%
Fruits and Vegetables	6	22	37	39	555%	79%	6%
Bottled Water	33	70	34	26	-21%	-63%	-23%
Restaurants	1,629	1,929	1,915	1,742	7%	-10%	-9%
Fast Food Restaurants	1,260	1,437	1,416	1,328	5%	-8%	-6%
Other Restaurants	369	492	499	414	12%	-16%	-17%
Grand Total	4,829	4,812	4,765	4,315	-11%	-10%	-9%

*Includes all packaged food and beverage categories

Source: Nielsen 2017

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 2016 vs.		
	2004	2007	2015	2016	2004	2007	2015
Foods and Beverages*	3,453	3,221	4,013	3,977	15%	23%	-1%
Candy	342	287	812	612	79%	113%	-25%
Cereals	375	378	361	413	10%	9%	15%
Prepared Meals	380	554	339	349	-8%	-37%	3%
Sweet Snacks	328	301	280	289	-12%	-4%	3%
Carbonated Beverages	269	129	236	247	-8%	92%	5%
Crackers and Savory Snacks	154	128	218	245	59%	92%	13%
Other Dairy	143	112	200	245	72%	119%	23%
Juice, Fruit, and Sports Drinks	346	273	251	244	-30%	-11%	-3%
Yogurt	93	148	233	225	142%	52%	-3%
Fruits and Vegetables	14	43	63	66	372%	54%	5%
Bottled Water	42	72	32	33	-21%	-54%	2%
Restaurants	2,032	2,298	2,844	2,830	39%	23%	-1%
Fast Food Restaurants	1,496	1,628	2,058	2,122	42%	30%	3%
Other Restaurants	536	670	786	708	32%	6%	-10%
Grand Total	5,485	5,519	6,857	6,806	24%	23%	-1%

*Includes all packaged food and beverage categories
Source: Nielsen 2017