

Executive Summary

RUDD REPORT

Targeted food and beverage advertising to Black and Hispanic consumers: 2022 update

<https://uconnruddcenter.org/targetedmarketing2022>

U.S. food companies disproportionately target Black and Hispanic consumers with marketing for high-calorie, low-nutrient products including candy, sugary drinks, snacks, and fast food. The more than one billion spent on this targeted marketing exacerbates inequities in poor diet and diet-related diseases in communities of color, including heart disease, obesity, and diabetes.

This report updates the Rudd Center's previous report on ethnically targeted advertising of packaged foods and beverages that examined 2017 data. Since then, TV viewing habits and advertising trends have changed dramatically. This report examines how these broader viewing and advertising trends have impacted ethnically targeted food advertising.

METHODS

This report uses the same methods and definitions as our previous targeted marketing reports to identify TV advertising targeted to Black and Hispanic consumers in 2021. Our analyses focus on the 19 food and beverage companies with the highest advertising spending, as well as additional companies that participate in the Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI). Nielsen syndicated market research data measured total TV and targeted TV advertising spending on Spanish-language and Black-targeted TV networks, as well as TV ads viewed by Hispanic and Black children, teens, and adults. We report changes from 2017 to 2021. In

addition, we examined companies' public statements about their targeted marketing campaigns. This report excludes targeted advertising by fast-food and other restaurants, which was previously reported in our Fast Food FACTS 2021 report.

KEY FINDINGS

Changes in food and beverage advertising: 2017 to 2021

Overall positive trends reflect major shifts in TV viewing habits and advertising in the U.S.

- TV Food ad spending totaled \$4.0 billion in 2021, a decline of 25% from 2017, while ad spending on Spanish-language and Black-targeted TV declined by 18% and 63%, totaling \$411.5 and \$86 million, respectively, in 2021.
- TV ads viewed by all demographic groups also declined during the same period, including 38% fewer ads viewed by Hispanic teens on Spanish-language TV and 58% to 62% fewer TV ads viewed by children and teens overall.
- Disparities in TV advertising exposure for Black versus White youth also decreased due to greater declines in TV ads viewed by Black youth (66-70%) than by White youth (56-58%).
- These positive trends in TV food ad exposure mirrored declines in amount of time spent watching TV, including by Black and White youth, and do not appear to reflect a change in ethnically targeted marketing strategies by food companies.

Despite overall declines in ad spending and TV ad exposure, food and beverage TV advertising continued to target Black and Hispanic consumers.

- In 2021, Black youth and adults viewed 9% to 21% more food and beverage TV ads compared to their White peers, after accounting for differences in amount of time spent watching TV.
- Companies increased their focus on advertising to Spanish-speaking TV viewers, evidenced by greater ad spending on Spanish-language

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TV as a proportion of total TV ad spending. As a result, reductions in ads viewed by Hispanic youth on Spanish-language TV were lower than reductions in ads viewed by youth on TV overall.

Targeted advertising by company

Amount of ethnically targeted advertising varied widely by company.

- Mars, Hershey, and Keurig Dr Pepper, the companies with the most targeted advertising in 2017, reduced both their Spanish-language and Black-targeted TV advertising spending by 70% or more in 2021.
- Red Bull (+835%), Ferrero (+139%), Kellogg (+63%), and Mondelez (+54) increased total TV advertising spending, as well as TV ads targeting Hispanic and Black consumers, in sharp contrast to overall declines for food and beverage advertising in total.

Targeted advertising by category

Targeted TV ads continued to primarily promote unhealthy food and beverage categories.

- Candy and gum/mints, sugary drinks, savory snacks, cereal, and sweet snacks represented three-quarters of Spanish-language and Black-targeted TV ad spending in 2021, up from approximately one-half of each in 2017.
- There was no advertising for fruits or vegetables on Spanish-language or Black-targeted TV in 2021, and companies spent just \$5,000 in total TV advertising for these categories.
- A small number of brands in healthier categories had ethnically targeted TV ads in 2021, including two nut brands that advertised on Spanish-language TV and two plain water brands on Black-targeted TV programming.
- Black teens no longer viewed disproportionately

more TV ads for sugary drinks or diet drinks compared to White teens in 2021, in contrast with 2017.

Targeted marketing campaigns

Numerous marketing campaigns, including in social media, targeted multicultural youth.

- Many campaigns incorporated hip-hop and Latinx music celebrities and other youth-oriented themes. Others utilized cause-related marketing, such as donations and collaborations with non-profits to benefit communities of color, to foster goodwill for food and beverage brands.
- Coca-Cola and PepsiCo brands were responsible for the majority of marketing campaigns identified that targeted multicultural youth and communities of color.
- Ethnically targeted marketing campaigns almost exclusively promoted unhealthy products.

DISCUSSION

The social, political, and economic context in which we analyze these findings has changed markedly since the Rudd Center's last examination of ethnically targeted marketing. The disproportionate negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on communities of color in the U.S. has intensified the need to monitor contributors to health disparities, including the targeted marketing of unhealthy foods to Black and Hispanic consumers.

There have also been major shifts in media viewing habits and TV advertising by U.S. companies across all product categories, not just the food and beverage industry. Young people have increased their media viewing on mobile devices and non-commercial streaming services, which are not measured in these data. As a result, companies have increased the proportion of advertising budgets allocated to digital versus TV advertising.

Targeted marketing designed to appeal specifically to Hispanic and Black consumers acknowledges their value as customers and is not problematic in and of itself. Companies are responsible to their investors to continually increase sales and profits, and it appears that they are attempting to broaden their appeal to an increasingly diverse customer base. Yet nearly all ethnically targeted brands in our analysis consist of primarily unhealthy

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product categories. Therefore, the ethnically targeted marketing to Black and Hispanic consumers identified in this report presents a significant barrier to improved public health and health equity.

Limitations

This research provides an extensive but not exhaustive evaluation of television advertising for packaged foods and beverages targeted to Hispanic and Black consumers. Nielsen data are not available to systematically examine targeting that occurred outside of TV advertising, including digital marketing, sponsorships, and retail promotions. We did not conduct a nutritional analysis of products sold by targeted brands, but previous research has demonstrated the poor nutritional quality of the majority of products in highly targeted categories, including cereals, beverages, and snacks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key actors within industry, the public health community, and policy makers must take responsibility for reducing unhealthy marketing that targets and disproportionately impacts Hispanic and Black consumers. Making healthier choices the easiest, most affordable, and most socially acceptable options would advance racial equity and mitigate the harms of structural racism.

- Food and beverage companies should devote their enormous resources to culturally relevant and cause-related marketing campaigns for nutritious products that would contribute positively to public health and reduce preventable diet related chronic disease.

- Media companies that own programming with large audiences of Hispanic and/or Black youth can establish nutrition standards to limit unhealthy food advertising and/or provide incentives to advertise healthier products (e.g., plain water, fruits, and vegetables).
- Public health advocates, researchers, and community and grassroots organizations can increase public awareness and call for improvements to the vast amounts of unhealthy food and beverage marketing that disproportionately targets communities of color.
- Policy makers and advocates can pursue or support legislation or regulation to address unhealthy food and beverage marketing, such as sweetened beverage taxes and restricting marketing in schools.

CONCLUSION

This report documents that food and beverage companies continue to disproportionately target Black and Hispanic consumers with TV advertising for almost exclusively unhealthy packaged food and beverage categories. Most companies in this analysis have healthier brands in their portfolios, including plain water, low-sugar cereals, yogurt, plain dairy, fruits, and vegetables that could be promoted. Therefore, choosing to disproportionately advertise their least nutritious brands, including sugary drinks, candy, chips, and high-sugar cereals, to Black and Hispanic consumers, must be weighed against the resulting costs to communities.

