

Food advertising targeted to Black youth: Contributing to health disparities

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Black youth receive a “double dose” of food marketing for nutritionally poor products: They see more food advertising in the media *and* more marketing messages in their communities. Exposure to unhealthy food marketing contributes to poor diet, including greater fast food and sugary drink consumption, and higher rates of obesity and related diseases. Experts also raise concerns that some companies may target advertising for nutritionally poor foods disproportionately more to Black youth.

The research

This research was designed to better understand targeted TV advertising by the largest food advertisers in the United States and identify opportunities to encourage companies to reduce disparities in food marketing aimed at Black youth.

Researchers compiled companies’ public statements about their targeted marketing practices and analyzed 2013 syndicated market research data to identify targeted TV advertising by company and brand. The 26 restaurant, food, and beverage companies spending at least \$100 million on advertising in 2013 and/or participating in the Children’s Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI) as of December 31, 2014 were examined. The 267 most highly advertised brands from these companies were also analyzed.

Findings

The majority of companies in the analysis advertised one or more of their brands on Black-targeted TV networks (those with an audience of 50% or more Black viewers) in 2013 – totaling \$161 million.

- Five companies spent more than \$10 million in Black-targeted TV advertising: Hershey, PepsiCo, Mars, Yum! Brands, and Kellogg.
- Hershey spent the most (\$23 million) *and* invested the highest proportion of its TV advertising budget on Black-targeted networks.
- Three additional companies allocated 4% or more of their TV advertising budgets to Black-targeted TV (twice the company average): Ferrero, Unilever, and Dr Pepper Snapple Group.

One-third of the 267 brands analyzed spent more than \$500,000 on Black-targeted TV and/or aimed their advertising disproportionately more to Black teens compared with White teens. Nearly all of these targeted brands consist of nutritionally poor products that contribute to poor diet and related diseases.

- Fast-food and other restaurant brands spent \$61 million to advertise on Black-targeted TV, one out of three food-related ads on these networks.
- Candy represented 18% of all food-related advertising on Black-targeted TV, and three-quarters of candy brands targeted their advertising to Black consumers. Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups, M&Ms, Hershey’s Kisses, and Hershey’s candy bar each spent more than \$2 million in advertising on Black-targeted TV.

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- Almost half of sugary drink and snack brands targeted Black consumers, contributing another 24% of food-related advertising spending on Black-targeted TV. Pop Tarts spent more than \$4 million, and Lay's Potato Chips and Coca-Cola Classic each spent approximately \$2 million.

In contrast, brands in healthier categories – including yogurt and other dairy – represented less than 2% of advertising spending on Black-targeted TV. Not one brand of 100% juice, plain water, or fruits and vegetables targeted advertising to Black consumers.

Black children and teens also view considerably more ads for food, beverages, and restaurants on all types of TV programming compared with White children and teens – 70% more ads in 2013.

- Black children viewed on average 13.3 food-related ads per day from the companies analyzed and Black teens averaged 15.5 ads per day. Compared with their White peers, Black children and teens viewed 5.6 and 7.5 additional food-related ads on TV every day.
- This disparity was even greater for some categories. Black children and teens saw more than twice as many TV ads for candy and gum and more than 90% additional ads for snacks and sugary drinks.

Recommendations

Targeted marketing designed to appeal to Black consumers is not problematic in and of itself. However, Black-targeted TV advertising almost exclusively promotes nutritionally poor foods and likely contributes to health disparities affecting Black communities.

Dramatic changes in marketing of foods, beverages, and restaurants targeting Black consumers are required:

- As Black children view disproportionately more food-related TV advertising, improvements in the CFBAI would also benefit Black children the most.
- Industry commitments to increase sales and marketing of healthier products – such as the Healthy Weight Commitment Foundation, Partnership for a Healthier America, and the National Restaurant Association's Kids LiveWell Program – should also address advertising in Black-targeted media and in Black communities.
- Fast-food restaurants and sugary drink, candy, and nutritionally poor snack food brands should stop targeting their advertising to all youth under 18, including multicultural youth.
- Media properties with large audiences of Black youth should set nutritional standards for advertised foods and provide incentives for advertising healthy products.

Public health advocacy campaigns should also highlight marketing practices of companies that disproportionately advertise unhealthy products to Black youth. If parents and others who care about the health of these youth demand that companies improve the quality of foods marketed to their children and in their communities, companies will have to improve their marketing practices.

Improving the food marketing environment for all young people – no matter who they are or where they live – would benefit public health for all.

The full report, *Food advertising targeted to Hispanic and Black youth: Contributing to health disparities*, Harris JL, Shehan C, Gross R, Kumanyika S, Lassiter V, Ramirez A, & Gallion K, is available at UConnRuddCenter.org/targeted-marketing