



YALE RUDD CENTER
FOR FOOD POLICY & OBESITY

Public attitudes about allowing children under age 13 to join Facebook

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Facebook's terms of service currently do not allow children under 13 to become members. However, the company is considering whether to allow children to join the social networking site. ¹ To understand public attitudes about this potential change, we added questions to an existing survey of parents and other adults on issues regarding food marketing to children and teens. We assessed attitudes about whether children under age 13 should have their own Facebook profiles and whether Facebook should allow advertisers to use Facebook profiles and other information to target marketing to children.

Methods

In July 2013, participants ages 21-65 with an annual income of at least \$15,000 who have primary or shared responsibility for household food and beverage choices were recruited via email through Survey Sampling International (www.surveysampling.com). ² The total sample size (N=1202) includes a random sample of parents with children between the ages of 2 and 17 living at home (n=601) and other adults (n=300), with augmentations of black parents (n=100) and Hispanic parents (n=201), including Spanish-speaking parents.

Results

As shown in Figure 1, there was strong disagreement with permitting children under the age of 13 to have their own profile pages, as well as allowing Facebook to provide information to advertisers for target marketing to children. Over 73% of parents *do not agree* that children under the age of 13 should have their own Facebook profiles. In addition, if children under 13 are permitted to use Facebook, more than two-thirds of parents say it *would not be okay* for fast food, soft drink and other snack companies to market to children on Facebook or for any advertisers to use Facebook information to target children. Other adults had similar, but slightly stronger, negative attitudes about children joining Facebook and advertisers targeting children through Facebook.

Figure 1: Disagreement with potential Facebook changes for children under age 13



Disagree (1-5), Agree (6-10)

Conclusion

There is very little support, among parents and other adults, for Facebook to allow children under 13 to join the social networking site. Further, there is considerable concern about allowing advertisers to use Facebook to reach children with marketing messages to encourage the consumption of unhealthy food, as well as practices that would allow companies to use children's Facebook information and activities to target advertising messages to them directly.

¹ Troianovski A & Raice S (June 4, 2012). Facebook explores giving kids access. *Wall Street Journal*. Available at <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303506404577444711741019238>.

² Survey Sampling International (2013). Available at www.surveysampling.com.