

Trends in Television Food Advertising to Young People: 2014 Update

March 2015

AUTHORS:

Catherine V. Shehan, MS
Jennifer L. Harris, PhD, MBA

Summary

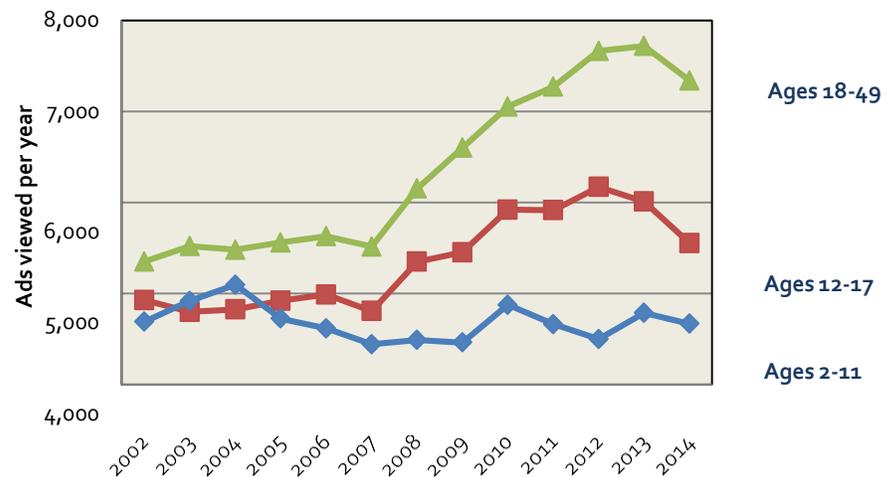
In this brief, we update our previous reports on food-related TV ads viewed by children and adolescents since 2002 to include 2014 data. We also examine changes since 2007, when the Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI) food industry self-regulatory program¹ was implemented.

In 2014, children viewed on average 12.8 ads per day for foods, beverages, and restaurants, and adolescents viewed 15.2 ads per day – declines of 2% and 7%, respectively, versus 2013. However, children viewed 5% more food-related ads in 2014 than they had in 2007, and adolescents viewed 16% more. Categories with more advertising to youth in 2014 versus 2007 included candy, carbonated beverages, fast-food and other restaurants, and crackers and savory snacks, as well as yogurt and other dairy. Advertisements for bottled water and fruits and vegetables also increased, but these categories each represented less than 2% of food advertisements seen by youth.

Food-related advertising on TV decreased from 2013 to 2014 for all age groups. However, children, adolescents, and adults viewed more of these ads in 2014 than they had in 2007, when the CFBAI launched.

Total Exposure to Food-related Advertising on TV

Figure 1 shows changes in the total number of TV ads for foods, beverages and restaurants viewed by children (2-11 years), adolescents (12-17 years) and adults (18-49 years) from 2002 to 2014.



Source: Nielsen 2015

In 2014, on average children, adolescents, and adults viewed 12.8, 15.2, and 20.1 TV advertisements per day for foods, beverages, and restaurants – declines from 2013 levels for all age groups. Food-related ads viewed by children decreased 2%, while adolescents and adults saw 7% and 5% fewer ads, respectively. Of note, 2014 continued a downward trend in ads viewed by adolescents begun in 2012, and marked the first year since 2004 that adults’ exposure to advertising decreased. However, compared to 2007 when the CFBAI was implemented, children viewed 5% more food-related ads and adolescents’ total exposure increased by 16%. Of note, adults saw an even greater increase in ads viewed of 33% during this same period.

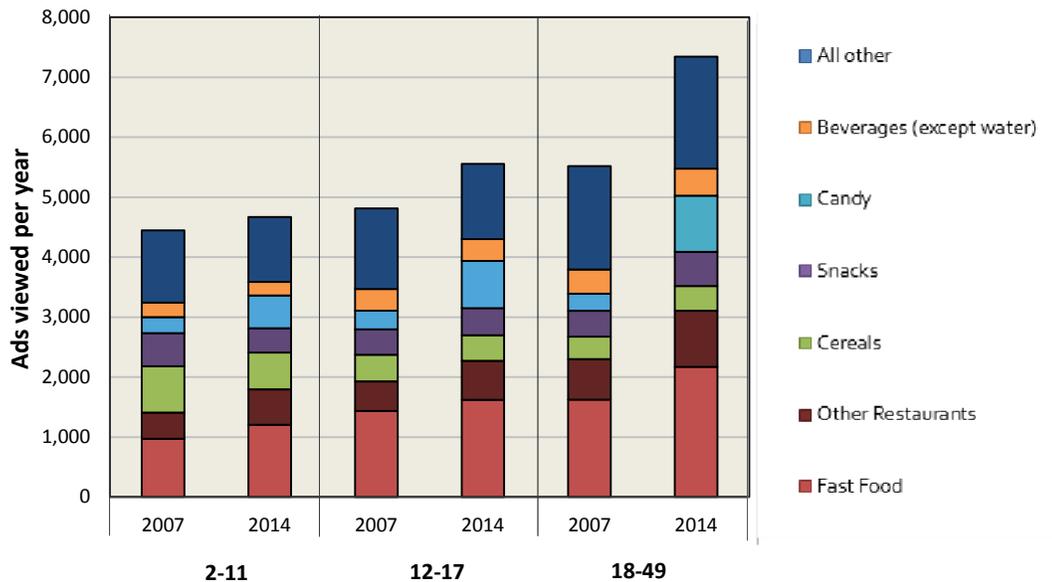
Exposure by Major Food Categories

While the number of food-related TV ads viewed by children and adolescents increased from 2007 to 2014, the categories of foods and beverages advertised most frequently remained fairly constant (see Figure 2). Individuals in all age groups continued to see more ads for fast-food restaurants than any other food and beverage category, representing over a quarter of all food-related ads seen by children and nearly one-third of ads seen by adolescents and adults. On average, children viewed 4.9 advertisements for fast-food and other restaurants daily in 2014, a 6% increase relative to 2013 and a 27% increase versus 2007. Adolescents were exposed to 6.2 daily fast-food and other restaurant advertisements in 2014, viewing 4% fewer than the previous year but 18% more than they had in 2007.

In 2014, fast-food restaurants were responsible for more than one-quarter of food-related ads seen by children and almost one-third of those seen by adolescents.

Other restaurants, candy, snack foods, and carbonated beverages contributed another third of food ads seen by children and adolescents.

Figure 2. Total food and beverage advertising exposure by category



Source: Nielsen 2015

Although cereals remained the second most frequently advertised food to children, cereal advertising to youth declined substantially in 2014. Children viewed 21% fewer of these ads than they had in 2013, as well as in 2007. As in 2013, candy remained the second most frequently advertised food to adolescents in 2014 and ranked fourth in advertising to children. Further, candy advertising to children continued to increase. Both children and adolescents saw more than twice as many ads for candy in 2014 compared with 2007.

Food categories with the greatest reduction in ads viewed by children from 2007 to 2014 included sweet snacks (-37%), prepared meals (-33%), and cereals (-21%).

Advertising for some food and beverage categories has decreased substantially since 2007. For children ages 2 to 11, advertising for both prepared foods and sweet snacks in 2014 were at their lowest levels for the past ten years. This age group also saw 19% fewer ads for crackers and savory snacks and 7% fewer ads for juice, fruit, and sports drinks relative to 2013. In 2014, adolescents also saw 25% fewer advertisements for prepared meals, 21% fewer ads for crackers and savory snacks, 11% fewer ads for sweet snacks, and 6% fewer carbonated beverage ads compared to 2013. Of note, despite the 2013 to 2014 decrease in number of ads for savory snacks seen by adolescents, this age group saw 37% more of these ads in 2014 than in 2007.

In contrast, youth exposure to TV advertisements for yogurt and other dairy products increased from 2007 to 2014. Children viewed 58% more dairy ads and 24% more yogurt ads in 2014 versus 2007; adolescents also viewed 43% and 32% more dairy and yogurt ads, respectively. However, from 2013 to 2014 advertising for these categories did not change or decreased – including a 16% reduction in other dairy ads viewed by children.

In 2014, children saw 14 candy ads and 31 fast-food ads for every fruit or vegetable commercial viewed.

Advertising for fruits and vegetables and bottled water also increased in recent years. Children saw 22% more ads for fruits and vegetables in 2014 than in 2013 and 75% more compared with 2007. Adolescents' exposure to these ads similarly increased 65% from 2007 to 2014, but did not change in the past year. Bottled water ads viewed by children more than doubled from 2013 to 2014, and ads viewed by teens increased 32%. However, advertising for these categories continued to represent 2% or less of food and beverage ads viewed by children and adolescents.

Conclusions

Food industry self-regulation has not substantially changed the landscape of food advertising to children under 12. Although food-related TV advertising to children declined from 2013 to 2014, children saw 5% more food ads in 2014 than they had in 2007, the year that most companies implemented their CFBAI pledges. Furthermore, fast-food and other restaurants, candy, snack foods, and carbonated beverages represented 60% and 66% of food ads viewed by children and adolescents respectively in 2014, while fruits and vegetables contributed less than 1% for both age groups. At the same time, total food-related advertising to adolescents increased 16%, suggesting that companies may have increased advertising to this older, but still vulnerable, group of children.² While the amount of food advertising on children's TV programming has declined in recent years,³ these results demonstrate that TV advertising to young people remains an obstacle for parents and caregivers attempting to encourage healthier dietary choices by their children.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

REFERENCES

1 Council of Better Business Bureaus. The National Partner Program. Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative. www.bbb.org/council/the-national-partner-program/national-advertising-review-services/childrens-food-and-beverage-advertising-initiative/

2 Harris JL, Schwartz MB, Heard A. (2014) .Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity. Older but still vulnerable: All children need protection from unhealthy food marketing. www.uconnruddcenter.org/files/Pdfs/Protecting_Older_Children_3_14.pdf

3 Powell LM, Harris JL, Fox T. (2013). Food marketing expenditures aimed at youth: Putting the numbers in context. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 45(4), 453-457

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 2014 vs.		
	2004	2007	2013	2014	2004	2007	2013
Foods and Beverages*	3,213	2,554	2,647	2,462	-23%	-4%	-7%
Cereals	973	772	773	613	-37%	-21%	-21%
Candy	397	266	536	549	38%	106%	2%
Prepared Meals	306	420	303	281	-8%	-33%	-7%
Sweet Snacks	637	432	281	272	-57%	-37%	-3%
Yogurt	204	178	221	221	8%	24%	0%
Juice, Fruit, and Sports Drinks	316	188	162	151	-52%	-19%	-7%
Crackers and Savory Snacks	147	121	160	130	-11%	8%	-19%
Carbonated Beverages	141	57	70	75	-47%	31%	6%
Other Dairy	72	43	81	68	-6%	58%	-16%
Bottled Water	16	55	28	62	289%	13%	121%
Fruits and Vegetables	4	22	32	39	864%	75%	22%
Restaurants	1,252	1,410	1,700	1,796	44%	27%	6%
Fast Food Restaurants	911	973	1,121	1,206	32%	24%	8%
Other Restaurants	341	437	580	591	73%	35%	2%
Grand Total	4,465	3,964	4,348	4,258	-5%	7%	-2%

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 2014 vs.		
	2004	2007	2013	2014	2004	2007	2013
Foods and Beverages*	2,486	2,241	3,074	2,668	7%	19%	-13%
Cereals	464	443	529	422	-9%	-5%	-20%
Candy	400	311	846	784	96%	152%	-7%
Prepared Meals	266	418	400	300	13%	-28%	-25%
Sweet Snacks	356	310	331	294	-17%	-5%	-11%
Yogurt	105	129	176	170	62%	32%	-4%
Juice, Fruit, and Sports Drinks	318	235	276	236	-26%	0%	-14%
Crackers and Savory Snacks	147	118	206	162	10%	37%	-22%
Other Dairy	96	61	98	87	-9%	43%	-11%
Carbonated Beverages	295	124	142	133	-55%	7%	-7%
Bottled Water	33	70	34	45	35%	-36%	31%
Fruits and Vegetables	6	22	36	36	505%	65%	1%
Restaurants	1,629	1,929	2,370	2,276	40%	18%	-4%
Fast Food Restaurants	1,260	1,437	1,673	1,620	29%	13%	-3%
Other Restaurants	369	492	697	655	78%	33%	-6%
Grand Total	4,115	4,170	5,444	4,944	20%	19%	-9%

*Includes all packaged food and beverage product categories

Source: Nielsen 2015

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 2014 vs.		
	2004	2007	2013	2014	2004	2007	2013
Foods and Beverages*	2,486	2,425	3,641	3,290	32%	36%	-10%
Cereals	375	378	505	415	11%	10%	-18%
Candy	342	287	972	943	176%	229%	-3%
Prepared Meals	380	554	551	424	11%	-24%	-23%
Sweet Snacks	328	301	408	369	12%	22%	-10%
Yogurt	93	148	210	206	122%	39%	-2%
Juice, Fruit, and Sports Beverages	346	273	334	288	-17%	5%	-14%
Crackers and Savory Snacks	154	128	227	195	27%	52%	-14%
Other Dairy	143	112	166	158	10%	41%	-5%
Carbonated Beverages	269	129	173	163	-39%	27%	-6%
Bottled Water	42	72	29	73	75%	2%	153%
Fruits and Vegetables	14	43	66	57	308%	33%	-13%
Restaurants	2,032	2,298	3,137	3,107	53%	35%	-1%
Fast Food Restaurants	1,496	1,628	2,169	2,173	45%	33%	0%
Other Restaurants	536	670	968	934	74%	39%	-3%
Grand Total	4,518	4,723	6,778	6,397	42%	35%	-6%

*Includes all packaged food and beverage product categories

Source: Nielsen 2015