

Trends in Television Food Advertising to Young People: 2017 Update

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Introduction

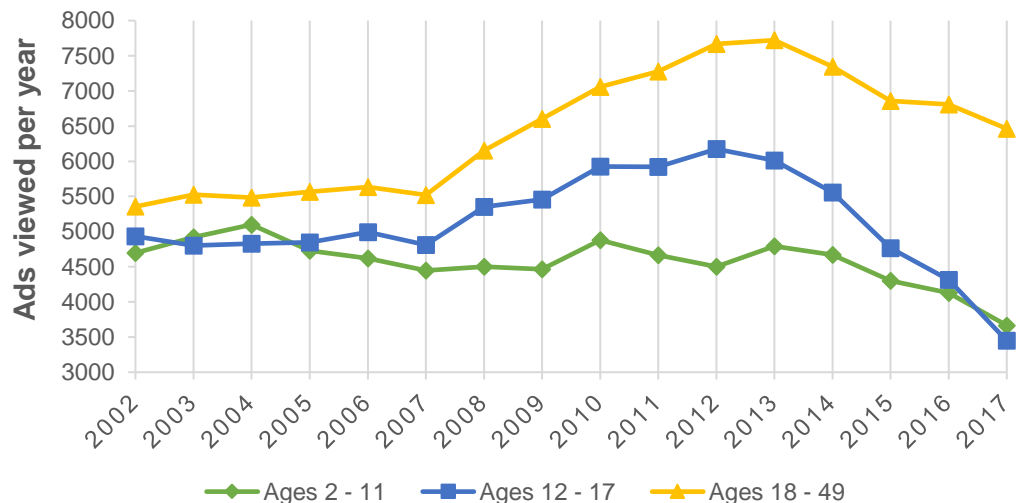
This annual brief documents trends in food-related TV advertising (including food, beverages, and restaurants) viewed by children and adolescents from 2002 to 2017, focusing on changes from 2016 to 2017. We also examine changes in categories of food and beverages advertised since 2007, the year the Children’s Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI) food industry self-regulatory program was implemented to “shift the mix of advertising primarily directed to children.”¹ For the first time, we also report changes in time spent watching TV by children and adolescents.

Total exposure to food-related advertising on TV

Individuals in all age groups viewed fewer food-related advertisements on TV in 2017 than in 2016, continuing the downward trend that began in 2013 (see **Figure 1**). From 2016 to 2017, ad exposure decreased by 11% for children and by 5% for adults. Adolescents experienced the largest decrease of 20%. Compared to 2007 (the year the CFBAI was implemented), children saw 18% fewer ads and adolescents saw 28% fewer.

Figure 1 shows changes in total food, beverage, and restaurant TV advertising viewed by children (ages 2-11), adolescents (ages 12-17), and adults (ages 18-49) from 2002 to 2017.

In 2017, children and adolescents saw fewer food-related ads on TV than in 2016—down by 11% and 20%, respectively.



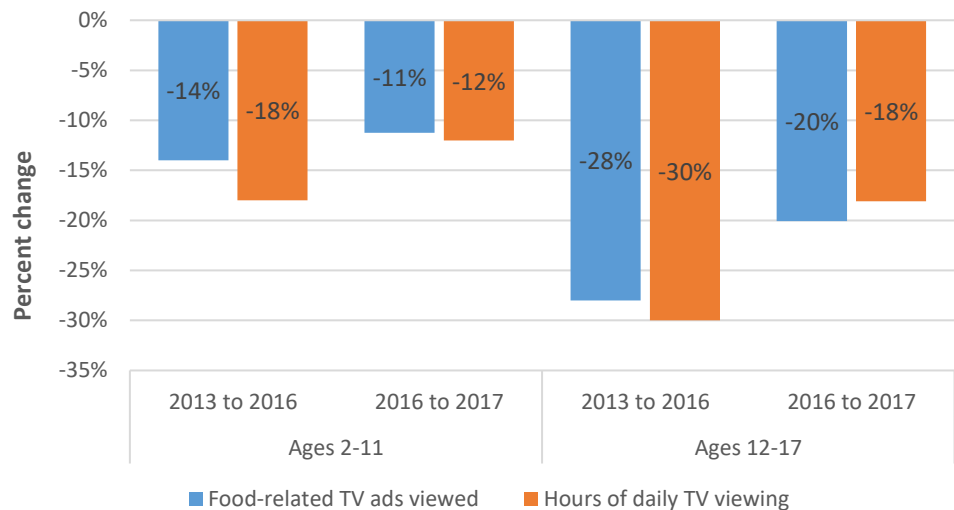
Source: Nielsen 2018

In 2017, adolescents viewed fewer food-related TV ads than children viewed—the first time in over ten years.

Despite these declines, in 2017 children continued to view on average 10.0 food-related TV ads per day. For the first time since 2004, adolescents viewed fewer food-related TV ads than did children, averaging 9.4 ads per day. Adults viewed on average 17.7 food-related ads per day.

Furthermore, the majority of the decline in food-related ads viewed can be attributed to reductions in amount of time spent watching TV from 2013 to 2017^a (see **Figure 2**). From 2013 to 2016, the average hours-per-day that children spent watching TV declined by 18%, while the number of food-related TV ads they viewed declined by 14% during the same period. For adolescents, daily TV viewing declined 30% and exposure to TV ads declined 28%. More recently, from 2016 to 2017, children watched 12% fewer hours of TV daily, compared with 11% fewer food-related ads viewed, while adolescents watched 18% fewer hours of TV and viewed 20% fewer food-related TV ads.

Figure 2. Changes in food-related TV ads viewed versus changes in TV viewing time



Source: Nielsen 2018

Declines in exposure to food-related TV ads can be largely attributed to substantial reductions in TV viewing by children and adolescents since 2013.

Changes in advertising by major food categories

For some individual categories, declines in TV ads viewed by children and adolescents from 2016 to 2017 were comparable to overall declines in food-related ads viewed (see **Appendix Tables 1 to 3**). For example, children saw 10% fewer ads for all restaurants from 2016 to 2017, while adolescents saw 19% fewer restaurant ads. Children’s exposure to TV ads for juices/fruit beverages/sports drinks fell by 13% and carbonated beverage^b ads viewed declined by 6%. For adolescents, exposure to TV ads for juices/fruit beverages/sports drinks, prepared meals, sweet snacks, crackers/savory snacks and

^a TV viewing is calculated based on the average time spent watching TV by individuals in a specific age group as reported by Nielsen, including TV programming on broadcast, cable, syndicated, and spot networks.

^b This category includes regular soda, diet soda, seltzer, and brand ads that do not specify one product. In 2017, regular soda and brand ads comprised 76% and 77% of carbonated beverage ads viewed by children and adolescents, respectively.

fruits/vegetables all declined by 13 to 24%.

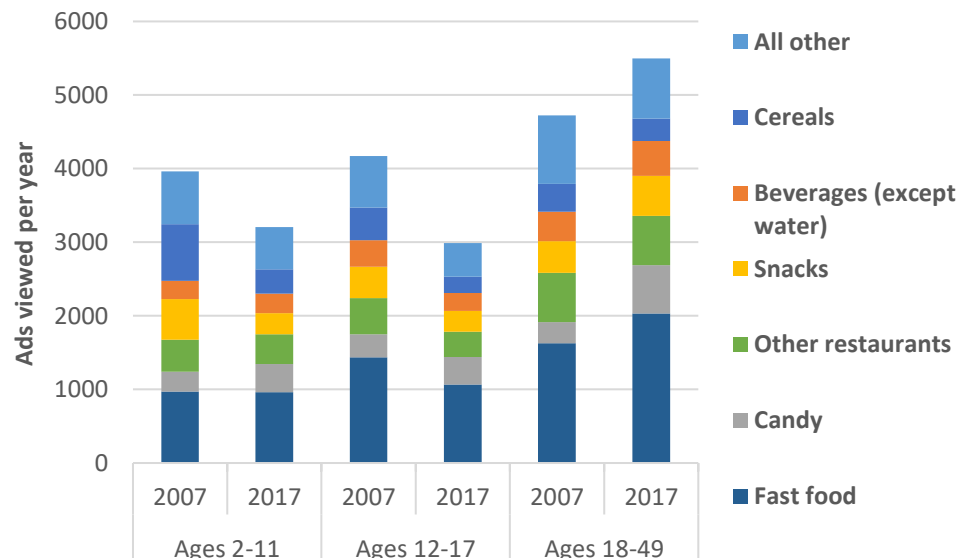
However, there were even greater declines in ads viewed for some categories. Exposure to TV ads for cereals decreased by 33% for children and 37% for adolescents from 2016 to 2017. Children and adolescents also saw approximately one-half the number of yogurt ads in 2017 compared to the previous year. Other notable reductions include a 23% decline in ads for sweet snacks viewed by children and a 34% decline in other dairy (not yogurt) ads viewed by adolescents. Exposure to ads for fruit and vegetables also declined by 18% for children.

On the other hand, the number of food ads viewed remained relatively unchanged or increased for other categories, despite declines in TV viewing time. Changes in children’s exposure to TV ads for candy, crackers/savory snacks, and prepared meals ranged from 0% change to a 3% increase. Bottled water ads increased for both children (+54%) and adolescents (+27%). Children also viewed 18% more ads for other dairy products, and adolescents viewed 10% more ads for carbonated beverages in 2017 than in 2016.

Changes since 2007

In the 10 years since CFBAI implementation in 2007, there have been several positive changes in youth viewership of food-related TV ads (see **Figure 3**). For fruit and vegetable ads, children’s has doubled (+106%), and adolescents viewed 53% more in 2017 than in 2007. Other positive changes include declines of 50% or more in exposure to cereal and sweet snacks ads for both children and adolescents, while exposure to ads for prepared meals declined by 37% and 53% for children and adolescents, respectively. Exposure to juices/fruit beverages/sports drink ads also declined for both children (-11%) and adolescents (-42%) from 2007 to 2017.

Figure 3. Total food-related TV advertising exposure by category.



Source: Nielsen 2017

Since 2007, the year the CFBAI was implemented, exposure to fruit and vegetable ads has doubled for children, and increased by more than 50% for adolescents.

Children and adolescents also saw at least 50% fewer ads for cereal and sweet snacks during this time.

In 2017, children saw 79% more ads for carbonated beverages and 44% more ads for candy compared to 2007.

For the first time, children viewed more ads for candy than any other packaged food product.

In 2017, fast food remained the most advertised food category to children and adolescents—more than one-quarter of all food-related ads viewed.

TV ads for the healthiest product categories represented less than 5% of all food-related TV ads viewed by youth.

In contrast, changes in ad exposure to other food and beverage categories raise concerns. Children viewed 79% more ads for carbonated beverages, 44% more ads for candy, and 17% more ads for crackers/savory snacks in 2017 than in 2007. In 2017, candy overtook cereals as the packaged food with the most TV advertisements viewed by children. Likewise, adolescents viewed 5% more ads for carbonated beverages, 20% more candy ads, and 11% more ads for crackers/savory snacks in 2017 versus 2007.

Furthermore, ads for two of the healthiest product categories declined from 2007 to 2017: exposure to bottled water ads declined by 23% for children and 53% for adolescents, while exposure to yogurt ads declined by 50% or more for both children and adolescents. In total, ads for the healthiest product categories (bottled water, fruits and vegetables, and yogurt) represented just 4% of food-related ads viewed by both children and adolescents in 2017. This compares to 6% of food-related ads viewed by children, and 5% of food-related ads viewed by adolescents in 2007.

Conclusion

In 2017, compared with the previous year, children's exposure to food-related TV advertising declined by 11%. In addition, children viewed 18% fewer ads compared to 2007, the first full year that CFBAI pledges were in effect. Adolescents' exposure to food-related TV ads declined at a greater rate, by 20% compared to 2016 and 28% versus 2007. Despite these reductions, children and adolescents continued to view on average 10.0 and 9.4 food-related TV ads per day, respectively.

Much of this reduction in food-related TV ads viewed can be attributed to substantial declines in hours spent watching TV since 2013. Notably, adolescents spent 43% less time watching TV in 2017 than in 2013, while children watched 28% less TV. As a result, for the first time since 2004, adolescents saw fewer food-related ads on TV in 2017 than children saw. This finding indicates a reversal of the sharp increase in ads viewed by adolescents from 2007 to 2012 (following CFBAI implementation).

In the ten years since the CFBAI was implemented, there have been improvements in children's exposure to TV ads for some food-related categories, including declines of 50% or more for sweet snacks and cereal. Additionally, children's exposure to ads for fruit and vegetables more than doubled during this time.

However, exposure to ads for some nutritionally poor categories increased from 2007 to 2017 for both children and adolescents, including carbonated beverages, candy, and crackers/savory snacks. Notably, from 2016 to 2017, carbonated beverage ads viewed by adolescents increased 10%, at the same time their hours of TV viewing declined 18%. In 2017, fast food restaurants remained the most advertised category for all youth, accounting for more than a quarter of food-related ads viewed, while candy overtook cereals as the most advertised packaged food category to children.

Overall, TV ads for the healthiest product categories (bottled water, fruits and vegetables, and yogurt) represented just 4% of food-related ads viewed by both children and adolescents. Thus, there is limited evidence that CFBAI has resulted in improvements in the primarily unhealthy mix of food-related categories advertised to children since the program's launch in 2007.

Declines in time spent watching TV and comparable reductions in total food-related TV ads viewed by youth in recent years demonstrate progress in reducing unhealthy food advertising to youth on TV. However, substantial increases in TV ads viewed by children for candy, carbonated beverages, and savory snacks from 2007 to 2017, as well as the continued overwhelmingly unhealthy mix of foods advertised to children and adolescents, demonstrate continued cause for concern.

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/
- 2 Harris, Frazier, Romo-Palafox, et al. (2017). FACTS 2017 Food industry self-regulation after 10 years: Progress and opportunities to improve food advertising to children. http://www.uconnruddcenter.org/files/Pdfs/FACTS2017_Final.pdf

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 2017 vs.		
	2004	2007	2016	2017	2004	2007	2016
Foods and Beverages*	3,847	3,036	2,614	2,298	-40%	-24%	-12%
Cereals	973	772	490	329	-66%	-57%	-33%
Candy	397	266	381	383	-4%	44%	0%
Prepared Meals	306	420	264	266	-13%	-37%	1%
Sweet Snacks	637	432	184	142	-78%	-67%	-23%
Yogurt	204	178	167	76	-63%	-58%	-55%
Juices, Fruit Beverages, and Sports Drinks	316	188	192	167	-47%	-11%	-13%
Crackers and Savory Snacks	147	121	137	142	-4%	17%	3%
Carbonated Beverages**	141	57	108	102	-27%	79%	-6%
Other Dairy	72	43	125	146	103%	240%	18%
Bottled Water	16	55	28	42	165%	-23%	54%
Fruits and Vegetables	4	22	55	45	1030%	106%	-18%
Restaurants	1,252	1,410	1,516	1,367	9%	-3%	-10%
Fast Food Restaurants	911	973	1,089	962	6%	-1%	-12%
Other Restaurants	341	437	427	405	19%	-7%	-5%
Grand Total	5,099	4,446	4,129	3,665	-28%	-18%	-11%

*Includes all packaged food and beverage categories

**Includes advertising for regular and diet drinks, seltzer, and brand advertising

Source: Nielsen 2018

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 2017 vs.		
	2004	2007	2016	2017	2004	2007	2016
Foods and Beverages*	3,200	2,883	2,573	2,037	-36%	-29%	-21%
Cereals	464	443	347	220	-53%	-50%	-37%
Candy	400	311	428	373	-7%	20%	-13%
Prepared Meals	266	418	235	197	-26%	-53%	-16%
Sweet Snacks	356	310	188	152	-57%	-51%	-54%
Yogurt	105	129	138	63	-40%	-51%	-54%
Juices, Fruit Beverages, and Sports Drinks	318	235	178	135	-57%	-42%	-24%
Crackers and Savory Snacks	147	118	151	131	-11%	11%	-13%
Carbonated Beverages**	295	124	118	130	-56%	5%	10%
Other Dairy	96	61	166	108	13%	78%	-34%
Bottled Water	33	70	26	33	0%	-53%	27%
Fruits and Vegetables	6	22	39	34	460%	53%	-14%
Restaurants	1,629	1,929	1,742	1,412	-13%	-27%	-19%
Fast Food Restaurants	1,260	1,437	1,328	1,067	-15%	-26%	-20%
Other Restaurants	369	492	414	345	-6%	-30%	-17%
Grand Total	4,829	4,812	4,345	3,449	-29%	-28%	-20%

*Includes all packaged food and beverage categories

**Includes advertising for regular and diet drinks, seltzer, and brand advertising

Source: Nielsen 2018

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 2017 vs.		
	2004	2007	2016	2017	2004	2007	2016
Foods and Beverages*	3,453	3,221	3,977	3,763	9%	17%	-5%
Cereals	375	378	413	306	-18%	-19%	-26%
Candy	342	287	612	658	92%	129%	8%
Prepared Meals	380	554	349	336	-12%	-39%	-4%
Sweet Snacks	328	301	289	296	-10%	-2%	2%
Yogurt	93	148	225	128	37%	-14%	-43%
Juices, Fruit Beverages, and Sports Drinks	346	273	244	236	-32%	-14%	-3%
Crackers and Savory Snacks	154	128	245	250	63%	96%	2%
Carbonated Beverages**	269	129	247	236	-12%	83%	-4%
Other Dairy	143	112	245	244	71%	118%	0%
Bottled Water	42	72	33	47	13%	-34%	44%
Fruits and Vegetables	14	43	66	62	346%	45%	-5%
Restaurants	2,032	2,298	2,830	2,699	33%	17%	-5%
Fast Food Restaurants	1,496	1,628	2,122	2,031	36%	25%	-4%
Other Restaurants	536	670	708	668	25%	0%	-6%
Grand Total	5,485	5,519	6,806	6,462	18%	17%	-5%

*Includes all packaged food and beverage categories

**Includes advertising for regular and diet drinks, seltzer, and brand advertising

Source: Nielsen 2018