



CHILDREN'S EXPOSURE TO FOOD ADVERTISING ON TELEVISION:

A Side-by-Side Comparison of Results from Recent Studies by the Federal Trade Commission and the Kaiser Family Foundation

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BACKGROUND

In recent months, two significant new studies have been released about food advertising to children on television: one in March, 2007 from the Kaiser Family Foundation, and the other in June, 2007 from the Federal Trade Commission. Because some of the issues the two studies explore are similar, this analysis is being released to document how the two studies compare on these issues, both in terms of findings and methodology.

One question that both the FTC and the Kaiser studies attempt to answer is: given children's actual viewing patterns, what is their average exposure to food advertising on television? To answer this question, the FTC study looks at advertising data from 2004, and the Kaiser study looks at data from 2005.

Unlike previous studies, both the FTC and the Kaiser studies take into account the amount of time children spend watching cable versus broadcast television; the proportion of their viewing time that is on weekdays versus weekends; the time of day of viewing; and the proportion of their viewing that is spent watching children's shows versus general audience programs. In addition, both studies factored in the amount of time children spend watching commercial-free networks like PBS, or networks without traditional food advertising, such as the Disney channel.

Both studies come to similar overall findings regarding the amount of food advertising children were exposed to on TV in recent years. The FTC study concludes that in 2004, children ages 2-11 were exposed to an average of 5,500 food ads per year. The Kaiser study finds that in 2005, children ages 2-11 were exposed to an average of 5,600 food ads per year. With regard to children's exposure to *all* types of advertising (not just food), the FTC study concludes that in 2004, children ages 2-11 were exposed to an average of 18,000 paid ads. The Kaiser study finds that in 2005, children ages 2-11 were exposed to an average of 20,000 paid ads. Both reports noted that these findings differed significantly from previous estimates.

While the average findings in the two studies are similar, there are differences when it comes to findings for specific age groups. The key differences in the studies are that the FTC study finds that *young* children (ages 2-5) are exposed to substantially *more* food ads than the Kaiser study found (approximately 1,000 more food ads per year, or 23% higher than the Kaiser estimate); and that the FTC found that older children are exposed to substantially *fewer* than the Kaiser study found (approximately 2,000 fewer food ads per year, or 26% less). However, the fact that the FTC data for this second group includes younger children than the Kaiser data (6-11 year-olds, versus 8-12 year-olds) probably accounts for some of this variation. Another key difference between the two studies is that the FTC report attempts to explore trends over time through a comparison with similar data from 1977; the Kaiser study is limited to an analysis of advertising in 2005, and draws no conclusions about trends.

SOURCES

Children's Exposure to TV Advertising in 1977 and 2004: Information for the Obesity Debate
Federal Trade Commission, June 1, 2007

Food For Thought: Television Food Advertising to Children in the United States
Kaiser Family Foundation, March 28, 2007

METHODOLOGIES: SIDE-BY-SIDE

Year of data in the study	
FTC study	Kaiser study
Based on food advertising in 2004.	Based on food advertising in 2005.
Trend data	
FTC study	Kaiser study
Includes a comparison with viewing data from 1977.	Does not include any comparisons over time.
Source of viewing data	
FTC study	Kaiser study
Based on Nielsen estimates of children's viewing habits from four sweeps weeks in 2004.	Based on estimates of children's viewing habits from previous Foundation studies, including surveys of 1,090 parents of children ages 2-7 and 2,032 8-18 year-olds, and week-long media-use diaries completed by approximately 700 8-18 year-olds.
Ages of children in study – Use of averages	
FTC study	Kaiser study
Study presents average data for children ages 2-11 years old.	Because children's viewing habits were found to vary significantly by age, the Kaiser study presented findings separately for different age groups, instead of using averages for the entire under-twelve population. However, for the purposes of this side-by-side analysis, the Kaiser data have been averaged for the 2-11 age group.
Ages of children in study – Subgroups	
FTC study	Kaiser study
Breaks out results for children ages 2-5 and 6-11.	Breaks out results for children ages 2-7 and 8-12.
Content of food advertising	
FTC study	Kaiser study
Does not include any review of the content of the ads themselves.	Includes detailed coding of approximately 9,000 food ads, and provides data on issues such as the proportion of ads that specifically target children, the types of appeals used, the use of licensed children's characters and premiums, depictions of physical activity, and other attributes of the advertising.
Public service messages on fitness and nutrition	
FTC study	Kaiser study
Does not include information on children's exposure to PSAs on fitness or nutrition.	Includes data on children's exposure to PSAs on fitness and nutrition.

KEY FINDINGS: SIDE-BY-SIDE

Number of food ads children are exposed to per year*				
FTC study 2004		Kaiser study 2005		
Age Group	Number of Ads	Age Group	Number of Ads	Notes:
2-11	5,500	2-11	5,600	The Kaiser report presented findings separately for children ages 2-7 and 8-12, because viewing patterns among those age groups vary substantially and overall averages were felt to mask important differences in children's ad exposure. However, when the Kaiser data is averaged across the ages 2-11 for purposes of comparison to the FTC's findings, the average exposure is 5,600 food ads per year. The FTC estimate is therefore 1.7% lower than the Kaiser estimate for the overall age group.
Age Group	Number of Ads	Age Group	Number of Ads	Notes:
2-5	5,400	2-7	4,400	The FTC study finds that young children were exposed to approximately 1,000 <i>more</i> food ads per year in 2004 than the Kaiser study found in 2005. The exclusion of 6-7 year-olds in the FTC data is not likely to contribute to the agency's higher estimates; if anything, excluding those ages should decrease the estimate of exposure to food advertising.
Age Group	Number of Ads	Age Group	Number of Ads	Notes:
6-11	5,600	8-12	7,600	The FTC finds that children in this approximate age group were exposed to 2,000 <i>fewer</i> food ads in 2004 than the Kaiser study concluded they were exposed to in 2005. However, the inclusion of 6- and 7-year-olds in the FTC data, and the inclusion of 12 year-olds in the Kaiser data is likely to contribute to the differences.
Types of food advertised – Proportion of food ads seen by children 2-11, for top product categories				
FTC study	Kaiser study	Type of Food	Notes:	
25%	28%	Restaurants and fast foods	Because children's viewing habits were found to vary substantially by age, the Kaiser Foundation's report presented findings separately for children ages 2-7 and 8-12. However, for the purposes of this comparison, the Kaiser data have been averaged across the ages 2-11. The Kaiser data can be found in Table 34, p.54 of the Foundation's report. Data for the FTC's results can be found in Table 3.4, p. 20 of the FTC report. Product categories for the two studies vary slightly: for example, the FTC has categories for "desserts and sweets" and "snacks" while the Foundation has a single category for "candy and snacks."	
25%	24%	Desserts, sweets and snacks		
18%	17%	Cereal		
Total advertising exposure – All products				
FTC study		Kaiser study		
Age Group	Number of Ads	Age Group	Number of Ads	Notes:
2-11	18,000	2-11	20,000	The Kaiser report presented findings separately for children ages 2-7 and 8-12, because viewing patterns among those age groups vary substantially and overall averages were felt to mask important differences in children's ad exposure. However, when the Kaiser data is averaged across the ages 2-11 for purposes of comparison to the FTC's findings, the average exposure is 20,000 ads per year. The FTC estimate is therefore 10% lower than the Kaiser estimate for the overall age group. Both studies have findings that are well below previous estimates.
Proportion of advertising seen by children 2-11 that is for food				
FTC study	Kaiser study	Notes:		
22%	27%	The Kaiser report presented findings separately for children ages 2-7 and 8-12, because viewing patterns among those age groups vary substantially and overall averages were felt to mask important differences in children's ad exposure. For this analysis, the Kaiser data has been averaged across the ages 2-11. The Kaiser data can be found in Table 32, page 52 of the Kaiser report.		

* Estimates on the number of ad exposures have been rounded to the nearest 100.

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