

# **Food and Beverage Marketing in Virtual Environments: Viewpoint on the Potential Implications for Young People of Color, Knowledge Gaps, and Future Research Directions**

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Submitted to: JMIR Public Health and Surveillance  
on: May 31, 2024

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## ***Table of Contents***

---

<b>Original Manuscript.....</b>	<b>4</b>
---------------------------------	----------

Preprint  
JMIR Publications

# Food and Beverage Marketing in Virtual Environments: Viewpoint on the Potential Implications for Young People of Color, Knowledge Gaps, and Future Research Directions

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## Abstract

Exposure to unhealthy food and beverage marketing is a major contributor to excessive weight gain in young people and may disproportionately affect Black and Latinx communities. Appropriate and comprehensive regulations on food and beverage companies is essential, particularly as companies expand their reach and leverage the latest technologies to marketing experiences using virtual reality (VR). Although VR technology is in its infancy, the potential effects of immersive food and beverage marketing on consumption, food and beverage corporations' history of racially-targeted marketing to Black and Latinx communities, and heightened burden of diet-related illnesses in Black/Latinx communities underscores a critical need to investigate immersive marketing to young people and young people of color. This viewpoint will provide a brief description of VR food and beverage marketing as the newest food and beverage marketing frontier, highlight key concerns and knowledge gaps, and underscore future directions in research.

(JMIR Preprints 31/05/2024:62807)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2196/preprints.62807>

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## Original Manuscript

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June 10, 2024

**Travis Sanchez, DVM, MPH,**  
**Emory University Rollins School of Public Health**  
Editor-in-Chief  
*JMIR Public Health and Surveillance*

Dear Dr. Sanchez,

We are thrilled to submit this manuscript entitled, “**Food and Beverage Marketing in Virtual Environments: Editorial on the Potential Implications for Young People of Color, Knowledge Gaps, and Future Research Directions**” for consideration as an Editorial to *JMIR Public Health and Surveillance (JPHS)*. We confirm that this work is original and has not been published elsewhere, nor is it currently under consideration for publication elsewhere.

The food and beverage industry spends \$14 billion each year marketing mostly unhealthy products, particularly to young people and young people of color. Despite unhealthy food and beverage marketing being linked to poor diet and excessive weight in young people, food and beverage companies are expanding their reach and leveraging the latest technologies to market using virtual reality (VR). VR food and beverage marketing promotes products in ways that are highly engaging, immersive, and intentionally “blur the lines” between the digital world and real world. This marketing may be particularly harmful because exposure to VR marketing combines traditional techniques and neuromarketing that may bypass conscious awareness and more powerfully precipitate a drive to purchase and consume unhealthy foods and beverages. Although VR technology is in its infancy, the potential effects of VR food and beverage marketing on consumption, food and beverage corporations’ history of racially-targeted marketing to Black and Latinx communities, and heightened burden of diet-related illnesses in Black/Latinx communities underscores a critical need to investigate VR food and beverage marketing to young people and young people of color. This manuscript provides a brief description of VR food and beverage marketing as the newest food and beverage marketing frontier, highlight key concerns and knowledge gaps, and underscore future directions in research.

The information shared in this manuscript aligns well *JPHS*’s focus on the intersection of public health and technology, and alerts the public health community about VR food and beverage marketing—the newest marketing frontier requiring a research focus that can inform appropriate regulations on food and beverage companies. These perspectives would be appealing to your readers who focus on the risks of certain advanced technologies and can generate new research to fill knowledge gaps.

All authors have agreed to submit this manuscript to *JPHS*. All correspondences should be addressed to me at [omni.cassidy@nyulangone.org](mailto:omni.cassidy@nyulangone.org).

Thank you for your consideration,



Omni Cassidy, Ph.D.