



Go! Slow! Whoa!: Changing Nutritional Guidelines and Character Branding on Food Products

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Introduction

- Child-directed marketing of foods & beverages plays a significant role in childhood obesity.
- The majority of items advertised to children during television programs are of low nutritional quality (Kunkel et al., 2009).
- Key actors in the marketing of these products are appealing media characters.
- Children experience trusted media characters across numerous venues such as television, mobile apps, web games, toys, & grocery stores (Bond, Richards, & Calvert, 2013).
- When parents purchase foods and beverages, advertising of high caloric, low nutrition products via media characters is problematic for childhood nutrition.
- Children influence parent food purchases, especially through pester power in the grocery stores (Roper Youth Report, 2003; Calvert, 2008).
- The Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI) has encouraged 18 leading companies to pledge better marketing practices directed towards young children, including the use of media characters (CFBAI, 2013).
- On December 31, 2013, new Uniform Nutrition Criteria were adopted by the CFBAI to provide more stringent guidelines for the nutritional content of products marketed to children.

Purpose

- To determine the efficacy of the CFBAI's new Uniform Nutrition Criteria by examining the use of media characters in child-directed marketing practices in grocery stores.

Hypotheses

- In grocery stores, marketers will use media characters to target unhealthy products more so than healthy products to children.
- Following the implementation of Uniform Nutrition Criteria, CFBAI corporations will use media characters to market more **Whoa** than **Go** products.
- Based on earlier findings, non-CFBAI corporations will market more **Go** products using media characters, as compared to CFBAI companies.

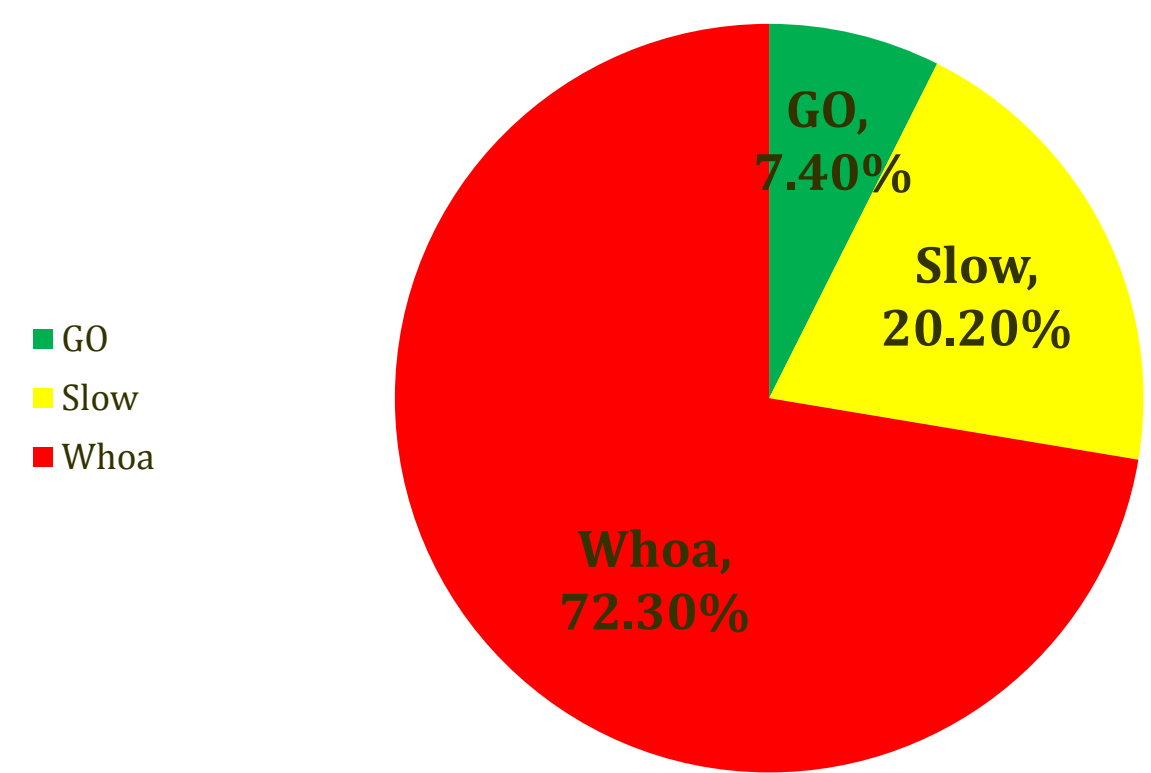
Methods

- Data collected from 1 Safeway (general grocer) and 1 Whole Foods (health-conscious store) from same neighborhood of Ward 2, District of Columbia.
- Each store was visited during July of 2014, after pledges had been signed.
 - Each store visited by two independent research assistants to ensure reliability
 - Products in check-out lines not included
- Digital photographs taken of each food & beverage product containing a media character.
- Each product categorized by the nutritional rating system adapted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & the National Institutes of Health from the Coordinated Approach to Child Health (CATCH) as:
 - Go** - healthy products to be consumed any time
 - Slow** - products to be consumed in moderation
 - Whoa** - unhealthy products to be consumed rarely
- Each product's manufacturer was determined to analyze the marketing practices & use of media characters of CFBAI versus non-CFBAI companies.

Results

H₁: In grocery stores, marketers will use media characters to target unhealthy products more so than healthy products to children. SUPPORTED

Go, Slow, Whoa Ratings of All Products (n=405)



For the entire sample.

$\chi^2 (2, n=405) = 287.393, p < .0001$

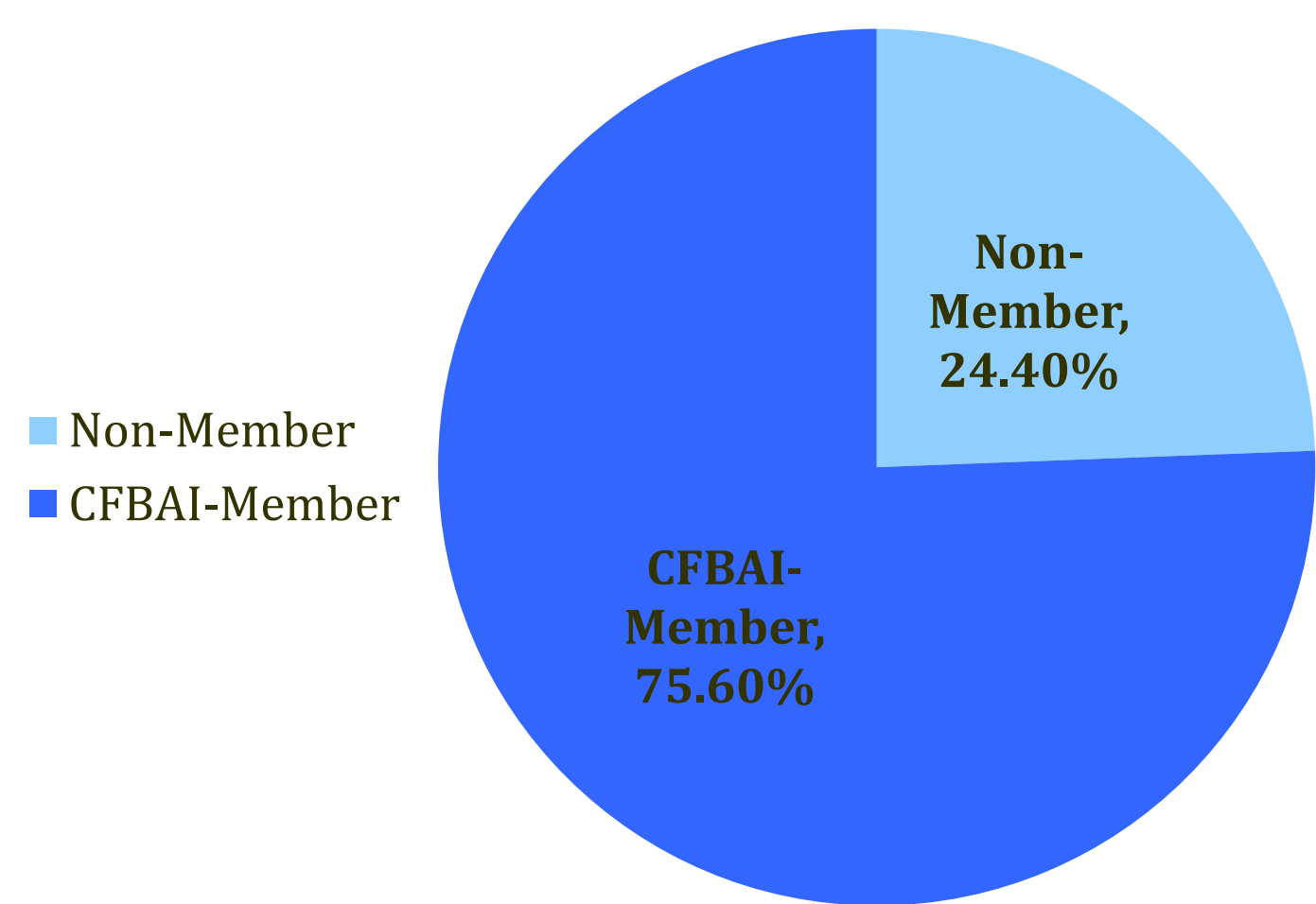
Whoa > **Go** ($\chi^2 (1, n=323) = 214.146, p < .0001$)

) & **Slow** ($\chi^2 (1, N=375) = 118.723, p < .0001$)

Slow > **Go** ($\chi^2 (1, N=112) = 24.143, p < .0001$)

H₂: Following the implementation of Uniform Nutrition Criteria, CFBAI corporations will use media characters to market more Whoa than Go products. SUPPORTED

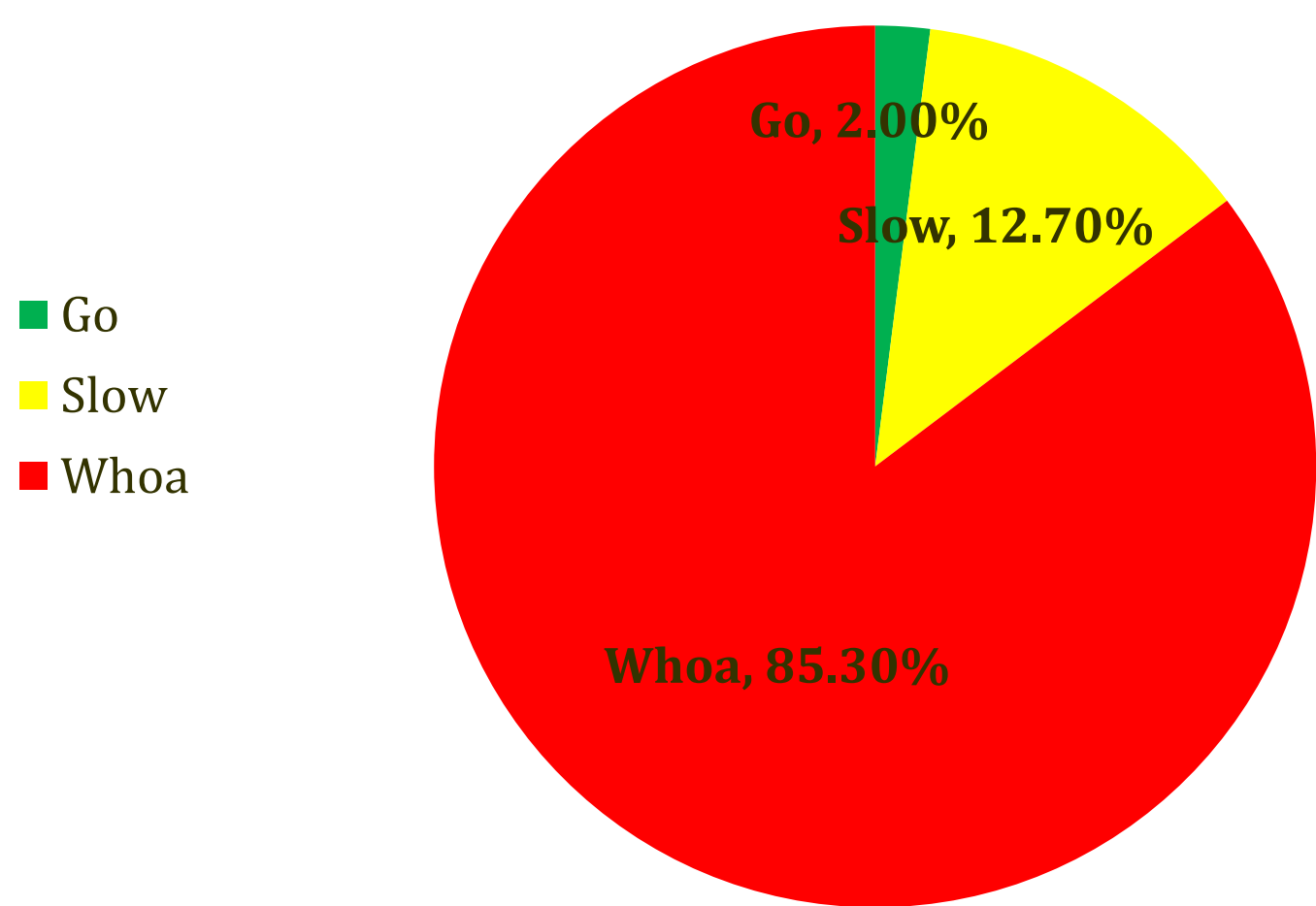
CFBAI Membership of Sample Manufacturers



For the entire sample.

The majority of products featuring media characters were marketed by CFBAI members.

Go Slow Whoa Ratings for CFBAI Members (n=306)



For the sample of CFBAI members.

$\chi^2 (2, N=306) = 377.118, p < .0001$

H₃: Based on earlier findings, non-CFBAI corporations will continue to market more Go products using media characters, as compared to CFBAI companies. SUPPORTED

		CFBAI Membership		Total
		Non-Member	CFBAI Member	
Go, Slow, Whoa Ratings	Count	24	6	30
	% within CFBAI Membership	24.20%	2.00%	7.40%
	Count	43	39	82
	% Within CFBAI Membership	43.40%	12.70%	20.20%
	Count	32	261	293
	% Within CFBAI Membership	32.30%	85.30%	72.30%
Total		99	306	405
		100%	100%	100%

Discussion

- Marketers are clearly targeting unhealthy products towards children.
 - Kunkel, Wright, McKinley (2009): 72.5% **Whoa**, 26.6% **Slow**, & 0.1% **Go** for television ads
 - Current study: 72.3% **Whoa**, 20.20% **Slow**, & 7.46% **Go** for product packaging
- Media characters still feature in promotions for unhealthy food & beverages.
- Despite having signed CFBAI sponsored pledges, 12 out of the 18 CFBAI companies sold 306 out of 405 products using media characters on packaging.
- New Uniform Nutrition Criteria was an ineffective addition to the CFBAI system.
- Six months post-initiation of the guidelines, CFBAI companies were still marketing significantly more unhealthy products targeted to children.
- Notably, CFBAI member companies marketed significantly more **Whoa** products than non-members.
- The Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI) is not regulating the food and beverage industry with guidelines that have any teeth.



Conclusion

- Consistent with earlier findings from television studies, the present study found that in grocery stores, the majority of child-directed food and beverage products have poor nutritional quality.
- The large portion of unhealthy products still manufactured by CFBAI companies demonstrates that current methods of regulation, including the new Uniform Nutrition Criteria, are insufficient.
- To ensure marketing of healthy foods & beverages to children, regulations to enforce uniform nutrition standards should be developed independently of industry, particularly in how media characters are being used to sell products.

References

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