

## **FOOD ADVERTISING TRENDS AND ITS IMPACT ON CHILDREN**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Marketing plays an important role in this transition process as it allows to modify and reinforce social norms that dictate the type of foods to be eaten and the manner and time to eat them. Marketing often depicts foods being consumed in situations other than mealtimes, away from the table and in unlimited quantities. The food and beverage industries spend billions of dollars every year on advertising, and the vast majority of promoted products are energy-dense and nutrient-poor.

Children are extremely vulnerable to food marketing. They are highly impressionable, cannot recognize advertising intent, lack nutritional knowledge, and are motivated by immediate gratifications. Moreover, food companies target children for they have a strong influence in what families buy and establish brand loyalty at an early age, which has long-term effects on eating preferences and behaviors. For example, the risk of becoming an overweight adult is twice as much for an overweight child compared with a normal weight child.

**Keywords:** Marketing, Food Advertising, Young Children, Nutrient-Poor.

### **Introduction**

Advertising is a way of communication which is used to convince an audience, in order to compel their behavior with respect to a commercial submission. More and more products are becoming available in the market; therefore advertising's purpose should be to raise awareness about them among potential consumers. Through use of various advertising strategies, the media attempts to increase the excitement and create a need by giving products a positive representation which has a remarkable appeal. The extent of impact of advertising on children is becoming stressful day by day. Advertisements showcase the must haves for children and making them a consumer even before they have attained the age of three.

Numerous methods are used to approach children, starting with television advertisements,

computer games, and toys in meals. Food advertisements on television occupy nearly 50 percent of the ad time on children's shows. These advertisements are totally dominated by unwholesome food products. Viral marketing is also being used to persuade children to talk to each other about a brand's website by emailing friends in the form of an e-greeting or invitation and inviting them to visit the site.

The manner in which the marketers attract children seems unethical because children cannot figure out the difference between reality and fantasy. Parents should extend concern over the way that fast food advertising has changed their children, invoking them to become overweight and causing tantrums. Especially for young girls, American Psychological Association states that "Advertising is frequently contributing to body dissatisfaction, eating disorders, low self-esteem, and depression."

### **Review of Literature**

**Wonsun Shin (2010)** explored the task of parental intervention in a child's consumer socialization on the internet. The study was conducted on 445 children of the age group of 9-12 years and 380 parents of South Korea. It was concluded that parent's attitude towards internet appeared to be a weak predictor of active mediation.

**Haroon et al. (2011)** conducted and reviewed children's weekend programmes in a study in Pakistan during a three week period. The study found that 35.11% of food advertisements are for snacks, and there were no advertisements for fruits.

**Khanna (2012)** conducted a comparative analysis of the attitude of rural and urban children towards television advertisements and their impact on family purchase decisions. A sample of 480 children and parents was taken and data was collected through interviews and questionnaires. It was concluded that the frequency of watching television was higher in urban areas than in rural areas. Television usage was independent of age. Time spent on weekdays in playing was higher among children from rural areas. Rural parents reported television as the major source of information whereas urban parents reported television friends, stores and internet as the important sources of information. There was a higher likeability of food and beverages advertisements among children. The study showed that parents are concerned with the food advertisements and believe that the ads cause obesity among children, are misleading and cause family conflict.

**Tarabashkina (2013)** studied how the children's nutritional knowledge influenced their dietary behaviour. Data was collected through focus groups, experiment and survey and analyzed using ANOVA and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The study established that greater social norms regarding fast foods, reduced parental nutritional knowledge, lesser frequency of

communication about food and food advertising amongst parents and children were linked to recurrent consumption of unhealthy foods by the children. Hence, children's frequent consumption of unhealthy food was associated to higher weight.

**Adya et al. (2014)** explored the importance of family communication and brand awareness in considering the influence of children on purchase decisions. The sample included 229 pairs of mother and child. The research was performed in Pune. It was found that family demographics and family communication influence the child wherein a child is not in a learner's role but in a teacher's role. Brand awareness is an important reason for influencing a child.

**Ussaima (2015)** analysed the influence of television advertisements and the role of television advertising in creating product awareness among children. A sample of 354 children and 250 parents of Madurai city were taken using random sampling. Data was analysed using SPSS. It was observed that advertisements are a very significant cause of product awareness followed by school friends and parents and 14% children made purchase requests instantaneously after watching advertisements. 45.48% children made purchase requests to their father, 44.35% to mother, 7.6% to grandparents and 2.5% to siblings.

### **Food Advertising**

Food advertising is the type of advertising that promotes food products and utilizes plentiful ways to reach out to the public. Although advertising has a long history, modern advertising started with the breakthrough of printing in the sixteenth century. Earlier advertising was restricted to print media. It is in the last hundred years that advertising has emerged into a key industry. So important has it become that it is fundamental to the production of general communication and provides the economic basis that enables existence.

A number of findings have proved that television advertisements for sweets, snacks and other junk food are the mainstays of advertising that target children. According to a 2007 study conducted by the American Kaiser Family Foundation, Majority of the advertising time on children's television was dedicated to food advertising. Not any of it includes advertisements regarding fruits or vegetables. The Kaiser Family study established that while food advertisements make widespread use of taste appeal to promote products, they also correlate the products with fun, embrace the appeal of contests and, many a times, pressurize the "newness" of products. Many advertisements relate physical activity with the products and emphasize the health benefits to be obtained from their utilization. It is often stressed out that the products contain 'essential nutrients'.

The British Heart Foundation observed that it is not only advertising on television that influences choices of kids for unhealthy foods; many things support it like products packaging, celebrity

endorsements and the shape and color of foods.

A study by the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at Yale University illustrated this point by presenting it in a study of children between the age group of four to six years old with alike food items in packages either with or without a trendy cartoon character. Results indicated that children were notably more probable to prefer the taste of low-nutrient, high-energy foods when there was a cartoon character on the package.

A number of food advertising techniques and channels are used to approach the children and promote brand awareness to increase product sales. Marketing channels include television advertising, product placements, in school marketing, kids clubs, Internet, toys and products with brand logos, etc.

### **POSITIVE EFFECTS OF FOOD ADVERTISEMENTS**

- Advertising increases kids' awareness regarding new products available in the market. It also increases their knowledge regarding the latest products.
- Influential advertisements, which target healthy food products, can help in improving the diet of children, in case they are eye-catching enough.

### **NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF ADVERTISEMENTS ON CHILDREN**

- Advertisements push children to persuade their parents to buy the products shown in the commercials, whether valuable or not. The tiny consumers tend to get adamant, if they are not provided with the product.
- Numerous advertisements in the present times include risky stunts, which can be performed only by experts. Although the commercials televise the statutory warnings with the advertisements, the children many a times try to emulate the stunts at home, with serious results.
- The pretentious advertisements televised generate impulse shopping in children.
- Children, after watching the shimmer of commercials, often lose the ability to live a life without materialistic joy.
- The kids usually get more fascinated towards the costly branded products, such as jeans and accessories. They pay no consideration to the inexpensive, but useful, ones that are not shown in the commercials.

- Advertisements have a circuitous effect on the behavior of kids. They tend to develop grumpiness, when deprived of the latest toys and clothes as shown in the commercials. Their personal preferences in clothing, toys, food etc are ruined by the advertisements, to a large extent.
- Junk foods, such as pizzas, burgers and soft drinks, are profoundly promoted during children's TV viewing time. This develops a longing for fatty, sugary and fast foods in kids, accordingly affecting their health badly.

### **ROLE OF PARENTS IN CREATING AWARENESS AND HEALTHY FOOD HABITS**

Parents play a very significant role in preventing the unhealthy advertisement impact on children and are chiefly responsible for encouraging their kids to accept healthy food habits. Due to the increasing number of hours that children spend in front of the television, a lesser amount of physical activity is the outburst of childhood obesity. Parents are supposed to limit television viewing time, remove television from their bedroom, check the shows watched by children, confine eating foods with poor nutrition content (Aleathia Cezar, BSN, 2008).

There is also a popular view that, eventually, it is the parent's responsibility to supervise and manage what and how much children are eating. It is up to them to persuade their children to adopt healthy habits and make sure that their children are educated on issues such as diet, exercise and disease. If corporations are restricted to advertise it would unlock a door that couldn't be closed and lead to severe decisions that could eventually impact on personal freedom and consumer choice.

### **ADVERTISING REGULATION IN INDIA**

In India, there are no explicit advertising laws associated to food advertisements that target children. Advertisements and promotional offers on Food & Beverage products should not show too much consumption (Advertising Standards Council of India). A number of developed countries have regulation on timing of advertisements and the number of times an advertisement can be shown within a particular time-frame. But in India no specific regulation prevails. Apart from the regulatory framework there are strict control systems that implement and check advertisements in a number of countries (Ali et al 2012). In the United States the Federal Trade Commission monitors and penalizes advertisers and marketers in case of breach of the code of conduct. Some of the guidelines stated in ASCI have been adopted but still children are influenced by the advertisements.

### **SUGGESTIONS TO REGULATE THE IMPACT OF ADVERTISEMENTS**

- It is recommended that there should be restriction on unhealthy foods advertisement on TV and television channels should pose a limit on advertising time and the number of advertisement for fast foods after 3.00 PM should be reduced.
- Healthy message should be conveyed in the advertisements.
- Characters or cartoons from children programs should be restricted in advertisements and awareness about balanced diet should be spread through advertisements.
- Parents must educate their children about advantages of eating healthy and disadvantages of unhealthy food.
- The Government should insist on companies to print statutory warnings on junk food and carbonated drinks.

## **CONCLUSION**

In recent years, the food and beverage industry has viewed children as a key market force. Consequently, children are targeted inexorably by food advertisers, and are exposed to a growing and unparalleled amount of advertising, marketing, and commercialism through a wide range of channels. Numerous studies have recognized associations between the number of hours of television watched and the occurrence of obesity among children. Because marketing to children and adolescents has become so persistent, numerous child advocates and media experts consider that such marketing amounts to a mounting public health crisis. It can be argued that children, particularly young kids, are a vulnerable group that should be protected from commercial influences that may badly affect their health, and that as a society that values children, there should be larger social responsibility for their present and future health. There is an urgent need for national dialogue on these issues.

According to the Global Burden of Disease Study, unhealthy dietary patterns have become the third risk factor associated with disability-adjusted life years and the second risk factor associated with mortality. Evidence shows the consumption of ultra-processed foods, including sweetened beverages, is associated with obesity and type 2 diabetes. Changes in eating patterns and the growing consumption of ultra-processed foods and beverages characterize a rapid nutrition transition.

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