

INFLUENCE OF TV FOOD ADVERTISING ON CHILDREN'S FOOD BEHAVIOR AND FOOD CONSUMPTION

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Abstract: Television plays an important role in children's socialization. Times have changed; today's children are born in 'television families' and regard TV as a permanent object in their life. The TV is familiar to children as face of family member. Today's children find a guide, a friend, an accompaniment in TV which they could control with a click. The TV is also a meal time accompaniment where parents feel relieved to handle meal time fussiness of young children with the TV as baby sitter. TV & TV Advertising are inseparable since the first TV commercial appeared on Doordarshan in 1976 which results in opening of flood gates of revenue for TV channels and avenues for advertisers to target consumers from all sections and age groups. Now TV Advertising is becoming an unavoidable feature. The TV advertising is the protagonist of consumer culture in modern India. It subtly & smartly sells the millions of viewers the virtue of consumerism. It is an integral part of today's life. It is transforming the thinking pattern & behavior of individual particularly young children and teenagers. The present paper put light on the influence of TV food advertising on the food behavior of children in terms of buying and consuming advertised food and how this consequently influence family purchase of food products.

The question which mainly hunts researchers- are children learning through advertisements' 'discourse' about buy, buy & buy philosophy? And if they are learning this, how is it transforming them as an individuals and human beings? The conditioning since birth generates consumption values and aspirations in children and eventually they become an independent adult consumer.

Key words: TV, TV Advertising, Influence, Food behavior, consumption

The advertisers believe in laying the foundation for life long consumption in early years. Like an unseen presence advertisements always invisibly, discreetly guide the children to materialistic world. The children are

targeted by advertisers through the variety of TV program especially prime time programs, cartoon channels, films, comedy serials, reality shows etc.

The advertisements for the food products which are appealing to children ranging from chocolates, biscuits, fast food to energy drinks all of them have some degree of bewildered attraction. This is well researched that TV play an important role in children's socialization and impacts their behaviour. The question arises is do these TV Food advertisements teach children about nutrition? The answer is that majority of food advertised on TV provide false calorie and little nutrition if any. The food advertisements promote addictive behavior that put children at risk of poor dietary pattern and consequently develops problems of obesity and nutritional deficiency.

Recent reports show that majority of Indian homes in urban cities, towns and rural area have TV sets. On an average Indian child spend 2-3 hours per day watching television. Apart from TV, computers and internet collectively increase the screen time for children which may go 4-5 hours per day during off day from school. This is a significant trend since the entry of TV and computers in the bedroom of children. An average child watches thousands of TV advertisements per year. By the age of 2 or 3 years children connect the images of brands seen on TV with the packaging images in super stores. Among all the products advertised, food is the heavily promoted product category targeting people where children are the primary target. Food advertisements account for well over 50% of all advertisements focusing children. This type of heaviest targeting reflects the belief by major food manufacturers that food habits developed mainly in childhood years and remain lifelong.

Content of TV Food advertising

The food products largely advertised on Indian TV are being promoted as 'Fun Food', the consumption of such foods is the only way to have fun. Advertisements for food like Fizzy drinks, chocolates, noodles, ice creams, biscuits, pizzas and burgers give a direct message to consume, to satisfy hunger as well as to relieve tensions in social situations. This all will enhance social security and provide emotional contentment. Above this, smart marketing of such products is highly persuasive and use techniques like celebration of special days at pizza joints, a gift voucher, a toy, a chance to meet celebrity etc. Food advertising uses powerful psychological techniques to promote positive emotional associations with these hard-to-resist food products.

Kelly & others (2008) conducted a study on persuasive food marketing to children on Australian TV, reflects that food advertisements use promotional characters twice during the program for young children compared to adult programs. It was also found that the rate of food advertisements with premium offers was substantially higher during young children's popular programs. During the children's peak viewing times, the majority of food advertisements containing promotional characters were for high sugar/low fiber breakfast cereal, chocolates, confectionaries, soups and sauces. Another study by The Henry .J Kaiser family foundation from US (2007) assessed the use of premium offers in TV Advertisements, found that 7% of all food advertisement contains offers, mainly for fast food meals. The persuasive food advertising using premiums are impactful in developing brand recognition and subsequently create a brand loyalty.

A content analysis of children's TV Advertising was done in relation to dental health where 1000 advertisements were analyzed by Rodd & Patel (2005). Advertisements for food and drink were subdivided according to their sugar & acid content. Researchers found that 34.8% of advertisements were related to food & drink products and 95.3% of these promoted food and drinks items were potentially carcinogenic and erosive, and only 4.7 % of advertisements had low sugar and acid content. A New Zealand study by Hammond, Wyllie & Others (1999) studied types of food advertisements of which 30% of all food advertisements were related to chocolate & confectionery items and 90% of food products advertised had a high fat, sugar and salt content. The children are attracted towards the colorful world of fruit juices, candies, ice-creams and sweet products, many children buy the colored candies by the name of the color like 'orange one, Red one' or by name of flavor like strawberry, mango etc.

A study done in Australia by Hebden & Others (2009) to assess the number of fast food advertising on Australian TV in terms of number, types of food- healthy , unhealthy and fast foods. The main results show that from 2009 to 2010 mean frequency of fast food increases from 1.1 to 1.5 per hour. Some fast food advertised for children's consumption contains excessive energy. Advertisers linked fast food with fun, entertainment, family time meal, big portion size, a movie ticket, a coupon, a birthday gift, a soft drink and so on.

The fast food advertisements modelled eating behaviour which suggests children to satisfy hunger within short time. Ordering food using smart phones and through food Apps is latest trend among Indian Children. This new

found liberty due to accessibility of android phones makes children habitual of fast food and they are sucked into the circle of junk food consumption.

A study conducted by Unnikrishnan & Bajpai (1994) on the impact of TV Advertisements on children revealed that upper class children are more influenced by the fast food culture & most of the Indian breakfast items & snacks are now replaced by chips, noodles, pizzas & burgers. Now days, evening time snack would be a bowl of Maggi noodles instead of healthy alternate Upma. The characters in TV advertisements exhibit a happy fun face while consuming any food product. Despite that most of the fast foods contain less nutrient and are full of calories the actors advertising those items look slim, beautiful which convey a message of no effects on weight & health of individuals .

Effect of food advertisements on food behaviour & consumption-

The television advertisements influence is linked with the direct exposure to TV Ads and consequent food selection & intake. The influence is also visible in children's attempt to coax, demand and impact parents to buy them an advertised product. Young children learn by observing and imitating the behaviour of others. Many studies have been conducted on food preferences & intake reflect that children who watch TV Ads consistently will have food choices based on advertisements compare to children who are not exposed to TV Ads much. Borzekowskiet & others (2001) found that children exposed to TV videos with food ads were significantly more likely to select advertised food products than children exposed to same video without Ads. Burdine (1984) conducted a cross sectional study on 2,695 (12-13) year old children in Texas reflect that the TV viewing is related significantly to their intake of sweet and salty snacks & further no association was found between TV viewing & consumption of healthy food as snacks.

Signorielli conducted a study on 4th & 5th grade children and results of regression analysis indicated a positive association between number of hours TV viewed & children's eating habits where children consumed sugared cereals, fast and salty foods, & sweet drinks. Another study by the same researcher (1997) replicated the initial study where children (N- 457) stated choices between pairs of food like Ice cream or Yogurt , Hamburger or Grilled sandwich, the results show that TV viewing has the significant factor in choosing unhealthy food

preferences ($p < 0.01$). Many other studies have also revealed the positive correlation between TV advertisements viewing & effect on food preferences. Some other studies found out that families which use TV as meal time baby sitter or where families eat together with TV viewing as an important meal time activity, in such families children's total calorie intake is much higher than other children who don't watch TV during meal time.

Buying persuasiveness by children

The children are becoming prime influential person in buying items for personal to family use. Each child is being considered as an opportunity for advertisers. The children of different background relate differently to the world of material things. The children focus on their age related needs & desires of toys, food, sweets, and other items they can directly use, and children also demand things for family use like latest TV, Fridge, Mobiles, Cars etc. The purchase list of monthly grocery is now prepared by mother in consideration of the demands of children. The children decides now a days about the kitchen stocks like brand of food items i.e ketchup, Jam, chocolates, noodles and many more. Today children quickly receive information about any new product & get enough ideas about the qualities of the product which they can demand & discuss with parents before purchasing those items. Children are now much better consumer than previous generation due to 24*7 media exposure. The children in typical middle class families have an association with the nearby shops & market areas, many children do daily purchase of biscuits, chocolates, soft drinks, bread etc. The high variability of dry snacks, confectionary items make it extremely difficult for parents to control children's demand or consumption of such substance.

Pipper & Ward (1987) in four week diary study of 250 mothers –child pair revealed significant correlation between the TV viewing hours & the number of purchase requests for the advertised products. 61% of the requests were for food items. The mothers who watch more television were more likely to purchase the advertised products their children demand than the mothers who watch less TV (Palmer, 1998). The children who are watching more TV made more purchase requests for the advertised food products and influence the parents regarding purchase of those food products. Unnikrishnan & Bajpai (1994) in their study on impact of TV advertising on children found that 80% children in the age group of 8 to 15 years said that their parents give in to demands of advertised products. The parents also revealed that older children are more forceful & demanding as

a consumer whereas, younger children throw tantrum in the super market where the sweet /salty /crunchy food products are lined up on lower shelves.

The parents and child conflict arise if the demands of the children are not met by their parents, the children feel deprived and dissatisfied. Commercials may contribute to unhappy feelings among young viewers when advertisements induced requests are denied, children may become angry and upset. The children feel desolated when parent cannot afford to buy them a costly brand of chocolates or cannot plan to celebrate their birthdays in a popular pizza joints. (Charles Akins (1981).

Developing ability to resist food advertising

To resist the influence and probable harm associated with consumption of nutrient –poor food advertised shall only be possible when young people develop rationale capacity. The young people must be educated to develop comprehension of motive of advertisers, build up self regulatory skill to become a rationale buyer of food products and to avoid being tempted to buy and try products impulsively.

The very young children lack ability to understand the intent of advertisers, advertising for them is simply a fun to watch with slogans, offers, jingles, cartoon, music etc. The parents could be firm when dealing with young child's request of food which parents feel might not be healthy for child. Children in the age group of 11 plus years, require regular reminder from adults to process the content of advertisement critically. Adolescents more & less understand the intent of advertisements but they cannot inhibit impulsive behaviors and resist immediate gratification for junk food. Peer pressure, conforming to the changing lifestyles make things easier for advertisers who strive to catch hold of this mentality of youth. Adolescents are more susceptible than adults to consume tempting but nutritionally deficient food products

Nutrition education, media literacy sessions at school can make children informed customers. If regular talks are arranged, the children can be guided to understand the persuasive intent of advertising and the value of a healthy food. The young children can be educated through classroom activities by using puppets, stories, songs & games etc. However, studies have shown that nutrition education cannot completely neutralize the influence of food

advertising. Mostly young people choose to eat food regardless of its nutrient values. Young people's food preferences are determined to a large extent by perceived taste rather than nutritional beliefs.

Disclaimer are being put in lots of ads for not imitating stunts or smoking cause cancer, but no regulation is there which require disclaimer to inform probable harm of high fat, sugar or sodium (HFSS) content in food advertised. Most of the food advertisements targeting young people provide little information about nutritional value of the food which does not help consumers to make estimated judgments regarding purchase of those food products.

Accountability on Food companies

India like other developed countries is also facing the junk food induced epidemic of obesity & poor dietary habits in young people which gradually impair the health of individuals. The food safety & standards authority of India has proposed a ban on all forms of advertising of products with high fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) aimed at children, a move that could affect companies making chips, burgers, pizzas and other junk food. According to a news report published in The Economics Time –April, 08 2018, the HFSS food products shall not be advertised to children in any form as said in a notice for draft regulations.

The draft policy suggests that food companies declare the quantity of total fat, added sugar, salt, Trans fat and energy in each serving with the recommended dietary allowance. However, the draft Food Safety and Standards (Labeling and Display) Regulations, 2018, did not spell out how the advertising curbs would be enforced. The Food and Beverage Alliance of India, which includes companies such as Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Nestle, Kellogg, Mars Chocolate, and Hindustan Unilever, have decided to voluntarily restrict food and beverage advertisements aimed at children. The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI), in self - Regulation Guidelines on Advertising of Foods & Beverage suggest that Advertisers adopt strict principles of self regulation and not mislead the general public in any manner. Caution and care should be observed in advertising of F&B especially ones containing relatively high Fat, Sugar and Salt (HFSS) and advertisements should not be misleading or deceptive. Specifically, ads should not mislead consumers to believe that consumption of product advertised will result directly in personal changes in intelligence or physical ability. Such claims if made in advertisements

should be substantiated with evidence and with adequate scientific basis. Advertisements that include health or nutritional claims shall be supported by appropriate scientific evidence and meeting the requirement of basic Food Standards laid down under the Food Safety Standards Act and Rules. Advertisements should not encourage over or excessive consumption or show inappropriately large portions of any food or beverage. Advertisements should also not undermine the importance of healthy lifestyles or mislead as to the nutritive value of the food or beverage. Advertisement should not undermine the role of parental care and guidance in ensuring proper food choices made by Children. Claims in advertisements should not be inconsistent with information on the label or packaging of the food or beverage. The government authorities must make laws with aim to protect young minds from clever food marketing; there is a need to put some restrictions on advertising especially for nutrient-poor products on TV targeted mostly at young people.

Parental role is significant

Children under 7 -8 Years

The young children must be kept away from TV as much as possible though it is extremely difficult for parents to monitor TV time if both of them are working. Parents can use DVD to let children watch programs. The TV unit should not be installed in Kid's bedroom as this would increase TV viewing time. Parents must point out while watching TV programs that ads have started and children can utilize that time to quickly do some other activity like bounce ball on wall or paint a picture so that their attention can be diverted.

Children in the age group of 8 - 12 years

Children in primary school age understand the message & started making food choices based on perceived taste according to color, shape and aroma of food. Parents should constantly talk about healthy food choices and most importantly role model the healthy food behavior. Parents must have a conversation about the messages in advertisements; decode the implied meaning of ads which try to convince kids to buy a product. Talk with children about images, words, slogans, theme, story line; ploy used to attract audience mainly children and what magnetize young minds most is significant in controlling the influence.

Children in the age group of 12 + years

Parents of children in teenage years must keep in mind that the horizon of child is broadening & he is now involved more with the outside world, especially sensitive to peer's pressure and media influence. Parents must make fast food rules for whole family and explain to children why a pizza cannot replace a healthy meal or a soft drink add more sugar and false calorie and is not a substitute of fresh fruit juice. The parents are always a role model for children, if they eat dinner together, feed them right kind of food & set an example of healthy eating, children will follow the pattern. Parents must be more vigilant with adolescents about their media behavior. Monitor the ads children display interest in, if any objectionable product is being sold, parents can lodge the complaint with the channel and to the Advertising Standards Council of India which is a non statutory Tribunal set up in 1985 and incorporated under section 25 of the Companies Act. It entertains and disposes of complaints based on its Code of Advertising Practice (CAP).

Children must be encouraged to question things rather than blindly following them, example the picture of real fruit on a package of fruit drink may not be a part of drink & it may be only fruit flavored. Parents can watch TV with children during prime time or during holidays, ask questions about what do you think about the content or claim made in advertisements, is the advertisement exaggerating the benefits of the food items for example, if the advertisements says "the soup contains health benefit of real vegetables", ask children to verify the fact by researching a little about the labeling on the pack of ready to cook soup, about the percentage of vegetables put in the product. Parents can play a significant role in shaping the ideas and beliefs of children. The researches have shown that when parents watch television with children and explain about the content children learn to critically analyze the TV information than those children who are left alone to understand the TV & its messages. The children should be encouraged to discuss Television at home to help them to become discerning viewers better equipped to guard themselves from bombardment of TV advertising.

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