

Influence of Television Advertisement on Unhealthy Food Preferences among Children

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Abstract: *Today Fast food is one of the world's largest growing food type attracting more customers. These industries are spending billions on marketing and advertising the products especially to children. There has been substantial increase in advertising of fast foods both in developed and developing countries. Children's are viewed as major target market in India by these fast food industries. Majority of the products are high in calories and less in nutritional value. The aggressive marketing and advertising by these fast food industries force the children to choose unhealthy food choices and lead them to create poor eating habit. Children's are more vulnerable, less able to understand the persuasive technique of advertisement and have least cognitive defenses towards television advertisement. They are glued up in watching Television and are being bombarded with more fast food advertisement. Yet, Food advertising received little attention at the regulatory frame work. This paper focus on examining the influence of television advertisement on children's, need for sustainability concept in food advertising towards children's, a positive approach to influence the children's healthy food products and to emphasis potential regulations that could be implemented.*

Keywords: Television Advertising, fast food industry, eating behavior, Health, and Policies

1. Introduction

Food and beverage industries are spending billions on marketing and advertising their products to children's. Majority of the products are high in calories and less in nutritional value. Marketing and advertisement might be a powerful force, emotionally motivate and influence consumer's behavior to buy the products. Advertisement is one of the effective tools of integrated marketing communication targeted towards the kids. Every day children are being constantly bombarded with commercial junk food advertising and Marketing, both through traditional media and new media. Majority of these foods are snacks, soft drinks, junk food, confectionary and sugared breakfast cereals - products that tend to be of little nutritional value. Ask your child to recall a food advert and chances are that it won't be one for apples or broccoli. The question is that are these advertisements really responsible in marketing their products or just focusing on their profits.

Objectives

- To study the Indian fast food industry.
- To study the impact of fast food consumption on children's.
- To study the impact of television advertising on children's.
- To study the potential regulations that could be implemented and parents role to create healthy food preference among children's.

Methods

This article is an exploratory study and is based on the extensive review of books, journals, articles and the internet search engine.

2. Indian Fast Food Industry

Fast food is one of the world's largest growing food type. India is popular for its spices and has rich heritage of foods and recipes. The fast food industry in India is witnessing rapid growth with the changing lifestyles of the young Indian population. The Indian Fast Food Industry is anticipated to grow at a CAGR of around 34% during 2011-2014. Anticipating the future growth, many big international players are entering into the market by making deals with the domestic players (industry research report 2011)

India's fast-food industry is expected to double in size between 2013 and 2016; to \$1.12 billion. It could become the next mega-market for international fast food players. (Vaishali Gauba 2015) India is host to 18.7 % of world's kids and in fact one third of India's population is under the age of 15 years. Therefore, targeting children through persuasive advertisements can greatly impact the generation of billions of dollar in sales every year. (Food advertising to children in India 2015). Half of India's 1.2 billion population is under 25 years old. (Oliver Balch 2012) McDonald's, Dunkin' Donuts, Subway, Pizza Hut, KFC, Coca-Cola and PepsiCo are just some of the international food brands now aggressively touting their wares to the Indian public.

Key Players in the Indian market

- Amalgamated Bean Coffee Trading Company (Café Coffee Day)
- Goli Vada Pav Private Limited
- Hardcastle Restaurants Private Limited (McDonald's)
- Jubilant Food Works Limited (Dominos and Dunkin' Donuts)
- Jumbo King Foods Private Limited
- Neopolitan Pizza Limited
- Prem Sagar Dosa Plaza Private Limited
- Spring Leaf Retail Pvt. Ltd. (Mast Kalandar)
- Subway Systems India Private Limited (Subway)

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- TMA Hospitality Service Pvt Ltd (Ammi's Biryani)
- Tata Starbucks Limited
- United Restaurant Limited
- Yum! Restaurants India (Pizza Hut, KFC, Taco Bell)

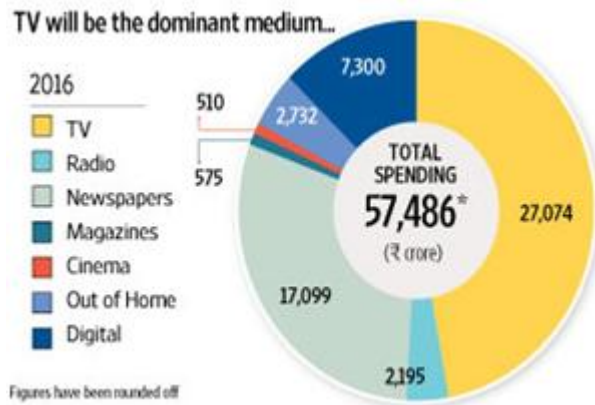
3. TV Advertisement towards Children's

Television is a powerful tool of advertisement and children's are exposed to overwhelming amount of advertisement. In India, 40-50 per cent of advertisements during children's programming were for food. (Dr.Alice, 2004). They are increasingly targeted by the million dollar companies because they have considerable ability to influence family members through pester power, knowledge of the product, and they are projected as future consumers. Children's are more vulnerable, less able to understand the persuasive technique of advertisement, their recognition of bias and deception in advertising and have least cognitive defenses towards television advertisement. They are glued up in watching Television and are being bombarded with more fast food advertisement. Advertising exploits individual insecurities, creates false needs and offers counterfeit solutions. (Beder S. 1998)

Studies estimate that children between the ages of 6 and 11 spend on average 28 hours a week watching television. (Kyla & Brad 2010). Almost all the industries right from food industry to alcohol industry, television is used as an outlet for advertising and marketing their products.

In recent years, television advertisers have increased their efforts to target young child audiences under the age of eight. (Dr.Alice 2004). According to a recent report, the fast food industry is increasingly targeting its marketing toward children -- with kids seeing ads when they're as young as 2 years old. Children now see about 1/3 more fast food TV ads than they did just six to seven years ago, while preschoolers see 21% more. (Kathleen Doheny, 2011)

In a research done on comparative analysis of television for advertisement, it was found that a total of 1602 food advertisement were appearing during the sample period. Advertisements about chocolates and sweet products were telecasted highest number of times followed by the adverts on Health/ Energy drinks and Grain/fruit-based products. Almost, all the food advertisements of different groups have claimed either health or nutritional benefit of the respective product. Ads claiming nutritional benefits were more as compared to health claims. "More nutrients", "Calcium & Carbohydrates", "High protein", "Low calories", "Makes taller & sharper" were the general claims appeared in the television advertisements (T. Vijayapushpam et al, 2016)



Source – Vidhichoudhary (2016)

<http://www.livemint.com/Consumer/LjI3ZO4nYkN8DNdyMIJJ/Ad-spending-to-grow-at-155-in-2016-higher-than-2015s-14.html>

Without proper action and regulatory measures, it is feared that companies will go for aggressive advertising and marketing activities.

According to food policy officer Clare Hughes, choice magazine "there is a complete imbalance in the advertisements being shown; they are not showing a balanced diet. Parents are trying to do what is right but we are making their lives harder by not having legislation on this issue". (Frith, M 2008)

There are other dissenting voices. The Canadian media claims that there is no good evidence that advertising has a substantial influence on children's food consumption and causing on overweight child. Consequently, it is not easy to believe that a complete ban on advertising would have any useful impact on childhood obesity rates. In countries such as Sweden and Quebec, where bans are in place, there has been no true change to the numbers of childhood obesity (Burke K 2007)

In Asia, there is still too little regulation controlling the programme to advertising ratio especially during children's programmes. In India 40-50 per cent of children's advertisements were about food. In India, Coca Cola, Pepsi Co, Britannia and Parle join Nestle as the major sponsors of food advertisements, promoting soft drinks, biscuits and other confectionery. (Dr. Alice 2004)

In the light of this, the WHO has come to the conclusion that heavy investment in food advertising is one of the factor causing obesity. Consequently, food advertising has been labelled as a "probable" cause of child obesity and has thus become a potential target for intervention. (WHO/FAO 2003)

How are children targeted by advertisers?

Children are primarily targeted in many ways. Marketers use a wide variety of techniques to attract to grab the attention of children's for their product. Some of them are

- Advertisements during children's show
- Popular cartoon characters
- Animation
- Celebrity Endorsement
- Story line of popular cartoon shows

4. Effect of Fast Food on Children's Health

Fast food companies are lined up to use cross promotional efforts of using high marketability of the characters from movie, popular cartoon characters, story line of popular cartoon shows (e.g Kellogg's mascots like Coco & Chhota Bheem)

However, the onslaught of junk food marketing that heralded the movie *Shrek the Third* earlier this year would be banned internationally under a plan for a new World Health Organization (WHO) code controlling the advertising of food to children. The reason given by the WHO is "that exposure to the commercial promotion of energy-dense, micronutrient-poor foods and beverages can adversely affect children's nutritional status" (WHO - World Health Organization 2006). According to the World Watch Institute (a Washington D.C. based research organization), for the first time, the number of obese adults in the world now matches the number of adults who are underweight. While the world's malnourished population has declined since 1980 to 1.1 billion, the number of overweight has increased to 1.1 billion. (World Watch Institute 2000). WHO's figures suggest that up to 177 million children worldwide are threatened by obesity-related diseases. (ABC News 2008)

As per WHO, about 43 million pre-school (under five) children worldwide are obese. Of these, nearly 35 million live in developing countries. A recent study by Diabetes Foundation of India (DFI) found that TV commercials have such impact on school children that they consider eating fatty foods fashionable. At least 54% of children surveyed preferred buying foods shown in commercials and 59% said they would continue to buy such foods. (Vineethapandey 2011)

With more than 50 million sufferers, India has the largest diabetes population in the world, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2015). The advertising industry claims that there is no direct correlation between the advertisement and obesity. It remains very difficult to measure the impact of advertisement, but we can measure the effect it has on the consumer behavior.

The fast food industry is increasingly targeting its marketing toward children using highly effective marketing techniques to encourage children to repeat purchase, regular consumption and brand loyalty. Children are becoming more important role in consumer market by influencing their parents' purchase by their peer power. Children today are influenced by multiple range of influences, cultures and media than any other generation. So it is not the complete ban on advertising would have useful impact on children's consumption pattern- they would still have exposure through other means. How do we protect children against this undue influence? Proposed solutions are 1. Media literacy initiatives 2. Parental control 3. Policies to limit television food advertisement.

5. Role of Parents to Create Awareness and Healthy Food Habits

The aggressive marketing of food products to children feeds unhealthy preferences of food choices. Parents play a vital role in preventing the unhealthy advertisement influence on children and are primarily responsible for feeding their children in encouraging healthy food habits.

Due to the growing numbers of hours that children sit in front of the television, less physical activity is the epidemic of childhood obesity. Parents should limit television viewing time, remove television from their bedroom, monitor the shows watched by children, restrict eating foods with poor nutrition content (Aleathia Cezar, BSN, 2008). Survey aimed to gain an insight into how parental denial affects children and how parents deal with the Nag factor. This revealed that 75 per cent of Filipino children would feel disappointed if their parents denied their request, in Pakistan most children would feel angry, and 27 per cent of Malaysian children would feel ashamed in the company of their friends and 21 per cent of Malaysian parents believed their children must hate them under such circumstances (Dr. Alice, 2004). This reveals that there is lack of parental control over the children. So parents play an important role in influencing the children's healthy eating habits.

There is also the popular view that, ultimately, it is the parents' responsibility to monitor and control what and how much children are eating. It is up to them to encourage healthy habits and ensure that their children are educated on matters such as diet, exercise and disease. If corporations are restricted in their freedom to advertise it would open a door that couldn't be closed and lead to more and more drastic decisions that could ultimately impact on personal freedoms and consumer choice.

6. Advertising Regulation in India

It is observed that children are exposed to various marketing techniques like repetition of advertisement using branded characters, animation, celebrity, cartoon characters across various media, promotional offers, branded packaging, store displays and other sales techniques. Everybody would agree that children need to be protected from this massive advertising and marketing of unhealthy food advertisement. In India, there are no specific advertising laws related to food advertisements targeted to children. Advertisements and promotional offers on Food & Beverage products should also not show excessive consumption (Advertising Standards Council of India)

Most developed countries apart from the content of the advertisement, also have regulation on timing of advertisements and the number of times an advertisement can be shown within a time-frame. But in India no specific regulation on time. Apart from the regulatory framework there are robust control systems that enforce and monitor advertisements. (Ali et al 2012) In the United States the Federal Trade Commission monitors and penalizes advertisers and marketers in the event of breach of the code of conduct. In the United Kingdom advertisers, promoters,

marketers are under the advertising Standards Authority of United Kingdom and any breach of the code may result in denial of access to advertising space. In India, apart from ASCI which self-regulates content there are no regulatory bodies to enforce basic advertising guidelines. We still see a lot of advertisements directed towards children that breach the primary advertising guidelines blatantly and are still shown on television.

7. Self-Regulation

“Self-regulation is the process whereby commercial food marketers participate in and are responsible for their own regulation. A prime example is the International Code of Advertising Practice, issued by the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC).” Dr. Alice, 2004. Each country has its own self-regulatory system and is over looked by the advertising and media industries and implemented through Code of Practices. This Code is mostly based on the International Code for Advertising Practices and provides guidelines for the protection of children against the exposure of harmful material. (Mark, 2016)

Like in many countries India too has a self-regulatory organization (SRO) for advertising content- The Advertising Standards Council of India, ASCI founded in 1985. Their mandate is that all advertising material must be truthful, legal and honest, decent and not objectify women, safe for consumers - especially children and last but not the least, fair to their competitors. (ASCI -Why Self-Regulation)

Many of the guidelines stated in ASCI have been adopted but still children are persuaded by the advertisements. Here are some recommendations concerning the advertisements towards children

- 1) Restriction of unhealthy foods advertisement on TV
- 2) Reduce the number of advertisement for fast foods after 6.00pm to 10pm
- 3) Monitor healthy message in the advertisements
- 4) Local governing bodies to have authority to limit advertisement
- 5) Awareness of balanced diet should be promoted through advertisement
- 6) Characters or cartoons from children programs should be restricted.

8. Conclusion

Today’s children are influenced by various marketing techniques on their choice of food. Television advertisements plays a dominant role in influencing their decision to major extent. Food marketers are targeting the children with highly effective marketing technique. Substantially scientific evidences proved that there is positive relation between unhealthy food advertisement and their choices of consumption. There is need for the Government to bring strong regulations on these companies but also the companies have corporate responsibility and sustainable concepts towards the future generation. It comes to the Parents responsibility to monitor and control the behavior of children towards this unhealthy food habits. They should create awareness and ensure that they educate

their children on matters such as diet, exercise and the diseases caused by this unhealthy food habit.

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