

Emerging behavioral patterns among the children due to influence of advertisements

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ABSTRACT

The paper is an attempt to decipher the correlations between children's media usage behavior and percolation of advertisement into their habits, affecting their consumer behavior and socialization. The paper proceeds with the argument that penetration of advertisement in children's life has multiple effects on their thinking pattern and conditioning about various aspects of the surrounding. But to understand this correlation is huge challenge before the field of communication. The study on which paper is based is an attempt to discern the possible reasons of deep influence of television advertisement on children making them vulnerable to unwanted and harmful messages. To study the above mentioned correlations a survey was carried out among 300 school children between the age of 3 to 12 year . The questionnaire was filled by the parents of those children who observers media usage behaviors of their wards and its effect on their choices in day to day life. The study finds out that majority of the parents do feel that their children are deeply attached with television advertisements and draw their shopping choices from them. The study presents a micro analysis of the factor responsible for the children's deep attachment with the advertisement determining their affirm trust in advt. messages.

Key Words : Advertisements, Children's media, Messages

INTRODUCTION

In the simplistic term advertisement are meant to influence the way people think or change their mind about something. When it comes to question of effects of advertisement on children, influence of message on them is manifold as compare to the adults. Though, advertisements attempt to change the mind of adults even directing them to support the marketing strategy, and succeed in their attempt to the larger extent. But the people of this age group can critical approach to understand the usefulness of the advertisements discarding harmful and unwanted messages from the useful one. But in case of children they might be vulnerable to all unwanted and harmful messages; whether it is advertisement or something. They can't comprehend the unrealistic things being portrayed in the advertisements

as their real world experience is limited so is limited the understanding about fact and fiction. The paper argues that advertisement penetrate into children's habit to a larger extent, so researchers should study the correlations of the changing habits-in terms of consumerism and socialization- of the children and their trust in the advertisement messages. Cambridge dictionary describes "*habit*" is something that you do often and regularly, sometimes without knowing that you are doing it.

It sound that sometimes people are so conditioned due to their habits that they fail to judge pros and cons of their habit of thoughts that largely determines their action.

As stated by Mahatma Gandhi, " Your belief becomes your thoughts, your thoughts become your words, your words become your action, your action become your habit, your habits become your value, your

values become your destiny.” The paper argues that this correlation need to be analyzed on younger generation belief –constructed under the influence of media messages. Gandhi’s view on individual’s belief construction is not in isolation, studies in the field of psychology do acknowledge the above mentioned fact. The paper further argues that research on —penetration of advertisements into children habits are not confined to their consumer behavior, it does affects the social circle in larger perspective e.g., *the way children act in the society is governed by the advertisements*.

Researchers throughout the world are focusing on vulnerability of the children while encountering the ads. Scholars (Matthew, Frances 2-17) conclude “ Because advertising to children and adolescents has become ubiquitous, researchers who study its influence raise significant concerns about the practice, especially as it relates to dietary behavior , family conflict and children’s potential vulnerability as and audiences”.

In view of the scholarly opinions on the research problem the paper covers the various aspects of children’s response to the advertisements. It helps to understand how do they respond to any particular advt. and give explicit direction about the possible solution to the unwanted influence of the advt. on them.

Children’s responses to advt. and their implication:

Throughout, the world numerous studies have been conducted to know the various facets of children’s response to advertisements. Since it varies from children to children and their exposure, family background and other factors, so there is no clear cut guidelines to understand the fact in totality. But while doing research in the area such studies can’t be overlooked as they give baseline to the ongoing research work. Some scholars argue that it is not always the case that advertisements have negative impact on children; contrary to the perception they prove very useful for children making them aware about various important things in the life. Advertising (Tillotma Chattergi, 2018) can have both positive and negative impact on children. Certain advertisements those of hygiene products can help inculcate good habits in children. Sometimes advertisements have motivating content that can encourage children to opt a profession or chase a dream.

American academy of pediatric (Chron, 2015) states that a child under the age of eight is unable to understand that advertisements are solely there to sell them to

products (advertisers). The experts of the organization also underline the fact that most of the time advertising world crosses the ethical line to manipulate the children, but we can’t expect from the children to gauge the real motive of the advertisers. The paper also endorse the argument that in view of mental maturity of the children it is beyond their comprehension to find out how they are being manipulated. In view of the limitation of child he/she can not respond to the advertisement messages, critically. Some scholars points out the important point that children responses to the advertisements have larger impact on family as well. Under the influence of the advertisements youths also shapes the buying patterns of their family (Calvert, 2008) from vacation choice to the car purchase to meal selection, they exert a tremendous pressure on family’s pocketbook. The point is valid and helpful to understand the larger impact of children’s believability of advertisements. In view of the argument the paper put counter argument that children action governed by the advt. has not only have economic aspect, it does have social implications. For instance the children participation in the society is also attached with it and obviously it becomes a research question.

Review of literature:

A study to understand the impact of advertisement on children behavior was carried out in 2012 for the master’s degree in Chaudhary Devi Lal University, Sirsa. The study had concluded that children copy the ads, but parents were of the view that it didn’t have negative impact on the children while it enhances their knowledge.

A study to understand the Children’s attitudes towards television advertising was conducted by Heidi L. Haskin (1999). The purpose of study was to understand the attitudes of children towards television commercials related to toys and foodstuffs. It involved children’s sensitivities and behavior. The researcher applied a mixed research methods like interviews, content analysis and survey method to collect data. The researcher clarified the three elements of the attitude, which included cognitive, emotional and behavioral elements. Heidi divided the cognition into awareness, belief, knowledge and experience. After thorough study of these elements the researcher explained the results of the research. The research concluded that children between the ages of five and eight years are unaware of the objectives and concepts of advertising, and in the contrast, children between the ages of nine and twelve

have the ability to quickly identify ads. This research proved that children's sense and understanding of ads varies according to their age groups. The maturity according to the age is an important component in explaining the concept of ads as a result (Austin *et al.*, 1999).

In Belgium, Nathili Danes (2007) studied the parent's response towards children's food products choices and their eating habits. The researchers used survey research methods and questionnaires as a tool to collect data from 485 parents of children studying in primary and secondary schools in Belgium. The results of the research revealed mixed reactions of the parents. Generally, children's parents in Belgians do not appear to be troubled by the effects of advertisements, but parents must be concerned about their children's food items, nutrition and health as well. Around 20 per cent parents believed that adds affect their children's eating habits. At the same time parents also believed that their children had understanding of the fact that television advertisements are business oriented (Chatterjee, 2018).

Chan and McNeal (2002) indicated that Chinese parents hold negative attitudes towards television advertising in general and specifically children's advertising. Parents of younger children were more critical than parents of older children as they were worried about children's inability to identify misleading content in commercials. Parents strongly felt that advertising should be banned during children hour which seems to suggest that Chinese parents rely on the government to set and enforce the rules to control the effects of advertising on children. They found that parents who have more negative attitudes towards advertising exercise their control through coercion, rather than through communication.

Nathalie Dens *et al.* (2007) in their study found out a structural equation model that was built using data from the sample of 485 parents and found family conflicts and pestering are among the most important drivers of restrictive mediation of television. Attitudes towards food advertising the degree to which children can understand the commercial intent of advertising and the perceived influence of advertisements on children do not directly affect restrictive mediation.

Elice J. Johansen (2012) had studied the portrayal of families and children's perspective in advertisements in the US. Research was specially focused on children. The purpose of the researcher was to know how the

image of the family is portrayed in advertisements and how it affects on the children. Children from different age groups are included in the research and are classified. It was found in the research that children live within the public media and advertising which affects their attitudes to a large extent. The researchers had used inspection and survey methods to collect data for research. The analysis found that as the children grow up, their advertisements viewing timing increases.

METHODOLOGY

Research was designed to understand the various dimensions of children's media usage behavior. To meet the purpose, the study was carried among parents of 300 school going children. The questionnaire was designed according in tune with various theories and models of the related subject. Survey was done in the schools of Chandigarh, Panchkula and Mohali. For the convenience of the parents and school administration, the survey was carried out during parents- teachers meetings in the schools. To maintain the non biased approach of the parents while filling- up the questionnaire, only those parents who closely watch the media usage behavior of the their children were included in the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following tables are indicators of different facets of children's television and specifically advertisements viewing habits.

As per the details below, 56% children liked to watch television and 7% children don't. 36.3% children often watch television and 0.7% parents did not notice about children watching TV (Table 1).

	Frequency	Per cent
Yes	168	56.0
No	21	7.0
Very little	109	36.3
Did not notice	2	.7

The Table 2 shows that 22 per cent of children spend the time watching television for 30 minutes, while 58.7 per cent children watch the television for one to two hours daily. The number of the children who watch television more than two hours is 15.7 per cent. 1.7 per cent of children did not watch television.

Table 2 : Time Spent on Media

	Frequency	Per cent
0-30	66	22.0
1-2 hours	176	58.7
more than 2	47	15.7
Off course not	5	1.7
Did not notice	6	2.0
Total	300	100.0

It shows that, the time children spent on watching television. 43.3 per cent children watch television in the evening. 17 per cent watch it after coming from the school while the percentage of children watching television at night is 14.7%. 12.7 per cent children watch TV any time. 1.3 per cent, watch TV in morning (Table 3).

Table 3 : Preference of Timing

	Frequency	Per cent
Evening	130	43.3
Morning	4	1.3
After school	51	17
Night	44	14.7
Any time	37	12.3
Lunch	26	8.7
All time	8	2.7
Total	300	100

In the survey, parents stated that children mostly like to watch cartoon channels. The children watching cartoons, sonic, Pogo, nick, and Disney are 59 per cent. After this, the percentage of children watching Discovery is 5.0.% Children watching film channels are 10.0 per cent. Along with this, there are 3.0 per cent children who watch channels like MTV, Sub TV, Endv and Big Magic. Only 1 per cent children watch news and educational channels. 14.7 per cent children like music channels.

Table 4 : TV programs preferences

	Frequency	Per cent
Songs/ Music channel	44	14.7
Cartoon Channel + Hungama, sonic, pogo, nick, Disney	177	59
Movie	30	10
Sports	5	1.7
Discovery	15	5
No answer	1	.3
None	3	1.0
News Channel+ Educational	3	1.0
Mtv+Sab Tv+&tv+Big Magic	9	3
Sony+colour+Star Plus	13	4.3
Total	300	100

Channels like Sony, Color and Star Plus are viewed by 4.3 per cent of the children. After this, Sports channels are seen by only 1.7 per cent of the children (Table 4).

More than 78.3 per cent of children watch television for entertainment. Music watchers are 5 per cent. Children with an educational objective are 3.3 per cent. Along with this, the percentage of children listening to entertainment and music is 5.3%. Children attributed to entertainment and educational purposes are 1 per cent. So the percentage of children watching entertainment and music is 2.7%. Simultaneously, for entertainment, music and educational purposes, television is 2.7 per cent (Table 5).

Table 5 : Purpose of using media

	Frequency	Per cent
Entertainment	235	78.3
Music	15	5.0
Academic	10	3.3
Information	3	1.0
Cannot say	6	2.0
Entertainment & Music	16	5.3
Entertainment & Academic	3	1.0
Entertainment & Information	4	1.3
Entertainment, Music & Academic	8	2.7
Total	300	100.0

The Table 6 shows the types of factors that draw the attention of the children to advertisements. With 68.7 per cent cartoon in the adds are the biggest attraction among the children . After this, musical ads are preferred by 12.7 per cent and graphics ads are preferred by 7.7 per cent children. Cartoon and musical advertising is 3.7 per cent, cartoon and graphics advertising is 2.0 per cent.

Table 6 : Advertisements attraction factors

	Frequency	Per cent
Cartoon Ads	206	68.7
Graphics	23	7.7
Musical Ads	38	12.7
Other	13	4.3
Cartoon Ads and Graphics	6	2.0
Cartoon and Musical Ads	11	3.7
Cartoon Ads, Graphics and Musical Ads.	3	1.0
Total	300	100.0

During the program, 21.3 per cent of the channels are changed by the children during adds. 37.7 per cent are the ones who do not change the channel and like to watch advertisements. 36 per cent change the channels after viewing the adds for some time (Table 7).

Table 7 : Children's advertisement preferences

	Frequency	Per cent
Yes	113	37.7
No	64	21.3
A little	108	36.0
Did not notice	15	5.0
Total	300	100.0

Data interpretation:

The above mentioned tables present an all inclusive picture of children's media usage habit. The tables on one side throw light on children's media preferences and the factor leading to their attraction towards adds on the other it helps us to understand that children's engagement in adds is outcome of various factors. It depends on the time they spend on media and their liberty to use media according to their wishes without any intervention from the parents. The most important part of the data is that it is very helpful to understand the correlations between children media usage behavior and affects of adds in their day to day life at micro level. It helps to understand the root cause of vulnerability of children on account of advt. messages.

Conclusion:

The study concludes with the idea that marketing strategies are successful to engage children in advertising directing them to change their consumer behavior according to the targets of the advertisers . It draws the conclusion that news related information is almost missing in the information diet of the children that may affect their grooming as a future citizen. We can't deny the fact wide spread news help young and adults to understand their surrounding, society at large and make world view. At least education and science discoveries related news prepare children for future . But if news is almost missing in their information diet, it will limit their exposure.

On the basis of the data interpretation of the study we can conclude that advertisements are affecting socialization of the children and limiting their information choices. It indicates that to narrow the children information choices may make them passive users of the information . The statically analysis concludes that parents intervention in children media choices are missing while children are not mature enough to understand the marketing strategy at their end.

Suggestion:

The study suggests that children are passive users of media messages who are accepting the information without questioning . The present study suggests that parents intervention in children media behavior should be studied in future researches . It will help to understand the fact whether children acquire some critical understanding to understand the misleading elements in the adds or not. If parents' intervention—helping children to understand the unrealistic aspects of adds- is studied by the researchers it will add a new dimension in the research. The study also suggests that some instructional based studies can be done in the future wherein children's can be interviewed before and after instructing about the unwanted and harmful messages in adds.

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