

14. Influence of Advertising on Food Habits of Children-Reviewing the Existing Literature and Directions for Future Research Agenda

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Abstract:

Advertising is a method of communication that aims to induce a group of people and influence their behavior in relation to a commercial submission. The main purpose of advertising is to create awareness about a myriad of items to potential customers. In order to influence their dietary choices, food preferences, and eventually food purchasing behavior, marketing maestros today have targeted children and adolescents as potential clients. The goal of the article is to examine how advertising of food affects kids and their food preferences through a comprehensive review of various existing literature.

Keywords:

Consumer Behavior, Advertisement, Food Habit, Children

14.1 Introduction:

The English poet William Wordsworth once said, "Child is the father of man," meaning that children exhibit traits in infancy that foreshadow who they will become as adults. The quote above is well known among modern marketers. The marketer finds that the children's market has enormous potential. Children today are more evolved than in earlier centuries, which is entirely due to the impact of rapid technological advancement. The changes in the sociological and psychological evolution of mankind are primarily due to these technological advancements. Children have become strong consumers as a result of their accessibility to personal assistant devices.

Consumers who are well informed tend to be more satisfied, and satisfied consumers are more likely to remain loyal customers. When segmenting, marketers see the children's market as a very promising one. Children are seen as a superset of the influencers, buyers, and adult consumers who will purchase products in the future. The buyers are the children themselves as present buyers, the influencers are those who actively or inactively shape their parents' purchasing habits, and the future adult buyers are those who will be the prospective purchasers in the future. The "cradle to grave" techniques were created by marketers by evaluating the segment's potential. Even before they are born, children start to consume things. Even before they are born, children start to use a lot of items. They are exposed to many marketing tactics from the moment of their birth; when they are young, their parents are the ones who target them, but as they get older and understand what makes a good consumer, they begin to act independently. Children's cognitive growth has a stronger impact on their efficacy and efficiency as consumers.

14.2 Decoding the Diet Dilemma: Consumer Behavior for Children’s Food Habits

Consumer behavior research is not a recent development in the field of marketing research. However, studies of sociological factors, psychological aspects of the consumption process, and other outside influences on marketing activities began to gain importance in the middle of the 20th century. The marketing concept gained more significance in the field of marketing research in the 1950s. More thorough investigation of the consumer decision-making process resulted from the philosophy of fully satisfying customer demands and achieving their satisfaction. Consumer behavior studies from the past offer a solid conceptual foundation for conducting research in the details of pertinent processes and functions. The conceptual frameworks for consumer behavior in marketing management allowed researchers to comprehend consumer behavior patterns that are based on consumer socialization. Marketers recently showed a greater interest in consumer habits, brand loyalty, and how children are learning to make purchases.

Table 14.1: Children's Five-Stage Shopping Learning Process in Their Consumer Development (Mcneal & Yeh, 1993).

Sr. No.	Stage	Shopping learning Process
Stage 1	Observing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child’s preliminary interaction with the marketplace. • Children accompany their parents to shopping malls. • Consumer socialization starts at the perceptual stage (36 months – 7 years).
Stage 2	Making requests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children make requests to parents when they see something they want in the store. • Make requests for specific products at home, probably because of the stimulation by television advertisements.

Sr. No.	Stage	Shopping learning Process
Stage 3	Making Selections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children experience their first physical contact as consumers by choosing an article and taking it from the shelf.
Stage 4	Assisted Purchases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scenes give meaning to the money children receive from their parents or grandparents. • Children start spending money on their own. • Contributes to the child's understanding that the store owns the goods and money is the medium of exchange.
Stage 5	Making Independent Purchases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performing independent purchases without parental assistance (John's reflective stage, 11-16 years). • Significant time lag between a child's first purchase with parents and an independent purchase.

Children's consumer socialization occurs in stages and an array of socializing factors, including peer group, media, and family influences it. Advertising and food packaging information are two examples of media that are useful for consumer socialization. The use of the internet, television and other forms of mass communication as consumer socializing tools has also been quite successful. It is possible that the unavailability systematic research on consumer behavior of children, particularly the influence or function of specific factors (such as family member, sellers, and the educational institutes), can be attributed to marketers' possible perception that it is wrong to see children as a "market".

14.3 Literature Review:

Around the world children's diet has been a problem not only for the parents but for the marketers as well. Several studies have been conducted on this topic to churn out the proper knowledge on this matter and for the purpose of present research, the following studies have been analyzed and the essence presented as hereunder.

According to a content analysis by Lewis and Hill (1998) in their article "Food advertising on British children's television: A content analysis and experimental study with nine-year-olds", opined that food is the product category that receives the most advertising on children's television. Confectionery, junk and fast foods receive the most attention. Therefore, 60% of food advertisements targeted at kids are for processed foods, 6% are for junk food restaurants, and the remaining 40% are for breakfast cereals and candy. In addition, they discovered an interaction effect: whereas children of average weight feel less healthy and crave sweets after viewing food advertisements, overweight children do the opposite. After seeing non-food advertisements, the opposite tendency was noticed. Stratton & Bromley (1999) in their study with the title "Families Accounts of the Causal Processes in Food Choice", found that the main concern of parents is making sure their kids are eating enough. Parents make an effort to adjust their food to the family's preferences in order to get kids to eat.

When discussing the eating habits of children in a survey in Britain, there was a conspicuous absence of references to nutrition and health. Numerous studies have been conducted to identify the reasons that affect kids' food habits, and schools and classmates also have a role in shaping their tastes and routines.

Pecheaux and Derbaix (2002) in their study "Children's Reactions to Advertising Communication." investigated a significant number of advertisements focused at children, the most impressionable demographic in any community. Children were viewed as a market category that was not only appealing but also important due to their impact on other family members' shopping preferences, especially for food.

Hastings et al. (2003), opined in their study "Review of research on the effects of food promotion to children", the foods that we should consume the most are the ones that receive the least amount of advertising. In the year 2004, a poll was conducted in the United Kingdom for the national family and parenting institute, parents felt that their kids are being dominated with advertisements aimed at ever-younger kids across an increasing number of social media sites. They claim to be stressed, agitated, and concerned, especially in light of the numerous interpersonal disputes they allege that consumer expectations from kids produce inside the family.

Young (2003) with his study "Advertising and Food Choice in Children: A Review of the Literature" came to the conclusion that youngsters begin to grasp advertising between the ages of eight and nine and that they actively participate in their families' food purchases. Children's dietary choices are said to be determined by the age of five before they can comprehend advertising. The author continues by stating that there are numerous factors that influence eating habits, among which viewing the television or commercials is just one.

Helen Dixon, et al. (2007) examined the relationship between children's frequent television viewing and attitudes about food in their study "The Effects of Television Advertisements for Junk Food Versus Nutritious Food on Children's Food Attitudes and Preferences". They also attempted to assess the impact of various television commercials for healthy and harmful foods on children's understanding of their diets, attitudes, and intentions and opined that it is easy to influence their dietary habits through consistent advertising in television.

Matthews (2007) investigated how channels and promotional tactics in the marketing of food to children affected sales in the study "Children and obesity: a pan-European project examining the role of food marketing". Children's culture was linked by referencing kid's movies and their protagonists, including games and fictional elements.

These and other inventive strategies were found to be used by food advertisers to target children in the UK and other nations. In addition to this, a lot of businesses featured cartoon characters or celebrities in their ads to entice kids. However, it was discovered that television being the main promotional medium mostly promoted unhealthy junk food instead of healthy foods. Powell et al. (2007), observed in their study "Exposure to Food Advertising on Television Among US Children" that television advertising in Singapore likewise makes extensive use of this method, with one campaign even going so far as to provide a complimentary soft drink with the purchase of uncooked rice.

In addition to clouding children's perceptions of healthy and harmful diets, these adverts constantly cause them to link rice with soft beverages. It is also observed that toys are used in several commercials to sell unhealthy food.

Khanna (2012) in his study "Children's attitude towards television advertisements and their impact on family purchase decisions" compared the attitudes of children in rural and urban areas regarding television commercials and their influence on family purchasing decisions. Data were gathered through interviews and questionnaires from a sample of 480 parents and kids. It was determined that television viewing was more common in cities than in rural regions. Urban parents cited friends, stores, and the internet as significant information sources, and parents in rural areas cited television as their primary source of information. According to the report, parents are concerned about food commercials and think that they mislead them into thinking that kids get obese.

Rathod R. M. & Par mar B.J. (2012) in their study on chocolate brands "Impact of Television Advertisements on Children: An Empirical Study with Reference to Chocolate Brands" discovered that kids don't think about price when they desire to buy the marketed foods. Additionally, they do not take into account if it is good or bad for them. The purchasing of the merchandise is the only thought they have and advertisements affect younger children the most.

Pettigrew et al. (2013) investigated in their study "The effects of television and Internet food advertising on parents and children" looked into how children's food choices were impacted by their understanding of nutrition. Focus groups, experiments, and surveys were used to gather data, which was then evaluated using ANOVA and structural equation modelling (SEM). The study found a correlation between children's repeated eating of unhealthy foods and increased societal norms around fast food, diminished parental nutritional understanding, less frequent food-related conversations with their parents, and exposure to food advertising. As a result, frequent eating of unhealthy foods by youngsters was linked to increased weight.

Sharma (2014) in his study "Influence of Children on Family Purchase Decisions in Urban India: An Exploratory Study" investigated the value of family communication and brand knowledge while taking into account how much impact kids have on purchasing decisions. 229 mother-and-child couples made up the sample. The study was carried out in Pune. It was discovered that a child's position is not one of a student but rather one of a teacher, depending on the family's demographics and communication patterns. Brand recognition is a crucial factor in influencing a youngster with the help of constant advertising, especially in the food sector.

Ussaima (2015) examined the impact of television ads and their function in raising children's product awareness in the study "Influence of television advertisements on children and their buying behavior a study". 354 kids and 250 parents were randomly selected from the city of Madurai. Ads were shown to be the second most important source of product awareness after schoolmates and parents, and 14% of kids immediately requested purchases after seeing ads. Children asked their parents for purchases in proportions of 45.48% to father, 44.35% to mother, 7.6% to grandparents, and 2.5% to siblings.

14.4 Further Scope of Study:

Nowadays it is observed that children are being targeted in the food and beverage industry. The marketing of food to children is therefore inevitable, and they are exposed to unprecedented levels of advertising, and consumerism via an array of media. Numerous studies have found links between the amount of time spent watching television and children's obesity rates. Many child advocates and media professionals believe that because marketing to children and adolescents has grown so pervasive, there is a growing public health concern. One might contend that young children in particular are a sensitive group that needs to be protected from commercials that might be harmful to their health. Further studies can be done on the other factors apart from advertisements which influence children for their consumption habits.

Reviewing the existing literature, it can be said that further exploration of the topic can be done on the basis of age in children specifically any comparative study between children, adolescents and teenagers. Limited studies have been conducted in India, therefore a comparative study between urban and rural populations will also be fruitful. Nowadays internet plays a pivotal role in children decision making process, therefore advertisements provided on the internet can also be taken into account for the purpose of the holistic study on this topic.

Therefore, we can infer ample scope for investigation exists in the abovementioned areas and future research can be undertaken to fill in those research gaps which will contribute to the development of the current field of study and significantly enrich the reservoir of existing knowledge.

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