

A Comparative Analysis of Television Food Advertisements Aimed at Adults and Children in India

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Abstract:-

Objective: To analyze food advertisements comparatively between children television channels and mainstream channels in India.

Design: Four leading TV channels were recorded between 07.00-09.00 hrs and 17.00-19.00 hrs telecasts of children's channels and 17.00-21.00 hrs airtimes of mainstream channels, amounting to a total of 112 hours of telecast for analysis for a period of one week, during the vacation. The data were viewed by one of the researchers and coded according to food categories, food products, health claims and presentation.

Results: A total of 1602 food advertisements were appeared and the duration of these ads was calculated as 42,120 seconds. Advertisements about chocolates and sweet products were telecasted highest number of times followed by the adverts on Health/ Energy drinks and Grain-based products. Advertisement of chocolates/sweets, Biscuits/cookies and potato chips were mostly telecasted in the children's channel compared to mainstream, which clearly indicates that the manufacturers of these products had targeted child audience. Contrary to this, 63% of adverts on health/ energy drinks were seen in the mainstream channels, which audience consist mostly adults including house-wives or parents. As the cost of the health drinks were high compared to the chocolates and the decision to purchase these products lies only with parents, health/ energy drinks were mostly advertised in the mainstream channel. All most all the adverts on health/ energy drinks boosted these as inevitable for the growth of children which tempts the parents. The same was the case with advertisement on grain/fruit-based products. 74% of this product advertisement was seen in the mainstream channels. All the advertisement of potato crisps during the sample week was appeared only in the children's channel and all the adverts on tea/coffee was seen only on mainstream channels which can be perceived as food advertisers' strategies was based on symbolical division of food habits between children and adults.

Conclusions: The majority of food advertisements shown in both children and mainstream channels do not foster good health despite the health claims made. The findings of the present study suggest that statutory regulation is needed to reduce the advertising of unhealthy food-related products, especially to children. At the same time, efforts could be made to encourage more advertising of healthy foods.

Key words: Food, Television, Advertisements, Adult and children

I. INTRODUCTION

Advertisement is one of the effective tools of integrated marketing communication to emotionally motivate consumers to buy the products [1]. Content analyses of food advertisements reveal that most Television (TV) ads are for food items of minimal nutritional value [2, 3]. It also has strong linkage with entertainment and the proliferation of media has blurred the distinguishing lines between advertisements and entertainment. To affect dietary change it is important to understand factors that influence food purchasing behavior of consumers [4].

Despite the growing strength of social networks, television advertising is still the most influential medium in people's purchase decisions. A report from the Television Bureau of Advertising and Knowledge Networks Inc reveals that 37 percent of television viewers make purchase decisions after watching advertisements on television compared to 7 percent for social networks. Impact and persuasion are two factors for a successful TV commercial that arouses viewer interest immediately and remains memorable. Television advertisements demonstrate their influence in a variety of ways.

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Advertisements featuring products like snacks, toys, confectionaries, cookies and fast food are specifically targeted at children, in order to motivate them to try new brands and buy more. A strong correlation has been observed between children and television advertisements, which are full of fascination and excitement [5,6]. The ways television media contributes to poor diet and physical inactivity include: time spent consuming media and its impact on reduced energy expenditure, eating during time spent watching television and the prevalence and impact of food advertisements [7].

Zimmerman and Bell [8] and Halford *et al* [9] found evidence to support the theory that TV viewing contribute to obesity. Parents' perceptions of TV food advertising directed at children revealed that parents perceive food advertising as a strong influence on their children's food preferences and eating habits [10,11], found that fast food and soft drink TV advertising was associated with increased consumption of both these items among elementary-school children.

Furthermore, fast food advertising was significantly associated with BMI (Body Mass Index) of overweight and obese children. Lack of physical activity is the main cause for overweight among children. In India, only 50 percent of children of 12 to 21 years of age regularly participate in rigorous physical activity, while 25 percent of children report no physical activity [12].

Television viewing is the dominant leisure activity in India. In a survey conducted by ASSOCHAM, Indian adults reported watching 14-16 hours of television a week, more than half of total leisure time. The average child spends two hours a day watching television, but 26 percent of children watch at least four hours of television per day [12]. Television is a powerful medium for marketing and advertising products [13, 14]. There is evidence to suggest that greater TV watching is associated with increased consumption of snacks, sweetened beverages and fast foods [8, 9,11].

The Overseas Development Institute (ODI), a leading independent think tank, found that Indians form a massive chunk of the one-in-three-adults now overweight or obese, adding up to 1.46 billion across the world [15]. For its report titled "Future Diets", London-based ODI selected five middle-income countries - India, China, Egypt, Peru and Thailand - as case studies to illustrate dietary trends in the developing world over the past 50 years. The analysis revealed that between 1980 and 2008, those affected in the developing world by obesity had tripled.

The percentage of obese and overweight in India rose from about 9 per cent of the population in 1980 to 11 per cent in 2008. A recent study conducted among 24,000 school children in south India showed that the proportion of overweight children increased from 4.94 percent of the total students in 2003 to 6.57 percent in 2005 demonstrating the time trend of this rapidly growing epidemic [16].

Exposure to televised food marketing is one of a number of key factors influencing the overall population's diet and eating preferences, ultimately affecting outcomes such as overweight and obesity [17,18]. Food advertising to children has long been dominated by low-nutrient, high-calorie products [19, 20], and the fact that younger children do not comprehend the persuasive intent of commercial messages [21,22] exacerbates concern about marketing influence.

The strategies used by advertisers in the Indian television media are similar to those seen in other countries [14,23] in that they make target-specific appeal to adults and children audience. Food advertisers tactically project their products in exclusive children television channels as compared to mainstream television channels.

In this background, this study was conducted (i) to quantitatively assess overall food advertisements in Indian prime television channels and (ii) to comparatively analyze these advertisements in mainstream and children television channels.

II. MATERIALS AND METHOD

Television Rating Points (TRP) were used to select four television channels for this study. Accordingly, four most popular commercial channels were selected. Of which two channels, Cartoon Network and Disney were meant for children and two belongs to mainstream i.e., STAR plus and Gemini channels.

‘Cartoon Network’ is the first kids channel in India available on all major satellite and cable television providers. Specifically for South Asian region, this channel primarily airs animated shows in four different languages: Hindi, English, Tamil and Telugu. This is a 24-hour channel and has larger viewership among kids in India. ‘Disney’ is also a 24-hour television channel aimed at children and families, available on all major satellite and cable television providers. The telecast schedule of this channel consists largely of original series aimed at pre-teens and young teenagers.

‘Star Plus’ is a Hindi language general entertainment television channel based in India. This popular channel’s shows include a mix of family dramas, comedies, reality shows, shows on crime and tele-films. Gemini TV is a regional language (Telugu) television channel occupies top position in TRP charts among the south Indian television channels. The channel’s programming includes serials, films, film-based programs, game shows and News. It broadcasts serials, films, live shows, game shows and news.

Data were collected by recording programmes of the above four channels during the prime time period for a week (i.e., from 23rd to 29th October 2012). This week happens to be the first term holidays for the schools in Hyderabad, India where the study was conducted. The sample week was selected as it matched the period of data collection during which a questionnaire was administered to the population about the influence of mass media on their food purchasing.

A prime time indicates highest viewer ship period of the television. Accordingly daily 07.00 – 09.00 hrs and 17.00 – 19.00 hrs telecast of children’s channels (Cartoon Network and Disney) and 17.00 – 21.00 hrs broadcast of mainstream (STAR plus and Gemini) Channels was recorded, amounting to a total of 112 hrs of telecast for analysis. All the recorded telecast was viewed by one of the author of this study for coding.

Food advertisements appeared in the recorded version of telecast was classified into ten different food categories viz., (1) Biscuits/ cakes, (2) Chocolates/ sweet products, (3) Health/ energy drinks, (4) Dairy products, (5) Tea/ coffee, (6) Grain/ fruit based products, (7) Atta/ Noodles/ Pizza, (8) Potato chips, (9) Oils/ Nuts, (10) Others. The duration of each advertisement (in seconds) and the food group to which it belongs was also recorded in the coding sheet. The coding scheme was adapted from previous content analysis research that examined food marketing messages on television targeting children [24].

III. RESULTS

A total of 1602 food advertisements were appeared during the sample period in all the four television channels viz., Cartoon Network, Disney, STAR plus and Gemini (Table 1). Total duration of these advertisements was calculated as 42,120 seconds. STAR plus has aired highest number (536) of food ads in duration of 14,650 seconds, followed by Cartoon Network (406 ads in 7,820 seconds); Disney (388 ads in 12,440 seconds) and Gemini (272 ads in 7,210 seconds).

Proportionate time for running each advertisement clearly varies between main stream and children’s channels. Average time for each ad shown in main stream channels (STAR plus and Gemini) was uniform i.e., around 26 to 27 seconds, whereas in Cartoon Network average time was only 19 seconds, but in Disney it stood highest about 32 seconds for each advertisement.

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

IV. DISCUSSION

In the current study, it was observed that food advertisers have employed two different strategies to target adults and children as the potential consumers. Advertisement of chocolates/sweets, Biscuits/ cakes and potato chips were mostly telecasted in the children’s channel compared to mainstream, which clearly indicates that the manufacturers of these products had targeted child audience for these products.

Contrary to this, 63% of adverts on health/ energy drinks were seen in the mainstream channels, which audience consist mostly adults including house-wives or parents. As the costs of health/ energy drinks are high compared to the chocolates and biscuits and the decision to purchase these drinks lies only with parents, they are mostly advertised in the mainstream channel. Almost all the adverts on health/ energy drinks boosted these drinks as inevitable for the growth of children which tempts the parents.

The same was the case with advertisement on grain/fruit-based food products. 74% of this product advertisement was seen in the mainstream channels. All the advertisements of potato chips during the sample week was appeared only in the children's channel and all the adverts on tea/coffee was seen only on mainstream channels which can be perceived as food advertisers' strategies based on symbolical division of food habits between children and adults.

Quantity of advertisements was observed as target-specific to the adult and children audience. Particularly, four products put as a group viz., (1) biscuits/ cakes; (2) chocolates/ sweets; (3) dairy products and (4) grain/ fruit based products' ads aired duration on the television channels reflects this feature. Of all the adverts on these four products appeared on both the children television channels, 74% were only on chocolates/ sweets, whereas in mainstream televisions it was only 30% (Figure 1).

In the mainstream channels, adverts on dairy products were 35% and on grain/ fruit based products was 33%. But, in the children channels it was calculated as only 5% and 8% respectively. Ads on biscuits/ cakes were 13% in children channels, whereas it was only a nominal of 2% in mainstream televisions.

The channels targeted by most Indian food advertisers were STAR plus and Cartoon network, which are channels viewed by the majority of middle-class Indians who are also ethnically diverse [25]. Moreover, the appearance of more than 50% of food advertisements during child and family viewing time and the fact that the most shown advertisements are for cakes, pizzas, and sweet products are a cause of concern.

There is strong evidence that suggests TV advertising to be the most powerful medium that encourages the consumption of high-energy food products and beverages [26,13], increases meal frequency [13], promotes fast-food restaurant use [26] and lowers the consumption of fruit and vegetables [27]. Previous research has suggested that parents believe that TV viewing does affect their children's nutritional choices and children tend to prefer unhealthy foods, such as snack foods [10]. This therefore, makes it less likely that the children will eat nutritious meals.

Explicit health claims by advertisers are also rife with the most common claims on main stream and children television channels. For food products advertised in mainstream TV channels, claims such as "Keeps you healthy", "Makes you active", "Low calories" were tagged, whereas food and drinks advertised in children channels they claimed them as "Makes taller & sharper", "More nutrients", "High protein".

Some of these advertisements comply with the health claim in that they mentioned the actual component (vitamin or mineral) that brings about the health benefit. However, some of the health claims were somewhat exaggerated. These claims suggested that the whole product brings about the health benefit, such that, if the user consumes these products, the user rapidly becomes smarter and gets a surge of mental/ brain power, resulting in a sudden flow of bright ideas. Moreover, more than half of the advertisements that had health claims promised enhancement of well-being. This is misleading as well-being is a broad area that involves that balance of mental, social and physical being [28].

Marketing techniques (such as premium offers) or other attributes of advertising (such as the use of web addresses/ contact phone numbers) have previously been identified in TV food advertising [29]. Such endorsements have been shown to increase recall rates for marketing communications as well as positively impacting upon consumers' attitudes towards the brand. Similarly, in the current study, best offers including "buy-one-get-one-free" were emphasized by supermarkets. Moreover, including reference to a company's web address was used to encourage consumers learn more about other products and offers.

The current study would be incomplete without referring to celebrity endorsements. Most of the advertisements used celebrities from cricket and movies, as these two events have huge fan following in India. International studies also suggests that, celebrities appearing in advertising enhance a product's worth and increase sales because they heighten attention to advertisements by virtue of visual and aural cues associated with celebrity endorsement and the celebrities' fame extends to the product/ brand they are endorsing [30,31].

In the current study, it was observed that all of the McDonald's meal advertisements included a reference to a free toy, which is one of the features that make McDonald's advertisements and products so successful, internationally [32].

Positives of Media

Not all children's programming is "bad" [33]. In the early 2000s Shakthiman, the popular children show that promoted the idea that eating fruits and vegetables make children grow big and strong. This influence was a positive reinforcement of the food choices and eating habits parents wanted their children to practice. For adults, television can supply a resource for healthy, as opposed to harmful, media.

Mainstream television channels constantly provide quick meals and menus for busy families that usually also incorporate a healthy component. On the Food Network, shows like Registered Dietitian Ellie Krieger's: Healthy Recipes, ideas for power breakfasts and energizing lunches as well as healthy dinners are all provided. Her advice columns are available online for those who seek more information to maintain a healthy lifestyle. These resources would not be available without the media as a component of this educational learning process.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This study analyzed food advertisements in Indian children television and general entertainment channels comparatively. The findings reveal that television food-related advertisements in India continue to promote less healthful food products. Misleading health claims are rife. Only a handful of advertisements shown are for food with a high nutrient content, such as fruit-based food, low-fat milk and milk products. Advertising of foods of poor nutritional value to children was prevalent. This persistence of advertisements for less healthful products is a cause for concern [34].

Taken as a whole, the findings of the present study suggest that statutory intervention is needed to reduce the advertising of unhealthy food-related products, especially to children. At the same time, efforts could be made to encourage more advertising of healthy foods. There is good reason to believe that such steps would modestly improve that national diet and might therefore help combat the obesity epidemic [35].

Advertisers will have to develop different game plans for different age groups in order to ensure a positive attitude towards the advertisement itself [36]. The various elements of advertisements have to be meticulously chosen in order to have the appropriate combination of credibility and entertainment. The credibility aspect of the advertisements has to be really focused upon to make the advertisements look believable and realistic.

For the younger age group, the advertiser should consider the fact that, the parents, who are also viewing the commercials, may be giving their realistic viewpoint on the aired commercials, and given the child's greater dependence on his parents for understanding the world, the advertisements have to be more credible. Whereas, for the older age groups, the marketer should communicate those story boards or visuals which are in tandem with similar information the child is getting from other sources especially peers, rather than basing them on sheer fantasy.

As the entertaining capability of the advertisement is welcome by all age groups, so advertisements should definitely be a source of entertainment by incorporating elements like jingles, animation and humor. Communication is more receptive, if it is presented in an entertaining manner.

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TABLE 1) STATEMENT SHOWING CLASSIFICATION OF FOOD ADVERTISEMENTS TELECASTED IN VARIOUS TELEVISION CHANNELS
 From 23-29 October, 2012

	Product	No. of advertisements					Duration of advt. (in seconds)					Health/ Nutritional claims
		Cartoon Network	Disney	Star Plus	Gemini	Total	Cartoon Network	Disney	Star Plus	Gemini	Total	
1.	Biscuits/ Cakes	61	16	24	–	102	1220	430	260	–	1910	Complete health / high protein.
2.	Chocolate/ sweet products	114	226	122	32	494	2790	6530	3570	680	13570	More nutrients.
3.	Health / energy drinks	36	48	76	64	224	490	2450	1180	2160	6280	Makes taller & sharper.
4.	Dairy products	–	18	138	–	156	–	680	4900	–	5580	Keeps you healthy.
5.	Tea / Coffee	–	–	26	34	60	–	–	500	600	1100	Makes you active.
6.	Grain / Fruit based products	58	–	64	98	220	980	–	2170	2560	5710	Calcium; Carbohydrates.
7.	Atta / Noodles / Pizza	50	42	68	14	174	770	1220	1470	300	3760	Low calories.
8.	Potato chips	12	14	–	–	26	190	380	–	–	570	–
9.	Oils / Nuts	–	12	18	18	48	–	370	600	500	1470	Tasty and healthy.
10.	Others	74	12	–	12	98	1380	380	–	410	2170	–
	Total	406	388	536	272	1602	7820	12440	14650	7210	42120	

FIGURE 1) PERCENTAGE OF DURATION OF ADVERTISEMENTS IN SECONDS

