

# Does the Food Advertisement on Television Have the Impact on Children's Food Purchasing Behavior? A Study Based on Pakistan Food Advertisement

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## Abstract

The purpose of conducting this study was to examine television advertisements and children's food using pattern when they were watching television and their desire to purchase goods that they saw advertisements on television. This study was conducted in two parts. In the first part, content analysis of the television advertisements was conducted. In second part of the study, a questionnaire was given to 200 parents. Total of 75 of these parent's children were attending 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades of the primary schools and 125 of the children were attending the pre-schools. The results showed that children were bombarded with so many advertisements and their behavior was more influenced by the television food advertisements. It was also affecting their food choices and health.

**Keywords:** Advertising, Childhood obesity, Television viewing, Food preferences, Food consumption

## 1. Introduction

Advertisement plays the major role in informing about the products and services to the target market. It is the paid form of communication to influence the behavior of the people with effective and efficient manner. With the passage of time trends are getting change, many parts of the country have dozens of broadcast and cable channels and hundreds more may be on the way. Advertising's view of its audience is undergoing significant changes as well. While researchers and practitioners continue to argue the merits of globalized marketing in general and globalized advertising in particular, an intriguing phenomenon has emerged (Aktaş Arnas, Y. 2006). Children are becoming more focus target market for many advertisers, and they are putting their extreme efforts to capture this valuable target market. Most of the advertisers are advertising those foods products which have above the standard level fats, more calories and salt such as confectionery, soft drinks, crisps and savory snacks, fast food (Ofcom,2004) and pre-sugared breakfast cereals are included in the daily lives of the children. This

eating pattern is leading children towards heart disease, diabetes, hypertension and obesity in later stage of the life.

Obesity and overweight problems are becoming more common in children because of the eating pattern of the children. Watching the television is a sluggish activity that pushes to reduce the metabolic rates and also make the habits not to do the physical exercise and all this closely related to taking frequently snacks, easy to available fast foods. According to the office of communication (2004), there is almost the unified agreement among the people related to preference of foods and its consumption patterns are based on multiple factors. Some of important factors shown to be involved where children are concerned are:

- a. Psychosocial determinants (e.g. food choices)
- b. More knowledge about the food items
- c. Hunger and gender factors influences
- d. Influence of time and convenience factors
- e. Family demographical factors
- f. Social network influences
- g. Schools cafeteria
- h. Food streets
- i. Huge promotion on media, specially electronic media such as television

## **2. Objectives**

The promotion of food items through advertisement on television has the great impact on eating habits and health of children in Pakistan. This respective study intended to check advertisements on television and food consumption of children when they are watching television and their wish to buy those food items they watch on television advertisements.

## **3. Importance of the study in Pakistan's scenario**

Many advertisers are targeting children in Pakistan, because children have great influence on their parents to spend on them. The parents on their children eating habits spend the reasonable amount of money. Generally, most of the parents and other member of the society may have the opinion that advertising have some negative, deliberate or inadvertent, influence on children (Goldberg, 1990; Goldberg & Gom, 1978; Grossbart & Crosby, 1984; Burr & Burr, 1977). Apart from the influence on parents, children also take some purchasing decisions during the school time. Therefore, the main and the most important purpose to conduct this study in this scenario is to make aware the parents about the eating habits and preferences of their children. They will come to know how their children are taking fats, salts and other unhealthy diet which disturbs their diet schedules. This research will be an eye opener for those parents who were unaware of this fact that their children may suffer from many dangerous diseases, and will also come to know that what the main factor is contributing to all these problems. They will also get conscious about the unnecessary food advertisements which may cause their children to move towards unhealthy diet and purchasing request. As most of the children use to eat more while watching television so when mothers will come to know about it they will definitely find out alternatives which may defend their children especially from obesity.

## **4. Literature review**

There has been very old public concern over the harmful effects of food promotion on children. High levels of concern currently centre on the evidence of rising obesity among children, in common with many other countries in the developed world (World Health Organization, 2000). Previous food-related concerns have included nutrition, dental health, dieting and anorexia, and so forth. The royal college of physicians has reported that the obesity among the children is increasing (Kopelman, 2004 & Ambler, 2004). All agrees that the food industry is one of the major player in the field of advertising (Hastings et al 2003, Young, Paliwoda & Crawford, 2003). Studies show that food advertising on television is dominated by breakfast cereals, confectionary, savory snacks and soft drinks, with fast food restaurants taking up an increasing proportion of advertising on television.

A major review of the field, recently conducted by Hastings et al (2003) for the food standards agency, has focused academic, policy and public attention on the role that food promotion, particularly television advertising, plays in influencing children's food choices, defined in terms of food knowledge, preferences and behavior. Both research methods and findings addressed in this and other reviews are much contested (Paliwoda & Crawford, 2004; Young, 2003; Ambler, 2004; and Livingstone, 2004) some reviews cover a wide terrain, examining the

range of factors which may influence children's diet. Others are focusing on the direct effects of advertising on food choice.

Unfortunately, much of the literature on diet and obesity pays little attention to media related factors such as exposure to television in general or advertising in particular. Also unfortunately, much of the literature on the effects of advertising pays little attention to the contextual factors which may mediate or provide alternative explanations for the observed relationship between media use and children's diet and/or weight. Reviewing the field is complex in part because the research available spans a range of academic disciplines, countries and contexts and also because empirical studies use different measures, control for different factors or omit valuable information. In reviewing the published literature, it is worth identifying not only what can be concluded but also what remains unclear as well as questions for future investigation. Importantly, the balance of evidence (experimental, correlation and observational) in the published literature shows that television advertising has a *modest, direct* effect on children's food choices. Although there remains much scope for debate, this conclusion is widely accepted across diverse positions and stakeholders (Livingstone, 2004).

Food promotion is having an effect, particularly on children's preferences, purchase behavior and consumption. This effect is independent of other factors and operates at both a brand and category level' (Hastings et al, 2003). Lewis and Hill (1998) conducted a content analysis showing that food is the most advertised product category on children's television, and that confectionary, cereals and savory snacks are the most advertised. Hence, 60% of food adverts to children are for convenience foods, 6% for fast food outlets, and the remainder for cereals and confectionery.

Lewis and Hill (1998) in this study they found that overweight children are less satisfied with their appearance and have a greater preference for thinness; feeling fat was directly related to weight. In general, children feel better, less worried and more liked after seeing adverts. They also found an interaction effect: after seeing a food advertisement, overweight children feel healthier and show a decreased desire to eat sweets, while normal weight children feel less healthy and more like eating sweets than before seeing the ad. The opposite pattern was observed after viewing non-food ads. Hastings et al (2003), 'the foods we should eat least are the most advertised, while the foods we should eat most are the least advertised'.

A recent survey of UK parents conducted for the national family and parenting institute (2004) shows that parents feel their children are 'bombarded' by advertising to ever younger children and across an ever-greater range of media Platforms. They claim to be anxious, irritated and pressurized, not least because of the considerable domestic conflicts they claim that consumer demands from children result in within the family. Young (2003) in his study he concluded that children understand advertising from eight to nine years old and that they play an active role in families' food buying. Dietary preferences of children are said to be established by about five years old, before advertising is understood. The author further argues that a multiplicity of factors, of which advertising/television viewing is only one, influence eating patterns.

Stratton & Bromley (1999) in their study they determined through a series of interviews that the dominant preoccupation of parents is to get their children to eat enough. Parents try to adjust the food to the preferences of family members so that children can eat. There was a notable lack of reference to nutrition and health when talking about food choices for children in the British families interviewed. There have been many investigations determinant of children's diets, while schools and peers are also influential in determining preferences and habits.

A study in New Zealand, Hill, Casswell, Maskill, Jones & Wyllie (1998) showed that although teenagers had good knowledge of what was healthy and what not, what they ate was determined by how desirable foods were. Gracey et al (1996) in their study "*Nutritional knowledge, beliefs and behaviours in teenage school students*" described that one of the critical and important factor of enhancing and balancing eating habits is to increase the awareness amongst the children to control their diet; "this needs to be accompanied by provision of nutrition education, and parents and schools need to be involved in making healthy foods more available".

This is really significance to develop the strong eating habits at the earlier stage of the life; if this pattern of eating habits would be continued in mature life and hard to change at a later stage of the life (Hill, Casswell, Maskill, Jones & Wyllie, 1998; Kelder, Perry & Klepp, 1994; Sweeting et al, 1994). Numerous studies pointed out the fact that those who eat with the family have healthier dietary habits. Family meals become less frequent as children get older and the frequency of those meals differ for different ethnic groups and socio-economical status (Neumark& Sztainer, Hannan, Story, Croll & Perry, 2003). The influence of family eating patterns on dietary intake stays strong even after controlling for other variables such as television viewing and physical activity. Eating away from home also increases the consumption of soft drinks which is related to problems with

weight (French, Lin et al, 2003). The purpose of this study is to examine television advertisements and children's food using pattern when they are watching television and their desire to purchase goods that they see advertisements on television in Pakistan.

## 5. Method

### 5.1 Sampling & Data collection

This study is conducted in two parts. In first part, content analysis of the television advertisement, which during the child programs on Saturday and Sunday were examined. For this purpose the television programs and the advertisements broadcast between 03:00 hours and 7:30 hours for three weeks were taken.

The second part of the study focused on children's behaviors while watching television advertisement and their purchasing request during shopping, in children aged 3-8years old. In second part of the study, questionnaires are given to 200 parents. A total of 75 of these parents' children were attending 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades of the primary schools and 125 of the children were attending the pre-schools.

### 5.2 Sample characteristics

The demographic characteristics are as follows: 55% were boys out of the total and 45% were girls. In total 63% of the parents were high school and university graduates. 75% of the fathers come under 28years and above. 95% of mothers were between 24-40 years.

Table 1 shows that 17.6% of the children pay attention to the advertisements; it was also found that children in the age group of 4-5 years showed attentive behavior more than the children in the other age groups. In contrast, 6.9% of the children are determined to do whatever they were doing and not taking any notice of the advertisements. It was found that 32.85% of the children asked their parents to buy the products presented in the advertisements while watching them in this behavior was highly observed in the 4-5 year old children.

Table 2 is indicating that children time is starting from 3.00hours to 7.00hours on different channels. It is observed at weekends for three weeks at Saturdays and Sundays. Between these hours, the total mean time of children's program on three channels were 104 mins.

Table 3 shows total mean amount of broadcast advertisements on the three channels were 29. Out of which about 21 advertisements were of food related. According to the table 3, 73.18 % of the advertisements broadcast are food related, 9.49% are telecom related and 5.02 are detergents related advertisements. It is very clear that food advertisements are more than others.

According to table 4, greater percentage is of snacks advertisements in total which is 35.11%, then chips 28.24%, ice cream 15.26%. But there no fruits advertisements which are in real sense having nutrients and energy.

## 6. Discussion & Limitation of the study

After analysis of results now there is need to develop the time plan of watching television for children by their parents. In school teachers can also play the significant role for guiding the television advertising watching. Children must be guided the both aspects of watching television advertisements, not leaving them on whatever is going on advertisement.

First this research only focused the children purchasing behavior based on television advertisements. It can also extended by taking other media as well. Second this can also be apply on some adults both male and female. Third, other daily using items advertisement can also consider for research.

## 7. Conclusion

In content analysis we came to the point that television food advertisements are playing greater role in such regard. Children are bombarded with so many advertisements. It is also affecting their food choices and health. In addition to this, when the behaviors of the children are examined, it can be observed that children consume food which are rich in fat and sugar while watching television and have problems with their parents about buying the products they have seen on the advertisements. This shows that children in the younger age groups are affected more from the advertisements broadcast on the television and reflect these more in their consuming behavior. In conclusion, it can be suggested that in order to reduce these damaging factors they can adjust the television watching timing of their children in the early years and can control their eating habits and buying requesting patterns.

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Table 1. Children's behaviors towards advertised products while watching advertisements

Behaviors observed during watching advertisements	Total	Frequency of observed behaviors							
		n	Age	3	4	5	6	7	8
			%						
Pay attention		61	17.6	8	14	32	3	3	
Watches for a few minutes		116	20.2	14	23	39	18	11	11
Looks from time to time		70	33.4	7	15	24	6	9	9
Does not care		24	6.9	2	1	6	4	6	5
Makes comments about the product		102	29.4	9	23	47	8	7	8
Wants the products		114	32.85	8	28	58	9	7	4

Table 2. Values of the children's programs and advertisements broadcast during the evening hours on weekends according to channels

	Cartoon Network		Indus Vision		Jeo	
	Saturday	Sunday	Saturday	Sunday	Saturday	Sunday
Time of the children's program	6.00-7.30	6.00-7.30	3.00-6.00	3.00-6.00	5.10-6.00	6.10-6.45
Total time of the children's program	90mins	90mins	180mins	180mins	50mins	35mins
Number of the advertisements	25	28	47	53	17	9
Total time of advertisements	11:05mins	12:08mins	11:58mins	13:42mins	8:08mins	3:75mins
Number of food advertisements	17	21	38	41	10	4

Table 3. Types of products advertised on the television channels

Types of products advertised	n	%
Food	131	73.18
Detergents	9	5.02
Cleaning supplies	3	1.67
Telecom	17	9.49
Kitchen supplies	4	2.23
Toothpaste	3	1.67
Beauty products	5	2.79
Diaper	3	1.67
Banking	4	2.23
Total	179	100

Table 4. Types of food advertisements on the channels

Types of food	n Total	% Total
Snacks	46	35.11
Ice cream	20	15.26
Drinks	16	12.21
Candy and chocolates	7	5.34
Biscuits	5	3.81
Chips	37	28.24
Total	131	100