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## Influence of advertising on young consumers buying decisions and habits

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The review was conducted to analyze the impact that advertising has on the buying behavior and purchase decisions of consumers and how does this influence vary across consumers with different demographic backgrounds.

**Methodology:** Six papers, four based on studies in India and two on studies abroad were reviewed for this purpose. It has been observed that advertisements significantly alter buying patterns among consumers. Young consumers are especially susceptible to such effects of advertising as their cognitive and critical skills are not enough developed. Parents' perception of the effects of advertising on children as well as responses from children themselves have been considered. Responses from children living in rural and urban areas, those belonging to age group of 8-14 years and teenagers, males and females have been analyzed for a more comprehensive discussion.

**Result:** The overall effects of advertising on children's consumption habits are mixed, in that, source of market information, knowledge of product pricing, consumer socialization is considered one of the benefits of advertisement exposure to children as it helps in developing consumer awareness of products, brands and role of consumption in daily life while poor eating habits, promotion of materialism, dissatisfaction from life, conspicuous consumption are some of the concerns raised about the negative effects of advertising.

**Contribution:** This paper provides insights into how advertisements shape children's purchasing behaviors, highlighting key observation and trends, factors influencing decisions, and the implication for marketing strategies. This study is crucial as it highlights that long term effects of exposure can guide policy changes and role of regulators to enforce guidelines, ensuring transparency, and promoting ethical and sustainable marketing practices to protect vulnerable consumers from misleading and harmful advertising.

**Keywords:** Conspicuous consumption, consumer socialization, nag- factor, nagging tendency, pester-power

### Introduction

The 2024 KPMG report on India's advertising industry highlights significant projected growth in digital advertising for 55% of ad spends by 2025 fueled by increasing use of smart phones and digital platforms appealing to younger, tech-savvy consumers, primarily Millennials and Gen Z consumers expected to lead the rise in e-commerce and digital content consumption presenting both opportunities and challenges for advertisers (KPMG, 2024) [8]. Personalized and programmatic advertising becoming key tools for engaging younger demographics (KPMG, 2024) [8]. These trends are reshaping marketing strategies, with brands focusing on personalized campaigns and ensuring ethical advertising practices to align with sustainability goals with young consumer prioritizing values like social responsibility and transparency. (KPMG, 2024; YourStory, 2024) [8, 5] Advertising has a significant influence on buying patterns of all consumers; and children, being in an especially susceptible age, are even more adversely impacted. Although, there are positive effects of advertising on children too like regular market information (price updates, offers and schemes, new products, and brands etc.) and consumer socialization; the negative ones (conspicuous consumption, nagging behavior, materialism, falsity etc.) outweigh them.

There have been rising concerns relating to the manipulative power of advertising and its wide and easy reach to children. For instance, all the papers studied, conclude that advertising has this effect of promoting materialism and nagging tendency among young children.

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This nagging leads to product purchase and shows the role of children in family- purchasing decisions. Brands try best to use this pester-power to their advantage, manipulating children's thoughts by appealing to and enhancing their material desires.

This review is based on studies conducted by researchers in India and abroad. It aims to combine the conclusions reached by them in their respective geographical settings and arrive at how advertising influences children in general.

### Objective

- The objective of the study is to examine and analyze the impact of advertising on buying behavior and purchase decision of young consumer and how exposure to advertisements influences their consumption patterns and brand preferences.
- To assess the role of advertising in shaping materialistic values and purchasing behavior among young consumers, focusing on the long-term effects on their consumption habits.

### Methodology

The papers reviewed for this study were selected based on their relevance to addressing the issue of influence of advertising on consumers' buying behavior (especially children). Papers with primary sources were given weight over those with secondary analysis as it was thought that the mental processes of everyone are unique and better understood personally.

For this review, data, and important points (observations, discussions, conclusions) were collected from the chosen papers and organized in a spreadsheet for easing a comprehensive analysis. Key results were highlighted and assessed based on their generality to different geographical and demographical situations. Certain limitations as well as strengths of the papers were recognized for a critical analysis. Facts cited in the papers from other sources were noted to broaden the perspective of this review.

The following showcases the major observations of each study and conclusions reached upon by the authors.

### Literature Review -Observations, Findings, and results

The chosen studies were based in six different geographical locations and concerned, in various ways, the influence that television advertising commands on the minds of young consumers.

1. **Mangalore; Karnataka:** A 2013 study on 600 school children, establishing a correlation between exposure to advertisements and prevalence of dental caries (tooth decays) among them, concluded a direct relationship for the two. It was found that 98.8% children watched television with the peak viewing time being 6-8 PM. It suggested to limit advertisements of unhealthy foods while promoting health-related messages. (Ghimire & Rao, 2013) <sup>[1]</sup>
2. **Ambala, Gurugram, Hisar, Rohtak; Haryana:** A 2009 study, considering four parameters- assistance in buying, influence on buying behaviour, impact on purchase decisions and influence on emotionality of teenagers, concludes that advertisements promote yearning and conspicuous consumption among teenagers. It was believed by the teenagers that advertisements helped them to improve product purchases and viewing a product they use, getting advertised on television, made them feel good. Urban

respondents were found to be more emotionally bound to advertisements than their rural counterparts. (Bishnoi & Sharma, 2020) <sup>[2]</sup>

3. **Vadodara; Gujarat:** A 2012 study, focused on influence of advertisements for confectionary products on children, concludes that children are neglectful of the health effects of products while they shop, and crave for nothing but the advertised product. It was confirmed that ~98% children watch television (cartoons and movies) for more than an hour each day. It was also observed that most children showed a preference for purchasing confectionary products, because of promotional perks like a free tattoo. No significant difference was observed, regarding the impact of advertisements, based on the medium of imparting education in Gujarati or English. (Rathod *et al.*, 2012) <sup>[3]</sup>
4. **Ludhiana, Moga, Barnala; Punjab:** A 2016 study, analyzing parents' perception of the influence of advertising on three variables analyses of materialism, parent and child conflict, and unhappiness, found slightly different views between rural and urban parents. Four major factors emerged in this regard viz., concern for junk food advertisements, family conflict, materialism, and falsity. Of these, concern for junk food advertisements was found to be the factor of greatest importance. Parents were, on average, skeptical about the truthfulness of TVCs and believed that advertising focuses on developing and exploiting the nag-factor. Rural parents viewed advertisements as a valuable source of market information, while urban parents strongly considered them as a cause of family conflicts. (Khanna, 2016) <sup>[4]</sup>
5. **Batticaloa; Sri Lanka:** A study of responses from 200 people, examining consumer brand preference in the competitive soft-drink market, focused on three variables- information, communication, and comprehension. It concluded that brand preference can significantly be altered by advertising. It was found that the influence of advertisements varied by gender, age, income, and educational level, with younger and higher-income groups showing higher influence (Vivekananthan, 2010) <sup>[7]</sup>
6. **Ota, Lagos; Nigeria:** A 2017 study, analyzing the exposure, viewership, and influence of social media advertisements on teenagers' purchasing decisions in three universities were examined and concluded, to the surprise of its authors, that young people, though highly active on social media platforms, do not significantly base their purchasing decisions on advertisements, despite being primary targets for most brands .active engagement on such platforms. It was found that 91% of the respondents viewed social media advertisements and are attracted by their creativity, relevance, frequency of display and entertainment value. Facebook (meta) was the most popular platform, where respondents received most advertisements. Only 35% of the respondents agreed being influenced by such advertisements while others largely said that the influence had been low or absent (Ogunyombo, Oyero, & Azeez, 2017) <sup>[6]</sup>.

Several miscellaneous observations were made in the studies about the influence of advertising on children's buying behavior and consumption habits by shaping their

preferences, increasing brand loyalty, and driving impulsive purchasing decisions for non-essential products, such as toys, snacks, and fast foods. Persuasive marketing strategies are used to capitalize on emotional appeals, peer influence and pester power. Brands effort to make consumer to habitually use products can affect consumption patterns, fostering materialistic attitude and unhealthy choices.

#### These include the following

- Assistance of television advertisements in purchase decisions, by providing marketplace information, was found to be independent of gender.
- Gender also was indeterminant of television watching habits among children. Rural and Male teenagers shown high acceptance of impact on buying decision whereas female and urban teenagers showed increase in emotional buying because of TV advertisement. (Bishnoi & Sharma, 2020)<sup>[2]</sup>
- Teenagers expected the products to be as good as those advertised, only to be bitter after purchase.
- With regards to emotionality, female teenagers were found to be more inclined towards advertisements than their male counterparts. (Bishnoi & Sharma, 2020)<sup>[2]</sup>
- In India, by the age of 8, children begin to understand the true purpose of advertising to detail understating by the time they grew older to 10 years. (Khanna, 2016)<sup>[4]</sup>
- Approximately 50% of all advertising time on children's television is dominated by food related products with one-third of these advertisements are for candy and snacks. None of them are for fruits or vegetables. (Khanna, 2016)<sup>[4]</sup>
- In the United States, young consumer specifically children exposed to fast food advertisements are 50% more likely to consume fast food. (Khanna, 2016)<sup>[4]</sup>
- Materialism is frequently linked to traits such as envy, possessiveness, miserliness, greed, and jealousy by parents, and they considered advertisers to be guilty of incorporating such negative traits in children. (Khanna, 2016)<sup>[4]</sup>
- Majority of parents hold negative views about advertising, and promotion of unhealthy eating habits was of utmost concern.

#### Discussions

After having analyzed the observations and conclusions made in the studies, it was tried to forge a general idea of the influence of advertising on children.

The findings suggest that it was more likely for children to consume candies when exposed to a related advertisement, teenagers were inclined towards conspicuous consumption on viewing advertisements, and that more chocolates were consumed due to knowledge of a free promotional tattoo, could be considered representative of the general promotion of materialism via advertising.

It was found that teenagers and rural parents considered, more than urban parents, advertisements as a valuable source of market information and consumer socialization. This could be due to unavailability of information elsewhere and sole reliance on advertisements. However, this could also have been a result of the relative ineptitude of both the strata in the rapidly evolving consumer markets. Teenagers are often overtaken by the allure of materialism and get swept ashore by appealing advertisements. Conventionally, rural population has been unequipped to understand organized capitalistic markets. Urban parents, in contrast,

have fair experience in their market dealings and realize the manipulative power and falsity of advertising claims.

The negligible effect of gender difference among children, in their response to advertising, has an implication for advertisers, in that, it may save them the job of running separately targeted advertisements. As female teenagers were found to be more involved with advertisements, companies may focus on creating emotionally appealing content (relating to feminism, gender equality etc.) to draw their attention.

The studies also highlight the negative role of advertisements in promoting unhealthy food consumption habits among young children. Higher likelihood of dental caries and eating junk food, in children who are exposed to more advertisements, reinforce the finding that around 50% of advertisements on children's television channels are food related, and, of them, around one-third are for junk food. Another revelation that around 98% children watch television, stresses the notion of advertising being a mass medium of communication, and hence, deepens the concern for undesired health consequences and unethical practices.

Although, role of gender differences in children was deemed to be minimal or unimportant, it could be that after a certain threshold of age is reached, this difference has a significant effect on the magnitude and direction in which people get influenced by advertisements.

Recently, debates around the direction in which the impact of advertisements on children is being analyzed whether the influence is on a rise or is declining with time, have gained traction. Two views are prevalent in the West:

1. One group holds the view that children have, and will inevitably, become more susceptible to advertising, owing to the ever-increasing commercial pressure and the cut-throat competition among brands to capture the largest market share, not only for current sales, but also to ensure enduring sales in the form of brand loyalty, as studies confirm that, in marketing, first impressions indeed have the potential to stick on forever.
2. The other group believes that young consumer is more resilient to unintentional impacts of advertisements. It is argued that parenting approaches and communication methods have enhanced children's ability to deal with misleading and deceptive advertisements.

#### Future research

Comprehensive research of large sample size at national and international levels can be conducted to see the influence of advertising on young consumer buying behavior (Bishnoi & Sharma, 2020)<sup>[2]</sup>. Creative marketing strategies and advertising should be designed for young consumer as segmentation is not easy due to similar behavioral characteristics. Target based celebrity endorsement practices should be carefully followed (Rathod *et al.*, 2012)<sup>[3]</sup>. Both parents' perceptions of internet-based advertisement on suggested on basis of literacy rate-based sample (Khanna, 2016). Presenting true information to audience of brand will help in building goodwill of brand (Vivekanathan, 2010)<sup>[7]</sup>.

#### Conclusion

The influence that advertisements have on consumers, particularly children, go beyond the intended brand attitude, brand image, loyalty, or sales boost effects. Advertisements are culpable, if not guilty, of several unintended effects. They can shape preferences, influence behavior, and create

social pressures in subtle but impactful ways. Advertisers recognize the pester-power exerted by children in influencing their family's buying decisions and amplify their advertising theme towards activating the cravings of children, to direct their nagging in favor of the respective brand's sale. This not only results in family conflicts, but also to an unsatisfied, disappointed, and unhappy child.

This review is restricted to studies which considered the influence of television advertising on the consumer buying behavior and consumption habits of young consumers. However, contemporarily, most of the exposure to advertisements is through social media.

The advertisement expenditure in countries like the United States, China and India is growing bigger with social media advertising. Technological advancements, in the form of virtual and augmented realities, make it possible for advertisers to reap the benefits of interactive brand placement. Future research should be conducted to have a better understanding of the possible ways, in which, brands may employ advertising tactics to gain a competitive edge, which may have unintended harmful effects for the most vulnerable consumer. This underscores the need for responsible advertising to promote balanced decision-making and healthier consumption behaviors among children.

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