

## Impact of Child Food advertising on Indian Parents and It's the Impact on the Rise of Obesity

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**Abstract:** The food industry in India has grown exponentially in the few years. Today in India the children sector is a major source of revenue for the food and beverage industry. Today marketers are now using intensive marketing and advertising efforts luring children. These channels are trying to reach out to the youth starting as early from the age of a toddler to the teenage category of youngsters. These food marketing channels include television advertising, in-school marketing, product placements, summer school campaigns, the Internet, toys and products with brand logos, and youth-targeted promotions, such as cross-selling and tie-ins. The foods marketed to children are predominantly high in sugar and fat, and as such are inconsistent with national dietary recommendations. The objective of this paper is to understand both the negative as well as positive effects of media on children's food habits.

**Keywords:** Food Advertising, National institute of Nutrition, Obesity, Nutrition, Food Label

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### I. Introduction

The childhood obesity epidemic is a serious health problem in the world as well as in the developing economies. This phenomenon is increasing day by day and has a substantial long term economic and social costs. Eating Nutritious food during childhood and adolescence for their growth & development and wellbeing is important. Due to the increase in the purchasing power parity amongst parents today's children and youth are eating more of fast food due to its easy availability and different taste. Less time is consumed in having fast food rather than having home cooked food. Although this paradigm shift is towards change in new eating habits, the reasons are due to multiple factors. A large contributor is towards Advertisements given by the marketers. Today's children mostly get influenced by television advertising as they spend time watching television in their idle hours. The advertisements on television capture the mind of the child as the ads on television include the colorful pictures and also the cartoons. The purpose of the study is to examine how the food advertising is leading to the increment in the sales trend and also making parents to buy the ready meals compensating with the home made meals.

#### 1.1 Lifestyle Trends

Lifestyle trends in India is changing and supporting a convenience food culture and increased consumption of HFSS food High Food in Salt and Sugar.

1. The packaged food industry in India is growing. As per the ASSOCHAM " Since 2010 the packaged food segment which includes beverages, dairy products, snacks and baked foods, has grown at an average growth rate of 32%. The market today stands at a current US\$ 32 bn and is estimated to reach by 2017 a size of US\$ 50bn.
2. Today families are eating pre prepared foods with working parents and young children spending less time in the kitchen ( For e.g. Frozen foods, instant noodles, pastas, curry meals etc.)
3. Large companies such as Britannia, PepsiCo, Nestle, Amul, ITC and the smaller ones falling in the unorganized sector believe that the fast food industry is growing rapidly.
4. The other factors that have multiple reasons for change in the eating habits are behavioral as well as psychological factors resulting in gender, hereditary, time, convenience and meal style.
5. The influence of school peers, friends, any form of promotions, and rise of out of home eating - fast food restaurants have resulted in change in the preference of food consumption.
6. Weekends eating out and spending time outside has increased the growth of fast food eating

#### 1.2 Rise of Fast Food Consumption

Fast food, are the products which are quickly made and served. There are different types of fast food, they can be burgers, sandwiches, soft drinks which are easily available and possess very less price. It could also be Chinese Foods which may include momos, manchurian, noodles, crispy nuggets and many more which can be found on any food points. The food also includes packed foods like chips, kurkure, puff corns, chocolates, wafers and plenty of drinks. Most of the fast food is rich in sodium which leads to risks in health. The harmful

effect of fast food can be chronic disorder, diabetes, blood pressure, growth problem in children's, and obesity. Increase in obesity leads to increase in the cholesterol level and also leads to other disease and physical discomfort. The time spent to prepare fast food is comparatively very low, with the home made cooked foods. These foods are non- nutritious and today, are very convenient for children's, youth and even adults due to less time spending and high disposable income.

### **1.3 Impact of Increase Levels of Obesity - India**

WHO Commission on Childhood Obesity, May 2014 states

*"In order to get the best possible advice on the crisis of childhood obesity, a high-level commission was set up during the 67th World Health Assembly in May 2014. The commission will produce a consensus report specifying approaches that are likely to be most effective in different contexts around the world. The recommendations of the report will be announced at the 2015 Assembly"*<sup>1</sup>.

- The number of overweight or obese infants and young children (aged zero to five years) increased from 31 million globally in 1990 to 44 million in 2012.
- A vast majority of overweight or obese children live in developing countries, where the rate of increase has been more than 30 per cent higher than that of developed countries.
- If current trends continue the number of overweight or obese infants and young children globally will increase to 70 million by 2025.
- Without intervention, obese infants and young children will likely continue to be obese during childhood, adolescence and adulthood.

Childhood obesity in India is a major concern. Overweight children are likely to become obese adults. As per the WHO *"About 44 per cent of the diabetes burden and 23 per cent of the CVD burden is attributable to overweight and obesity. Overweight children are more likely than non-overweight children to develop insulin resistance, hyperinsulinemia, diabetes and CVD at a younger age, which in turn are associated with a higher chance of premature death and disability"*<sup>2</sup>.

Many Studies have established the link between consumption of junk food and obesity. Numerous studies done among school children of Delhi, Amritsar and southern India show that the prevalence of overweight/obesity is high and on the rise. In urban post-pubertal children of Delhi, it increased from 16 per cent in 2002 to about 24 per cent in 2006. It is high among the affluent class and children of private schools compared to low- and middle-income groups. As per the National institute of Nutrition the importance of body building foods such as proteins, and protective nutrients such as minerals and vitamins should be administered to children<sup>3</sup>

**Table 1:** Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) for a 10-12 year old moderately active child

<b>Nutrient/Energy</b>	<b>RDA</b>
Energy (E)	2100 Kcal*
Sugar	Up to 30 g
Total visible fat	35 g [~15% E]
Saturated fatty acids (SFA)	Up to 8% E
Trans fatty acids (TFA)	< 1% E
Salt	5 g

## **II. Literature Review**

The children's market has become significantly important to marketers (McNeal, 1998). Many marketers spend millions of dollars on advertising to reach this growing segment (Jardine and Wentz, 2005). A look at India's own advertising growth market chart shows that the whole advertising spend is set to boom 8 times since 1995 when it was around 47 billion to around 367 billion rupees.

The effects of advertising on children have been highly debated among various groups, including parents, researchers, industry experts, and government agencies. One of the primary debates has been the potential impact of food advertising directed at children. A variety of institutions are involved in this debate. Some of these organizations such as public advocacy groups criticize the food companies and television

<sup>1</sup> "Impact of Increase Levels of Obesity - India , says expert," [http://www.cseindia.org/userfiles/junk\\_food\\_targeted\\_children.pdf](http://www.cseindia.org/userfiles/junk_food_targeted_children.pdf) [accessed on 01 June, 2016]

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networks concerning the increased amounts spent as well as the types of promotional efforts targeted at children (York, 2007)

There is also debate among practitioners on advertising practices directed at children, with even marketing professionals indicating concern about advertising targeted at children. When interviewed, 35% of them consider the general ethical and moral standards in the industry to be “lower than in the past,” with 40% believing that these standards are about the same (Grimm, 2004). Thus, only 25% believe the standards are improved.

Some companies have already started taking actions to deal with criticisms and even with government warning. In Europe, soft-drink companies have developed self-regulatory measures to stop advertising junk food and to help tackle child obesity. To avoid stricter laws, soft-drink companies have pledged to stop marketing towards children under 12 years old. The companies also have pledged to limit soft-drink sales at schools (Wentz, 2005). Furthermore, some companies have also responded to government calls by promoting active lifestyles when targeting children in food ads. McDonald’s, in the UK, ran a campaign that featured Ronald McDonald and used animated fruit and vegetable characters which were called Yums. These characters urged children to eat right and stay active (Jardineand Wentz, 2004).

### III. Objectives

The objectives of the paper are:

1. To study and analyze the perception of the parents towards various food item advertisements directed towards children.
2. To study the impact of unethical advertising practices and their effect on perception of parents.

### IV. Research Methodology

The research was primary in nature aimed at consumer behavior and awareness level. For the same the following methodology was employed:

*Research method: Questionnaire*

*Sampling technique: Stratified Sampling*

*Sample Size: 200 Respondents – SEC A / B customers (200 each); Age 20 - 40*

*Tools Used: SPSS 20.0; MS Excel 2013*

### V. Analysis

#### Hypothesis 1

**H<sub>0</sub>** – There is no significant difference on impact of unethical practices in children’s food advertisements between male and female parents.

**H<sub>1</sub>** .There is a significant difference on impact of unethical practices in children’s food advertisements between male and female parents.

**Table 5.1.1 Group Statistics**

Group Statistics					
	Gender of the respondent	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Advertisers follow unethical practices in advertisements directed towards children.	Male	69	4.35	.480	.058
	Female	131	2.79	.218	.080

**Table 5.1.2 Two sample t test**

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Advertisers follow unethical practices in advertisements directed towards children.	Equal variances assumed	19.631	.000	13.143	198	.000	1.554	.118	1.321	1.787
	Equal variances not assumed			15.728	198	.000	1.754	.099	1.359	1.799

**Analysis**

To test the hypothesis a two independent sample T test is conducted. F test of sample variances has a probability which is less than 0.05. Accordingly T test based on equal variances not assumed should be used. The t value is 19.631 with 198 degrees of freedom this gives a probability of 0.00 which is less than significance level of 0.05. Therefore null hypothesis of equal means is rejected. Because the mean impact level for males is 4.35 and that for females is 2.79, we can conclude that impact of unethical practices in children's food product advertisements is more on males than that of females.

**5.2Hypothesis 2**

**H<sub>0</sub>** \_ There is no significant difference in the impact of endorser on the purchase decision of male and female parents.

**H<sub>1</sub>** \_There is a significant difference in the impact of endorser on the purchase decision of male and female parents.

**Table 5.2.1 Group Statistics**

Group Statistics					
	Gender of the respondent	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
The endorser has an effect on my purchase decision	Male	69	1.32	.469	.057
	Female	131	2.81	.809	.071

**Table 5.2.2 Two sample t test**

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	
The endorser has an effect on my purchase decision	Equal variances assumed	18.387	.000	16.148	198	.000	1.798	.106	1.580	1.917
	Equal variances not assumed			18.871	198	.003	1.708	.091	1.530	1.887

**Analysis**

To test the hypothesis a two independent sample T test is conducted. F test of sample variances has a probability which is less than 0.05. Accordingly T test based on equal variances not assumed should be used. The t value is 18.387 with 198 degrees of freedom this gives a probability of 0.03 which is less than significance level of 0.05. Therefore null hypothesis of equal means is rejected. Because the mean impact level for males is 1.32 and that for females is 2.81, we can conclude that impact of endorser on purchase decision is more on females than that of males.

**VI. Conclusions**

1. Today the amount of time spent by children indoors resulting in television watching has resulted in poor health diets and low metabolic rate resulting in lack of physical exercise.
2. It is also seen that consumers are open to different pricing and packaging approaches which enable them to decide on their purchase patterns though a tighter control over their eating habits with respect to HFSS foods need to be reduced. Families are eating more pre prepared foods due to the convenience factor which are causing concerns.
3. There is also lack of clarity of terminologies (lean vs. fat) and customer knowledge is very important on the labelling products.

**VII. Suggestions and Recommendations**

1. Consumerism is the buzz word these days, it has not only captivated and enticed the world it has also made profit as the most important thing for businesses around the world. In a state such as this where companies are increasing their efforts to increase consumerism, the need of ethics becomes even more important. It is extremely necessary to follow ethical practices and also to safeguard the interests of all the sections of society.

2. Fast food advertising has become a major concern in the arena of food product advertising. Advertising to children, in particular, has become a heated topic as it is suggested that there is a lack of advertiser responsibility.
3. The study has revealed that the food advertisers use tricks and gimmicks and teach bad food habits to children.
4. It was also revealed during the course of research that children exercise a strong control in decisions relating to the food items of their choice.
5. There is also confusion regarding additives, as regulators have no clear list of permitted additives for use yet.6. This study has tried to understand the perception of parents towards the current advertising practices of food advertisements which are directed towards children.

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