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Research Scholar, University of Delhi, Delhi

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## INFLUENCE OF ADVERTISING VIA SOCIAL NETWORKS ON CHILDREN

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Dr. Ishpreet Virdi\*

### ABSTRACT

*Advertising has magnificent effect on the day to day lives of every human being; be it adults or children as well. Recently, advertisers and marketers have started targeting children directly; which was not the case few years ago. Earlier, advertising for all children products were targeted on parents only and the message was framed accordingly. Now, messages framed for advertisements are more pervasive and sophisticated to grab the attention of children and glue them to their products and brands. This is a conceptual research paper which will focus on the prevalence of advertising in children. More light will be thrown on other factors that increase this influence on children. This paper will try to access the influential capacity of advertising on young humans. Conclusions will be drawn by providing suggestions to contract this influence.*

**KEYWORDS:** Social Network, Advertising, e-Advertising, Children Products.

### Introduction

#### The Predominance of Advertising in our Children's Lives

Advertisements are prepared to persuade the intended audience to buy the product being advertised. However, some years ago, advertisements for baby and child products would fall in the category of exception, since, they were not targeted to the children directly (the actual consumer) on the contrary, they were targeted to the decider and the buyer of those products i.e., their parents. With the advent of technology and improvement in the society, marketers who make products like toys, games, food items; develop ad campaigns to promote them to the direct consumers now (the children at large). Many years ago, advertisements were subjected till the display of window, in store display, newspaper and magazine advertisements, and very limited and precise TV and radio commercials. During 90's a new phase of advertising was witnessed, which was directly focusing on the children for their products. Today, almost every product used by children is being advertised in one way or the other such as clothes, backpacks, shoes, books, etc. the main focus is to steadily increase the influence of advertising on children.

The focus of today's advertisements is persuasion rather than focusing on hard sell strategies, for instance, distributing a toy while buying a happy meal pack at a fast food chain restaurant. The toy would be related to a movie, cartoon, or a game. Moreover, children book covers, stationary, toys, backpacks, clothing, scooters and toy cars are also created while relating the product to some theme. These advertisements targeted to children at large, tends to create a need or desire in them which was otherwise not. By this strategy an endless loop of buying unwanted products is created and the consumer and their parents are trapped in it. Advertising and persuasion has walked a long way and is not limited to window dressing, radio or TV commercial advertising, newspaper ad, etc. some of the cartoons, movies, and video games are specifically used for targeting the children towards advertise products. Nowadays, schools also permit advertising posters on the buses or more. Therefore, with the increased level of bombarding advertisements from all directions creates and influence on the viewers and lured them to buy and try the product which they otherwise do not want at all.

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\* Research Scholar, University of Delhi, Delhi, India.

### **Factors that Enhance the Influence of Advertising on Children**

New generation children are exposed to advertisements at an exponential rate as compared to the children of the early days. In addition of websites and online games, they are exposed to internet advertising also which is today's most influential source of advertising.

Our earlier study indicates that the average Indian child is exposed to over 40,000 television commercials each year. This number does not include the in product advertising category. Increased exposure to internet is an additional cause. This can be justified the fact analyzed from our previous work that marketers are targeting children as young as 4 years old via the internet, often with the parents being unaware. This has raised the concern of parents towards the increasing number of advertising targeted towards their children.

More undesirable erroneous advertising trend is, targeting "adult type" products towards children. For instance, vehicle manufacturers use the strategy to influence the children so that they in return will act as a salesman for their brand in front of their parents. The only thing the advertisers have to do is to register their brand name positively in the mind of children and they may win a customer for life. We all have seen ads of Porsche and Chevrolet that shows a small boy going to school and recognizing his car as the symbol of "cool" and success. This is a strategy to imbibe the brands name in children mind at the very young age.

Another example which can be referred to as the skill to create brand loyalty at the very young age and creating a customer forever is, use of dolls and their supplementary products which may promote brand name of makeup, clothing; use of board games to promote credit card; HOT WHEELS race tracks to promote specific brand of car. All these promotions are done in collaboration with both the companies, the manufacturer and the advertising product company, and are paid for these promotions. Such promotions result in making kids consumer of such products and brand loyal at a very young age for maybe a lifetime.

### **Is Advertising a Big Influencer?**

Many studies support that advertising is an effective tool to influence children as they lack the skills of critical analysis and judgmental thinking like a matured adult. Hence, some of the renowned studies have highlighted the fact that advertising can lead children to choose unhealthy food and poor lifestyle choices.

Moreover, advertising in today's times have a greater influence on child's sexual orientation and development. This paper tries to tie a link in this connection and has covered many of such related issues. Advertisements are children's motivators nowadays rather than schools or guardians were earlier.

As suggested by child development specialists, advertising has taken a disastrous route in children's life when welfare of children is concerned. In 2011, a written appeal from a psychologist group raised their concern in marketing towards children and its psychological effects on little ones. They suggested that this data and knowledge is used in designing ad campaigns targeted towards children at large. There is a more recent American Psychology Association task force which has ordered restrictions in marketing certain products to children due to concerns discussed above. The concern for child development and the problem in their upbringing has grown increasingly among child psychologists because of the disastrous effects of advertising targeted towards children at large.

### **Positive Effect of Advertising on Children**

- Advertisements act as a source of information. Many ads nowadays, display technological development and advancements as an achievement that offer a good learning platform to the children.
- Ads also educate and aware children about new products available in the market.
- Right advertisements should be promoted, like healthy food choices etc. to promote good habits in child and they can go for more balanced and healthy diet.
- Ads related to hygiene products will develop good habits and will make children good citizens.
- Some motivating content in the advertisements can be an influencer to encourage young children to follow their passion and dream and work towards it.
- Ads can influence children to right path and can make them a good human being by presenting ads to them that teach them to help others in need, do household chores, etc.

- Promoting empathy and sense of responsibility in children can be the best that advertisements show be doing to children by posturizing relevant content and information.
- Advertisements can focus on diverting the attention and concern of children towards environmental protection and can motivate them to work upon its solutions.
- Ads with are cautionary in nature should reveal the consequences of consuming alcohol and smoking, help them to understand the risks and danger involved, and motivate them to stay away from such products even when they are advertised by the companies due to high profit margin in selling such health hazardous products.

### **Negative Effects of Advertising on Kids**

When we have read about many of the positive effects of advertisements on children, it doesn't mean that advertisement is most favourable thing having no bad effects. The ill effects of advertisement outweigh the positive side of advertisement. Here, listing all the ill effects of advertising on the young:-

- Pester power strategy is used by the marketers and advertisers very strongly. They target young children through their advertising skills to persuade them, which then persuaded child uses his stubborn nature to demand in front of parent to buy the specific product or brand.
- People interpret wrongly the message and information transmitted via advertisements and children being the younger lot who do not have much information processing capability, may capture the information in a negative sense.
- Dangerous activities performed by the actors in the advertisements like stunts, persuade young children to imitate such activities which can be risky for them.
- Business houses focus upon higher profits for which they recklessly advertise their products in the market which leads them towards impulse buying activities among children.
- Advertisements create false image in the mind of children by presenting things in an unrealistic manner which leads them to fall for the advertised product categories.
- Research shows that advertisements develop a materialistic outlook towards the advertised product and other things. The content and information portrayed in the advertisements mold the innocent brains of children towards leading a materialistic life.
- Advertisers target to register their brand names in the mind of the viewers specifically of the expensive branded ads.
- Visually attractive unhealthy junk food items are advertised in a lucrative manner that children feel tempted to try out such unhealthy food and in turn harming their eating habits and moving towards obesity.
- Children demand unnecessary toys and other things because of the advertisements they watch on various sources of media regularly which influence them to go for it.
- Some of the young children suffer from low self-esteem and will power when they consider themselves as inferior to other children who have more products and capacity to buy.
- Advertisements are a source of information for young minds. They see the world and society the way it is portrayed on media and advertisements. Ads showing men drinking alcohol and smoking, or ads portraying women as an object are some of the examples which should be avoided.
- Comparative advertisements using comparison as a tool to differentiate their product from other brands, impart the idea of inferiority and superiority in the child at a very young age.
- Acts like lying, cheating, robing, make a child vulnerable to such behavior. Hence, advertisements should not present such acts.

### **Conclusion**

#### **Ways to Counteract this Influence of Advertising on Children**

Parents should act a wall, or protector for children against some of the ill advertisements. They can protect their child by some of the following ways:

- Time should be fixed and lessened for children on television and on internet.
- Be informed about other sources of advertisers to reach children and try to restrict their entry into your child's life. Become informed citizen through articles published online.

- Educate kids to be more media savvy and to critically think about the purpose of many media messages. Find out some talking points with the child.
- Get involved. Learn more about an organization that works to provide an environment free from excessive advertising.

### **Campaigns for Commercial-free Childhood**

Children should be restricted to access some particular advertisements. Educating children is another step that should be taken by concerned parents. Government regulations should also be modified in such a way to restrict the advertisers to target young children in their advertisements.

The Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood describes itself as:

"a national coalition of health care professionals, educators, advocacy groups, parents, and individuals who care about children".

Headquartered at the Judge Baker Children's Center in Boston, CCFC is the only national organization devoted to limiting the impact of commercial culture on children.

When we visit the website of Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, the website provides individuals access to educational materials on topics such as media violence, sexualization, ad creep, body image, materialism, obesity, and more. Visitors to the site can become involved by:

- sending letters to corporations which target children in their marketing campaigns
- working to influence proposed legislation
- signing CCFC petitions regarding additional governmental regulations
- learning more via upcoming events such as movies and lectures
- reporting ads to CCFC
- making tax free contributions

Therefore we must be well aware of the various campaigns prevailing as well as the ways to protect children from the social media disadvantages, advertising crimes, etc.

In today's developing technology and fast changing world, advertisements have become way more innovative and advanced; it becomes hard to shield our children from such exposure. Everything is being advertised everywhere. Be it luggage bags, buses, metro stations, television commercials, even students bags and books, toys etc. keeping children away from advertising is next to impossible nowadays. Once the child sees the advertisement, getting influenced by it is the next thing, and demanding the product to consume is another thing. Therefore, to protect your child from the negativity of these advertisement is to educate your child and inform him about the reality and the story behind these advertised products and the marketing world. Tell your child about the advertising strategies used by advertisers to attract young children.

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