

## THE IMPACT OF FOOD ADVERTISEMENTS ON CHILDHOOD OBESITY

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### **Abstract**

The food choices of children are often dragged by media which includes television advertisements and online advertisements. They affect children's interest directly. This review focuses on studies of how the digital advertisements (on television and internet connected devices like mobiles and computers) lead to alarming increase of rates of obesity in children.

As the number of hours spent on screens has increased manifold, there is decrease of physical activities of children. This has lead to increase in health hazards like obesity in early childhood. To curb this menace, one step could be to enforce formal restrictions on FMCG advertisements. This would lead to change in the policies of advertisement broadcasting where in children are exposed to for long hours. Moreover the onus not only lies on the big corporate companies but equal responsibility should also be shouldered by the parents where a regular check could protect the interests of their children. This could be checked by restrictions on food habits, limit the number of hours spent on television and on computer screens, monitor the broadcasting viewed by children and even the children should be encouraged to view along with the parents themselves, rather parents should not leave the children on their own, a quality time should be spent with the children.

**Keywords:** Marketing Strategies, impact of marketing on health, marketing for different age groups

### **Introduction**

The childhood obesity is a widespread occurrence of an infectious disease with a serious health issue that could eventually lead to high mortality and with substantial impact on long term costs associated with economic as well as social costs (Ackard, 2003). Previously the major concern on children was on nutrition, dental health but of lately the concern has had shifted to rising obesity in the children. The National Diet and Nutrition Survey 1997 for 4-18 year olds found one in five as obese (Gregory 2000). When we talk of America's children, the rate of obesity in the youth as well as children have had increased alarmingly tripled

(pediatrics, 2006). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the condition of obesity has nearly doubled in the children age group of 2-5 years (5% to 12%) and age 6-11 years (6.5% to 17.0%). Obesity in childhood is associated with poor health and with diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular ailments and even some forms of cancerous substances (report of APA task force).

Many factors have contributed to food choice and to obesity but primarily it's on screen advertising which has led to obesity. It has had been observed that children spend more time in front of the screens rather than engaging in physical activities (Crespo, 2001). This in turn leads to number of factors ultimately leading to wastage of muscles. Research has found strong link between increasingly openness to advertisements and childhood obesity. Most of the children under the age group of 8 years are not able to segregate and decipher the importance of right advertisements (Fulkerson, 2007). Children of the age group 5-10 years have remarkable recall capability which leads to great exploration. It has been observed that product preferences do affect the requests of product purchase which ultimately lead to change in the purchasing patterns of the parents (Gable, 2007).

### **Impact of Advertising and Obesity on Children**

Advertisements related to girls and ladies lead to low self esteem and confidence, dejection, dissatisfaction and frustration. Advertising precisely pointed to teenage girls often lead to unhealthy weight control (fasting, weight control pills, laxatives, fasting, meal skipping) measures often leading to various diseases and ultimately to depression (foundation, 2004).

Obese considered children may a shot away from the target of teasing and bullying. Body dissatisfaction may co-exist with depression, dejection, depression, social rejection, anger, low self esteem and to even the extent of suicidal thought (Koplan, 2005).

### **Relation of Advertising on Television and Obesity of Children**

It has had been observed that with the increase in the hours of watching television it leads to obesity in children. The main factor leading to it is the exposure to ads which are related to unhealthy food products likewise: fast foods, aerated drinks, low nutrient foods and in fact high calorie related (Debnath, 2016). This is supported by the facts that every increase in the hour leads to higher intakes of the unhealthy food products. On medical grounds additional 150 calories only can lead to increase in the weight. This again is correlated with the facts and research that more the children watch television more is the weight gained (Pugalenti,

2016). Though marketers have undergone into self-regulation phase but still it needs a lot of improvement. Of the total ad time on kids shows, food ads account of nearly 50 percent were these ads are primarily dominated by unhealthy food stuff (SHAMEEM, 2012). Television and primarily internet has brought a revolution in the feed of great deals over past some time. Children are being more exposed to the advertisements now before never. The main reason could be the penetration of the television and internet in the societies, food marketing does have an impression on the food preferences, consumption health which eventually leads to obesity to the children. more than this nuclear families in the society could also adhere to the root cause of the exposure of the children to advertisements rather vulnerability to availability of the screens. The Institute of Medicine of the National Academics found there is a relation of age and level of exposure to ads is summarized in the following table:

| Ages  | No. of ads per day | Hrs of ads per day | No. of ads per year | Exposure to PSAs |
|-------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| 2-7   | 12                 | 29:31              | 4427                | 1 every 2-3 days |
| 8-12  | 21                 | 50:48              | 7609                | 1 every 2-3 days |
| 13-17 | 17                 | 40:50              | 6098                | <1 every week    |

(Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, 2007)

**Exposure to Foods to Children on Online Marketing**

When comparing internet with television it has been often observed that level of complexity is greeted in the context of internet as and when compared to television. This is since because content and issue of unadulterated advertising is often vague than on television. A study further has proven that children particularly find it tough to recognize the advertisements on websites as compared to television. When compare to 12 year olds who recognized nearly a quarter of ads, 6 year olds could decipher only a quarter of it. Promotion of food brands on internet is often clubbed with online games which are heavily branded meaning high involvement and provision of lot of entertainment (Eckrich, 2009).

Online advertisements often contain other advertisements which are often irrelevant like viz.: website memberships, commercials, tie-ups and even viral marketing wherein this lead to invitation to other children asking them to visit the respective sites (behl, 2016). The continual branding to the children under the age of 6-8 who have great recall value often lead to influence of purchase decisions of the parents (Hoffman, 2010).

## Discussion

The challenges of obesity are directly driven to advertisements. The result of this study is concluded that advertisements lead the generation towards impulse eating other than the consideration of healthy eating often leading to binging eating (science, 2017).

The results conclude that obesity will remain a part of advertisements unless and until strict measures are being undertaken both by the advertisers and by the parents. Though the marketers claim to affect only brand preference and not eating habits, but the other factors also provide evidence towards change in behavioral outcome.

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