

## ADVERTISEMENTS' EFFECT ON FOOD HABITS OF CHILDREN – AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

Advertisement is the predominant Promotional Mix Variable which is being used in every industry to get noticed by their prospective customer, and thereby turning them into life time consumers. And these advertisements are also playing their part in shaping the lifestyle of the individuals at large, whether elders, teenagers or children. Especially, these advertisements are influencing the lifestyle of the children in much greater fashion, both in righteous and unrighteous direction. This paper basically explores how the children's food habits are being influenced by the advertisements and the mechanism of regulating the advertisements being aired. Further, this research paper also presents the kinds of regulations that are in force around the globe to control and regulate the advertisements targeting the children. Using 'On-the-Spot' sampling method, 100 children, in the age group of 5-15, and 50 parents are interviewed with the help of interview schedule and data thus collected is presented in the form of a pie chart. It is found that the food habits of the children are categorically influenced by the advertisements. So, it is inevitable for the legal system to be proactive and control the menace of the advertisements and their undesirable effects on children. Also, parents need to keep a conscientious eye on their children.

**Keywords:** Advertisements, Children, food habits, healthy food, role of parents.

**Introduction:**

Science & Technology is playing phenomenal role in the advancement of human race. Eventually, science brought lot of gifts to mankind; one such is mass-media. This mass-media includes Newspapers, Periodicals, Television, Radio etc. Of all these, Television is playing influential role in an individual life. This is true with regard to the programs content being telecast as well as the advertisements aired in between. Advertisements are used by every industry to get noticed by their prospective customer, and thereby turning them into consumers. And these advertisements are also playing their part in shaping the lifestyle of the individuals at large, whether elders, teenagers or children. Especially, these advertisements are influencing the lifestyle of the children in much greater fashion, both in righteous and unrighteous direction. The degree of impact of advertising on adults may be of some concern but the outcome on children is indeed devastating. Advertisers of children's television used to appeal to the parents earlier but now they appeal directly to children who do not have the emotional or cognitive tools to evaluate what's being sold to them. Television is no more just a source of entertainment for children. They showcase the must haves for a kid making them a consumer even before they have reached the age of three. Small kids even below the age of three are found to be dominating the purchase decision, which is again the result of increasing influence of advertisements. Today, when children accompany their parents to super markets or shopping malls, they have their own shopping lists ready, sometimes, of the products yet to arrive in the market.

Inclusion of children in TV commercials is not a new phenomenon to the world of advertisement. But if you look back, children could be seen in those commercials of products which are directly used by them, for example, biscuits, chocolates, beverages like Rasna etc. Today the scenario is totally different. We can see children in the commercials of insurance products, automobiles, and even home appliances. The reason is quite interesting – the role of children of current generation in decision making is much greater compared to the scenario 10 - 15 years ago. Children in current families invariably 1 or 2 in number as against 3-5 in old days, dominate the family purchase decisions and one of the major reasons for this change is advertisement. It will not be an exaggeration if it is said that advertisements are shaping the attitudes and value systems of children by making them more and more demanding.

Thus the influence of the media on the psychosocial development of children is profound. Not only mental health, but ads are also impacting the physical health of the children. And here lies the objective of this research paper. It is found that 65% of the food preferences of children are the result of advertisements. This includes all categories of food items, right from biscuits, chocolates to pizza, fruit juice and even health drinks. On the one hand the advertisements are motivating the children to go for health drinks like Boost, Horlicks, on the other hand they are also diluting their food habits by compelling them to consume noodles, pizzas, and cola drinks.

Thus the objectives of this research paper are to explore both the beneficial and harmful effects of media on children's food habits, and to identify how the advertising industry can be regulated by formulating unified laws to prevent the over-exposure of children to the ad world as well as to emphasize on ways of directing children towards imbibing healthy food habits. A review of regulations implemented in other parts of world as well as India regarding advertisements targeting children is also included in the paper.

**Positive Effects Of Advertisement On Kids:**

On the one hand, televisions commercials are certainly informative and play their part in making the kids knowledgeable about the new arrivals and the range of the products available in the market. Ads increase their knowledge about the new technologies and the latest innovations in various fields.

Convincing ads, attractively made, centering on healthy food products, can exercise a positive influence and help improve the dietary habits of a child.

### **Negative Effects Of Advertisement On Kids:**

On the other hand, television commercials can even be so influential on the young and impressionable minds that they can shape or even alter to a great extent the personal preferences of the children in matters of clothing, toys, food and luxuries etc. Many advertisements in the present times include dangerous stunts, which can be performed only by experts. Even though the commercials broadcast the statutory warnings with the ad, the kids often try to imitate the stunts at home, with fatal results.

The flashy advertisements broadcast on television generate impulsive shopping in children. Junk foods such as pizzas, burgers and soft drinks are heavily promoted during children's TV viewing time. This develops a craving for fatty, sugary and fast foods in kids, thereby affecting their health adversely.

Advertisements encourage the children to persuade or even force their parents to purchase the products shown in the commercials, whether useful or not. The little ones tend to get adamant, if the product of their choice is not bought. Children often tend to misinterpret the messages conveyed in commercials. They overlook the positive side and are attracted more by the negatives. Children, after watching the glitter of commercials, often lose the ability to live a life without materialistic joy.

Kids usually get more attracted towards the branded products, such as jeans and expensive accessories. They disregard the inexpensive but useful ones that are not featured in the commercials.

### **Review Of Literature:**

According to the "India Media Market 2007" report from Heernet Ventures, the Indian media market is expected to grow from revenues of \$9.2 billion in 2007 to \$17 billion by 2012. That converts to an estimated INR 415.4 billion in 2007 rising to INR 766 billion in 2012, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 13%. Accounting for 43% of total ad spending, newspapers are the largest advertising channel in India, followed by television, at 35% of the total, with the other media channels far behind. Online advertising currently accounts for only 3% of total spending.

Internet, another important source of knowledge for children, has also become a medium for marketing as more and more children are taking to Internet. The concept of online marketing has caught up of late and products are advertised on popular and frequently visited sites using techniques like 'Pop Ups'. This leads the buyer (children in this case) to a new world of market and sometimes even to pornographic material at the adolescent age. Now the child is attracted to the products advertised which are designed strategically and thus become the new segment for the marketing company. Although internet marketing is still evolving in India, it is better we wake up to this future problem and take some preventive steps before it is too late.

One cannot underestimate the positive impact created on the minds of children using the tools of social advertising which is a very good example of positive advertising. The objective of social advertising is to change public attitude and behavior and stimulate positive change. The polio ad campaign successfully resulted in the immunization of additional six million children at the polio booths across the nation between November, 2002 and February, 2003.

According to the New Encyclopedia Britannica, "Advertising is a form of communication intended to promote the sale of a product or service to influence the public opinion to gain political support or to advance a particular cause". This survey focuses on the children in the age group of 5-15 years who are now being considered as new segment for the marketing companies. Advertisement is the major source of marketing the product. So Companies spend huge amount of money to promote their product in the competitive environment. Advertising in print media grew 14.7% in 2004 compared to TV ad which

has grown by 13%. During January-December 2004, ad spend in press accounted for 46% of the total advertising pie of Rs 11,800 crore followed by TV at 41%, outdoor 7%, cinema 3%, radio 2% and internet 0.5%.

According to research study in UP commissioned by UNICEF, more than 94 percent of respondents reported that they came to the polio booth after seeing the spots on television which were endorsed by celebrities like Amitabh Bachhan, Shahrukh Khan, Sachin Tendulkar, Jaya Bachhan to name a few. Around 112 polio cases have been reported in the year 2003 compared to 1600 cases in the year 2002. A UNICEF-supported television and radio campaign won a silver medal at this year's EFFIE Awards given by the advertising industry.

Similarly advertisements of iodized salt generate the awareness among people to buy it, which avoids the prevalence of Goiter. Advertising also helps the children's health in a positive way - be it a three-year old kid or a teenager. Commercials by soap companies like Dettol, Lifebuoy etc. inspire children to stay clean. Brushing twice a day was a marketing strategy for more usage of product but such advertisements always help the children improve their hygienic habits. Even the use of some cartoons or sometimes small ideas like "Pepsodent Germicheck– Dhishum Dhishum" encourages the child to use the product to realize the benefits shown in the advertisements. Companies such as Amul and Nestle are advertising milk products to the young generation as something cool & refreshing, e.g. Amul Kool. Advertising & Society International Marketing Conference on Marketing & Society, 8-10 April, 2007, IIMK 305 claims any dairy-product is good diet for growing children. Dairy-products are much more vitamin-rich and useful than products like soft drinks which are actually harmful to the health.

Now we can throw some light on advertisements having negative impact on children. Most advertisements of Soft Drinks are endorsed by sporting celebrities and film stars. According to the findings of the Delhi based NGO, Centre for Science & Environment, all soft drinks made in India contain pesticide residues almost 27 times higher than the EU norms. Consumption of these beverages is on the rise in the growing children who nowadays take it as a part of regular diet or a good partying option that is readily available to them. Even after the reports by CSE about the findings of pesticide residues nothing much has been done to curb this menace.

Burgers, pizzas and the mouthwatering fast foods force their way into most commercials that are shown during the children's programs. These products are mainly advertised as the diet complete with all the required nutrients for the human body. All these junk food items are easily accessible to the school going kids having working parents who do not have time to cook. Fast food chains often target their advertising at children and teenagers or the young who more or less have the required purchasing power and who most of the times influence the purchasing behavior of parents and who can become the target market for their products for a long time to come. For example Mc Donald's happy meal which always has a toy attached to it and a newly released children's movie. Children are very fond of clowns and cartoon characters which form the advertising mascot for the target audience. The early onset of diabetes is mainly due to the changing food habits in the children and the adolescents. Until the very recent times, only people in the age group of 20-35 years used to be affected by diabetes. But now, children aged anywhere between three months and 17 years are also developing diabetes, which is a cause for great concern. The habit of regularly consuming fast food may lead to obesity among children. Obesity per se is not a serious health problem, but it is a prime precursor of many non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases (CVDs), gall bladder ailments, cancer, psycho-social problems, breathlessness, sleep disorders, asthma, arthritis, weak bones and reproductive hormone abnormalities. Iron deficiency can result into anemia.

Research has proved that children decide for themselves about what kind of clothes they want to wear and parents more often than not have to relent to the demands of their children in matters of choice. All the children's purchase decisions are generally influenced by the advertisements shown all over the

media, billboards and magazines. In many cases this also poses huge problems to the parents with budget constrains to satisfy their children's needs resulting in emotional distress among them.

Many girl children have a deep desire to look like a Barbie Doll, an every girl's fantasy. But the stick-thin Barbie doll image makes the kids grow in a way that they think will make them like their role model and even makes them highly health-conscious. All the girls want to have a Barbie doll image and by doing that they damage their physical health. Sometimes the efforts to emulate their heroes land these children in serious trouble that may be dangerous to their lives.

**Research Design:**

Using the powerful medium of television commercials many companies are seeking to attract the large and powerful segment of the children into their folds. This research paper majorly deals with understanding the children's likes and dislikes and their parents' role in the decision making and the influence of advertising on the buying habits seen in them. The data collection was done using on-the-spot sampling in the form of personal interview. Various secondary sources are also used for gathering data related to the research report. Analysis of data has been done using quantitative methods such as Arithmetic Mean. The facts and findings analyzed are presented in the form of pie charts and bar charts for ease of understanding. This research report does not just concentrate on the findings but also suggests corrective measures to be taken up to minimize the after effects of the advertising world which are only on the rise. This impact of advertising on children is exponential and will rapidly grow in the near future. Therefore considering the severity of the possible problems, this report aims at taking precautionary steps on the government's front, ethical front of the advertisers and of course on the parental & children's front.

**Data Collection:****Primary Data:**

Primary data is collected from the respondents with the help of interview schedule. It was mainly directed towards investigation of the various impacts the advertising has on the children's minds & how advertisements shape their buying and food habits. The survey had to be done at the point of purchase. So it was carried out in food malls and food courts like McDonalds where the brands are sold and in also in schools where interaction can also be made with the parents the parents.

**Sampling Technique:**

Non-Probability Sampling Technique was used & in that on-the-spot sampling was done. The responses were collected from 100 children and 50 parents, who were interviewed as per the schedule at different places of purchase. Hence an on-the-spot sampling technique was decided, which would enable using personal judgment to conveniently approach the parents and children and save time also.

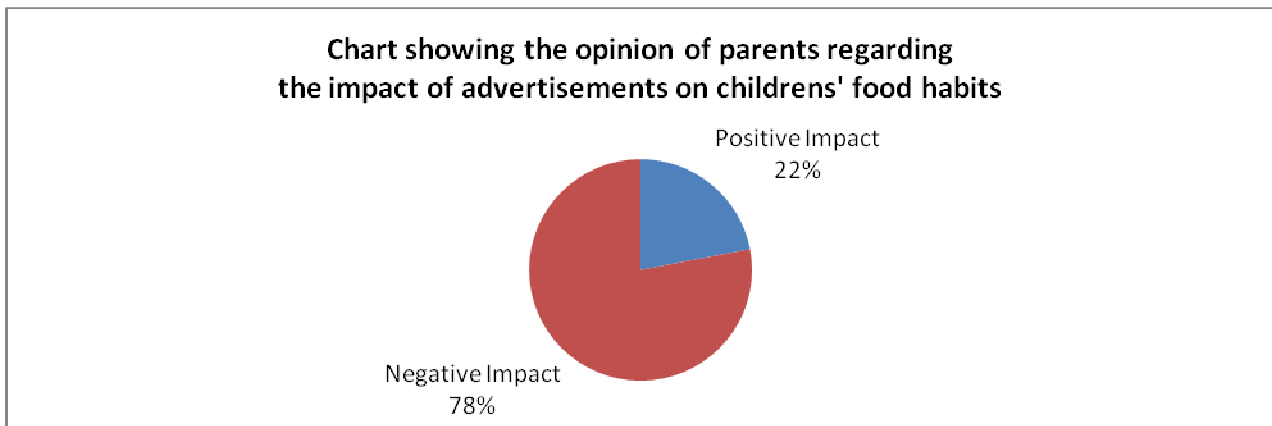
**Secondary Data:**

The secondary data is collected form prevision research reports on the related issues. Apart from this, the secondary data is also collected from internet for getting the data about the various statutory rules and regulations on advertising. The data is also collected from the websites of food chains like McDonalds, Pizzahut, Dominos...etc.

**Analysis Of Findings:****A] Primary Data Findings:**

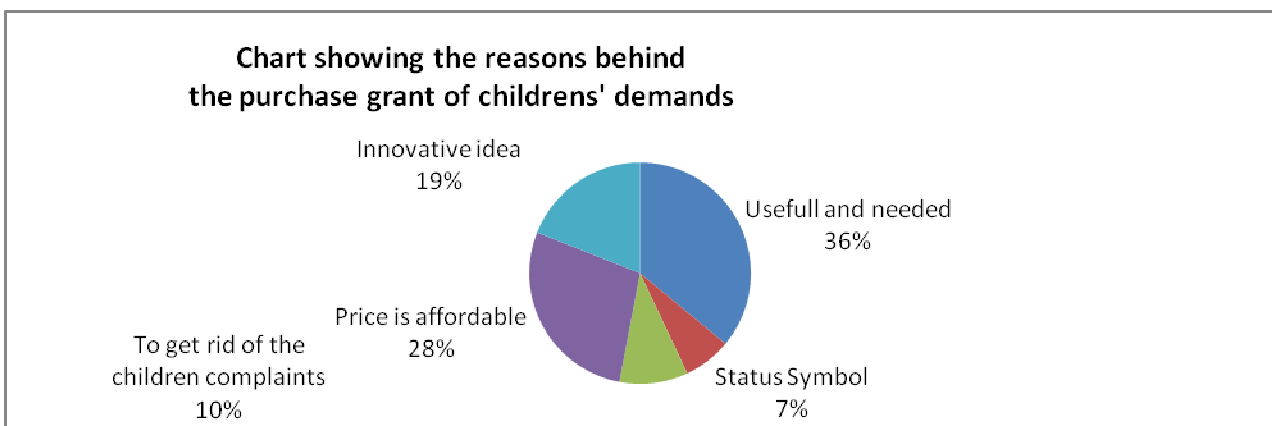
1. When asked about the impact of advertisements on ‘Food Habits’ of children, 78% parents responded that the impact is negative and only 22% responded that the impact is positive. This is mainly due to those advertisements, which motivate the children to consume healthy food like milk, eggs, and health drinks.

**Chart 1:**



2. 65% parents responded that their children aggressively demand some food item and dominate the purchase decision due to its advertisement on TV.
3. When asked about the circumstances in which they grant the purchase demands of children initiated from advertisements, 36% of the parents responded that they allow the purchase because the product is useful and needed, 28% allow as the product is affordable, 19% allow as there is some innovative content, 7% parents allow because owning product is status symbol and 10% parents allowed the purchase for no specific reason, but just to get rid of the demand of the children and irritation causing out of it.

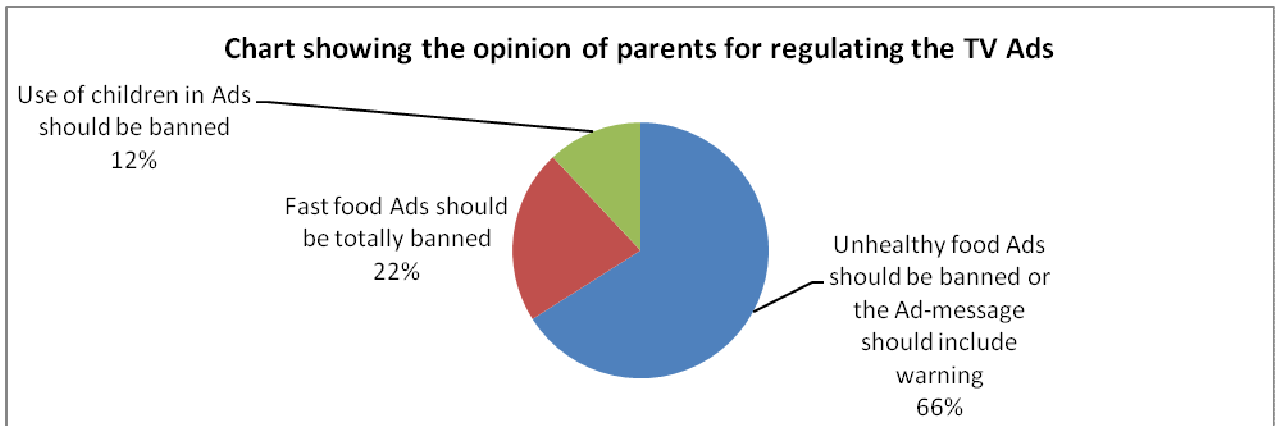
**Chart 2:**



4. 92 % of the parents surveyed feel that there is need for regulation as far as food related Advertisements are concerned. Of these about 66% say that, either the advertisements of unhealthy food products should be banned or the Ad-Message should be regulated by including the warning against excess consumption. 12% parents say that all the food Ads targeting children should be totally banned and about 22% say that the use of children in food advertisements should be banned, as when children

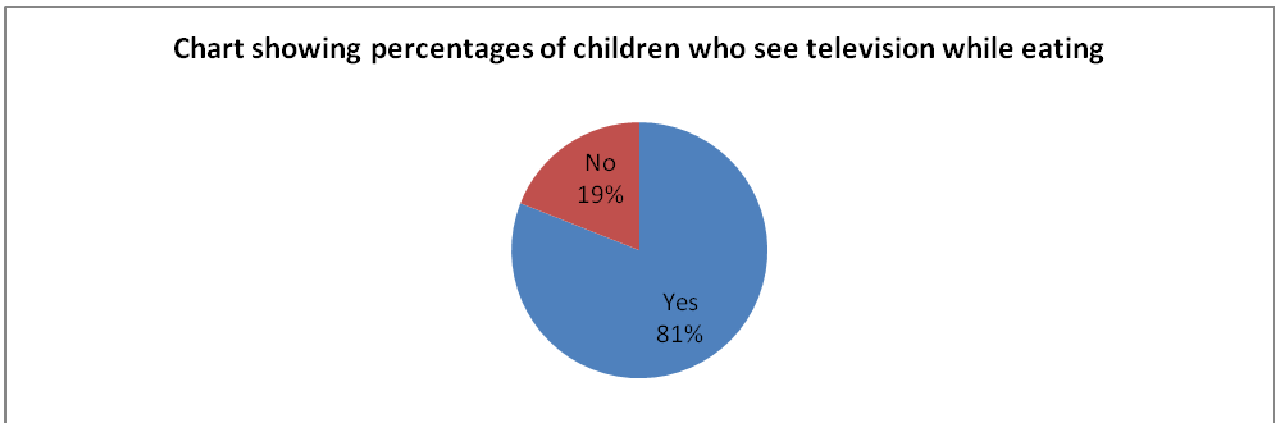
themselves endorse such products, it becomes all the more difficult for the parents to convince their kids not to consume these food items.

**Chart 3:**



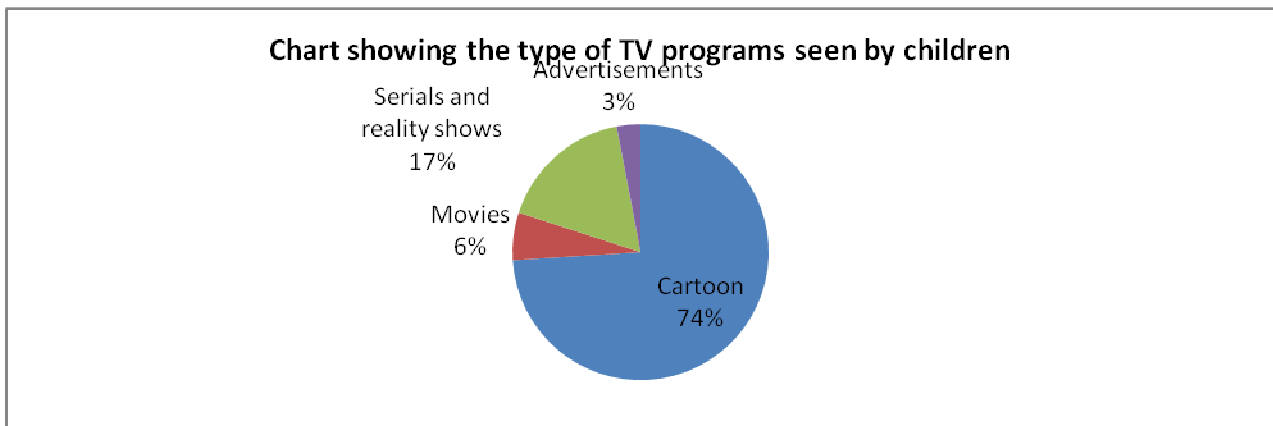
5. Around 81% of children watch TV while eating which may affect their food intake.

**Chart 4:**



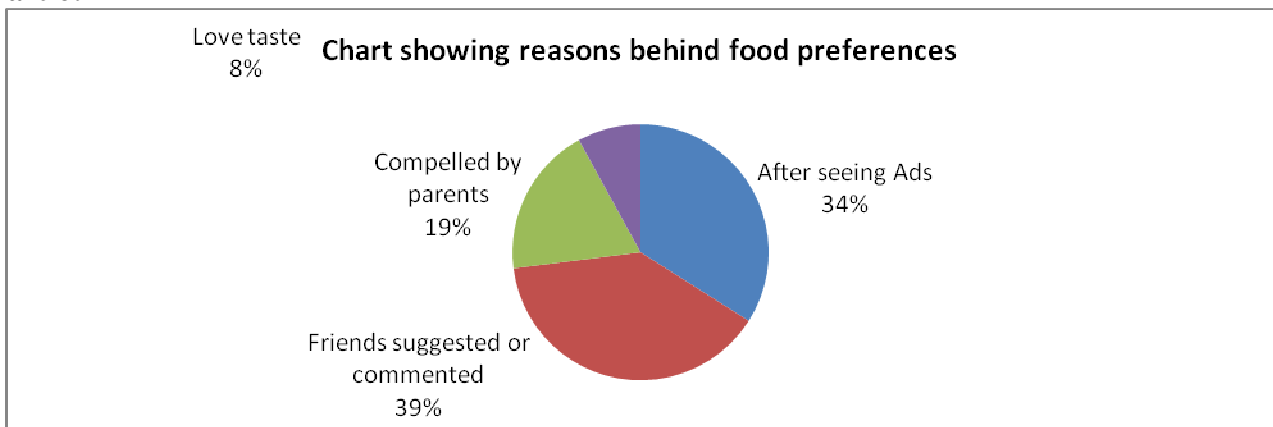
6. Children when asked about the type of program they generally watch on television Around 74% of the children watch cartoon channels, 6% watch movies, 17% watch serials and especially children reality shows, and only 3% see advertisements. The ads which are shown on cartoon Channel are invariably seen by the children and thus impact children psychology.

**Chart 5:**



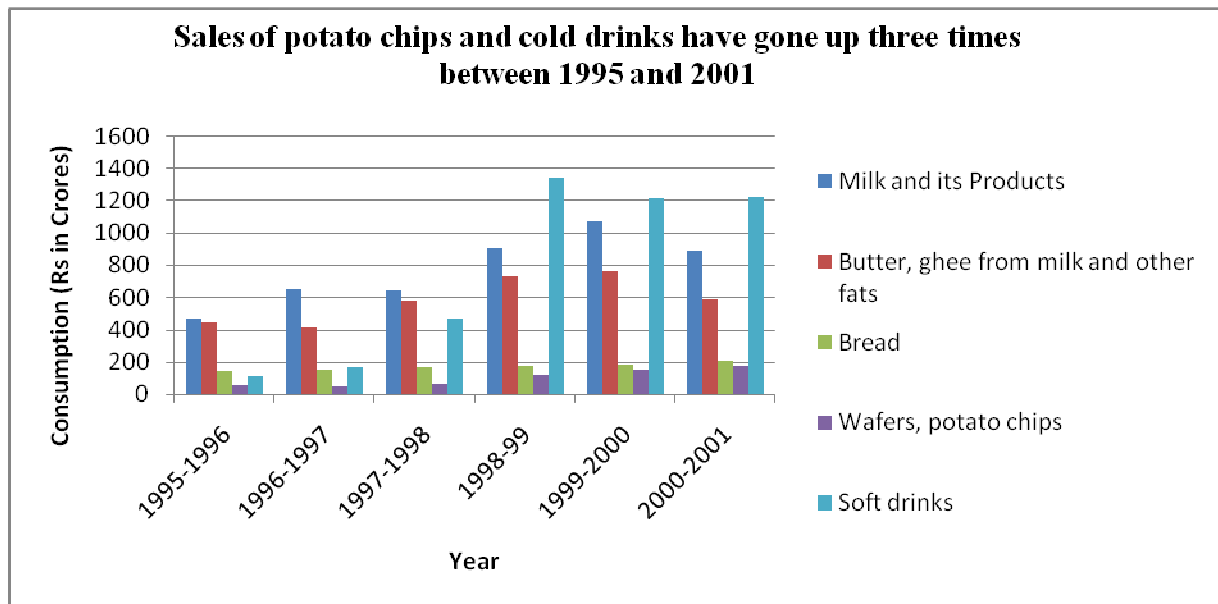
7. When investigated what really influence children to decide their food preferences, it is found that 34% children prefer to consume any eatable, as they have seen its advertisement. 39% children prefer to eat or drink any food item, just because their friends have suggested or commented about it, most of them were again in the category who consumed that food item after seeing the advertisement. 19% children consume any food item as it is needed and parents compel to eat, and 8% children are in that category who repetitively consume some particular food product or beverage as they like its taste very much. The products like some branded chips and snacks, noodles, flavored biscuits, flavored beverages in the name of fruit juices...etc are in this category of food items.

**Chart 6:**



**B] Secondary Data Findings:**





Source: Parna Dasgupta 2004, Director, Confederation of Indian Food Trade & Industry (CIFTI), New Delhi

1. Size of Advertising industry in India: Rs.16300 crore (ET 26/02/07)
2. Snack food market size: Rs.4500 crore (ET 26/02/07)  
Branded snack food market size: Rs.1300 crore (ET 26/02/07)
3. More than 60% of commercials promote sugared cereals, candy, fatty foods and toys.
4. Pan Cheese Pizza contains 46.6 % of fats in 2 slices of Pizza whereas a normal body intake should be of 10-20 % calories from fat.
5. According to the new "India Media Market 2007" report from Heernet Ventures, the Indian media market is expected to grow from revenues of \$9.2 billion in 2007 to \$17 billion by 2012.
6. After the pulse polio ad campaign only 112 cases of lack of vaccination were reported in comparison to 1600 cases before the campaign.
7. 70% of parents agreed that their children influence them while buying products.
8. Only 2% of the amount goes into Research and development of the product but almost 50% goes into Advertising in India.
9. A leading nutritionist in AIIMS, in a Delhi survey of well-to-do schools found that about 27% of school children were overweight and 7% obese.
10. Fast food consisted of 83% of the advertised products.
11. Increasing Sales of fast food & soft drinks over previous years.

### Advertising Regulation In Different Countries:

Advertising laws in India, or the lack of them, are in strong contrast with advertising standards in Europe or in the US where concerned parents and governments closely monitor what their children are learning and picking up from TV in the form of advertisements. In Sweden and Norway, TV advertising and sponsorship of programs aimed at children below the age of 12 are prohibited. In Greece, the advertising of toys on television is banned between 7.00 a.m. and 10.00 p.m. In Germany and Denmark there are bans on certain forms of toys. In Austria and the Flemish part of Belgium no advertising is permitted 5 minutes before or after programs for children. Sponsorship of children's programs is not permitted in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden while in Germany and the Netherlands, although it is

allowed, it is not used in practice. Australia does not allow advertisements during programs for pre-school children.

## **Suggestions To Regulate The Impact Of Ads On Children's Food Habits**

### **1) Parent Involvement and Education:**

Studies show that parents play an important role in their children's social learning, but if a parent's views are not discussed explicitly with children, the medium may teach and influence. As a rule, parents should be educated with respect to what should be healthy food as per proper nutritional intake for their children. Parents should continuously assess their children's food habits and their impact on their health. If a child is found getting into wrong food habits, especially due to ads, it is the prime responsibility of the parents to explain to their children the damaging effects of such habits. Apart from these, parents should educate their children about the advantages of healthy food and disadvantages of unhealthy food.

### **2) Statutory Warning:**

The intake of junk food & carbonated drinks causes numerous diseases such as obesity, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases (CVDs), gall bladder ailments, cancer, psycho-social problems, breathlessness, sleep disorders, asthma, arthritis, weak bones and reproductive hormone abnormalities. So it should come with statutory warnings as in the case of cigarettes (Smoking is injurious for health and milk powder such as "Intake of this food more than twice a week is not good for health.")

### **3) Legal Implications:**

In India, there are no specific advertising laws that relate to children and food-related advertisements in particular. A host of laws and acts like the 'Cable TV Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995' and the 'Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles and Infant Food Act' deal with children-related advertising in a vague way. Not only are there advertisements that are targeted at children but a host of them that feature young children, even babies. In most parts of the world, there are few or no specific rules concerning food advertising to children beyond the rules which must apply to all advertising. In India, even general rules pertaining to advertising are very lax. Also, there are no regulatory bodies that monitor TV advertisements. Apart from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting that decides to intervene when it wants to, there are only voluntary groups like the 'Advertising Agencies Association of India', and the 'Advertising Standards Council of India', both of which are business organizations and can only put moral pressure on advertisers and companies to withdraw objectionable advertisements. There is urgent need for voluntary and government pressure groups to seriously take note of the situation.

The government needs to draft and implement laws that do not deal with advertising in general but are specific and relate to every aspect of advertising, especially those that target young children and pertain to food. In other parts of the world, there exist voluntary groups like the 'Ad busters' and 'Mothers groups' that watch and pressure governments to clamp down on aggressive and intrusive advertising. At present there are various laws implemented by government under various ministries.

### **4) Advertisement Code to be monitored by an organization which will take care of the following:**

- A.** Before any AD is aired on television, the most sought medium by children, some code of conduct should be followed. Any food ADs should be scrutinized with regards to the claims they are making & the food ingredients should meet some standards laid down by recognized organization like WHO.
- B.** Checking whether time limit for advertisement is followed by the companies or not. TV Channels generally do not follow any rules regarding advertising air time. Doordarshan poses a limit on

advertising time which is a maximum of 7.5 minutes of advertisements in a 30 minute program. Private TV channels are free to air as many advertisements they like.

### Conclusion:

From the analysis of primary data and secondary data it is concluded that advertising severely affects the food habits of the children of the present generation. The role of parents and legal system plays crucial role in preventing the anti-health ads influencing the children's food habits. Though advertisement is integral part of the industry which wants its product to be reached to the customer, they should not forget that it's their social responsibility to take care of the next generation of the country which is being targeted tactfully to earn profits. Parents should make the kids more aware of the surroundings so that they start taking proper and logical decision. Also, government's role is important here. It can do it by implementing proper food laws and harmonization of various laws into single unified law.

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