

Junk Food Advertisements With Free Offer: Their Repercussions On The Minds Of Children In The Age Group Of 3 - 10 Years

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INTRODUCTION

Television (TV) food advertising has attracted attention for its potential role in promoting unhealthy eating among children. Children aged 2 to 11 years spend on an average, three hours a day watching television, which is more than with any other medium, and children see about 5,500 food advertisements per annum (**Gantz W et al.,**). Average children view over 40,000 commercials a year. Most of them are for candies, cereals, toys, and fast food restaurants. According to UK Children's Secretary Ed Balls, the average child in the United Kingdom watches approximately 10,000 television ads per annum, and can recognize 400 brands by age 10. Social cognitive theory (**Bandura, 1994**) predicts that children learn from behaviour symbolically modelled en masse media, as well as from role models in their immediate social environment. **Arnas (2006)** reported that TV advertisements affected young children's unhealthy food consumption. In general, there is good research evidence that advertising impacts on children's food preferences and consumption (**Hastings et al., 2003**). Research into the effects of food advertising on children is increasing. One of the reasons why TV has such an effect is because food is the most frequently advertised product category on children's TV programming, and it has been established that exposure to food advertisements effectively promotes consumption of the advertised products (**Halford 2004**). Previous studies conducted in developed countries have shown that the vast majority of food advertising targeted at children is for food of poor nutritional value, whereas, such foods as fruit, vegetables, and whole grains are seldom advertised. A number of surveys have found greater TV viewing is associated with consumption of energy dense foods and drinks (**Campbell 2006**). Past studies have found that about half of all advertisements during children's programming are for food (**Gamble M, et al.,**) and the majority of advertised products are for fast food, sugary cereals, and other foods high in fat, sugars, or sodium or low in nutritional value (**Kotz K, Story M.**). The rates of childhood obesity have been increasing in many countries over recent decades (**Wang and Lobstein, 2006**) and are considered to pose substantial present and future population health risks (**Lee, 2008**). Obesity is a fast growing problem (**Goedecke**). Childhood obesity rates have tripled during the past two decades, and one third of the children are either overweight or obese (**Ogden CL et al.,**). Children consume fatter, saturated fat, sodium, and added sugars, and fewer whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy products than is recommended (**Enns CW**). Although numerous factors influence children's diets, one that has received increasing attention is food marketing. The Institute of Medicine of the National Academies found that food marketing influences children's food preferences, consumption, and health, and linked television advertising to obesity.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In a review of the literature, **Hastings et al., (2003)** concluded that there was strong evidence to conclude that television advertising influences children's food purchases and pressure is put on parents to make such purchases. There was more modest evidence for effects on children's response to food promotion, their consumption behavior, diet and health related outcomes. The majority of these ads are for food and drink that are high in fat, sugar, calories, salt and low in nutrients. The advertisers know that children can and do influence their parents when it comes to food purchases. The study looked at the national and international websites of the top five food and drink companies by advertising spend to assess the methods used to promote unhealthy food and drink to children under 16. The key findings indicated that the companies are using their own websites to market junk food.

Children are much more vocal than they used to be, and they are not afraid to speak up when they want something. This

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is called as nagging. In other words, kids are not afraid to kick and scream to get their parents to buy something. Fast food advertising to children is all about nagging. Marketers rely on children to nag the parents, rather than market to the parents directly. They know that marketing to children will net higher results. Marketers break Pester Power (Nagging) down into two categories such as persistence nagging and importance nagging. Persistence nagging is begging repeatedly. Importance nagging, on the other hand, is what marketers rely on. Offering free with the product takes an important role in buying habits of the children. The free offerings of toys, games, picture induces the children in buying the products. The Children use their Pester Power. The parents yield to their children. The parents know that the product offered with a free offer is unhealthy and useless, but the children force them to purchase that product. All unsold stock of Glucon D biscuits was sold for the emancipated offering of Shaktiman sticker. Offering free with the product is a marketing and advertising technique. These children are cheated by the false free offer of an attractive package, than the improvement of quality of the products, which are unhealthy and cause obesity. Hence, the researcher has made an attempt to analyze to what extent the free offer influences the children and what are the factors that are directly related to increasing the pester power of the children.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To what extent, the Junk Food Advertisements with free offer influence the children and their parents in buying the products and its impact in the behavior of children.
2. To analyze the attitude and behavior of the children before and after getting the product with the free offer.
3. To what extent the Pester Power (Nagging) influences the parents in buying the products.
4. Awareness and attitudes of parents and children in relation with free gifts offered with the product and to know to what extent the children are cheated.
5. To identify the snaky tricks of the advertisers to sell their products in the kids market.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The present study covers the area of Tuticorin District, Tamil Nadu. It deals with the impact of food advertisements on primary school children and the time frame of this study was about 12 months (i.e.) April 2009 to March 2010.

METHODOLOGY

✿ **Research Design:** The survey examined the Impact of Junk Food Advertisements on TV on Primary School Children. The study was conducted from April 2009 to March 2010 as a part of M.Phil. research work. A sample of 204 children was taken through convenience sampling method.

✿ **Instrumentation:** The questionnaire was specially designed for this survey by authors of this article because no such research had been conducted in Tamil Nadu. The questionnaire pilot tested using 25 children between October and November 2009 for clarity and validity, and adjustments were made where ever necessary. The revised questionnaire was divided into three sections, with a demographic section at the first. Areas of inquiry included (2) Junk food advertisements and (3) its awareness and attitudes of parents and the Pester Power (Nagging) of the children. 240 questionnaires were prepared and issued to the parents. Finally, the researcher collected 204 questionnaires. Some questions included multi item scales. Answers were given on a 5-point scale, where 1 indicated the weakest and 5 the strongest agreement. Rank test is used to identify the preferences of the children and parents. Each questionnaire took an average of 17 minutes to complete. The questionnaire is given to the parents to know their children's activities and attitudes and knowledge towards children's program and junk food advertisements.

✿ **Data Collection:** The parents, especially mothers know their children inside out, every single activity and movements. Hence, the questionnaires were given to the parents who completed the questionnaire under the supervision of Research Scholars. Identity numbers were assigned to each questionnaire to guarantee anonymity of respondents and to enable easier identification of questionnaires.

✿ **Data Analysis:** Scores for each test category (Junk food advertisements appearing during the children's program and the awareness of misleading advertisements) were calculated by assigning correct responses. Mean and Standard deviation values were used to evaluate the scores. Statistical significance was made at a P value of < 0.05.

✿ **Sources Of Data Collection:** Primary data were collected from parents of children studying in primary schools through questionnaire and interview method. The parents were randomly requested to fill the questionnaire. Secondary data consists of different literatures like books, published in articles and websites were collected by the researcher.

RESULTS

✿ **Profile of the Respondents:** Two hundred and four children and their parents were contacted and the questionnaire was filled in by the parents. The children were also interviewed with their parents. Out of 204 respondents, 23.10 percent were in the age group of 3 to 5 years, 48.10 percent was in the age group of 6 to 8 years, and the remaining 28.80 percent were in the age group of 9 to 10 years. Among the parents, 81.40 percent were female (mother) respondents, and the remaining 18.6 percent were male (father) respondents. Nearly, one fourth of the parents comprised of the mothers.

Table 1: Children's Preferences In TV Programs

Programs	I	II	III	IV	Total	Percent	Rank
Cartoon	192	177	106	44	519	25 %	III
Animation	300	135	114	27	576	28 %	I
Hero characters	216	162	112	40	530	26 %	II
Star personalities	109	138	76	93	415	21 %	IV
Total					204	100	

Table 1 provide the ranks of children preferences from various children programs used by advertisers to attract children. Out of 204 respondents 28% of the children were influenced by animation program and its advertisements, which got the first rank, 26% of the children liked star personalities and their appearance in advertisements, which got the second rank, 25% of the children preferred Cartoon Network and its advertisements, which took the third rank and the remaining 21% of the children were attracted by film stars, which took the last rank. Hence, it can be concluded that majority of the children prefer animation programs on TV. The star personalities attract least of the children.

Table 2: Children's Responses On Nagging For Advertised Junk Food Items (ANOVA)

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	7.467a	8	.933	1.172	.318
Intercept	1319.254	1	1319.25	1655.90	.000
Age	2.749	3	.916	1.150	.330
Income of parent	5.810	5	1.162	1.458	.205
Total	2704.000	204			
Corrected Total	162.824	203			

Table 2 shows the relationship between age, income, and children's attitude towards advertised products. 'F' value is .318. It is greater than the table value ($P < 0.05$). Hence, the Null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 3: Children's Preferences In Collecting Free Gifts With Products Purchased

Free offer	I	II	III	IV	Total	Percent	Rank
Tattoos	164	144	136	47	491	24 %	III
Toys	160	201	118	38	517	25 %	II
Booklets	172	180	86	58	496	24 %	III
Sticker collection	320	87	68	61	536	27 %	I
Total					204		

This indicates that there is the significant association between age, income and attitude of children towards advertised products. Therefore, it can be inferred that all children nag their parents, irrespective of the income of parents and age of the children. Table 3 points out the rank of children's preferences regarding free gifts offered with the food products purchased. Out of 204 respondents, 27% of the children preferred sticker collection offered with the food products, which took the first rank, 25% of the children preferred the free gift of Toys with the food products, which took the second rank, and 24% of the children were interested in collecting tattoos and booklets, and this factor was given the last rank. Hence, it can be concluded that majority of the children prefer a free gift of the sticker collection. Least of the children were attracted towards tattoos and booklets.

Table 4: Reasons To Buy Junk Foods (Other Than Advertisements)

Reasons to Buy	I	II	III	IV	Total	Percent	Rank
Taste	264	150	98	39	551	27 %	II
Colour	52	213	140	50	455	22 %	III
Happiness	76	159	118	73	426	21 %	IV
Attractive package	424	90	52	42	608	30 %	I
Total					204	100	

Table 4 indicates on what basis the children buy the junk food items. Out of 204 respondents, 30% of the children were induced to buy junk food products due to their attractive packages, which occupies the first rank, 27% of children preferred to buy the products for their taste, which took the second rank, 22% of the children bought food products due to its attractive colour, which took the third rank, and the remaining 21% of the children purchased the food products only for temporary happiness, which got the last rank. Hence, it is concluded that majority of the children prefer and are induced to buy junk food items for their attractive packages. Least of the children buy products for their temporary happiness.

Table 5: Nagging Of Children To Buy Advertised Products

	Frequency	Percent	Cum. Percent
Strongly agree	156	76.5	76.5
Agree	39	19.1	95.6
Strongly disagree	6	2.9	98.5
Disagree	2	1.0	99.5
No opinion	1	.5	100.0
Total	204	100.0	

As it is an evident from Table 5, most of the parents strongly agreed (76.5%) and agreed (19.1%) that their children's pester power coerces them to buy the advertised product. This statement is strongly disagreed (2.9%) and disagreed (1%) by the parents. This is not a significant factor. This analysis shows that generally, parents give into the children's pestering to buy products.

Table 6: Foodstuff Offered With Free Gift Is Of High Quality

	Frequency	Percent	Cum. Percent
Strongly agree	4	2.0	2.0
Agree	7	3.4	5.4
Strongly Disagree	126	61.8	67.2
Disagree	51	25.0	92.2
No opinion	16	7.8	100.0
Total	204	100.0	

Table 7: Free Gifts Offered With The Product And Its Utility For Children

	Frequency	Percent	Cum.Percent
Strongly agree	1	.5	.5
Agree	3	1.5	2.0
Strongly Disagree	165	80.9	82.8
Disagree	29	14.2	97.1
No opinion	6	2.9	100.0
Total	204	100.0	

Table 6 provides an overall view of the analysis of the quality of free gifts offered with food stuff. Most of the parents (61.8%) strongly disagreed and (25.0%) of them disagreed with the statement of free gifts offered with the food stuff is of high quality, whereas, 2% and 3.4% of the parents strongly agreed and agreed with the same respectively. Similarly, it states that 7.8% of the parents made no comment on this statement. This substantiates the argument that most of the parents believe that the quality of free gifts offered with food stuff is of low quality. From the Table 7, it can be inferred that the empirical study confirms that the statement of free gifts offered with the products and its usefulness to children is strongly disagreed (82.8%) and disagreed (14.2%) by almost all the parents. As per the parents' view, the free gifts offered with the product is not useful to their children. The children started nagging their parents to buy the product just after watching the TV advertisements. The rest of the parents strongly agreed (.5%) and agreed (1.5%) to the statement cited, which is insignificant.

Table 8: Impact Of Advertisements On Children

	Frequency	Percent	Cum. Percent
Improper Imagination	45	22.1	22.1
Create Unrealistic Expectations	86	42.2	64.2
Try to Imitate the Hero	69	33.8	98.0
Others	4	2.0	100.0
Total	204	100.0	

Table 8 reports that majority (42.2%) of the parents state that the advertisement leads their children towards unrealistic expectations. The children believe that the message given in the advertisement is real and practical. Another 33.8% of parents felt that their children try to imitate the movie stars, whereas, 22.1% of the children are kept under illusion by improper imagination. Therefore, it is concluded that the majority of the parents pointed out that the advertisements on TV induces their children towards unrealistic and unwanted expectations.

Table 9: Advertisements Broadcasted During Children's Prime Time

	Frequency	Percent	Cum.Percent
Promotional characters	3	1.5	1.5
Free gifts	169	82.8	84.3
Junk foods	32	15.7	100.0
Total	204	100.0	

Table 9 analyzes the impact of advertisement on children in their prime time with different promotional characters. Almost 82.8% of the respondents state that the children's prime time advertisement is attached with free gifts offer. Whereas 15.7% of the respondents reported that the children's advertisements are made with junk foods. The remaining respondents (1.5%) state that the advertisements have other promotional characters. As per the Table 9, advertisements about free gifts are mainly broadcasted during children's prime time.

DISCUSSION

The advertisements in TV take an important role in purchasing the junk food and other items not useful to the children. Advertisements create an unrealistic expectation in the minds of their children. The advertiser first identifies the weakness of the children and targets the influence of Pester Power (Nagging) with their parents. Actually, the parents spend money to buy the product with free gifts. However, the advertisements are not concerned with the parents' interest to buy the product. They give high preference to children's taste and preference, which is unhealthy and not useful to the children. From this study, it can be inferred that the children have more pester power. 95.6% of the parents complained that their children nag them to buy useless products after watching advertisements of products with free offer. 82.8% of the advertisements broadcasted about a free offer with the product. There is a significant association between the nagging of children and their age and income of the parents. Hence, all children, irrespective of their parents' income and age, nag their parents to purchase the product with a free offer after or while watching TV. Products with a free offer are not a good quality. The Government should insist that the advertisers should not include free gift items such as toys or collectible items, which appeal to the children and promote unhealthy foods. The children give preference to Animation programs, and in case of a free offer; the children give first preferences to sticker collection followed by toys. When compared to taste, colour, happiness and attractive packages of the products, the children gave first preferences to attractive packages followed by its colour.

The Government should ban Radio and TV advertisements promoting unhealthy food between and such ads. should not be aired from 06 to 21 hours. Parents should watch their children's interest in advertising messages. The older children should be taught about the purpose of advertising and the mind tricks advertisers use in their messages. Parental control is very much important in developing attitudes and behaviour of the children after watching TV programmes. Involving children in extracurricular activities helps to keep them active and stimulated.

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