

A Study on the Impact of Food Advertising (Television) on the Food Preferences of Preschoolers in Kochi City

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Abstract

The time children spend, by watching television is increasing as everybody around them are busy. It is not just their favorite cartoons or movies that they watch but also many very different advertisements, which come in between these programs. Food advertisements are commercials or advertisements of food, both healthy and unhealthy. As the children watch these advertisements which are being presented in a very appealing manner, an inner urge is being created in children to try these food items and they start demanding these for their consumption. The study concentrates on preschoolers (3 -6 years) who are just stepping out to the society. Their initial years are very interesting for the study as they observe everything very keenly. Food preferences of children changes vastly in these initial years. The study gets to know the impact of food advertisement in children.

Keywords: Food advertisements, food preferences, preschoolers.

Introduction

Children are exposed to a huge amount of food advertising through various media, especially television. There is substantial evidence that this advertising influence children's food preferences and consumption and is likely to contribute to overweight and obesity. Current regulations are ineffective for reducing children's exposure to unhealthy food advertising.

The endorsements of food products by cartoon characters and offers and gifts are used to attract children's attention and persuade them to request or buy an advertised product. Evidences prove that young children lack the ability to discriminate between healthy and unhealthy food.

Behavioural outcomes such as purchase requests have been shown to be modified by attractive advertisements.

Parents are concerned about the advertising of food products at times when children watch television, and in particular, of unhealthy food. The particular aspects which concerned them are that such advertising is usually for unhealthy foods and that it creates a desire, expectation and / or demand for these foods.

In this study we are analysing the impact of food advertisement on pre-schoolers in Kochi city. Pre-schoolers are absolutely fresh and they are just stepping to the world around so their preferences and choices change over time, so these few years at preschool is brought under study. Behavioural outcomes such as purchase requests, have been shown to be modified by food advertisements.

Statement of the Problem

Future of a nation belongs to the young blood, today's children are tomorrow's youth. It is very important that the health of children is been taken utmost care. Children's food preferences and choices should be administered carefully. Food advertising plays a significant role in the mind of children about their food preferences. The study aims at understanding the impact of food advertising on the food preferences of pre-schoolers in Kochi city.

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Objectives

The objectives of the study are designed as follows:

- i. To study the factors that attract children towards advertisements.
- ii. To study the food advertising influence on the various age categories of preschoolers.
- iii. To estimate the time spend by children watching television and its influences on food choices.

Research Methodology

Exploratory study has been used for this topic. The study is based in a survey of the respondents (mothers of preschoolers). For that 200 samples were distributed, of which 120 were completely filled and returned, purposive sampling is the technique used. The data are collected through primary and secondary sources. Structured questionnaire has been used for collecting primary data, data was collected from parents of preschoolers at various school events like sports day and annual day of different pre-schools in Kochi. The data collected are analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The various tests used were Chi square, Correlation and one way AVOVA. Secondary data was collected from various journals, articles and information from websites.

Hypothesis

H1: Food advertisements have a positive relationship with Children's Food preferences.

H2: The time spend on television and food advertisement based demands are positively related.

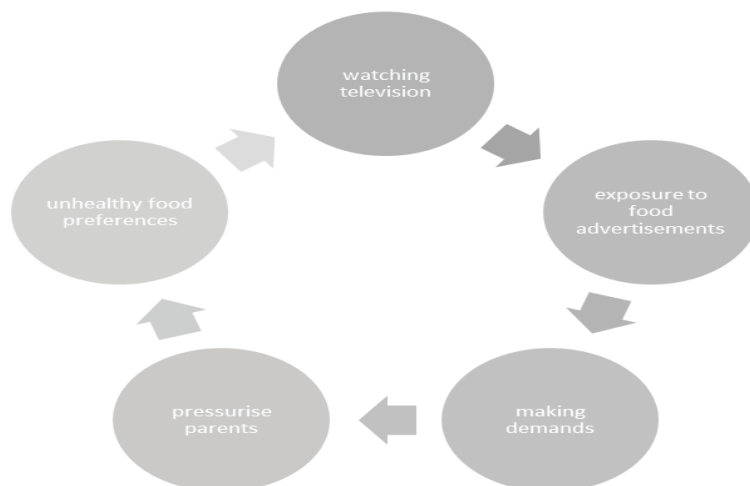
H3: There is a significant relationship between the age of pre-schoolers and the influence of food advertisement

LITERATURE REVIEW

Food preferences of children are not formed in a day, as an infant and in the initial years as a toddler a child eats normally what his mother feeds him or her. Once he starts distinguishing between tastes the child starts showing likes and dislikes for certain food items, even then parents can take the upper hand in deciding what the child should eat. But when the child starts to communicate, your tiny tots comes out with 'demands'. Normally these demands are for products which parents are least interested to feed the child.

Now the question is how children get to know about these products. When the child is inside home, the best thing to keep them sit in a place for some time is to switch on the television with their favourite cartoon programmes. The fact is that they don't only watch these cartoons in television but there are very many 'food advertisements' in television, which are very appealing to the kids.

Once, twice, thrice or more time they watch these advertisements an urge is grown these little minds to just try them, and then they start communicating about their demands, normally this starts in the pre-schooling age, where they see the outside world at large in the absence of their parents. The demand might be met sometimes or might be denied, depending on the parents. In the long run, these demands turn out to be a habit and result to unhealthy eating habits



Considerable scientific evidence establishes a link between unhealthy food advertising and children's food choices, purchases and consumption

The exposure that young mind goes through as a result of food advertising is a subject matter of study, their preferences and choice of what they eat are greatly influenced by the media advertisements at large.⁽¹⁾

Children have been constituted as a very important consumer group, new day marketers are ready to pay more to this group recognising them as a primary market, an influencing market and a future market. The study underlines the fact that advertising influences children purchase request and family dynamics.⁽³⁾

Food advertisements in television has always been criticised as they play a major role in promoting unhealthy dietary practices among children. The study concluded that food advertisement environment should be changed in such a way that nutritious foods are promoted and unhealthy (junk) foods should be unrepresented and thus healthy eating habits can be reinforced.⁽⁸⁾

It was also pointed out that obesity, diabetes, hypertension and coronary heart disease have been directly related with children’s eating habits and their food consumption. The study also marked that a desire is being created in children to purchase goods that is been shown in various advertisements.⁽⁹⁾

Some of the studies even concluded that childhood obesity is increasing worldwide due to the overconsumption of unhealthy food. This increase has been labelled as an epidemic by the canters for disease control and prevention and the world health organisation.⁽¹²⁾

It was noted that food advertisement and children’s food preferences are of critical interest. In those study it was commented that exposure to more advertisements resulted in increased intake of unhealthy food. Exposure to food advertisements lead to increased consumption.⁽¹³⁾

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1. Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	38.788a	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	36.648	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	5.721	1	.017
N of Valid Cases	120		
a. 4 cells (44.4%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .53.			

From the above table1, the obtained chi square value 38.788 is significant at 95% confidence interval, it means that the obtained significance value (0.000) is less than the cut off value (0.05).

Table 2 Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	82.500a	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	84.107	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	46.401	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	120		
a. 4 cells (44.4%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .53.			

The above table 2 indicates that the obtained significance value 0.00 which is less than cut off value of 0.05.

Therefore to sum up from both the chi- square tables above: the null hypothesis is rejected and alternative hypothesis is accepted. There is a positive relation between time children spend watching television and making demands.

		Time watching television	frequency of making demands
Time watching television	Pearson Correlation	1	.219*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.016
	N	120	120
frequency of making demands	Pearson Correlation	.219*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.016	
	N	120	120

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
From the above table 3, the Pearson correlation value 0.219 is significant at 95% confidence interval, this indicates that frequency of making demands is positively correlated with time of watching television.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Unhealthy eating habits	Between Groups	.009	3	.003	.018	.997
	Within Groups	19.191	116	.165		
	Total	19.200	119			
Ads are too persuasive for children	Between Groups	.090	3	.030	.109	.955
	Within Groups	31.910	116	.275		
	Total	32.000	119			
identify products	Between Groups	.052	3	.017	.035	.991
	Within Groups	57.415	116	.495		
	Total	57.467	119			
pressurize parents to purchase	Between Groups	.056	3	.019	.092	.965
	Within Groups	23.411	116	.202		
	Total	23.467	119			

From, the above analysis we find that the significance value obtained for unhealthy eating habits is 0.997, ads

persuasive for children is 0.955, children identifying products is 0.991, pressurising parents to purchase is 0.965. All of these are above p value 0.05 and therefore, there is no statistically significant difference in the age of pre-schoolers and the above variables which shows the influence of food advertisements.

Hence the null hypothesis is accepted and alternative hypothesis is rejected, there is no significant relationship between age of preschoolers and influence of food advertisement.

Societal Implications of The Study

The study pinpoints to a solid statement that all of the preschoolers who were examined in the study watched television on a daily basis. The alarming fact is that parents consider television as a means to keep their kids engaged without causing any disturbance to them. But what really happens is that they watch a lot more than what is actually necessary for their age. The first thing is the very appealing food advertisements that they watch amidst their television programs, 90% of the children enjoy food advertisements and they make demands for these food items which are least important for their health.

Children at this tender age is very vulnerable and they are not aware of the genuineness and health implications of the products advertised, it is the parents and the care takers who should guide on them in this regard

When enquired about whether their children discuss with their classmates, about 60% disagreed and 40% of the parents had a neutral stand. Surprisingly 100% of the parents agreed that their children demand products based on food advertisements. Majority of the children demand food products when they are taken out for shopping.

Parents have a neutral response regarding advertisements being too persuasive for children. All parents unanimously agreed that food advertisements lead to unhealthy food preferences among children. 60% of the parents strongly agree and 40% of the parents agreed that their children pressurize them to purchase according to their demand. Children are very smart in identifying products shown in advertisements. Majority

of the parents said that their children do not interfere in the products that parents buy. Some of the parents commented that there should be strict government regulations on advertising unhealthy food products.

Suggestions

- Proper awareness and education should be given to parents regarding the effects of unhealthy eating habits.
- Children should be encouraged to eat healthy food in pre-schools.
- No unhealthy food should be encouraged during meal time whether at school or at home.
- Children should be educated that all products advertised are not good ones.
- Healthy food habits should be inculcated right at home itself.
- Children should spent very limited time of their childhood unproductively in front of television.

Conclusion

As parents all of us are conscious about the health of our children, but sometimes parents tend to forget that it is very small things that contribute to this health factor. One thing that every parent disclosed during the study was that every child right from the age of three years watch television, even if not daily but watch them frequently, it is a mode of keeping their tiny tots sit at one place without roaming around. Everything else follows this first step of watching television.

But fortunately certain parents though their children watch television and make demand for unhealthy food products, they can win their child and divert their child to the right path. So to conclude on this study it is not only watching television and food advertisements cause unhealthy eating habits among pre-schoolers, but there are certain other things that parents should follow. They should always be vigilant on what is going around your child, what is he observing, what is he talking in his groups and whether the demands that these children make are right or wrong. Parents and teachers should train children in such a way that he or she is in a position to say no to what is not good for them.

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Ethical Clearance: No other companies or organisations are pointed out in this paper.

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