

**The Unethical Practices of Food Advertisements Targeted at Children: A Parental Viewpoint**

**\* Dr. P. Pon Meenakshi**

\* Associate Professor, Sree Narayana Guru Institute of Management Studies, Coimbatore

**Abstract:**

Many factors contribute to the risk of developing obesity. One that has been identified is the way in which unhealthy food or products that are energy-dense and nutrient-poor are marketed to children. In 2006, the WHO's technical meeting on marketing of food and non-alcoholic beverages to children concluded that the exposure to the promotion of energy dense, nutrient-poor foods and beverages can adversely affect children's eating habits. They also found that overwhelming marketing is responsible for the increasing use of energy dense, micronutrient poor foods, and undermines the recommendations for a healthy diet. It has an adverse effect on children's understanding of food knowledge, purchase behavior, and consumption. Multinational companies have been able to exploit the lack of control and regulation on marketing and advertising in developing countries, and have been using tricks and gimmicks to promote food, which is high in fat, sugar and preservatives. This paper dealt with various unethical Practices followed in food advertisement.

**Keywords:** Unethical practices, food item, advertisement etc.

**Introduction:**

Ethics in marketing deals with the principles and values that the marketing institutions ought to have. Discussions of marketing ethics are focused on two major concerns: one is the concern related to political philosophy, and the other is regarding the transaction focused business practice. On the one side, it has been said that maximizing profit for the shareholder is the only ethic in marketing, while on the other, it is argued that market is responsible to the consumers and other proximate as well as remote stakeholders as much as, if not less, it is responsible to its shareholders. The questions of ethics become more important when the market targets the most impressionable section of the society, children. The food product companies are now spending a great amount on advertising to reach/attract this segment.

Good nutritional diet during childhood and adolescence is essential for physical and mental growth. At the same time, eating behavior is also established which contributes to long-term health and chronic disease risk. However, the Indian food consumption trend data shows a shift over a last one decade. Children and adolescents eat out more frequently (junk/fast foods, soft drinks, and snacks). Very few studies have been conducted and documented in India regarding the dietary intake pattern of the Indian children and adolescents.

Studies have shown that an overweight or obese child is far more susceptible to health issues later in life. The world health organization (WHO) estimates that 2.3 billion people, i.e., almost one third of the global population will be overweight by 2015. It is estimated that one in ten school age children are clinically overweight or obese, which is a total of 155 million around the world.

A further 22 million children under the age of five are overweight. While every continent has to face up to the health consequences and economic repercussions of this preventable catastrophe, Asia is arguably facing the great challenge. Overweight and obesity rates are rising faster in south East Asia than anywhere else in the world.

With a predicted 27.5% rise in obese children in the region between 2005 and 2010, every contributing factor needs to be urgently addressed.

The Indian fast food market is growing at an annual rate of 25-30%, according to a report published by market research firm, RNCOS in September 2010, titled "Indian fast food market analysis". Foreign fast food chains are aggressively increasing their presence in the country. For instance, Domino's has planned to open 60-65 outlets every year in these three years (2010-2012), while the other brands are also preparing for a massive expansion across the country by 2015.

Although it is the personal responsibility of consumers to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle, government regulatory bodies, NGOs and the consumer forums also have a significant role to play in this regard. Strict rules and regulations for the marketing of the same and prompt action now can prevent a major catastrophe in the future- for individuals and society as a whole.

### **Literature Review**

1. The children's market has become significantly important to marketers (McNeal, 1998). Many marketers spend millions of dollars on advertising to reach this growing segment (Jardine and Wentz, 2005). A look at India's own advertising growth shows that the whole advertising expenditure boomed eight times since 1995, when it was around 47 billion, to around 367 billion rupees (Dingra, 2008).

2. The effect of advertising on children has been highly debated among various groups, including parents, HGOs, industry experts and government agencies. One of the primary debates has been the potential impact of food advertising directed at children. A variety of institutions is involved in this debate. Some of these organizations, such as public advocacy groups, criticize the food companies and television networks regarding the increased amount spent as well as the type of promotional efforts targeted at children (York, 2007).

3. There is also a debate among practitioners on advertising practices directed at children, with even marketing professionals expressing concerns about advertising targeted at children. When interviewed, 35% of them considered the general ethical and moral standards in the industry to be 'lower than in the past,' with 40% believing that these standards are about the same. Only 25% believed that the standards have improved (Grimm, 2004).

4. Some companies have already started taking action to deal with criticisms and also because of government warnings. In Europe, soft-drinks companies have developed self-regulatory measures to advertising junk food and help in tackling child obesity. To avoid stricter laws, soft drinks companies have pledged to stop the marketing aimed at children under 12 year of age. The companies also have pledged to limit soft-drink sales at schools (Wentz, 2006). Furthermore, some companies have also responded to government calls by promoting active lifestyles when targeting children in food advertisements. Mc Donald's, in the UK, ran a campaign that featured Ronald McDonald and used animated fruit and vegetable characters, which were called Yums. These characters urged children to eat right and stay active (Jardine and Wentz, 2005).

5. Obesity among children has become an increasing problem throughout the US as well across the world. Approximately, 16% of teenagers aged 12-19 years and 15% of children aged 5-11 years are currently obese in The US. There has been a 300% increase in the number of obese and overweight children in the past 30 years. Within the next decade, these numbers are predicted to almost double (Reed, 2008).

6. A research done by the institute of medicine says that food and drink advertising puts kids at the risk of health problems. Moreover, low calorie meals and a healthy way of

eating need to be introduced into the children's diet instead of Wendy's, McDonald's, or other fast food companies' products. The job of an advertiser is to make consumers want things that they might have not wanted in the beginning. Eventually, their wants become their desires. Now, why children? Children are the ideal candidates for advertisers to target, because starting young creates brand loyalty.

7. The findings of the study by Gorn and Goldberg (1977) include the fact that low-income children exposed to a commercial just once had favorable attitudes towards the advertised product. Furthermore, these authors found that exposure to television ads among five and six years old children directly influenced their breakfast food and snack preferences (Goldberg et al., 1978). Finally, exposure to advertisements has also influenced the frequency of snacking among children (Bolton, 1983).

8. Advertising has been criticized for promoting materialism, persuading individuals to buy things that do not need and providing false or misleading information (Pollay and Mittal, 1993). Parents concerns toward the impact of advertising directed at children have risen significantly in the last decade (Hudson et al., 2008). These concerns have also been expressed by academicians (Moore, 2004). However, only a limited number of studies have examined ethical issues aimed at the children's segment (Ahuja et al., 2001; and Hudson et al., 2008).

9. Advertising to the young as a whole is a very heated, debatable issue; many advertisers defend their rights of 'commercial free speech'. Others argue that children's understanding of advertisements is part of their development and growth, and it is unrealistic to make them live in ideal innocence when it is not the case in the real world, and that such isolation will eventually affect the child's wellbeing (O'Sullivan, 2005).

10. As noted, research examining parents' attitudes towards advertising particularly to food advertising directed at children, is limited. Pass studies examined the relationship between family communication patterns and parental reactions toward advertising (Rose et al., 1998), and parental involvement and authoritative parenting and attitude toward advertising (Carlson and Grossbart, 1988). Only one study examined the relationship between attitude toward food advertising and parental styles (Crosby and Grossbart, 1984). Promoting junk food is not only an ethical debatable issue, but many girls are also deeply affected by thin figures of celebrities in the advertisements. It causes low self esteem and dissatisfaction among them (Hobbs, 2006).

11. Parents' attitude towards nutrition varies. Research shows the positive impact of parental influence and nutritional education (Grossbart et al., 1982). Furthermore, mothers particularly wield a significant influence over children's consumption of a balanced diet and exposure to a variety of foods (Crosby et al., 1982). This research has also shown that mothers who endorsed nutritional information had more positive attitudes toward nutrition and expressed more concerns about food advertising targeted at children. Now, the government of India has also taken several steps to deal with children's nutritional problems by being involved in school lunch programs, regulation of children's advertising and nutrition education in schools.

12. Ethical decision-making process must be influenced by the perception that the potential action has a moral or ethical facet that needs to be evaluated (Barnett, 2011). For marketing practitioners, studies have shown that perceived moral intensity affects the perception ethical problems in various situations (Singhapakdi et al., 1996 and 1999).

### **Scope of the Study:**

This study aims at understanding the unethical practices of food advertisements aimed at children in Palakkad district. The study has its scope to help the society in finding how much children are affected by the unethical practices of food advertisements undertaken in today's market.

**Limitations of the Study:**

1. The study was limited to the areas in Palakkad district only
2. The study has been conducted for a period of one month
3. Sampling size was 20 respondents. There may be some changes if the sampling size and the number of districts are increased.
4. The respondents may give biased information, which may affect the reliability of the results.

**Research Methodology**

Research methodology is a way to systematically solve the research problem. It may be understood as science of studying how research is done scientifically. In this, we study various steps that are generally adopted by a researcher in studying research problem along with the logic behind them. As far as this project is concerned, the predicament under study is the –unethical practices of food advertisements on children.

**Sample Design**

This descriptive research describes data and characteristics about the population or phenomenon being studied. The purpose of sample design is to give an accurate picture of some aspect of the marketing environment. Sample design is a definite plan for obtaining sample from the sampling frame. Sample design includes

1. Sample unit
2. Sample size
3. Sampling technique

**Universe of the Study:** The universe of the study includes almost all the customers in Palakkad district.

**Sampling Unit:** The sampling unit consisted of the selected respondent in the district of Palakkad.

**Sample Size:** Samples were collected from 20 respondents residing in the district of Palakkad.

**Sampling Technique:** The sampling technique used in simple random sampling. The samples are chosen according to the lottery method.

**Data Collection Method:**

Data are of two types. They are

1. Primary data
2. Secondary data

For the purpose of this project, data were collected from both primary as well as secondary source.

**Primary Data:** Primary data are those data that are collected fresh for the first time and which seem to be original in character. Primary data was collected through questionnaires distributed to the respondents of Palakkad district.

**Secondary Data:**

Secondary data were collected from external sources. External sources are internet, magazines, textbooks and through websites.

**Statistical Tool:**

Statistical tools such as Reliability test, one way ANOVA, T test, Regression, Chi square test are used for analyzing the data & arriving at the conclusion.

**Hypothesis to be tested:**

1. To find if there is significant difference between income and food items
2. To find if there is significant difference between occupation and ethical practices
3. To find if there is significant difference between education level and food items
4. To find if there is significant difference between advertisement and occupation
5. To find if there is significant difference between food items and education level
6. To find if there is significant difference between magazines and household incomes.

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.63	21

The above reliability test Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.63..

**Table 2: Age of the Respondent**

Age	Frequency	Percent
<25	4	20.0
26-35	3	15.0
36-45	7	35.0
>45	6	30.0
Total	20	100.0

**Inference:**

From the above table it is found that 20 people are below 25 yrs, 15 between 26-35, 35 between 36-45 and 30 above 40 yrs.

**Table 3: Gender of the Respondent**

Gender	Frequency	Percent
MALE	10	50.0
FEMALE	10	50.0
Total	20	100.0

Inference:

From the above table it is found that there are 50 male and 50 female respondents

**Table .4: Ranking the Following Parameters**

Statements	N	Mean	Rank
HOUSEHOLD INCOME	20	1.40	13
OCCUPATION	20	2.55	12
ADVERTISEMENTS	20	4.35	1
POTENTIAL HARM	20	3.75	8
WELFARE	20	3.25	11
FOOD ADVERTISING	20	4.00	4
CHOICE	20	4.00	4
EFFECT	20	3.35	10
TRICKS AND GIMMICKS	20	3.90	7
ETHICAL PRACTICES	20	3.55	9
CELEBRITIES	20	4.00	4
NUTRITION INFMN	20	4.10	2
MAGAZINES	20	4.05	3
Valid N (list wise)	20		

According to the ranking done it has been found that the first rank goes to advertisements followed by nutrition information in the second rank followed by magazines in the third rank followed by celebrities, food advertising and choice in the fourth rank followed by tricks and gimmicks in the seventh rank followed by potential harm in the eighth rank followed by ethical practices in the ninth rank followed by effect in the tenth rank followed by welfare in the eleventh rank followed by occupation and income in the twelfth and thirteenth rank.

**Table .5: Regression Showing Number of Children and Food Items**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	2.173	.848		2.564	.020
CHILDREN	.437	.324	.303	1.349	.194

$$Y = 2.173 + 0.437x$$

There is a positive regression between number of children and food items.

**Table .6: Chisquare Showing Income and Food Items**

1. Formulation of Hypothesis:

Ho: There is no significant difference between Income and Food items.

H1: there is significant difference between Income and Food items

2. Finding Calculated Value:

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.925 <sup>a</sup>	8	.270
Likelihood Ratio	12.231	8	.141
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.473	1	.034
N of Valid Cases	20		

3. Inference:

From the above chi square test it is found that the significance value is .270 which is more than .05. so Ho is rejected. So there is a significant difference between income and food items.

**Table 7: Chi-square Showing Occupation and Ethical Practices**

**1. Formulation of Hypothesis:**

Ho: there is no significant difference between occupation and ethical practices.

H1: there is significant difference between occupation and ethical practices.

**2. Finding Calculated Value:**

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.389 <sup>a</sup>	9	.320
Likelihood Ratio	11.931	9	.217
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.209	1	.272
N of Valid Cases	20		

**3. Inference:**

From the above chi square test, it is found that the significance value is .320 which is above .05. So Ho is rejected. So there is a significant difference between occupation and ethical practices.

**Table .8 – T-test for Education Level and Food Items:**

**1. Formulation of Hypothesis**

Ho: There is no significant difference between Educational Level and Food items.

H1: There is significant difference between educational level and Food items.

**2. Finding Calculated Value:**

	Test Value = 0					
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Education Level	10.180	19	.000	1.850	1.47	2.23
Food Items	8.396	19	.000	3.200	2.40	4.00

**3. INFERENCE:** From the above t test table it is found that the significant point is .000 which is less than .05.so Ho is accepted. So there is no significant difference between education level and food items.

Table.11- Anova Table Showing Significance between Magazines and Household Income

**1. Formulation of Hypothesis:**

Ho: There is no significant difference between magazines and household income:

H1: There is a significant difference between magazines and household income.

2. Finding calculated value:

	Sum of Squares	D f	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.150	2	.075	.035	.966
Within Groups	36.800	17	2.165		
Total	36.950	19			

3. INFERENCE:

From the anova table, it is noted that the significance point is. 966. So Ho is rejected as it is more than .05. Therefore, there is significant difference between magazines and household income.

**Findings**

- From the Age of the respondent, it is evident that 20 people are below 25 yrs, 15 people are below 26-35, 35 people in 36-45, 30 people above 45 yrs.
- From the Gender of the respondent, it is evident that 50 people are Male and 50 people are Female.
- From the ranking of the parameters it is evident that Advertisement, Nutrition level and Magazines come in 1, 2, 3 ranks.
- From the Regression table it is evident that there is a positive regression between number of children and food items.
- From the Chi-square table 1 it is evident that there is a significant difference between income and food items.
- From the Chi-square table 2 it is evident that there is a significant difference between occupation and ethical practices.
- From the T table it is evident that there is no significant difference between Education level and Food items.
- From the Anova table 1 it is evident that there is a significant difference between Advertisement and occupation.
- From the Anova table 2 it is evident that there is a significant difference between Food items and Education level.
- From the Anova table 3 it is evident that there is a significant difference between magazines and Household Income.

**Suggestions**

1. It is evident from the regression table that there is a positive regression between children and food items. So it is a good idea.
2. The children are following bad eating habits which they grasp from the a
3. Advertisements, which are a wrong thing and it should be changed.
4. The parents should concentrate on more nutritional foods than on any soft drinks and bakery items.
5. There should not be any ethical practices followed in advertising.

6. According to the income of the parents, they should focus on the products.
7. It is mandatory that the children should be given what food they like but it should be a nutritional food and good for health.
8. The parents should have complete knowledge about the food items available in the food industry and changing advertisements.
9. The parents should seek advice from other people who are well known about the nutrition level of the food.
10. Each and every media should show valid and reliable advertisements about the food items which is good for the children.

**Conclusion:**

From the research unethical practices of food advertisements was studied. Here 20 respondents were selected and research study was done by using descriptive study and it was found that whether children are more influenced to nutrition food or soft drinks.

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