

## TELEVISION AND INTERNET MARKETING TO CHILDREN AS CONSUMERS- CURRENT TRENDS AND ISSUES

Vasutha K<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Madurai Kamaraj University

### Abstract

*This article addresses marketing to children and though marketers have targeted children for decades, few trends have further increased their interest in children as customers. First, the disposable income of children have increased, alongwith influencing power over parents. Second, the invasion of technology in advertising has opened many previously unknown opportunites. Children are more adept as using technology than adults, to the advantage of advertisers. The marketing techniques used in television and the internet have been elaborated. The current trends of digital marketing is percieved as more economical and it is argued these trends could adversely affect the behaviorial development of children leading to conflict with parents, health issues and cynisim at young age and so on. Television can be more easily mediated by public policy while digital marketing cannot due to its inherent nature. The article concludes with recommendations for regulations to be uniformly framed across all mediums of advertising.*

**Key words:** Children consumers, digital marketing, advertising.

### Introduction

As the fifth largest retail market in the world, Indian consumers generate US\$ 833 billion per year of business currently and this figure is likely to touch US\$1.3 trillion by 2020.<sup>6</sup> Indian marketers have been quick to see this and realized the tremendous opportunities that exist for advertising. From time in history marketers have relied on advertising to take care of the large supply of goods from mass production. While this might have happened faster in the western economies, India too has been no exception to seeing its advertising sector come of age.<sup>7</sup> Advertising strategies have made gain out of the lack of awareness in people to create the interest and the want to purchase goods which they would not have without advertising. One of the important reasons for the dominance of advertising has been television. Television in India, reaches the young and old, the literate and illiterate, the rich and poor, the rural and urban and hence everybody can be impacted. It is the digital age now, and advertising has crept into this domain as well. For a literate and tech savvy economy like India, digital advertising promises high revenues even for small capital investments.

Marketing and advertising today influence children in their buying decisions. Youngsters are swayed by these commercials and they are unable to discern the persuasive

---

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ibef.org/industry/indian-retail-industry-analysis-presentation>

<sup>7</sup> L. Mazur, "Marketing Madness," *E Magazine: The Environmental Magazine* 7, no. 3 (1996).

intent of these advertisements. It is no surprise then that marketers and advertisers look at youth as a big market and strategies are explicitly targeted at them. This article examines the trends in such marketing as well the issues that come with it and the challenges it poses to regulate the impacts of advertisements.

### Marketing and Advertising

According to the American Marketing Association, marketing is “Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.”<sup>8</sup> Advertisers intelligently use the “Four Ps” of marketing—product, place, price, and promotion—to present to the public an array of their goods and services in a variety of media to draw customers’ attention and interest in buying their product.

Television has long been the staple of advertising to children and youth. It is believed that children view approximately 40,000 advertisements each year.<sup>9</sup> The kind of products marketed to children typically included cereal, fast foods, toys and have now grown to include many others like clothes, movies, restaurants, recreation and entertainment spots and so on. However what has changed is the method of advertising to children- it has expanded from traditional channels to include the digital medium too now.<sup>10</sup>

Another discerning change has been the affluence in children and adolescents today. The average spend by children has increased manifold and youth are shaping the way the families spend. Children are the influencing factors in parents’ choice of car, meals, vacations and so on. Thus, it makes sense for a marketer to influence youth as a strategy to influence the entire family.

Children are heavy media users and early adopters of newer technologies, hence it is no surprise then that media marketing and advertising campaigns use both television and newer media effectively as pathways into children’s homes and lives.<sup>11</sup>

India’s digital advertising market has grown at a fast pace of 33 per cent annually between 2010 and 2015, while the spend as a percentage of total advertising increased to 13 per

---

<sup>8</sup> American Marketing Association, [www.marketingpower.com/content4620.php](http://www.marketingpower.com/content4620.php) (retrieved March 18, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> D. Kunkel, “Children and Television Advertising,” in *Handbook of Children and the Media*, edited by D. Singer and J. Singer (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> K. Weber, M. Story, and L. Harnack, “Internet Food Marketing Strategies Aimed at Children and Adolescents: A Content Analysis of Food and Beverage Brand Web Sites,” *Journal of American Dietetic Association* 106, no. 9 (2006): 463-66.

<sup>11</sup> D. Roberts, U. Foehr, and V. Rideout, *Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year-Olds* (Menlo Park, Calif.: Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2005).

cent or nearly US\$ 1 billion in 2015.<sup>12</sup>

### Trends in Marketing Techniques

Marketers use a variety of techniques to attract audiences to increase product purchases. Traditional marketing techniques in television commercials include repetition, branded characters, catchy and interesting production features, celebrity endorsements, and premiums (free merchandise that accompanies a product).

In recent years advertisers have begun to experiment with new techniques. One such technique is stealth advertising, in which marketers attempt to conceal the intent of an advertisement. The theory behind the new technique is that advertising is most effective when consumers do not realize it as advertising that they are viewing or experiencing.

Repetition involves simply repeating the same commercial message over and over. The underlying thought is that familiarity with a product increases the likelihood of a person purchasing and using it.

Attention-getting production features are designed to attract children's interest in commercial content. Such features, which are heavily concentrated in children's television advertisements, include action and movement, rapid pacing, sound effects, and loud music.

Branded characters and premiums. Are successfully used in campaigns that appeal to children and youth to sell products ranging from cereal to vacations to toys. Disney characters are used to sell stationery, breakfast cereals and the like Marketers also use premiums, such as a small toy in a McDonald's Happy Meal, to increase product purchases by children online and on television.<sup>13</sup>

Celebrity endorsements also help sell products in a big way. Athletes are depicted on cereal boxes and appear onscreen wearing and using specific athletic clothes and gear. Sachin Tendulkar has been promoting health drink Boost throughout his career. Children who like those celebrities are expected to purchase these products.

Product placement was first recognized as a successful marketing technique when fictional characters were used to identify with products. Jughead in the Archies comic series was fond of burgers. In fact burger joints are even named after these characters.

Viral marketing is the flutter created when people start to talk about a product to one another, either in real or virtual conversation. Viral marketing is especially effective with teens, particularly if it involves big discounts, attractive products, and meaningful freebies.

---

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.ibef.org/industry/indian-retail-industry-analysis-presentation=>

<sup>13</sup> S. L. Calvert, *Children's Journeys through the Information Age* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1999).

Online interactive agents are a virtual form of stealth advertising. Marketers program robots, or bots, to reply to web site visitors who initiate a conversation. Such bots are programmed to respond to users one to one so that it builds brand loyalty.

Video news releases, in which companies circulate stories about their products, are a form of virtual advertising. Video news releases, which are cheaper than traditional advertisements, are neither presented nor labeled as advertisements, but appear as features. Thus they break barriers in the stance that older viewers take when viewing an advertisement-that they understand is trying to sell them a product.

Integrated marketing strategies. Another new marketing trend is the use of integrated marketing strategies, particularly with branded characters driving interest across media platforms. Companies charge advertisers a fee for licensing popular children's characters for multimedia applications in TV, books, games, and movies to sell products. These strategies integrate different media, as well as different product lines by tying food to toys, or clothes or other children's' goods.

Tracking software and spyware. Not surprisingly, online marketers want to know who is visiting their websites to find out how effective their marketing strategies are. By using cookies or electronic bits of data placed on a computer from a website, compulsory signing in, marketers can create an extensive data file about each individual user's preferences for places and products.

**Table 1 TV and Online Advertisements**

Marketing technique	Used in Television	Used in the Internet
Repetition of the message	Y	Y
Branded characters	Y	Y
Attention-getting production features	Y	Y
Celebrity endorsements	Y	Y
Premiums	Y	Y
Product placement	Y	Y
Advergaming		Y
Viral marketing		Y
Tracking software and spyware		Y
Online interactive agents		Y
Integrated marketing strategies	Y	Y
Video news releases	Y	Y

In summary, although television is still the dominant venue for advertising, marketers are exploring new ways to market to children and adolescents through online media and wireless devices, often using stealth techniques whereby consumers are immersed in branded environments, frequently without knowing that they are being

exposed to sophisticated marketing campaigns. Marketers carefully analyze children and adolescents' interest patterns. Tracking these patterns provides extensive information that marketers now analyze in aggregate form, but that can, in the future, be used for one-on-one relational marketing strategies directed at specific individuals.

### **Exposure to Advertising and Behavioral Issues in Children**

Exposing children to commercial messages can lead to negative outcomes, including parent-child conflict, cynicism, obesity, and possibly materialistic attitudes.

For both younger and older children, not every request for a product leads to a purchase. Being denied a product can lead to conflict between parent and child.<sup>14</sup> For instance, it was found that when parents denied children's requests for products, children who were heavy viewers argued about the purchase 21 percent of the time, while light viewers argued only 9 percent of the time.<sup>15</sup> Advertisers call this the "nag factor."

In a review of research, one study found a causal relationship between children's viewing of television commercials and their pestering parents in the grocery store.<sup>16</sup>

Also children who are repeatedly exposed to attractive messages about "fun" products still want them, even if they are aware of advertiser selling techniques. The implication is that even though children—and adults too, for that matter—may know that something is not what it seems, that does not stop them from wanting it.

Since so many advertisements targeted to children are for foods that are high in calories and low in nutritional value, concerns have been raised that food advertisements are partly to blame for children being overweight and obese.<sup>17</sup>

### **Regulation**

Children's maturity and age prevent them from understanding advertiser intent. The Advertising Standards Council of India has placed safeguards to protect young child audiences. Among the guidelines are three principles. First, the changeover between an advertisement and the program content must be clear and distinct; the program make a statement like "We will be back after the commercial break," to separate program and commercial content. Second, main hosts cannot sell products. That is, the main characters on a television program cannot sell products during that program or even during the commercial break. And, third, products cannot be sold through the contents of a program.

Besides the above and a host of other specifications, television and other media advertising can be mediated. However, regulation for online advertising is yet to become

---

<sup>14</sup>Valkenburg and Cantor, "The Development of a Child into a Consumer".

<sup>15</sup>Aitkin, "Effects of Television Advertising on Children"

<sup>16</sup>L. McDermott and others, "International Food Advertising, Pester Power, and Its Effects," *International Journal of Advertising* 25, no. 4 (2006): 513-39.

<sup>17</sup>Kunkel and others, *Report of the APA Task Force on Advertising and Children*

full fledged. Regulators should mainly address the issue of whether and how to make the regulation of newer online marketing activities consistent with traditional television and film guidelines. Moreover, in many cases the online environment is not even constrained by law. Setting up an online shop in a different country, for example, can insulate users from prosecution for violating a number of laws that they would have to follow within the our country

### **Conclusion**

Advertising aimed at children and youth has become a way of life nowadays. Children not only have their own disposable income, but also, are able to wield influence over what their parents buy, and marketers attempt to determine how that money is spent. Till of late television reaped most of the advertising dollars, however now this has to be shared with online channels as well. Marketing practices such as repetition, branded environments, and free prizes are effective in attracting children's attention and in retention, at the same time also influencing their purchasing choices. Children however cannot be expected to understand the persuasive content of advertising and their interests are likely to be jeopardized. Thus, though public policy will regulate how advertisers can interact with children via television, online environments will be less heavily regulated than the more traditional media.