ABSTRACT

OF

ADVERTISING AND INDIAN CHILDREN: A STUDY OF SOCIO- ECONOMIC & POLITICAL IMPACT IN THE NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION

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ABSTRACT

The research explores the impact of television advertising on Indian urban children in the context of social, economic, and political values. The marketing to children is of concern because of their inherent vulnerability to commercial persuasion. Although, most children are, on an average, fairly perceptive and intelligent, the fact is that they are considerably less informed - as compared to adults – and, thereby, are a largely vulnerable audience for television advertising.

Advertising is as ubiquitous as the air we breathe. This study thus focuses on television advertising and its impact on Indian urban children (A case study of NCR of Delhi). The reasons are simple yet manifold. Firstly, Television uses aural and visual channels of communication, which occurs in real time, placing a much greater perceptual and cognitive burden on young audiences than does any other advertising. Secondly, Television today has emerged as the primary vehicle for delivering commercial messages to children. Thirdly, Television is a primary story teller. Fourthly, Television is an invasive medium which percolates under the radar of consciousness of young children. Television is a near omnipotent member of the family that portrays actions and far-flung settings to children daily for hours at a time. Finally, narrowing on television advertisements helps focus the research without significantly restricting its scope, for virtually anything that can be done linguistically in print and radio advertising is also applicable in television advertising.

The thesis thus addresses marketing to children and shows that although marketers have targeted children for decades, two recent trends have increased their interest in child consumers. First, both the discretionary income of children and their power to influence parent purchases have increased over time. Second, the enormous increase in the number of available television channels has led to smaller audiences for each channel, thereby creating a growing media space just for children and children's products.

The first chapter, introductory in nature, gives the motivation and background for the thesis. Continuing, the key issues are introduced, namely Advertising, Children, Television Advertising to Children, Laws governing the issue of Television Advertising to Children and the Indian Advertising Scenario. Further, the Significance & Rationale behind the thesis, definition of the problem, objectives and operative definitions for this study have been elaborated. The chapter deliberates on Advertising, a persuasive venture, as a complex phenomenon, which is an intrinsic part of society, culture, history, and the economy — which defies any simple or single definition. Some aspects of it are universal, while others are culturally specific. It is personal salesmanship metamorphosed into mediated communication. Most academicians agree that while it sometimes provides new information, it often cajoles, and always attempts to persuade. In addition to selling messages, advertising encodes cultural values and social ideals. Further, depending on one's point of view, it is a positive or negative force in society and the economy.

The second chapter presents the principal issues pertaining to advertising itself. It serves as a foundation to help understand the principal guiding forces behind Advertising: economic, social, technological, political, and commercial. The chapter also creates a platform to understand the background, nature, and some of the dynamics of Television Advertising. Therefore, the chapter looks into the issues in contemporary advertising. To survive, maintain and sustain itself Advertising seeks to generate profits, which in turn requires attracting sizeable audiences. Mass media audiences fulfil this requirement of a sizeable audience. While niche and segmented audiences also consume mediated messages it is the negotiation of text by mass media audiences which remains the major source of income for most advertisers.

The third chapter, which reviews literature, is based on the theories and literature studies of Television Advertising and its Impact on Children, concerning the research purpose and the research question. It serves as a foundation to help understand the definition and clarify the issues governing commercial messages and their influence on the perception, attitude, and behaviour of children; thereby, how the Law perceives

the situation. The purpose is to create a common platform of understanding for the thesis.

The review of literature, both in the global and Indian context, provides conceptual clarity and focus, which helps define the parameters of this research. Further, it discusses the parents' perception of television advertising and its impact on their children. Selected television advertisements have been analysed to understand reality as portrayed by the advertiser to offset against the comprehension of television adverts by children. In the Indian context, it is noted that though many studies exist they are staggered and do not form a cohesive literature addressing the issues pertaining to television advertising and its impact on children.

Surveying the research on children and television, the researcher found that many different social and market agents having economic and political stakes in the issue are active in the policy debate. Proponents as well as opponents of television advertising aimed at children have initiated and financed studies, the results of which often seem to serve their respective interests. Therefore, studies follow one of the two principal paradigms: the empowered child, and the vulnerable child. However, the findings of most of the secondary literature reviewed point in one direction, namely, that the older the child, the more the child seems to be able to grasp the intent behind advertising, even when it is implicit. It all depends on the individual child's cognitive development. Further, it was found that there is a definite impact, both intended and unintended, of television advertising on children. In most western countries, the governments have or plan to have some sort of a regulatory body to protect children from being exploited by the persuasive powers of advertising, an all-pervasive form of media.

The fourth chapter is on Research and Methodology, gives an overview of the methods that this research employs. The Research Questions were framed, Hypotheses formed, Research Design developed, Data Sources identified, Sampling designed, Instruments prepared, and Results of the Pilot Study discussed keeping the findings of the previous chapter in mind. Furthermore, the kind of Analysis used as well as Credibility issues are also discussed in this chapter, which concludes with the

Limitation of this research. The research design is based on the premise that advertising affects its viewers in several ways such as the way advertising causes intended change, causes unintended change, causes minor change in terms of form or intensity, facilitates change either intended or un-intended, reinforces what exists in the larger social reality, and finally prevents change. An exhaustive questionnaire covering the demographical profile of the children & parents, media habits, attitude & perception, understanding of the intent, value emphasis, influence on behaviour, and the role played by the parents was prepared and tested through a pilot study. A sample size of 600 students was determined. Schools were identified and selected through a lottery method. Students (aged 8-14 years) were chosen from various classes such that all children were given an equal chance of representation. The questionnaire was administered in the urban areas of the National Capital Region of Delhi.

The collected data on the demographical profile of the children & parents, media habits, attitude & perception, understanding of the intent, value emphasis, influence on behaviour, and the role played by the parents is also analysed in this chapter. The analysis closely explores Social, Economic, and Political values through their significant attributes.

The empirical findings of the survey are presented in the fifth chapter. The chapter starts with a General Demographic description of urban children, followed by the children's media consumption habits, motives and attitudes with a focus on the research problems in this thesis. A brief summary completes the descriptive part of the demographics and media consumption habits of children surveyed for this research. The chapter concludes by observing that in an anxiety ridden and stress driven society, the TV screen and TV advertising in particular serves as a window of escape for people's own inadequacies and harried existence and what they want is something entertaining, a release mechanism, to drown their frustrations in the stressful reality of the world. This poses a danger since advertising instead of 'informing' & 'offering alternatives' seems to entice young viewers to see a make-believe world which has been essentially created out of their own assumptions.

The sixth chapter presents the findings of the survey regarding the Reality & Perception of Urban Children in the National Capital Region of Delhi. This chapter starts with a description of children's advertising consumption. It follows with children's perception of economic, social, and political values & sub-values through advertising on television. Further, the chapter presents the findings of this research relating to the impact of advertising on the attitude & behaviour of children vis-à-vis the nag factor; attempts to influence their parents' purchase decisions, as well as consumerism with a focus on the research problems in this thesis.

The research found that television mediated commercial messages offer entertainment, culture, information and education to Indian urban children. They play a vital role in children's lives by imparting information and visual rhetoric, which shapes the attitudes and behaviour of its audiences. A number of factors influence the way children respond to these television advertisements, which encourage an adherence to certain individual life styles. The overwhelming amount of advertising and its prevalence in mass media lead the researcher to argue that advertising leaves an indelible imprint on children's social, economic and political values.

The seventh chapter presents the findings of the survey relating to the Perception of the parents of urban children in the National Capital Region of Delhi. The chapter starts with advertising and the commercial socialization of children. It follows with the parents' perception of advertising and the impact of television on their children vis-à-vis the nag factor; attempts to influence parents' purchase decisions and consumerism with a focus on the research problems in this thesis. The chapter concludes with the efforts undertaken by the parents to make children more media literate.

The chapter concludes that while television advertisements do aid in terms of consumer socialisation, some of what they teach is not desirable for children to learn. The fundamental concern is that it encourages consumerism, precipitates parent child conflict, and reinforces a status quo in terms of the political ideologue of a capitalist-based established industrial order and encourages stereotypes. A lack of media

literacy imparted to children both at school and at the parent-child level is also compromising children under the influence of television advertising.

The penultimate Chapter presents the overall Findings and Recommendations of the research. It concludes with possible indications on further & future research in the field of Television Advertising and Children.

The final Chapter is the conclusion of the thesis that:

Advertisements on television do target Children. The research finds that paid advertising to children primarily involves television spots that feature toys and food products, while advertisers of products which are indirectly consumed by children also tend to address children in their commercial messages.

Respondents with various demographic variables (e.g. gender, age, and family type) are not homogeneous in their responses with reference to perception and attitudes towards television advertising. The research finds that marketing strategies make children, in the age group of 8 to 14 years vulnerable because they lack the cognitive skills to understand the persuasive intent of television advertisements. The younger the child, the more he or she reacts favourably to advertising. The research notes that children's comprehension of advertising messages is dependent on factors such as their ability and skill to make a distinction between commercial from non-commercial content.

Respondents with various demographic variables do not remain homogeneous with reference to perception and attitudes towards television advertising in terms of the significant attributes of Social values - Traditionalism, Modernism, Family, Personal Integrity, Aestheticism, and Morality. The research found that children perceive through television advertising certain messages which influence their social values and the sample population did not act homogeneous in their perception of these values from advertising on television. The research finds a trend that is indicative of the erosion of basic social tenets. This trend is more conspicuous among children from

extended/joint family households, Buddhist & Sikh faiths, the younger age group of 8-11 years, and boys. In short, the research finds a definite social impact of television advertising on children.

Respondents with various demographic variables also do not remain homogeneous with reference to their perception and attitudes towards television advertising in terms of the significant attributes of Political variables - Constitutionalism, Pluralism, Nationalism, Socialism, and Capitalism. The research finds that there is a definite political impact of television advertising on children, although the children do not behave as a homogeneous group since independent variables govern the way a child perceives these values. The research finds that it is also through advertising that children perceive political values. Further, the research finds that television advertising promotes capitalism over socialism as a way of life to children.

The research also found that respondents with various demographic variables are not homogeneous with reference to perception and attitudes towards television advertising in terms of the significant attributes of economic variables - Products, Utility, Economy, Productivity, and Consumerism. In line with the findings of Winick et al. (1973); Adler et al. (1977); Williams (1997); and Barbaro & Earp (2008), the research found advertising stimulates materialism and consumerism. Advertising on television has a negative impact on the well-being of children by way of the nag-factor, attempts to influence parent's purchase decision and parent-child conflict scenarios. This is in line with the findings of Galst & White(1976); Burr & Burr (1977); Goldberg & Gorn (1978); Kunkel D (2001); Chaplin & John (2007).

The research found that children exposed to television advertising exert influence on parents' purchase decisions. The research also reports that children, in metropolitan cities like New Delhi, do influence the buying patterns of their families. From vacation choices to car purchases to meal selections, they exert a sizeable power over the family consumption pattern.

Thus, to influence the younger generation is to influence the entire family's buying decisions. In fact, the research found that one of the negative impacts of television advertising is that children nag and act as a pressure group for parents when it comes to purchase decisions.

One of the findings revealed that rearing practices play a major role in influencing the way children perceive advertisements. The research shows that a majority of parents actively undertake consumer socialisation of children. Further, the majority of parents also fail to address the factors which give rise to unhappiness in the children, as well as materialism, and consumerism in their wards. Parents are the primary socialising agents since they have the responsibility of rearing their children and thus providing the first line of defence between children and other players in society. The values inculcated by parents in their children go a long way in shaping the perceptions and attitudes of children towards advertising on television.

The findings of the research also suggest that parents do not actively help their children (aged 8-14 years) to understand and negotiate the meaning and intent of advertising on television. Further, since the average parent's education level is low at secondary level or below, the quality of media literacy imparted by parents is suspect.

Government regulations can provide some protection for children from advertising and marketing practices. But, it is the parents' role to provide the first line of defence for children by providing media literacy and keeping a watch over their children's media usage habits. Younger children often do not understand the persuasive intent of advertisements, and even older children probably have difficulty understanding the intent of newer marketing techniques that blur the line between commercials and program content. There is relatively little government regulation to protect children from this highly commercialized environment. The study concludes that urban children in India live and grow up in a highly sophisticated marketing environment that influences their preferences and behaviours.

In effect, advertisements create; particularly in the present recessive economic scenario, an immediate experience of a virtual reality that has become at once central to the fantasy lives of young urban audiences. The fantasies are so powerful indeed, that the "theme" of these advertisements on television, has become celebrated almost beyond the glory of the ancient gods... consumerism, wealth, and individual success at any cost.

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