

IMPACTS OF FOOD PRODUCT ADVERTISEMENTS OF PAKISTAN TELEVISION ON THE EATING HABITS OF CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates children's viewing habits of Pakistan Television to find out the impacts of food-products advertising on children's health. Television is such an important socialization agent that it is present in children's lives. Many advertisements broadcast on television are the creations of brilliant minds that want to persuade them to purchase the advertised products. But parents like to provide good food to their children for their health. 40% parents agree that PTV's ads affected the health of their children. Results show that 23% children watch television up to 3 hours and 30% were watched television up to 4 hours a day. The results also show that thirty percent (30%) of children respondents watches PTV for more than four hours daily. The study evidences that majority of children respondents are influenced by the T.V advertisements and usually like to buy cold-drinks, some children responded like to buy chips and like products as well. These products increase fats on the body especially in children of age 8-12 years. Television also has negative impacts, it creates eye problems. It stops the children from going out and playing with friends. Its advertising makes them buy things even if they do not need. It can make them tired and unable to focus on their lessons.

INTRODUCTION

Television belongs to the family of audio-visual communication medium. It is able to transmit sounds and images carrying message of a varied nature and for a variety of purpose. It has strong influence on people, in the culture and on other media. It is a widely used telecommunication system for broadcasting and receiving moving pictures and sound over a distance from all around the world. The term may also be used to refer specifically to a television set, programming or television transmission. Television commercials have become one of the most effective, most persuasive, and most popular methods of selling products of many sorts.

Within Pakistani culture we need to look deeper at the role of television and advertisements, to assess why they hold such a valuable position. Pakistan Television is a permanent fixture in children's lives. The television set is as familiar to children as the faces of family members. Television set is always there, to entertain and to give company to children, especially when no one else in the mood to play, chat or interact with them. They are increasingly being exposed to different cultures, absorbing new ideas and impressions about other cultures.

Many television advertisements are catchy jingles or catch-phrases that generate sustained appeal, which may remain in the minds of television viewers long after the span of the advertising campaign. Nowadays advertising spread in our entire culture influences in society and our fundamental patterns of life. Advertising can be seen as one of the factors that contribute to shape people's life, their basic values, and attitudes. But actual picture is different, according to Edger "Advertising is the art of making whole lies out of half truth." 1

Advertising has been watched in many ways: on Television, Newspapers, Billboards, Walls, Video, Internet and in many other forms. The protection of children from harm is linked directly to the issue of what affects observed from viewing television. The criticisms regarding watching television of children are linked to what they watch and for how long. Television advertising on food causes parental concern; parents try to control the television viewing of their children. Parental control of television viewing is expected to lower the number of hours of a child, which leaves impacts on their health.

HISTORY OF ADVERTISING

Advertising is as old as civilization itself. The earliest beginnings of advertising, of course, are impossible to pinpoint, but there are several examples dating back thousands of years. In early days, signboards were placed above the doors of business establishments, and later, the town crier was an important advertising medium.

Advertising was a well established part of the social environment of early civilizations. However, until the advent of mass selling in the 19th century, advertising played only a minor role in the conducting of business. 1

OBJECTIVES

The study was conducted while keeping following objectives in mind:

- To investigate children's viewing habits of Pakistan Television
- To find out impacts of food-products advertising on children's health

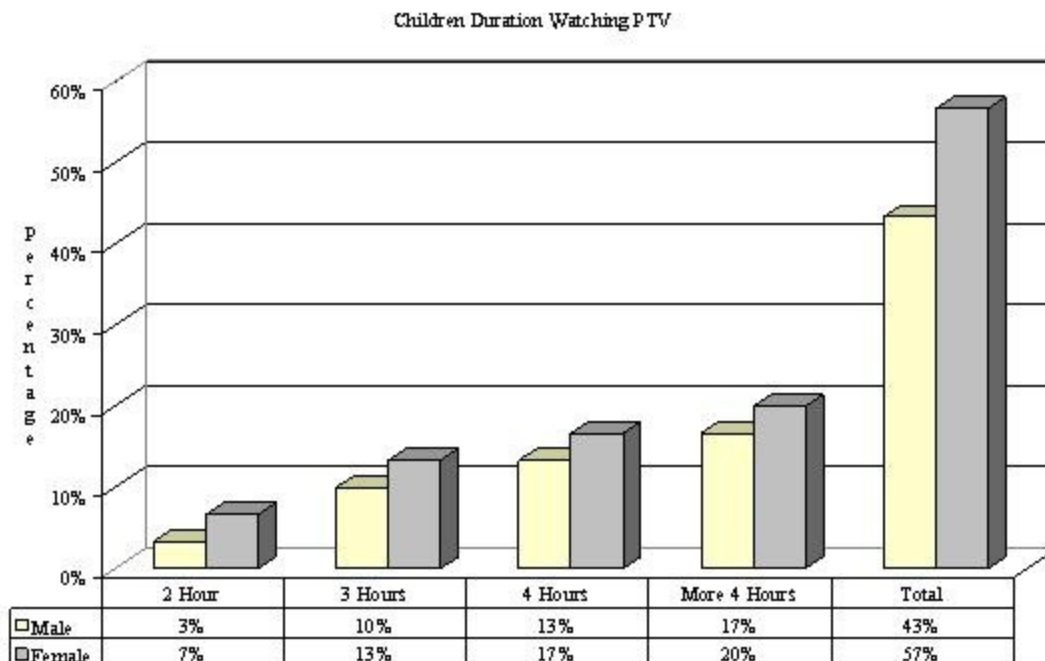
Television is an important socialisation agent; it is present in children's lives. Many advertisements broadcast on television are the creations of brilliant minds that want to persuade them to purchase the advertised products. Evidence are mounting that marketing to children is harmful. Nearly every aspect of children's lives has been adversely affected by recent trends of advertising. Research links advertising to increased obesity and eating disorders in children because they are vulnerable to persuasive messages. According to Media scholar Gorge “Television has become unavoidable and unremitting factor in shaping that what we are and what we will become.” 2

The children under the age of eight are unable to critically comprehend televised advertising messages and are prone to accept advertiser messages as truthful, accurate and unbiased. This can lead to unhealthy eating habits as evidenced by today's youth. This is a critical concern because the most common products marketed to children are cereals, candies, sweets, sodas and snack foods. Advertising of such unhealthy food products to young children contributes to poor nutritional habits that may last a lifetime and be a variable in the current epidemic of obesity among kids.

TELEVISION ADVERTISING

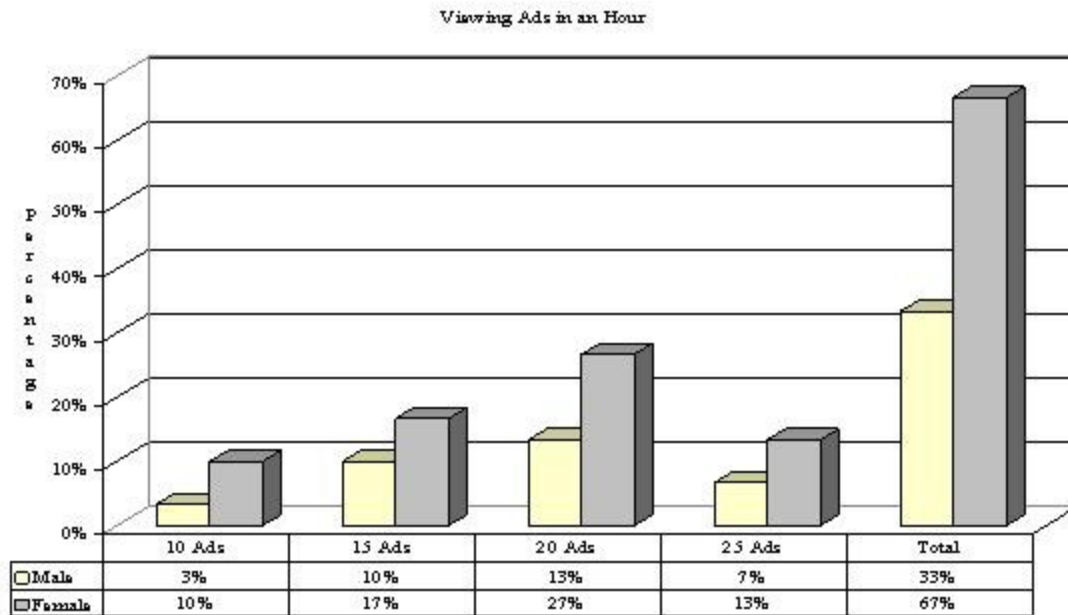
A consumer exposed hundreds commercial messages every day. They may appear in the form of billboards, newspapers, television commercials, etc. It is actually a very structured form of applied communication, employing both verbal and nonverbal elements that are composed to fill specific space and time formats determined by the sponsor. First and foremost, advertising is communication – a special kind of communication. Traditionally, advertising has been principally a one-way process, but with today's new interactive technology, consumers can give feedback to advertising messages in real time using the same channels as the sender. Most advertising is intended to be persuasive – to win converts to a product, service, or idea.

The issues surrounding advertising directed to children are related to certain commercial campaigns primarily targeting children. Cold-drink advertisements are commonly shown during sports events and seen by millions of children, creating brand familiarity and motivating children for buying.



The results of above graph show that, the majority (30%) of children respondents watches PTV for more than four hours daily.

They have been exposed more than 15 edible ads during one hour and when they watch television more than 4 hours a day that mean they was around 25-30 time one product's ad in one sitting as shows in below graph . Actually that is the problem area because watching television for long time i.e. more than five hours creates adverse effects on the health of children of 8-12 years old.



The impact of television advertising is the greatest among children. The children like television commercials more than elder group, and they are also more deeply influenced by the catchy appearance of advertiser on their lives.

Advertising aimed at children is based on three concerns, first, it is believed that advertising promote superficially and values founded in material goods and consumption. Second, children are considered inexperienced consumers and easy prey for the sophisticated persuasion of advertisers. Third, advertising influences children demand for everything from toy to snack food.

THE ROLE OF ADVERTISING

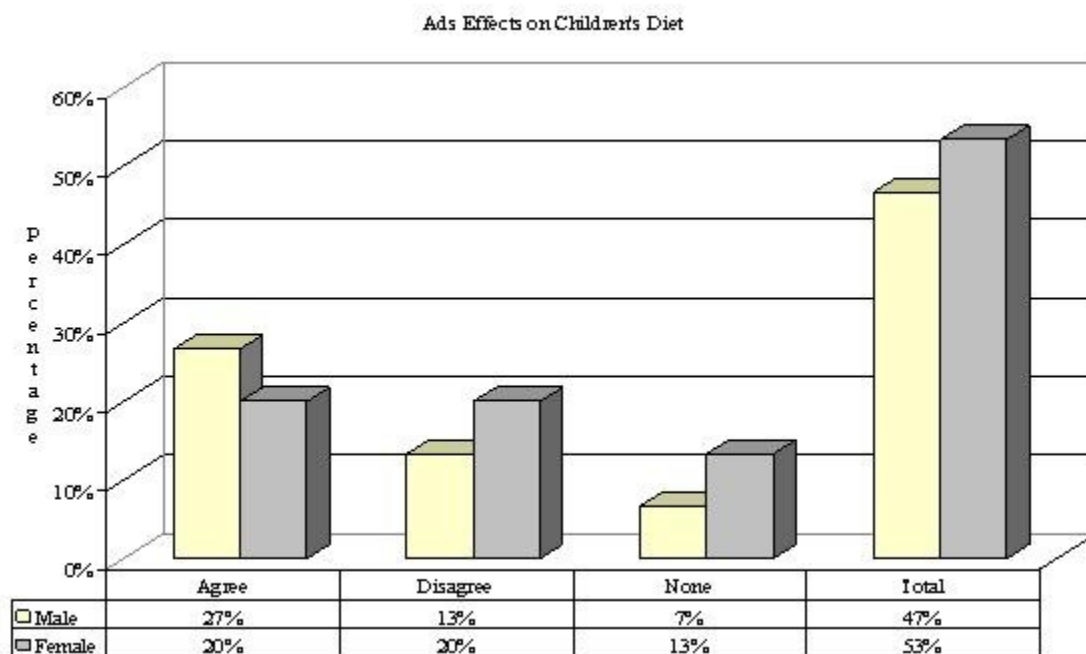
Advertising plays a vital role in the economic system of a country. It helps in selling ideas, goods, and services. Advertising both reflects and affects our lifestyles, and thus, plays a substantial social role. Advertising has become so close to our life, therefore, it serves multidimensional communication needs of society. Business firms, labour unions, government agencies, and political leaders are successfully employing advertising to inform and persuade people about their purpose.

Kapoor gives the four points of role of advertising: First, the country's gross national product is greater and the standard of living is higher. Advertising creates jobs with a greater variety of products, and increase the economy of country. Second, argument of Kapoor is that advertising plays a major role in informing the consumer so that more intelligent choices are made in the marketplace. Third, rationale for advertising is that the firm's cost of production per unit of output is lower because advertising increases demand for the firm's output, so, advertising leads to more efficient use of resources in the economy. Finally, she says that advertising leaves the impacts either positive or negative on the general masses as well as on children. These impacts are changed according to the culture and environment. 3

The above mentioned four points are whole picture of advertising that advertisers want to achieve. This same situation can be found in Pakistan . So, no one can able to explore all the aspects of advertising at this level because so many hurdles are there, such as lack of resources, shortage of time etc.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Every parent consciously and keenly observes the health of their children in all society. But parents are more attached with their children in Pakistani society because children are their future and they will help in finances when parents will retire. All parents like to provide good food to their children for their health. Both parents are working because they want to improve their living standard. 4



As evident from the above graph that 40% parents agree that PTV's ads affected the health of their children and they are worried about the situation. They felt that television authorities must revise the policy of advertising. Some times parents over looks children's activities i.e. what and when they eat? When and how they watch television? Why they become obese and idle?

Actually the researcher explores the answer of all these questions because these questions are mainly related with the study.

Health experts have linked excessive watching television to obesity - a significant health problem today. While watching television, children are inactive to buy such products. They are also bombarded with advertising messages that encourage them to buy and eat unhealthy foods such as potato chips, burgers, pastries etc. and empty-calorie soft drinks that often become preferred snack foods. Indirectly advertising leave too much affect on children's health. Even if children are watching 4 hours of quality educational programs on television in a day, that means they are not exercising, reading, socializing, or spending time outside. But some studies have

shown that decreasing the amount of television watching by children led to less weight gain and lower body mass index increase, and make them idle that is not better for their health. 5

Obesity increases the risk of developing disease. According to the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, almost 70 percent of heart disease cases in the United States are linked to excess body fat, and obese people are more than twice as likely to develop hypertension. The risk of medical complications, particularly heart disease, increases when body fat is distributed around the waist, especially in the abdomen. This type of upper body fat distribution is more common in men than in women.

CAUSES OF OBESITY

Obesity, medical condition characterized by storage of excess body fat. The human body naturally stores fat tissue under the skin and around organs and joints. Fat is critical for good health because it is a source of energy when the body lacks the energy necessary to sustain life processes, and it provides insulation and protection for internal organs. But the accumulation of too much fat in the body is associated with a variety of health problems. Studies show that individuals who are overweight or obese run a greater risk of developing diabetes mellitus, hypertension, coronary heart disease, stroke, arthritis, and some forms of cancer. 6

The causes of obesity are complex and include some factors. Basically, obesity occurs when a person eats more calories than the body burns up. The children have an 80 percent chance of being obese if their parents are obese. Obesity in childhood and adolescence can be related to:

- Poor eating habits
- Overeating habits
- Unnecessary use of Cold drinks
- Eating Non-nutrition food
- Eating out-side the home

IMPACTS OF ADVERTISING

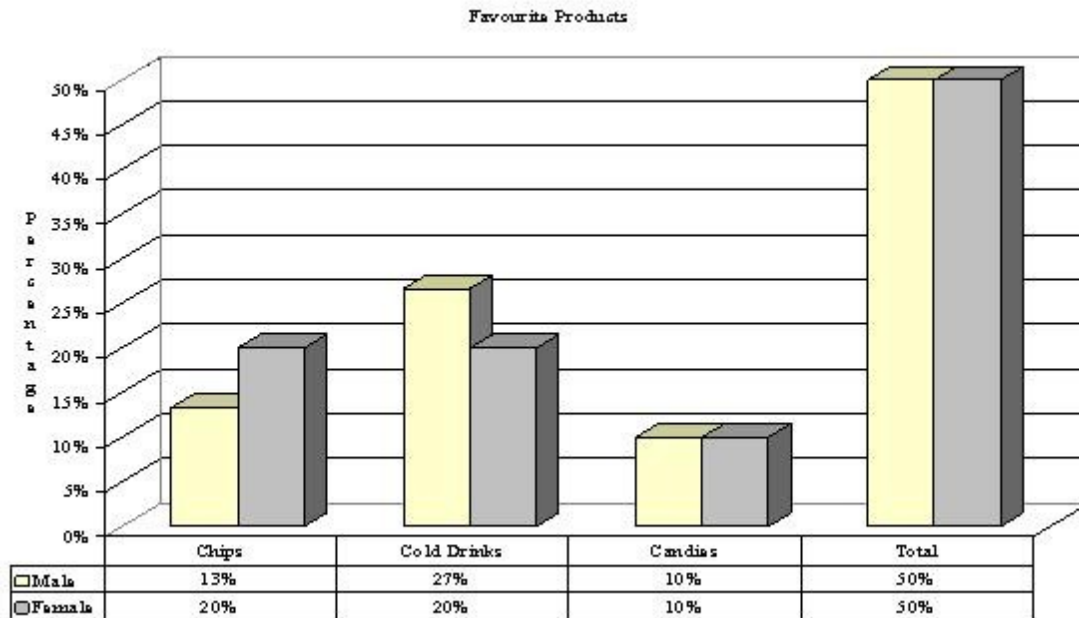
Modern life style has frozen the family size in the Pakistani society. Nuclear family has taken place of the joint family. Lifestyle trends in urban Pakistan (rising incomes, longer working hours, more working mothers, and time-poor/cash-rich parents) tend to support their families, which lead the child to watching television and increased consumption of unnecessary food.

Furthermore, the advertising industry makes junk food seem irresistible.

Unfortunately, children are not given proper guidance as to what they should do. The media is not playing its proper role in the promotion of children's rights and the difficulties they have to face in the society. Even the authorities of Pakistan Television ignored this side and they can not design programs according to children's requirements.

IMPACTS ON CHILDREN'S HEALTH

James suggests that “Childhood obesity arises from foods that are high in fat and low in fibre. When children eat that food, the insulin not only increases the effects of the pleasure-chemical dopamine (making the child want to eat more of the same food) but also reduces the effects of the hormone leptons, making the child want to eat more and be less active”. 7

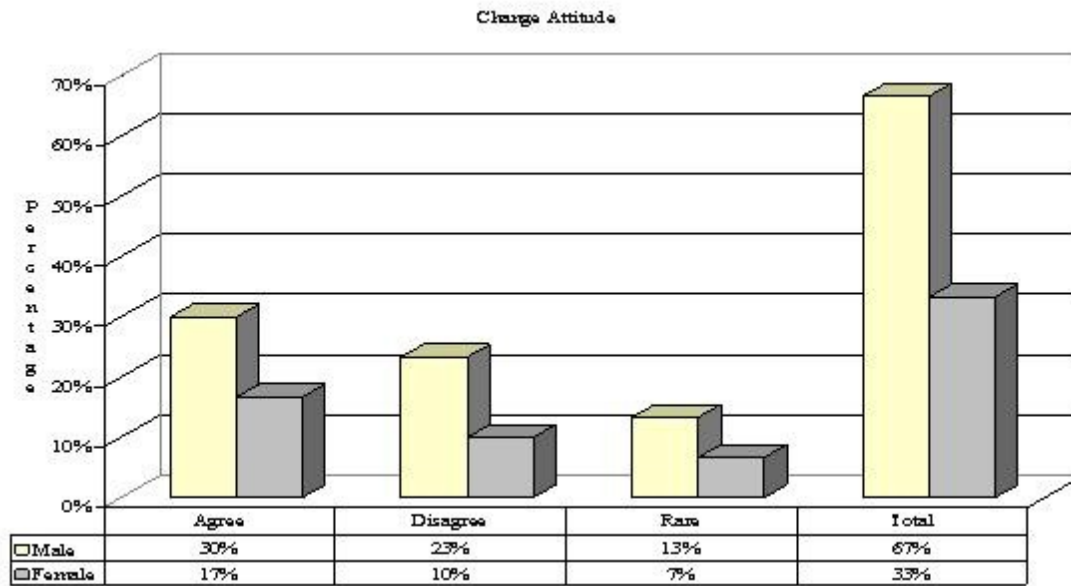


As evident of the above graph that majority of children respondents usually liked to buy cold-drinks but some children responded that they also liked to buy chips type products as well. These products increase fats on the body especially in children because the age 8-12 years is the grooming age and they need proper diet for their health. Television also has negative impacts, it creates eye problems. It stops the children from going out and playing with friends. Its advertising makes them buy things even if they do not need. It can make them tired and unable to focus on their lessons.

LEAVE UNHEALTHY HABITS

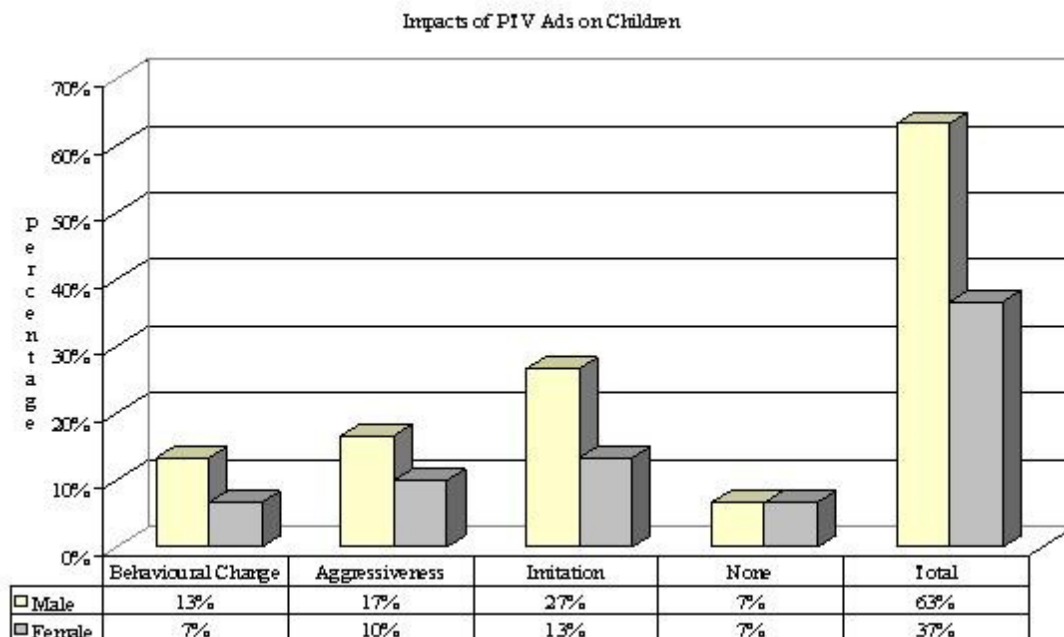
Gerbner said that the many media experts in Western countries who continue to be deeply anxious about the commercial context of television programming. They argue that television advertising leave impacts on society, particularly on the health of children, and television advertising is not going on air without reason. 8

The impact of television on children has received much attention. Research suggests that children see television advertising as just another form of programming and react uncritically to its messages, which makes them especially vulnerable to advertising. There is also concern about the way in which children respond to advertising.



According to the respondents of parents which show in above graph that children attitude was changed if they did not buy or allow them to buy such edibles. They behave aggressively with their elders or parents.

Research indicates that many children are unduly influenced by this standard of health, become dissatisfied with their own bodies, and may develop eating disorders in pursuit of a thin figure. Children get influenced by PTV advertisements so these ads leave negative affect on their life; which change their behaviour toward sibling according the below graph.



Parents also agreed that their children tried to imitate and behave aggressively when they saw ads, because advertiser showed super human actions.

FINDINGS

In Pakistan almost all the children have been watching television regularly. The information about children's spending time on viewing television was to estimate their exposure to the variety of advertisements. Variation of advertising's influence has been observed differently in one child to another, and from day to day for the same child. Nevertheless, some general influences of advertising on children's health were observed.

All the children have been watching television daily. 23% children saw television for up to 3 hours and 30% were watched television up to 4 hours a day. Thus, they were found heavy and regular viewers. Most of the children spend quite a lot of time sitting in front of television screen watching various programmes.

Thus, children of 8 to 10 years old were found to be more attracted towards television ads and they watched them with great interest but with the increase in their age, children's preferences shifted towards television programmes.

Most of the children in all age groups watched the television ads with greater interest. That means many audio-visual techniques in television advertising were simply aimed at gaining, and holding children's attention, which impressed them to purchase various products. Thus, television advertisements could really make a tremendous impact on children. The researcher found the following aspects:

- Children of 8-12 years old were watched PTV regularly, most of the children liked to watch at evening and their watching span was 4-5 hours daily.
- Children liked to watch PTV's children shows, quiz programmes but their parents allowed them to watch PTV for getting information and entertainment as well.
- Majority of the children usually liked to buy cold-drinks but some children liked to buy chips type products as well. The researcher find out that these products increase fats on children's body because the age 8-12 years is the grooming age and they need proper and nutritionist diet for their health.
- Children's attitude was changed if they did not buy or allow them to buy such edibles. They behaved aggressively with their elders or parents.
- The children tried to imitate when they saw ads, but they shows aggressiveness during/after watching ads toward siblings.
- Parents always bought readymade food on their children's demand because they were well earned. They fulfilled all demands of their children whatever they demanded for eating. This eating habit created eating-disorder in the children of 8-12 years old.

- PTV ads effected children's diet and increased eating disorder.
- Pakistan Television's ads increased eating disorder and decreased health of children of 8-12 years old.

The data of this research study proves that fats increased in the body of people especially in children, if they regularly drink these products. Increases fat in the body is not good sign because fat creates obesity and hear-diseases. Children are over weight according to their age and height because they are regularly use these cold drinks and eating fried meats outside the home with their parents or elders.

Children think that if we eat and drink more than other we have good muscles but their stomachs are not digesting the such food properly, so eating disorder increased and after a couple of months their weight is decreasing. That is only for their eating disorder. They seen that the performer of powder-milk ads is healthier because s/he drink that milk after that they trying to buy and drink that power-milk but they do not know the actual picture.

ECOMMENDATIONS

After concluding the results of the data the researcher give the following recommendations:

- Policymakers need to take steps to better protection of children from exposure of PTV advertising because of the inherent unfairness of advertising to audiences who lack the capability to evaluate wrong information in television advertising.
- Parents should attempt to restrict their children's watching time.
- Teachers and parents can help children to decide what they should watch on Pakistan Television.
- Parents should keep an eye on any other negative effects of children's health, eating-disorder and problems their eye sight.
- Children should be encouraged both in their schools and at home to discuss television advertising.
- Parents/Teachers should help children to look for programmes which relevant for their health and has some positive impacts on their health of Pakistan Television.

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