

Children in advertisements

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The ever expanding markets for goods and their unchallenged assault through advertisements are flooding the society with information and ideas, attitudes and imagery which is difficult to control and assimilate. This is affecting the young minds to a great extent especially when entertainment is interspersed with commercial messages. Adults may be able to develop a rational resistance to this onslaught, but children may not. The children of non-TV age did not take advertisements seriously. They heard commercials on radio, read advertisements in comic books, children's magazines and outdoor posters.

On the whole, adults as well as children cared little for advertisements. Television changed people's perception of advertisements. For the TV advertiser, children are a very attractive target group to be cultivated. They become a pressure group on parents and parents often succumb to children's demands. Sometimes it takes a form of emotional blackmail. They are not buyers. According to Wadwalkar (1990), "children are parasite consumers." But, children are potential buyers. They will grow up watching certain brands and kinds of products on television.

Long repetitive exposure causes familiarity. In masscommunication, familiarity is rightly considered a prerequisite for persuasion and control, and repetition a principle of persuasion. TV advertising for children is an investment for the future too. When they turn into buyers they are already oriented towards buying certain brands and kinds of products. Wadwalkar says, that by taking messages to children, the TV advertiser, at one stroke, has widened the decision making base in the family. No more could adults entirely dictate the purchase of all the different kinds and brands of products.

Children cannot be kept entirely out of such decision making. This concerns not so much the quantum of planned purchase, but the occasional, repeat and impulsive purchases. Children are fascinated by TV advertisements. They react to these glamorous, fast paced visuals on TV with their exciting music and their determined sales pitch. TV advertising has entered into daily life- of children. It colors their conversation and play as they speak to one another using slogans, jingles etc. of advertisements.

Almost every advertisement that appears on TV contributes to their vocabulary. Advertisements, being short are ideally suited to the concentration, of even young children. TV advertisements get repeated with such regularity that children learn them. They are in this respect perfectly tied to early learning process. Advertisements put together a series of rapidly changing exciting, visuals to highlight a product. They may not be able to grasp the full meaning of the scene but the focus on the product leaves enough impact on them.

In an article on 'Children and Advertising, Dr. Yadava, Director, IIMC (1989) described how advertising influences behavioural patterns: " Television advertising familiarises the young ones with the world outside and helps them to pick up its mode of expression, its mannerisms and ways of facing it when they grow up. Stimulated feelings of needs and desire tend to occur in the form of powerful imperatives. The intensity with which children experience desire and their inability to assign priorities and accept delays in satisfying them is the common experience of most parents.

When these urges remain unfulfilled, such children may grow up with lots of resentment against their parents and the existing social set up. Advertising

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aimed at children in India is not quite so precise yet, but it's getting there. According to Nabankar Gupta the director of sales and marketing, Videocon, " The under 16 age group is extremely important for the consumer durable business as they are major influencers in deciding on the product as well as the brand. " Children of this age group are more knowledgeable about product benefits than the parents. Some of our most successful commercials for washing machines and air coolers use this age group as models to create a direct relationship with the viewer. Doordarshan's code states that any advertisement that endangers the safety of children or creates in them an interest in unhealthy practices shall not be shown. Code No. 23 also provides that no advertisement shall be accepted which leads children to believe that if they do not use or own the product advertised they will be inferior in some way to other children or are likely to be ridiculed for not using it.

Despite this, far too many children have begun to associate happiness with acquisition, the one sure sign that consumerism has hit the Indian mind set. As pointed out by Unnikrishan and Bajpai, " In India, advertising on TV is, today, creating a set of images especially for the Indian child, alongside a host of other dominant images for the rest of its audience. Once internalized, together these become a text of personal success and levels of achievement". Further, they add that, this presentation does not sensitize children to their own or other people's realities.

The affluent child might feel convinced that only his or her class of Indians really counts. On the other hand, the child from a poor family class may be forced to acknowledge that the life styles of the affluent class are the only legitimate ones. Increasing westernization (reflected in Indian advertising's

choice of style, music and visual message) characterizes the best of television commercials, while a predominantly upper class bias dominates and sets the tone for cultural images swiftly becoming popular and being internalized despite being alien to the majority.

Children in every strata of the society are walking around with images of beautiful homes, gadgets that make life comfortable, fun foods and fancy clothes in their minds. The less advantaged children who are being urged to conform to the ways of a society and to a value system they can hardly comprehend. They are frightened and frustrated not having the resources to keep up with the demands of the new emerging order. For child viewer, TV advertising holds three types of appeal. 1.

Advertisements that appeal directly to the child. It corresponds to the role of children as consumers to whom a certain set of commodities of direct relevance (toys, confectioneries etc.) appeal. 2. The second group corresponds to the role of the child as a future consumer. This group includes advertisements for all products that are not of immediate relevance to the child including as cars, refrigerators, tyres, cooking, paints etc. 3. The last group corresponds to the role of the child as actor, participant and salesperson.

In this group are all the advertisements that feature children. A study by Unnikrishan and Bajpai (1994), on the " impact of television advertising on children" drew the following conclusions. i. TV messages have different meanings for children from different social segments. ii. Children in India, are being exposed to what might be termed an unreal reality. Television (barring

what might appeal on regional networks) often depicts a 'reality' which fails to mirror Indian society or life for what it is. iii.

All children, irrespective of their economic or social status, are influenced by what they see and hear on TV, although the meanings and messages are understood and absorbed differently by children as they bring into their negotiation of TV information, their own experiences. iv. On the average, children in Delhi watch 17 hours of TV every week (which means that at least 50 percents of them watch significantly more than this average figure) children spend more time in front of the small screen than on hobbies and other activities, including home work and meals. . The average 8 year old spends about 68 hours every month, 30 days (of 24 hours each) every year, and one entire year out of 10 exclusively on watching television. vi. Advertising especially when it targets the child, powerfully promotes a consumercultureand the values associated with it. vii. Seventy five percent of children said they loved watching advertisements on TV. When asked whether they liked them better than the programmes themselves, 63. 90 percent of the 5-8 age group said yes, while 43-54 percent of the 8-12 age group and 36. 0 percent of the 13-15 age group said yes. viii. Children below eight see advertisements only as pictures with story lives. Only older children understand the advertisements intention to well. ix. Sixty five percent of children in the 8 to 15 years of age group felt they needed the products they saw on TV. Bhatia (1997) studied the influence of TV advertisements on adolescents of Baroda city . She found moderate impact of TV advertisements on their physical, social, emotional and cognitive development as well as on relationship with their parents.

Adolescents were highly influenced by TV advertisements in adopting the ways of expressing one's self. They developed liking for a well decorated home by viewing TV advertisements. They enjoyed seeing their favourite models and sportsman in the advertisements and they expressed that they wanted to become like them. Their general knowledge also increased and they developed ability to differentiate between the different brands of the same product. Some of them understood the motive behind the TV advertisement. Studies on advertising and children by various researchers have highlighted the following findings. 1.

Children of all the age group and majority of home makers and male heads watch television in all the peak hour transmission, thus having maximum exposure of advertisements. 2. Many items liked by children were introduced in Indian families through TV advertisements. Most of the products advertised on TV were being purchased by the respondents even when they considered many of these commodities unnecessary. 3. TV advertisements made the selected brands of food products popular with children of all income groups. 4. Children started speaking to one another on a 'lingo' dotted with words, phrases and expressions from TV advertisements.

Thus, of all the age groups, advertising especially of television has profound impact on children. The impact of advertising does not function in isolation but it is dependent upon a host of other factors like the nature of advertisement viewing behaviour, socio-economic status, consumer habits and tastes of individuals and their families and the degree and direction of their perceptions. The future of Indian advertising is bright if it takes up it's

socialresponsibilityand conducts itself in such a way that it is seen as an important part of the economicdevelopment of the country.