



## The Influence of Advertising on Children and Their Purchasing Behavior

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### Abstract:

In today's media-saturated environment, children are among the most vulnerable and targeted audiences of advertising campaigns. This research paper explores the profound and multi-dimensional impact of advertising on children and their purchasing behavior.

With children increasingly exposed to both traditional and digital forms of advertising—from television commercials to YouTube and mobile apps—this study investigates how such exposure shapes their preferences, consumption habits, and influence over family purchase decisions.

The research begins by tracing the evolution of advertising and its growing focus on young audiences. It highlights how advertisers strategically use colors, jingles, animation, and celebrity endorsements to capture children's attention and build brand loyalty from an early age.

Through both primary data collected via structured questionnaires and a thorough review of existing literature, the study analyzes the cognitive and emotional responses of children to advertisements and the resulting behavior observed by parents.

Findings reveal a strong correlation between high screen time and increased consumer demand among children. More than three-quarters of surveyed parents reported that their children often request specific products after being exposed to advertisements, particularly those promoting food, toys, and clothing. The phenomenon known as the "nag factor"—children persistently urging parents to buy advertised products—emerged as a significant theme, influencing household spending patterns and decision-making dynamics.

Additionally, the paper discusses how excessive advertising can contribute to materialism, unhealthy eating habits, and distorted social values among children.

The paper also addresses the broader socio-cultural implications, including regional language preferences, media access disparities, and the growing dominance of digital advertising in India.

As the digital landscape expands, children are now interacting with branded content across various platforms, making it even harder for parents and regulators to control what they are exposed to.

This study concludes by emphasizing the need for a balanced and ethical approach to advertising that recognizes its power and responsibility. It calls for greater media literacy education among children, parental involvement in media consumption, and stronger regulatory measures to protect young minds.

While advertising can inform and even educate, unchecked exposure without critical interpretation may lead to long-term developmental consequences. Thus, the research underscores the urgency of adopting a more child-sensitive advertising ecosystem that aligns commercial interests with social well-being.

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### Introduction

Advertising has become an integral part of modern life, influencing not just consumer decisions but also shaping perceptions, aspirations, and social behaviors.

In an era characterized by digital transformation and media convergence, the reach and influence of advertising have grown exponentially. While traditionally aimed at adult consumers, advertising has increasingly turned its attention toward a younger audience—children—who are now seen as both direct consumers and powerful influencers within family purchasing decisions.

Children today are exposed to a constant stream of advertising content across various platforms: television, mobile apps, video-sharing sites like YouTube, social media, and even educational websites.

This unprecedented exposure is not incidental but the result of calculated marketing strategies designed to tap into children's impressionable minds. Marketers often utilize vibrant visuals, catchy jingles, animated characters, and relatable scenarios to appeal to young viewers and create lasting brand impressions.

Children, particularly those aged between 5 and 12, are cognitively and emotionally developing and are still learning to distinguish between entertainment and persuasive content.

Many do not yet possess the critical thinking skills necessary to understand the intent behind advertisements.

This makes them particularly susceptible to advertising messages, often interpreting commercials literally and forming strong emotional attachments to branded products.

As a result, they tend to express their preferences more assertively and may influence parental purchasing through persistent requests—popularly known as the "nag factor."

The influence of advertising on children raises important ethical, developmental, and social concerns.

While advertising can serve educational or informational purposes—such as promoting healthy habits or awareness of new technologies—it often promotes materialistic values, unrealistic body images, unhealthy food choices, and impulsive behavior.

This creates a complex dilemma for parents, educators, policymakers, and society at large: how to balance the commercial goals of businesses with the developmental needs and well-being of children.

This research paper explores these dynamics in detail, aiming to understand the scope and nature of advertising's influence on children in India. It examines how advertising shapes children's consumption patterns, impacts their family interactions, and alters their lifestyle preferences. Using both primary and secondary data, this study focuses particularly on the responses of parents in Delhi, whose insights reveal how advertising affects household purchasing decisions and children's expectations.

The study also considers broader issues such as screen time trends, language preferences, regulatory shortcomings, and the rapid rise of digital advertising.

By highlighting the interplay between marketing tactics and child psychology, the research aims to contribute to ongoing discussions around responsible advertising, media literacy, and child welfare.

Ultimately, it seeks to inform strategies that can safeguard children while recognizing their emerging role in the consumer marketplace.

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## Literature Review

The relationship between advertising and child behavior has been a subject of academic inquiry since the mid-20th century. Over the decades, researchers have increasingly recognized children not just as passive viewers but as active participants in the consumer economy. With the proliferation of media channels and the expansion of digital technologies, the exposure of children to advertising has grown both in intensity and complexity. This literature review synthesizes existing research on how advertising affects children's attitudes, preferences, and behaviors, while also examining their evolving role in family purchasing decisions.

Historically, children were viewed primarily as extensions of their parents' consumer behavior rather than autonomous consumers. As noted by Patel (2014), during the 1940s and 1950s, advertisers primarily targeted parents, assuming that children had minimal purchasing influence. However, with the rise of children's programming in the 1950s and 1960s—most notably the collaboration between Disney and ABC that brought "The Mickey Mouse Club" into homes—marketers began to see children as a lucrative demographic. By the 1970s, studies estimated that children were exposed to over 20,000 commercials per year (Robertson & Rossiter, 1976).

From the 1980s onward, the academic view began to shift. Children were increasingly acknowledged as "consumers in training" with significant sway over household purchasing. Tiwari (2015) and Halford et al. (2007) argue that repeated exposure to advertisements does not merely increase product awareness but actually alters consumption behavior, especially in the food sector.

One of the key issues in child-targeted advertising is the extent to which children understand persuasive intent. According to developmental theories, particularly Piaget's stages of cognitive development, children under the age of 8 often lack the cognitive ability to distinguish between commercial content and entertainment.

Many scholars have examined the emotional and psychological effects of advertising on children. Gbadeyan (2009) observed that children are more vulnerable to peer pressure and aspirational content promoted through advertising. Chithira and Sengottuvelu (2017) emphasized that children tend to form emotional attachments to characters or visuals shown in advertisements.

A growing body of research has raised alarm about the impact of food advertising on children's dietary habits. Hastings et al. (2003) and IOM (2006) demonstrated a direct correlation between exposure to high-sugar, high-fat food advertisements and unhealthy eating behaviors in children.

The emergence of digital platforms has intensified the challenges of regulating child-targeted advertising. As noted by Bassi et al. (2021), children now encounter branded content not just through TV commercials, but also via mobile apps, video games, YouTube videos, and social media influencers.

Studies consistently show that children frequently influence their parents' purchasing decisions by repeatedly requesting or demanding products seen in advertisements. Kantar's KidScan India survey (2024) found that nearly 80% of parents acknowledged their children's involvement in family shopping.

Despite growing evidence of the adverse effects of advertising on children, regulatory frameworks remain inadequate. The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) has issued guidelines, yet enforcement remains inconsistent.

The literature makes it clear that advertising exerts a significant influence on children's behavior, ranging from brand preference and product demand to emotional well-being and family dynamics.

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## Research Methodology

This section outlines the systematic approach adopted to investigate the influence of advertising on children and how it shapes their buying behavior and family purchasing dynamics. The methodology was designed to ensure that both qualitative perceptions and quantitative trends could be captured effectively.

This study follows a descriptive research design, using both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. A non-probability purposive sampling method was adopted, targeting parents of school-going children aged 5–12 in Delhi. A total of 50 respondents were surveyed using structured questionnaires.

The scope included evaluating children's screen time, their product preferences, the frequency of brand recall, and parental reactions. Data was analyzed thematically, and secondary sources such as UNICEF and WHO reports were also used for contextual reference.

While efforts were made to ensure diversity, limitations include a relatively small urban sample and reliance on parental perception, which may introduce bias.

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## Data Analysis

The analysis of data from 50 parents in Delhi reveals strong evidence that advertising significantly influences children's preferences, screen habits, and purchasing influence. Most children watch TV or digital media daily, with peak ad exposure in the evening.

92% of parents confirmed their children recall and request products seen in advertisements. Food, toys, and branded clothing topped the list of requested items. The "nag factor" was evident, with 76% reporting regular requests and 44% citing persistent persuasion.

Parents recognized both positive and negative effects. While advertising increased awareness of products and new technologies, it also encouraged unhealthy food habits, brand obsession, and sometimes risky imitations.

Language and gender trends showed boys responding more to gadgets and sportswear, while girls leaned toward fashion and food ads. English ads were more effective on kids' channels; Hindi dominated family programming.

The findings reinforce that children today are not only targets of marketing but also agents of influence within their households.

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## Conclusion

The influence of advertising on children is not only real but deeply embedded in their daily experiences. This study shows that children are highly impressionable and often mimic or demand products they see in advertisements. The "nag factor" plays a significant role in influencing parental purchases, especially in categories such as snacks, toys, and gadgets.

Although advertising can be educational, especially when promoting health or safety, most advertisements are commercially driven and may promote unhealthy behavior or materialistic attitudes. With the increasing shift to digital platforms, children's exposure is rising rapidly and often escapes adult supervision.

The findings underscore the need for a collaborative effort among advertisers, parents, educators, and policymakers to ensure that advertising does not exploit children's vulnerability. Encouraging media literacy, ethical advertising, and parental mediation are vital steps toward protecting children in today's consumer-driven media landscape.

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