



CHILDREN ADVERTISING LITERACY AND DIFFERENT VIEWPOINTS

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ABSTRACT

Advertisements in the modern age of internet media are increasingly interspersed with both educational and entertaining material (e.g., on a website, in an online game, etc.). In light of this, it is more difficult to notice and interpret these commercials, especially for younger and less skilled customers. Children, in contrast to adults, are more susceptible to advertising because they are less likely to recognize the commercial’s motivation behind such communications. Since children have a far less informed understanding of the real objective of advertising (like: persuading and selling), it has been argued that children are more susceptible to "unfair" influence from it than adults. In recent decades, this area (children susceptibility towards advertising) has prompted increased public and governmental concerns and heated discussions. Brian Young (1990), in his seminal review, proposed a research agenda pertaining to some important issues on children and advertising, such as whether or not children can comprehend advertising, how and when they acquire advertising-related knowledge, and how educational programmed can improve children's understanding of advertising. Consequently, he laid the ground for research into what has been termed "advertising literacy." This article will focus on the different viewpoints of researchers about advertising literacy and traditional vs. non-traditional form of advertising. At the very end new challenges in the field of advertisements and potential next steps were discussed.

KEYWORDS: *Children advertising literacy, Traditional advertising, non-traditional advertising, laws for children advertising*

CHILDREN AS A TARGET GROUP IN INDIA

Marketers worldwide as well as in India are now targeting children as their products’ target market. Change in the target demographic has risen since TV has taken over prime room the households. The ultimate aim of a company is to build a consumer, and in simplest form it can say - a Consumer is someone whom the entire business activities revolve. These new consumers are innocent and sophisticated too, but they are alert, tech savvy and aware about their options available to

them. They are fully aware of what their parents should buy for them and what they would purchase for themselves. Their parents saw them as the representatives of the modern paradigm and technology. This is due to TV exposure of children, according to BARC statistics, children (2-14 years old) as an audience account for 20 per cent of total TV viewership. As shown by the below table (% Share of impression);

Table 1.2: Different Age Groups Audience

	Age Group	Share of Universe
Kids	2-14 years	20%
Youth /millennials	15-21 years	17%
	22-30 years	16%
Adults	31-40 years	17%
	41-50 years	15%
Mature	51-60 years	9%
Seniors	61+ years	7%

Source: BARC India, BMW data; Period- Wk08-Wk52, 2017, TG: 15-30 years, Market: All India, Channels considered: ALL

And such active viewership is not only restricted to kids’ channel. Children also share screen on non-kids’ channels with their family members.

TV ads effect on children purchase behaviour which impinged upon their consumer related behaviour in the form of pestering

their parents. However, Cantor et Al (2001) found that there were wide range of commercials that targeted a specific child audience and taught them to become less dependent on their parents to learn consumer values.

Children constitute a major audience for advertisers because today, they have their own purchasing power and affect the



buying decision of their parents (Ward et al. 1972). Also, they're the adult consumers of the future. When a child "caught into their nest," marketers realize that the sooner they may begin to build their future loyal client and brand loyalty at a young age, the greater their chances of making relentless sales later on. (Šramová B. 2015). This is an economically cheaper way to create an early childhood customer base rather than to make strategies and plans for adults and seniors' customers.

CHILDREN ADVERTISING LITERACY AND DIFFERENT VIEWPOINTS

The growing reach of advertisers and absence of some statutory bodies to regulate the advertising and its adverse effects, it becomes necessary to make children advertising literate. Children advertising research heavily depends on the frameworks established by developmental psychologists. It would be advantageous if there were a single, widely accepted developmental psychology paradigm that could offer a straightforward answer to concerns about children's advertising abilities. As of now, there is no such framework. Almost all the researches in the field of children advertising and its effect, have been influenced by "Piaget's theory of cognitive development (1932), theory of information processing (Rodder, 1981), theory of mind or "belief-desire psychology" (Wellman, 1990), and the most current is the theory of mind paradigm (Moses & Baldwin, 2005)". These theories identify three developmental stages of child: early childhood (from birth to five years), middle childhood (from six to nine years), and late childhood (10 to 12 years old). Each stage enhanced the child's social-cognitive and information-processing skills, which aided in the development of advertising literacy components (Buijzen, 2010).

Advertising literacy was defined by various research practitioners as: consumers' awareness of the range of different types of advertisements, their ability to articulate various production methods, sensitivity to the advertising message, and familiarity with the jargon of the industry (O'Donohoe, 1995). Further Ritson and Elliott (1995) An advertising literate customer is described as someone who can understand the advertising material, co-create, and consider the numerous potential interpretations of a particular commercial. Advertising literacy, on the other hand, is usually described as the conceptual understanding of advertising in the context of children. After went through the child literature seven advertising literacy components identified; 1). Ad recognition- able to make a fair difference between advertising and other programs; (2) Advertising source awareness- a fundamental knowledge of who finances for advertising; (3) comprehension of intended audience- comprehension of focused and segmented audience; (4) understanding selling intent of advertiser-that advertiser try to sell out their product; (5) comprehending persuasive intent- comprehending the advertiser's effort to manipulate the customer by altering their state of mind, attitude, and understanding about the commercial and goods; (6) knowledge of the marketer's persuasive tactics- knowing that the advertiser utilized specific methods to increase their desire for the specific goods; (7)

Recognizing advertising bias—being aware of the discrepancy between advertised and real goods (Rozendaal, 2011). The further perspective is offered by Rozendaal et al (2011), by adding two more dimensions in their study, as named of, *attitudinal advertising literacy* and *advertising literacy performance*. Bartholomew and Donohue (2003) proposed three roles for children's advertising literacy: ad master (when they understand the intent and meaning of an advertisement), ad controller (when they demonstrate control over an advertisement by beginning to avoid certain advertisements), and ad critics (When critically evaluate the advertisements).

Wright, Friestad, and Boush (2005) highlighted the need of focusing on how these aspects of children's advertising literacy differ from adult-like advertising knowledge, and the importance of utilizing the latter as a benchmark for comparison. This is not to say that adults are never affected by advertising. Adult consumers too are influenced by advertising otherwise, marketers would not devote large portions of their media expenditures to advertising. However, at the very least, they can understand advertisers' true underlying objectives (as compared to children, who are not). So, Gunter, Oates, & Blades (2005) concluded that If adults are convinced to purchase advertised goods, their advertising literacy generally protects them from being used unjustly.

Wright et al. (2005) asked what children haven't yet learned, or what they don't accomplish as fast and effectively as adults when it comes to coping with advertising targeted at them. In order to address this challenge, several researches used "cognitive development and socialization theories" to determine when children learn or acquire the essential skills and beliefs to recognize and understand advertising. It is assumed that as children's socialization and cognitive development improve their advertising literacy that will increase until it reaches adult-like levels (Brahim Zarouali et al 2019).

ADVERTISING LITERACY AND AGE OF CHILDREN: A BATTLE OF PERSPECTIVES

The major issue struck with advertising literacy is about the consensus, as there's no concord existed in literature with regards to its definition and age at which a child become fully advertising literate. There are ample of empirical studies regarding the age and various components of advertising literacy. A consumer socialization hypothesis was developed based on Piaget's theory of "cognitive development", and it identified different phases in children's capacity to understand advertising. It is believed that children cannot fully absorb information until they reach the age of seven. A child's reasoning abilities may be developed between the ages of seven and eleven (the concrete operational stage of cognitive development). They can distinguish between advertisements and other material, but they typically require specific cue to do so. As a result, youngsters at this stage are referred as "cued processors."

Young (1990) discovered that children as young as eight years old are advertising literate because they are able to reason about the advertising message. Whereas, Buckingham (1993)



identified the seven to twelve years old as advertising literate as they understanding ad intent and target audience, along with this they developed a critical thinking about nature and content of advertisement. Rozendaal (2011) in her study make a comparison between eight to twelve years old children with adults (18-30 years old) and found that 10-12 years Old's Ad recognition level is comparable to adult level but their level of understanding selling and persuasive intent is not reached up to adult level even at the age of 12 years. Rozendaal et. al (2011) in another study found that the ability to comprehend ad biasness rose from 8 to 12 years of age, but peaked at 10 years of age.

FACTORS THAT DRIVE THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADVERTISING LITERACY

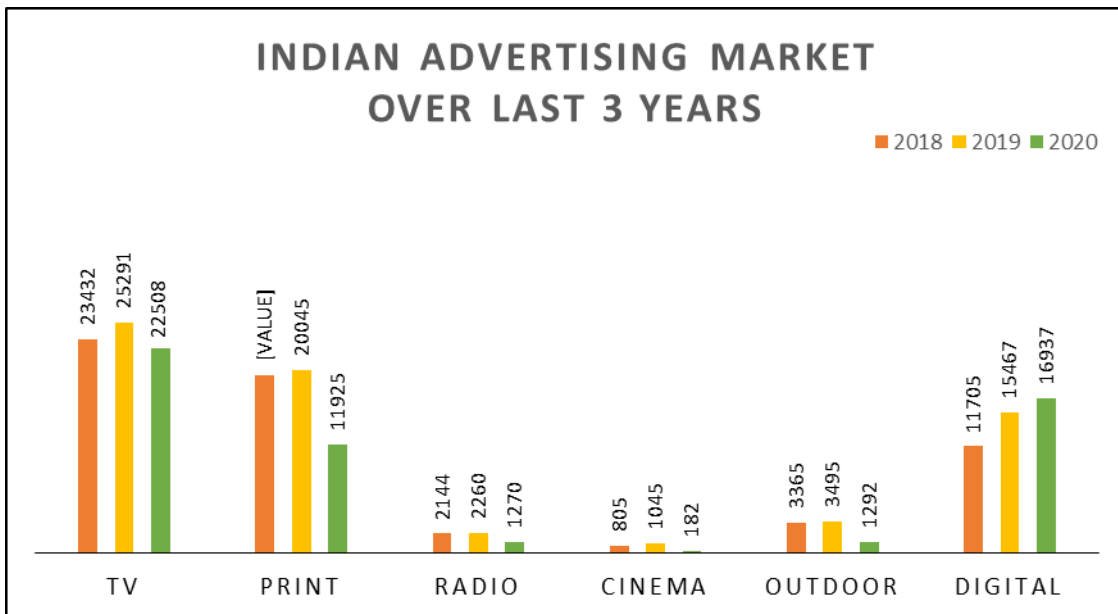
There are a number of variables that influence the development of a child's advertising literacy including his or her socio-economic background. In this respect, two major effects should be identified: parents and peers. Parents are the first teacher of a child. They are the one who plays a major part in a children's socialization as a consumer. A child's advertising literacy depends on their parents' ability to educate and teach them about how advertising works.

Second, personal contacts with peers can also affect children's advertising literacy development. Children may converse with their classmates about consumer issues, which can be seen as an essential source in their advertising learning process (Brahim Zarouali et. al 2019). Peers offer information about ads, testify as to their experiences with specific goods, provide recommendations on which things to purchase, and so on. As a result, they are regarded as a significant source of information that contributes to the development of advertising literacy.

CHILDREN ADVERTISING LITERACY WITH TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL FORM OF ADVERTISING

After discussing how children are target group for the advertisers, we'll shift gears to examine how well-versed they are in various types of advertising. And this new type of media is also growing at very fast pace. The below graph 1.1, shows the annual Pitch Madison Advertising Report 2020, which revealed that traditional media (Radio, print, TV, cinema and outdoor) shows a declining trend as compared with 2019. Digital is the exception with the positive trend of 9.7% in 2020

Figure 1.1: Growth of various Advertising Medium



GROWTH % IN 2020/2019 (figure in Rs Crore)

Concerns about the development of ad literacy have arisen as a result of the increasing prevalence of advertising inside engaging digital contexts. Due to the prevalence of children's usage of digital media, they are routinely exposed to subliminal advertising in the form of product placement, advergimes and the recent one is volgging. Young consumers have increased hurdles in detecting and comprehending the nature of these ad formats due to the subtle integration of commercial messaging into engaging media settings. Recent research (Owen, Lewis, Auty, & Buijzen, 2013) shows that

kids have a far harder time spotting interactive and atypical types of advertising than they do with more conventional kinds of marketing seen in mainstream media. To demonstrate this, a quick summary of how well children understand both conventional (television commercials) and non-traditional (advergimes, product placement, banners, volgging etc.) forms of advertising will be provided.



TV ADVERTISING

Advertisers have long chosen TV as predominant medium because of its sheer reach but it all started in 1959 when TV was launched in India with a motive for education and awareness of people, not for entertainment purpose. But shift has moved from awareness to entertainment and target the tiniest section of society. Since 1970s, researchers, academics and policy makers raise concern about whether children are capable of recognising and understanding television advertising. Since then, various studies have been conducted on children's knowledge and abilities about television advertising. Children are capable of recognizing ads at an early age, but it takes them longer to comprehend their selling purpose. At the age of eight, children begin to comprehend the selling aim of advertising, but a complete comprehension of the persuasive intent of television ads does not emerge until the age of twelve. Overall, young children do pretty well in identifying and comprehending ads. This conclusion applies exclusively to conventional TV advertising. Children struggle far more with hybrid kinds of internet advertising. The next paragraphs will discuss these advertising forms.

ADVERGAMES

Advergaming are video games designed to advertise a certain company's services or goods. It's a framework that lets brands take use of the latest advancements in interactive gaming to spread their own messages. Advertisements in video games often include high-sugar, low-nutrient food goods. These advergaming have been linked to kids adopting bad habits that might lead to weight gain. Therefore, there has been a lot of research focus on advergaming and the development of children's advertising literacy. When the persuasive material of an advergame is not properly differentiated from the game itself, research shows that youngsters have a hard time detecting the commercial goal of the advergame (Vanwesenbeeck et al., 2016). Because of this, encouraging young people to become advertising literate is challenging. Consequently, it has been proposed that children are very sensitive to the (poor) advertising impacts of advergaming.

ONLINE BANNER

Banners are ubiquitous on the Internet and remain one of the most popular forms of internet advertising. It appears as advertisements on almost all websites, often as little buttons, rectangles (rectangular pictures on the page), or skyscrapers (thin and tall banners). Despite the fact that one may expect online banners to be a clearly recognisable ad style due to their unique appearance on websites, the literature strangely suggests in the other way. However, it's important to keep in mind that very few research have focused on advertising literacy in the context of online banners. Thus, researchers should use caution when drawing robust conclusions, since such ground often lacks sufficient empirical support. However, it is clear that even by age 12, children have difficulty processing information presented in internet advertisements.

SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING

Vulnerability to social media advertising is a concern that is especially pertinent among older children, since several significant current social network sites (SNSs) do not permit membership until the age of 13. (e.g., Facebook and Instagram). The majority of these SNSs are free since their primary source of income is advertising. Social networking sites have a significant advantage in presenting online advertisements: they have amassed an unparalleled amount of personal information on their members. Companies may then use this information to send advertisements to particular individuals. Advertisers may choose their desired demographic based on a wide range of characteristics, including age, gender, occupation, interests, hobbies, and even marital status. In addition to targeted adverts, businesses may establish a presence on social networking sites by setting up a free brand profile. The "like" or "follow" button allows users to subscribe to this brand page. There are signs that youngsters on social media may not be completely aware of the persuasive information that circulates among their peers, despite the fact that this is a relatively new field of study (Lawlor, Dunne, & Rowley, 2016). Branded sites and targeted advertising aren't making sense to them from a business perspective. For this reason, it is reasonable to assume that young people's understanding of how to critically evaluate commercial content on social media is limited.

EXISTING LAWS AND POLICIES IN INDIA: REGARDING ADVERSE EFFECTS OF ADVERTISING ON CHILDREN

Some countries are taking actions to protect children from advertisement's adverse effects. Many European governments have put restrictions on tv advertisements aimed at children. However, in India, we do not appear to comprehend the problem. Nowadays, every second advertisement on TV is using kids' innocence to increase their sale. The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI), which was formed in 1985, has issued a code for self-regulation in advertising, but regrettably, it does not include any provisions for protecting children from being targeted by advertisements.

The ASCI's primary goal is to improve public confidence in ads and to oversee all aspects of the advertising industry, including marketers, advertising agencies and media etc. There is another regulatory body, which named 'Telecom regulatory authority of India' (TRAI), this authority is handling or issuing the standard of quality of services, regulation 2012. It governs the time of an advertisement's transmission as well as the length of the advertising. Along with this, there are several acts in India that uphold a consumer's rights, such as nutritional claims, privacy rights, regional public and community standards, and so on. There are various regulatory bodies that handle customer complaints about advertisements, advertising quality, and duration, such as; the Indian Broadcasting Foundation (IBF), the Broadcasting Content Complaints Council (BCCC), the Electronic Media Monitoring Centre (EMMC), and the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), among others. There is no separate statutory body in charge of coping with child-related advertising and materials. However, in European



countries, separate regulatory bodies for child safety of advertisements' consequences exist, such as the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which controls marketing duration and character endorsement. And the Child Advertising Evaluation Unit (CARU), which plays an important role in promoting ethical advertising to children under the age of twelve.

Finally, after analysing the entire scenario of Indian broadcasting statutory bodies, it can be inferred that the child protection law for advertisement's effects should be updated. Also, there should be some statutory bodies like the FCC and CARU, that focus solely on child safety of advertisements' consequences.

CONCLUSION

As we have discussed earlier that how today's youth are confronted with a media landscape rife with many forms of advertising (some of which have been discussed here, but many more remain unaddressed). Their advertising literacy is low, with the exception of their ability to recognise and comprehend classic TV commercials, and does not extend to the recognition and comprehension of (more recent) embedded advertising forms. To conclude, children are not (yet) mature customers who can evaluate the merits of stealth advertising on their own. Therefore, there has been a call for adults to assist children in developing adequate advertising literacy. As a result, many programmes in developed countries have been proposed to educate children about advertising like: FCC and CARU etc.

NEW CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In the end few suggestions for where the field may go from here are offered. In the first place, although it is generally accepted that teaching children how to recognize and evaluate advertisements might help them protect their minds from its influence, yet the findings of scientific studies are mixed. Previous study on the correlation between children's advertising literacy and ad impacts has shown conflicting findings; future studies may be able to tease out these connections to provide a better picture. Considering a child's special attributes and their social environment might be helpful in this respect. Furthermore, there should be greater investigation into how successful disclosures and advertising literacy programs are. These efforts, by giving strong factual evidence, may be highly useful instruments for enhancing children's advertising literacy. Finally, there are always new forms of advertising appearing in what is a very dynamic industry. Researchers in the field of advertising must, therefore, keep up with the ever-changing landscape of digital marketing. The impact of new, hybrid kinds of advertising on young consumers must be studied. Finally, investigators may consider include many generations in their study. Growing up with a variety of new kinds of advertising may have affected digital natives differently than previous generations.

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