

Food Advertisements on Television: A Content Analysis of Children's Channel and Efficacy of Media Literacy Programme

Thara Sebastian^{1*} and Arsha Mathew²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Home Science, St. Teresa's College, Ernakulam, Kerala, India

²PG Student, Child Development, Department of Home Science, St. Teresa's College, Ernakulam, Kerala, India; tharamat@gmail.com

Abstract

Food marketing directed to children is becoming an important matter of concern nowadays as television is still one of the most influential mediums providing information regarding food. Content analysis of food advertisements on Malayalam kid's channel revealed the nature, amount and duration of food advertisements broadcast through the channel. Majority of food advertisements telecasted in children's channel were on processed foods. The research based disclaimers were very few and the explanations were written in small print at the bottom of the screen. The media literacy programme on television food advertisements conducted for school going children based on the content analysis was found to be effective as there is significant difference in the knowledge level before and after the education programme. Awareness programmes on television food advertisements and strengthening of regulatory strategies on food advertisements by government will make a difference in changing the attitude of the present generation on processed foods advertised on television and their food habits.

Keywords: Content Analysis, Malayalam Children's Channel, Media Literacy/Awareness Programme, Television Food Advertisements

1. Introduction

Advertisements have become an effective tool of integrated marketing communication that emotionally motivates consumers to buy their products and services¹. For this purpose marketers adopt different techniques to sell their products. In this challenging environment marketers make use of modern media and advertisements to bring their products into the minds of the customer^{2,3}.

Advertisers have chosen television as the prevailing medium for reaching consumers to market their products. Today, children are becoming the potential consumers due to rising penetration of mass media in the community

and television has become the most influential model that provides the widest source of information for children. No other media can invade their minds as television does. Children take up millions of images, pictures, illustration, impressions from their television viewing. It is getting transformed quickly into a primary source of information and is becoming very much influential than a parent or a teacher⁴. Though the technology and advertising techniques are changing, television remains the most prominent approach of marketing food and beverages to youth, especially for those in early childhood^{5,6}.

Content analysis of food advertisements reveals that most of the food advertisements on television are of

*Author for correspondence

low-nutrient, high-calorie products and the fact is that younger children do not understand the persuasive intent of commercial messages⁷.

Food marketing directed to children is becoming a big issue of concern in the present day society. A lot of research has been done in the developed countries. But very less research has been done in India especially in Kerala. Food advertisements on kid's channels are increasing day by day, so regulations and policies need to be enforced and parents and children must be educated.

2. Materials and Methods

The study was conducted as two phases

Phase 1: Content Analysis of Television Food Advertisements

The popular Malayalam Channel in Kerala, namely, Kochu TV was selected for content analysis of food related advertisements. The free aired Malayalam children's channel was recorded with the help of a local cable TV provider for 4 days. The total number and duration of advertisements were recorded on two weekdays (Monday and Thursday) and weekends (Saturday and Sunday) and that is for 12 hours/day. The local cable TV provider directly connected the cable to an external hard disc and copied the content directly. The data recorded in the two external hard discs with high frequency were converted into low frequency using iSkysoft video converter (purchased) by the investigator. All the recorded programmes were viewed and coded. The coded contents were analysed for number, duration, types, benefits claimed by food advertisements and marketing techniques used by advertisers to sell their products. The food advertisements were mainly categorised under sweets/chocolates, breakfast cereals, biscuits, instant noodles/pasta, energy boosters, fruits and vegetables, dairy products, cakes/ muffins, coffee/tea/ condiments, instant soups, oil and fats and horlicks/boost.

Phase 2: Development, Presentation and Evaluation of Media Literacy Programme of "Food Advertisements in Television on Children"

The schools located in Ernakulam city were selected for conducting media literacy programme. The sample

consisted of 120 children from three selected schools of Ernakulam city between the age group of 8-10 years, studying in 4th and 5th standards. A power point presentation on the topic "Food advertisements on television and children" was used to conduct the media literacy programme. The presentation consisted of 26 slides and the topics included were

- Television as mode of communication.
- Targeted marketing aimed at children.
- Positive effect of advertisements.
- Negative effect of advertisements.
- Influence of food advertisements on children.
- Food labelling – E numbers.
- Harmful ingredients in advertised foods.
- Harmful effects on body.
- Junk food vs. healthy eating.
- Healthy and essential foods needed for children.

A questionnaire was used to assess the knowledge of the children about food advertisements on television before and after the media literacy programme. Against each statement two alternatives were given that is, agree or disagree. The respondents have to read out each statement and have to tick whether they agree or disagree to the statement. Statistical analysis t 'test' was used to find out the effectiveness of the media literacy programme.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Number and Duration of Television Food Advertisements

The details regarding the number and duration of television food advertisements are given in Table 1.

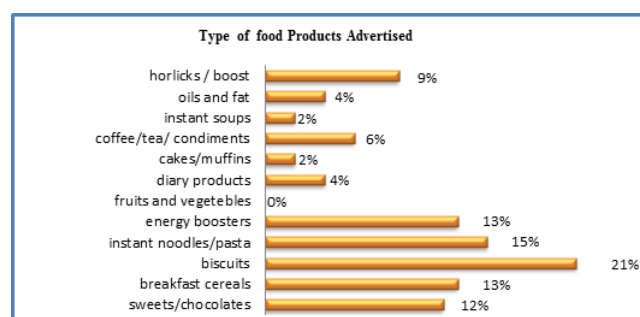
From Table 1, it is clear that the total advertisements were more on weekends (n = 962) when compared to weekdays (n = 757). The duration of advertisements were also more on weekends (6 hours 4 minutes) than weekdays (5 hours 3 minutes). Food advertisements shown on children's channel on weekends (n = 549) were more when compared to weekdays (n = 445). The duration of food advertisements were also more on weekends (4 hours 1 minute) than on weekdays (2 hours 8 minutes).

Table 1. Number and duration of television food advertisements

Days	Number of total Advertisements (n)	Duration (hours/ minute)	Number of food Advertisements (n)	Duration (hours/ minute)
Weekends (12 hours)/day				
Day 1 (Saturday)(12 hours)	414	2:54	236	1.33
Day 2 (Sunday)(12 hours)	548	3.10	313	2.28
Total	962	6.04	549	4.01
Weekdays (12 hours)/day				
Day 3 (Monday)(12 hours)	353	2:21	221	1.03
Day 4 (Thursday)(12hours)	404	2:21	224	1.05
Total	757	5:03	445	2.08

3.2 Types of Food Products Advertised on Children's Channel

All the food advertisements recorded during content analysis were analyzed for the type of products aired in children's channel.

**Figure 1.** Types of food products advertised on children's channel.

The results (Figure 1.) show that the most commonly advertised food product was different types of biscuits (21%). After biscuits, the most advertised products were instant noodles/pasta (15%), followed by energy boosters (13%) and breakfast cereals (13%), sweets/chocolates (12%), horlicks/boost (9%), coffee/tea (6%), oil/fat (4%), dairy products (4%), instant soups (2%) and cakes/muffins (2%). It is noted that any advertisements related to fruits and vegetables were not broadcast during the 48 hours (12 hours/day) of telecasting time.

The results are in line with reviews analysed by Hasting 2003⁸. A review of literature on television and children's consumption pattern concludes that the big fives of food promotion: pre-sugared breakfast cereals, soft-drinks, confectionary, savoury snacks and fast food outlets are most commonly advertised in television. In most of the

studies the level of advertising of fruit and vegetables has been found to be limited⁹.

3.3 Benefits Claimed by Food Advertisers on Children's Channel

The benefits claimed by the advertisers to promote their products were noted during content analysis. Out of 994 food advertisements, 488 (49%) had claimed the benefits for their products.

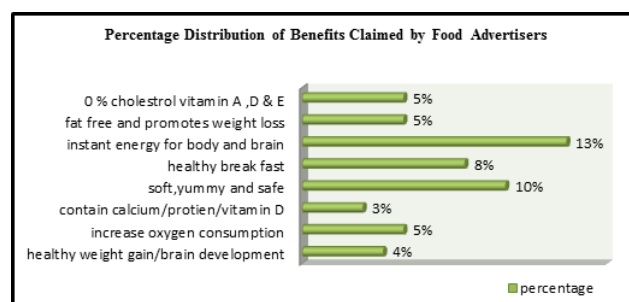
**Figure 2.** Benefits claimed by food advertisers on children's channel.

Figure 2 illustrates the different health and nutrition claims by different food advertisements. The different claims were for "Instant energy for body and brain" (13%) for *glucovita* bolts (energy booster), "Soft yummy and safe" (10%) for yippee noodles, "healthy breakfast" (8%), "Increase oxygen consumption and stamina" (5%), "Fat free and promotes weight loss" (5%), "0% cholesterol, vitamin A, D and E" (5%), "Healthy weight gain & brain development" (4%) and "Contain Calcium, protein and vitamin D" (3%). Out of total food advertisements showing benefits, (17%) advertisements are claiming that it will promote brain development. Another noticeable finding is that research based disclaimers are very less.

Even if it is there, the explanations are written in small prints at the bottom of the screen. A study done in South Africa depicts more than half of the advertisements that had health claims promised enhancement of well-being. This is misleading as well-being is a broad area that involves the balance of mental, social and physical being¹⁰. In another study done in Srilanka, it is noted that none of the advertisements promoted fruits or vegetables, and none of the advertisements had a disclaimer¹¹.

3.4 Marketing Techniques Used by Food Advertisers on Children's Channel

Different types of marketing techniques were used by the advertisers to promote their products mainly through television.

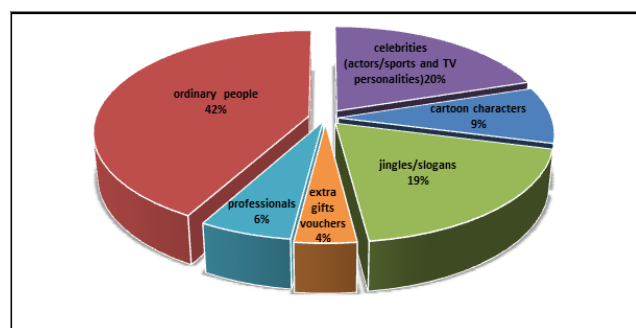


Figure 3. Marketing techniques used by advertisers on children's channel.

In Figure 3 it is evident that the main marketing technique used for advertising is using ordinary people as models that are 42% of advertisements were using adults and children acting like family members in the advertisements. Among the marketing techniques, children (59%) are being selected as models for advertising food products. Second most advertised techniques are using celebrities (20%) for advertising products. The celebrities can be people from films, sports and health professionals.

It is found that both children and adults appreciate seeing age appropriate celebrities on television as they trust and respect them¹². International studies also suggest that celebrities appearing in advertising enhance a product's worth and increase sales because they heighten attention to advertisements by virtue of the visual and aural cues associated with celebrity endorsement and the celebrities' fame extends to the product/brand they are endorsing¹³.

3.5 Evaluation of Media Literacy Programme of Food Advertisements in Television on Children

The effectiveness of the media literacy programme for children regarding food advertisements on television was studied using pre test and post test scores using a questionnaire (Figure 4). The questionnaires were distributed before and after the media literacy programme. Comparison of pre-test and post-test scores was done using statistical analysis ('t' test) to find out the effectiveness of the programme.

Table 2. Effectiveness of media literacy programme of food advertisements in television on children

Scores	Mean	SD	Difference	t - value
Pre-test	3.025	1.934	8.233	41.30**
Post-test	11.26	0.884		

** The difference is significant at 0.01 levels

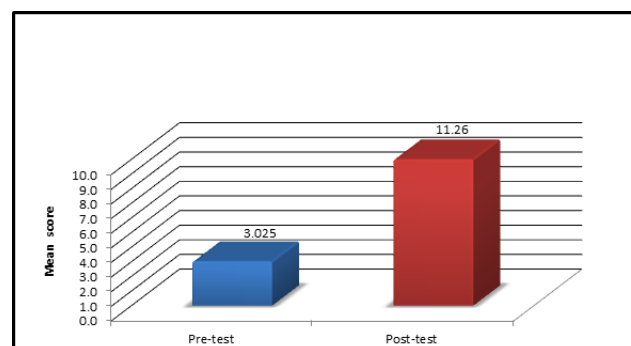


Figure 4. Scores before and after media literacy programme.

Table 2 and Figure 4 reveal that the mean pre-test score is 3.025 and post test score is 11.26. The post test mean score is higher than the pre-test score. The 't' value is 41.30**. The calculated 't' value is greater than the table value (2.576 at 0.01 level). So the research hypothesis in the present study is accepted. So it is evident that there is a significant difference in the knowledge level of children before and after the media literacy programme. The media literacy programme has helped to impart comprehensive knowledge about effects of food advertisements in television on children in selected schools in Ernakulum city.

4. Conclusion

Content analysis of food advertisements revealed the number, duration, types, benefits claimed and marketing techniques used by food advertisers to promote their food products in popular Malayalam children's channel. Advertisers were found to use different techniques and benefit claims to promote their products on television. The widely used benefit claim in the study was found to be for brain development. The most advertised products during content analysis were different types of biscuits, energy boosters, breakfast cereals and sweets/chocolates. The media literacy programme on television food advertisements conducted based on the content analysis was found to be highly effective in imparting knowledge to school going children, 8-10 years of age. Schools need to implement media literacy curriculum as this will have a modest effect in equipping children with skills to understand commercial messages. However, additional support from parents and other members of the community is generally needed if media literacy is to have a greater effect.

5. References

1. Moore ES, Lutz RJ. Children advertising and product experiences. *Journal of Consumer Research*. 2000; 27:31–48. Available from: <http://www.jstor.org>
2. McGinnis JM, Gootman JA, Kraak VI. Committee on food marketing and the diets of children and youth; institute of medicine. *Food Marketing to Children and Youth: Threat or Opportunity?* Washington, DC: The National Academies Press; 2006.
3. Calvert SL. Children as consumers: Advertising and marketing. *The Future of Children*. 2008; 18(1):205–34.
4. Panwar JS, Agnihotri M. Advertising message processing amongst urban children- An Indian experience with special reference to TV advertising. *Proceedings of Marketing Conference Entitled Marketing Paradigms for Emerging Economies*; IIM Ahmedabad. 2005 Jan.
5. Linn SE. Food marketing to children in the context of a marketing maelstrom. *J Public Health Policy*. 2004; 25(3-4):367–78.
6. Rudd center for food policy and obesity, United States of America. *Trends in Television Food Advertising: Progress in Reducing Unhealthy Marketing to Young People?* Available from: <http://www.yaleruddcenter.org/resources/upload/docs/what/reports>
7. Folta SC, Goldberg JP, Economos C, Bell R, Meltzer R. Food advertising targeted at school-age children: A content analysis. *Journal of Nutrition Education*. 2006; 38:244–8.
8. Hastings G, Stead M, McDermott L, Forsyth A, MacKintosh A, Rayner M. Review of research on the effects of food promotion to children. *Centre for Social marketing*. 2003.
9. Coon KA, Tucker KL. Television and children's consumption patterns. A review of the literature. *Minerva Pediatrics*. 2005; 54:423–36.
10. Mchiza ZJ, Temple NJ, Steyn NP, Abrahams Z, Clayford M. Content analysis of television food advertisements aimed at adults and children in South Africa. *Public Health Nutrition*. 2013; 16(12):2213–20.
11. Prathapan S, Wijewardena K, Low WY. Content analysis of food and beverages advertisements targeting children and adults on television in Sri Lanka. *Asia Pac J Public Health*. 2015 Jan; 28(1 Suppl):86S–92S.
12. Ulger B. Packages with cartoon trade characters versus advertising: An empirical examination of preschoolers' food preferences. *J Food Prod Mark*. 2009; 15:104–17.
13. Gantz SN, Angelini JR. *Food for thought- Television food advertising to children in the United States*. Washington DC: The Kaiser Family Foundation; 2006.