ADVERTISEMENTS AND ITS IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Catch them young is the new advertising mantra. Most of the advertisements especially in television are targeted to children. Today they are bombarded with powerful advertising messages from various media which are designed to win their mind and heart. Adults have lifelong experiences, the advantage of age backed with education as filters to navigate these powerful advertising messages but children don’t. For them advertising is everywhere, all the time in school at home at shopping mall and in parks. From the time they get up early in the morning till the time they go to sleep they are communicating with thousands of brands through advertisements. They are growing up watching television commercial, listening jingles, playing videogames. Answers to why marketers and advertisers want to catch them young are many. Children are growing faster. They are tagged as KGOY- Kids grow up young as they have more access to answers to their queries with different forms of media. They have more personal power, more money, influence and attention than any other generation. No other generation has ever had a much disposable income as this one. That is why this emerging generation has become powerful enough to have a specific allotment in every marketer’s budget. This paper focuses on why children are the target of many advertising campaigns, How they react to advertising messages, What are the emerging advertising strategies adopted by the advertisers to woo younger generation, the ethical standards followed by the advertisers and the corporate social responsibility initiatives taken by the advertisers.

Catch them young. Why?

Children today live in a multimedia world. There are around three hundred and twenty five television channels, fifty thousand newspapers and forty three thousand periodicals along with number of FM channels in India. It is a world composed of media forms that are now part of the total culture in which a child is born, grows and develops into an adult. Against the backdrop of media explosion and changing cultural landscape in the country television and other electronic media are important than ever as a type of non

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1 Nair tanushree, Children Loosing Childhood Very Fast, Statesman, 23.09.06
certified teacher of children. Whenever T.V is on in the home it teaches the young viewer so many things about themselves as well as about others. It is because of this exposure a three year old child identifies a brand and use pester-power to force its parents to buy a product.

Another very important reason with marketers to catch them young is the disposable income they have. According to a survey conducted by the Turner International India pvt the total pocket money of the surveyed kids(SEC A, B,C from 14 cities across the country was 331 crore with gift money adding 138 crore. The total is staggering 478 crore per year. Another reason for marketers and advertisers to smile and catch them young.

**Television & Advertising: a natural fascination**

Children are fascinated by the media especially television. All over the world children have this natural affection for television. It not only entertains them but also is the most powerful teacher. The only question which crops up again and again is what this powerful teacher is teaching. There are various types of programmes like news, soap operas, movies, documentaries, children’s programmes and advertising. Out of these children are more attracted to advertisements as advertisements tell them a story stuffed in a few seconds. Children don’t have to sit in front of TV sets for hours to make out what exactly is happening. Moreover advertisements take them to fairy world of the strongest, wisest, coolest and simply the best. But as we know most of the fairly tales are concocted so are many of the advertisements. According to a survey conducted b the cartoon network 74 percent said ads helped them to decide what to buy. About 14 percent of kids felt ads are of no use and 11 % of kids believed that advertising had nothing to do with what they buy.

Advertising to children is a sensitive and emotionally-charged issue because children are easily influenced and like to experiment with new things whether it is a product or the way product is advertised. The proliferation of products, advertising, promotions and media targeted to children is of great concern to the industry and the general public. Advertising is under attack because it is perceived as "making kids want what they don't need" and puts pressure on parents to respond to those needs. More recently, advertising
is also accused of being a factor in causing children's obesity. In addition to these advertising is also criticized for the ways in which products are advertised and the various strategies adopted by the advertisers to woo its target audience:

**Surrogate advertising:**

Advertisements of liquor and tobacco are banned from being advertised in the mass media. But the makers of most of these products resort to 'surrogate advertising' – a sort of indirect advertising in which a 'cover product' is made to point towards the actual product, the latter being banned from advertising. For instance, the Ministry of Health (MoH), Government of India, has banned the advertising of tobacco and liquor. But many liquor brands (like McDowell's whisky) initiate other products like sodas in the same name which are then advertised. Similarly, many 'gutkhabrands introduce their pan masala products which indirectly advertise the gutkhas. Another instance of surrogate advertising is 'Four Square Bravery Awards' in the name of Four Square cigarettes.

**Product placements**

Product placement is a marketing practice designed to intentionally insert products into the content of entertainment programme like movies and entertainment programmes. When a director choose a particular brand of car not because it was according to his artistic vision but because he was paid a hefty amount to show that product in the movie is what product placement is all about. In most cases the placement is done in a subtle manner so that the attention from the main content of the program or media outlet is not diverted. The concept has existed in movies for over 50 years but did not evolve significantly until the 1970s when tobacco companies recognized the advantages of this promotional approach. In recent years, marketers have become more aggressive in identifying outlets for product placements; especially in television programs for example Nokia mobile phones prominently displayed in the reality show *Indian Idol 2*, product placement is an effective and often indirect way to build brand awareness. However, the concept is no longer limited to movies and television. Electronic games often use the concept to promote popular music.
In India, the concept is also gaining popularity, especially in movies and television shows. A few examples of product placement in Indian movies are Pass Pass brand in *Yadein*, Coke in *Taal*, Maruti Swift in *Bunty Aur Babli*, Hero Honda, Atlas, Bournvita in *Koi Mil Gaya*, Bru in *Saathiya* and Calvin Klein in *Salaam Namaste*.

**Program length commercials**

Some programmes are peopled by licensed characters that began as toys and later had programs developed around them in what are sometimes referred to as program length commercials. Show on Barbie, Powerpuff girls, Beyblade etc.

The main goal of such shows is to sell toys through the heroes of the show. Many have argued that this takes unfair advantage of children as the practice makes separation of program and advertising less clear and harder to discern.

**Character merchandise**

Marketers are happy to have superman, power puff girls, Spiderman that can be animated to sell many other products. The aim is to extend the character into a large world of consumer products so as to create lifestyle brand. Mattel toys India which has licensed Barbie collection for developing kiddie shoes in India. In India character merchandise already accounts for every fifth rupee spent on branded products for children. a market placed at 13,000 crore. Cartoon network enterprise, the global branding and merchandising arm of cartoon network has licensed its power puff girls, Johny Bravo and Bey blade to all sorts of products.

**Stereotypes in advertising**

Majority advertisements featuring children had little boys in varying shapes, sizes and moods. And the few ads that did feature young girls, projected them with their mothers in ads for beauty products. Most reinforced stereotypical images of being chatterboxes, or sweet delicate ‘things’.

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2 Kunkel, D (1988) *From a raised eyebrow to a turned back*, Journal of communication
Most of the advertisements from *Daag Achae Hai!* campaign for Surf Excel, a detergent featured little boys in different roles, one as a protector – brother beats up a mud puddle to make his sister laugh, another as crusader, and yet another as a well-intentioned individual who gets into a mock fight to break up another. Majority feature boys as dirty, naughty, rowdy, intelligent, cute or with celebrities making them appear even more desirable to parents. Even when two children are shown in ads, it’s usually a boy and girl or two boys and rarely is a family with two girls spotted.

The current sex ratio in India of 927 girls for every 1000 boys is a dangerous indicator of preference for the male child. The media has to make an effort to avoid such stereotypes, which are so internalized that we don’t even realize what we are doing. There are very few new representations. Even if the woman is now out of the home, she still lives within her skin. Anxieties have shifted from performing within the home to appearing outside. As most of the advertisements feature the “body as a traitor” by highlighting problems such as dandruff and body odour. Though the traditional roles had been upgraded, and it is not surprising to see the detergent mom being replaced by a washing machine mom, empowered by technology. Though it not possible to change society purely through representation in advertising, but advertisers should highlight instances where society has changed or is changing. Advertising could influence society and big brands could take the initiative to break stereotypes.

**Impact of advertising on kids:**

There was a time in 60s and 70s when the main target audience of advertisers were house-wives but this gave way to youth being the target of the ads. The focus then shifted to children, which continues even today. Today, children can be seen in ads which are not at all child-products. Even in an advertisement of Maruti Esteem two children were shown comparing whose daddy has the bigger car. "In fact, today 84% of parents take their children along with them when buying products which are not child-products – simply because children have a big say in buying decisions."
Advertisements do have great impact on children whether it is decision of purchasing toys, dresses or imitating their favorite characters. Boys in the south imitate Rajnikant, the popular actor of films in the south, who had a particular style of flipping a cigarette to his lips. They unconsciously started trying to flip the cigarette in the same manner and many took to smoking through this playful, imitative initiation.  

**Is there any regulation in advertising in India**

In recent years the quantity of false, misleading and offensive advertising has resulted in consumers having an increasing disbelief in advertising, and a growing resentment of it. Misleading, false advertising also constitutes unfair competition. Advertising agencies have formed an association called the Advertising Agencies Association of India (AAAI) which also has a governing board called the Advertising Standard Council of India.

The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) (1985) has adopted a Code for Self-Regulation in Advertising. It is a commitment to honest advertising and to fair competition in the market-place. It stands for the protection of the legitimate interests of consumers and all concerned with advertising - advertisers, media, advertising agencies and others who help in the creation or placement of advertisements.

**Corporate social responsibility of Advertising**

Advertising's foremost social responsibility in free market society is to sell stuff and sell it efficiently. It sparks the free market system by making choices known and by stimulating competition which in turn leads to product improvement. Advertising also bring every citizen endless variety of free information and enjoyment through paid sponsorship of media content and there is point here with respect to children's

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3 Parag Paul Choudhury of Voluntary Organisation in Interest of Consumer Education (VOICE), a Delhi-based NGO
advertising if there were no children advertising there would be no child programming and kids instead of watching childre's programme would be watching Kyonki Sas bhi bahu Thi. In addition to this there many corporate social responsibility initiative taken by the advertisers like Nick along with Boost has announced " Let us play an initiative to motivate kids and their parents to work towards healthy and playful lifestyle. The let us just play movement will kick off with an initiative where Nick would go blank for 30 minutes on September 27, 08. to encourage kids to step out and play outdoors.

Frooti also had a CSR initiative to gave less fortunate a chance to experience mango moments. This was done by the activities like Aam Bantne se Badhta Hai. and Alms for Aams in collaboration with Radio one where in a caller called and shared their most memorable mango moment. For every experience that was shared, frooti foundation donated a carton of frooti to an orphanage.

Jago Grahak Jago campaign for Tata tea was also a very successful campaign with social cause. It also resulted into social awareness site for public. There are many such campaigns which not only promotes product but also has a social commitment.

Despite such initiatives advertising had its critics. Advertising is still a target and will always be. Because advertising is so omnipresent that it is blamed for host of social evils. Ad has a social responsibility to be sensitive to children which is perhaps the most important reason that advertiser has a responsibility to regulate itself.