

# **The Effect of Advertising on Children and Adolescents - A Critical Appraisal**

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**Abstract-** This paper aims to identify the critical effects of advertisements on children and adolescents. Young people view more than 40, 000 ads per year on television alone and increasingly are being exposed to advertising on the Internet, in magazines, and in schools. There are multiple negative outcomes like childhood obesity, poor nutrition, and cigarette & alcohol use. Media education has been shown to be effective in mitigating some of the negative effects of advertising on children and adolescents.

**Keywords-** *Adoloscent, Advertising, Children, Endorsements, Media, Psychology*

## I. INTRODUCTION

European countries severely curtail advertising to children; on the other hand, selling to children is simply “business as usual” in US [1]. The average young person views more than 3000 ads per day on television (TV), on the Internet, on billboards, and in magazines [2]. Advertisers are targeting younger children in an effort to establish “brand-name preference” at an early age [3] because they spend \$180 billion, and influence perhaps another \$200 billion of their parents’ spending per year [4-5]. Increasingly, advertisers are seeking to find new and creative ways of targeting young

consumers via the Internet, in schools, and even in bathroom stalls.

## II. THE EFFECTS OF ADVERTISING ON CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Research has shown that young children—younger than 8 years—are cognitively and psychologically defenseless against advertising [6-9]. They do not understand the notion of Intent to sell and frequently accept advertising claims at face value [10]. However some Western countries like Sweden and Norway forbid all advertising directed at children younger than 12 years, [11] but other countries need to take stringent decisions in this direction.

## III. ADVERTISING IN DIFFERENT MEDIA

### *A. Television*

Children and adolescents view 40 000 ads per year on TV alone [12]. This occurs despite the fact that in many western countries, the Children’s Television Act of 1990 (Pub L No. 101–437) limits advertising on children’s programming to 10.5 minutes/ hour on weekends and 12 minutes/hour on weekdays. However,

much of children's viewing occurs during prime time, which features nearly 16 minutes/hour of Advertising [13].

#### *B. Movies*

A 2000 FTC (Federal Trade Commission) investigation found that violent movies, music, and video games have been intentionally marketed to children and adolescents. [14] For instance, M-rated video games, which according to the gaming industry's own rating system are not recommended for children younger than 17 years, are frequently advertised in movie theaters, video game magazines, and publications with high youth readership [15]. Also, movies targeted at children often prominently feature brand-name products and fast food restaurants [16].

#### *C. Print Media*

According to Consumer's Union, [17] study more than 160 magazines are targeted at children across the globe. Earlier Young people were exposed to 45% more beer ads and 27% more ads for hard liquor in teen magazines than adult's do [18]. Despite the Master Settlement Agreement with the tobacco industry in 1998, tobacco advertising expenditures in 38 youth-oriented magazines amounted to \$217 million in 2000 [19].

#### *D. Internet*

An increasing number of Web sites try to entice children and teenagers to make direct sales. Teenagers account for more than \$1 billion in e-commerce dollars, [20] and the industry spent \$72.6 million on Internet banner ads alone in 2010. More than 100 commercial Web sites promote alcohol products [21]. Content of these sites varies widely, from little more than basic

brand information to chat rooms. Many of these sites use slick promotional techniques to target young people. [22] In 1998, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (Pub L No. 105-277) was passed, which mandates that commercial Web sites cannot knowingly collect information from children younger than 13 years. These sites are required to provide notice on the site to parents about their collection, use, and disclosure of children's personal information and must obtain "verifiable parental consent" before collecting, using, or disclosing their information [23].

#### *E. Marketing Techniques*

Advertisers have traditionally used techniques to which children and adolescents are more susceptible, such as product placements in movies and TV shows, [24] tie-ins between movies and fast food restaurants, tie-ins between TV shows and toy action figures or other products, and celebrity endorsements. [25] Tooth pastes, soaps, mobile services etc., are currently being marketed to 6- to 12-year-olds, with the potential for directing specific advertisers to children and preteens. Coca-Cola reportedly paid Warner Bros. Studios \$150 million for the global marketing rights to the movie "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone," [26] and nearly 20% of fast food restaurant ads now mention a toy premium in their ads [27]. Certain tie-in products may be inappropriate for children (e.g. action figures from the World Wrestling Federation). In the near future, children watching a TV program will be able to click an on-screen link and go to a Web site during the program. [28] Interactive games and promotions on digital TV will have the ability to lure children away from regular programming, encouraging them to spend a long time in

an environment that lacks clear separation between content and advertising. Interactive technology may also allow advertisers to collect vast amounts of information about children's viewing habits & preferences and target them on the basis of that information [29].

### III. SPECIFIC HEALTH-RELATED AREAS OF CONCERN

#### *A. Tobacco Advertising*

Tobacco manufacturers spend \$50 million/day (\$18.8billion/year) on advertising and promotion. [30] Exposure to tobacco advertising may be a bigger risk factor than having family members and peers who smoke [31] and can even undermine the effect of strong parenting practices [32]. Couple of studies have found that approximately one third of all adolescent smoking can be attributed to tobacco advertising and promotions. [33-34] In addition, more than 20 studies have found that children exposed to cigarette ads or promotions are more likely to become smokers themselves [35-36]. Recent evidence has emerged that tobacco companies have specifically targeted teenagers as young as 13 years of age [37].

#### *B. Alcohol Advertising*

Alcohol manufacturers spend \$11 billion/year on advertising and promotion [38]. Young people typically view 2000 beer and wine commercials annually, [39] with most of the ads concentrated in sports programming. During prime time, only 1 alcohol ad appears every 4 hours; yet, in sports programming, the frequency increases to 2.4 ads per hour [40-41].

Research has found that adolescent drinkers are more likely to have been exposed to alcohol advertising [42]-[48]. Though certain Advertising regulations were incorporated to curtail direct alcohol brand promotion, the corporations were promoting other product with same brand name (E.g.: Royal stag CD's, Mc Dowell's purified drinking water bottles etc.)

#### *C. Drug Advertising*

"Just Say No" as a message to teenagers about drugs seems to be failure given that \$18 billion/year is spent on cigarette advertising, \$11billion/year is spent on alcohol advertising, and nearly \$7 billion/year is spent on prescription drug advertising [49]. Drug companies now spend more than twice as much on marketing as they do on research and development. The top 10 drug companies made a total profit of \$35.9 billion in 2002—more than the other 490 companies in the Fortune 500 combined [50]. Is such advertising effective? A recent survey of physicians found that 92% of patients had requested an advertised drug. [51-52] In addition, children and teenagers may get the message that there is a drug available to cure all ills and heal all pain, a drug for every occasion (including sexual intercourse) [39]. Food Advertising and Obesity Advertisers spend more than \$5 billion/year to promote restaurants and another \$4 billion to promote food products [53]. On TV, of the estimated 40,000 ads per year that young people see, half are for food, especially sugared cereals and high-calorie snacks [29],[54]. Healthy foods are advertised less than 3% of the time [55]. Increasingly, fast food conglomerates are using toy tie-ins with major children's motion pictures to try to attract young people [56]. Nearly 20% of fast food ads now mention a toy

premium in their commercials (Eg: McDonald with SHREK cartoon) [29]. Several studies document that young children request more junk food (defined as foods with high-caloric density but very low nutrient density) after viewing commercials. [57 - 60] In a study, the amount of TV viewed per week correlated with requests for specific foods and with caloric intake [61]. At the same time, advertising healthy foods has been shown to increase wholesome eating in children as young as 3 to 6 years of age [62].

#### *D. Sex in Advertising*

Sex is used in commercials to sell everything from beer to shampoo to cars [63]. New research is showing that teenagers' exposure to sexual content in the media may be responsible for earlier onset of sexual intercourse or other sexual activities [64-65]. What is increasingly apparent is the discrepancy between the abundance of advertising of products for erectile dysfunction (ED) (between January and October, 2004, drug companies spent \$343 million advertising Viagra, Levitra, and Cialis) [66] and the lack of advertising for birth control products or emergency contraceptives on the major TV networks. Ads for erectile dysfunction (ED) drugs give children and teens inappropriate messages about sex and sexuality at a time when they are not being taught well in school sex education programs [67-68]. Research has definitively found that giving teenagers increased access to birth control through advertising does not make them sexually active at a younger age [69],[76]. American advertising also frequently uses female models that are anorectic in appearance and, thus, may contribute to the development of a distorted body self image and abnormal eating behaviors in young girls [77-79]

#### *E. Advertising in School*

Advertisers have slowly but steadily infiltrated school systems around the country. The "3 Rs" have now become the "4 Rs," with the fourth R being "retail" [80-81]. Ads are now appearing on school buses, in gymnasiums, on book covers, and even in bathroom stalls in metropolitan cities [82]. More than 20000 schools nationwide have signed exclusive contracts with soft drink companies [83]. In addition, there are many fast food and Ice cream chains in school cafeterias around the country [84]. There are some good news, however. In May, 2006, the nation's Ministry of Human resources development agreed to halt nearly all sales of soft drinks to public schools and sell only water, unsweetened juice, and low-fat milk in elementary and middle schools [85].

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Clearly, advertising represents "big business" across the world and can have a significant effect on young people. Unlike free speech, commercial speech does not enjoy the same protections under the First Amendment of our Constitution. Cigarette advertising and alcohol advertising was banned as they play significant effect on public health, and ads for junk food could easily be restricted. One solution that is no controversial and would be easy to implement is to educate children and teenagers about the effects of advertising literacy. Curricula have been developed that teach young people to become critical viewers of media in all of its form, including advertising. Media education seems to be protective in mitigating harmful effects of media,

including the effects of cigarette, alcohol, and food advertising

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