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# **IMPACT OF TV COMMERCIALS ON URBAN AND RURAL CHILDREN OF SILCHAR**

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## **Abstract**

Every day children are exposed to numerous advertisements the moment they switch on the idiot box. TV advertising shows various aspects of life in a few seconds. For children it is like a window which enables them to escape from their present socio- economic state as well as psychological state to a zone of unending happiness and pleasure. For the present study, a sample of 500 children of age group 2-11 years, residing in urban and rural areas of Silchar is selected. The excessive exposure to TV advertisements may contribute significantly to rise in the level of materialistic attitude in children, unhealthy food habits. The study explores the understanding of capability of the ads according to their age.

Key words: advertisements, children, consumption, education, media, rural, urban, television.

## **Introduction**

Advertisements have become the common ingredient in everyone's life in such a way that everyone in their life at least once has tasted the flavour of ads. An advertisement comes and goes like a flash, although it is short lived, it marks a huge impact on the viewers. The immediate and intended impact by advertiser is that the advertised product is valued in a positive way and the viewer is convinced enough to buy the product (Unnikrishnan and Bajpai, 1995). A child is a careful observer who views the television as a bridge between their ordinary life of child and a magical world of boundless happiness and dreams. Human beings are emotional and aesthetic creatures, who have always invested the things they make, acquire or use with meaning beyond the merely utilitarian (Hood, 2005). Unlike adults they are unable to comprehend the intention of selling behind the ads. Children do not understand the notion of intent to sell and frequently accepts advertisement claims at face value (Macklin, 1999). In late 1970s, the Federal Trade Commission concluded that it was unfair and deceptive to advertise to children younger than 6 years (Federal Trade Commission in the Matter of Children's Advertising: FTC Final Staff Report and Recommendation. Washington, DC, 1981). In order to minimise the harmful effects of ads some countries banned the featuring the ads for a specific time period in a day. Sweden and Norway ban all advertising

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directed at children younger than 12 years, Greece curtails toy advertising until after 10 PM, and Denmark and Belgium strictly control advertising aimed at children (Valkenburg, 2000). India has witnessed a rapid growth in the advertising sector. There has been a rapid spread in TV programming, along with a concomitant growth in TV advertising (Unnikrishnan and Bajpai, 1995).

### **Objectives of the study**

The main objectives of the study are:

- (i) To find out whether the buying behavior of children is influenced by television advertisements.
- (ii) To know what-kind of gratification children achieve when they see an advertisement as well as when they buy the product.
- (iii) To understand the perception of children towards ads according to their age.

### **Hypotheses**

- H1: Rural children are more impacted by advertisements than urban children.
- H2: Television advertisements encourage a sense of materialism among children.
- H3: Children of higher age group are able to understand the underlying meaning of the ads.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Uses and Gratification theory attempts to explain the uses and functions of the media for individuals, groups and society as a whole. It also explains how people use media in order to satisfy their needs. It also identifies the positive as well as negative consequences of individual media use. The core concept of the theory lays the assumption that audience members actively seek out the mass media to satisfy individual needs. But the interpretation of the message varies from one individual to another. The audience may decode the message not in the same way it has been encoded. For instance, children watching a particular advertisement of play station games can be interpreted in many ways. As these games are expensive in nature, some children may feel that buying the product will be a complete waste of money, for another group of children it becomes a desire and they want to have it at any cost and for some it remains a dream as they cannot even think of having it.

According to Blumler and Katz Uses and Gratification theory suggests that media users play an active role in choosing and using the



media. The theorist says that a media user searches for a media source that best fulfills the needs of the user. Uses and gratifications assume that the user has alternate choices to satisfy their need. Wimmer and Dominick (1994) say that U and G began in the 1940s when researchers became interested in why audiences engaged in various forms of media behaviour, such as listening to the radio or reading the newspaper.

### **Review of literature**

Namita Unnikrishnan and Shailaja Bajpai's research study on *Impact of Television Advertisement on Children* was conducted in the year 1995. The research was done on the impact of advertising on the values, attitudes and aspirations of children residing in urban as well as rural areas of Delhi. The study was conducted among 700 children between 5- 15 years. And according to its findings, 75% children between age group 8- 15 want to purchase products that were advertised on TV during that time. Research study titled *The Influence of TV Advertisements on Adolescents of Baroda City* was conducted by Uma Joshi and Ritu Bhatia in 1997. The study revealed that the impact of advertisements on lifestyles, habits, behaviour, emotions and thinking patterns of the adolescents was enormous. The study provides a guideline for parents and schools on how to control the impact of advertisements have pushed their children to words a consumer culture, exposed them to violence and influence that are the harmful to the interest of the society, it also portrays the positive role that advertisements play in the education of children.

A case study titled *The Impact of Television Advertising on child Health and Family Spending* carried out by Kadambini Katke. For the purpose of study random sampling method is used. The sample size was limited to 200 parents of child aged between 3-12 years. The statistical technique of correlation is used to analyse the relationship of television advertising and its impact on child health and family spending. This paper discusses the television advertising and its impact on child health and family spending. The study has revealed that a positive co-relationship exists between time spend with television and its impact on the buying behavior of a child and its influence on family spending. Barrie Gunter, Caroline Oates and Mark Blades (2005), in their book on *Advertising to Children on TV: Content, Impact and Regulation* reviewed the research examines the content of advertising on television aimed at children, children's understanding of advertising, and the influence of advertising on young viewers.

A study conducted on *Freedom to be a Child: Commercial Pressures on Children (2007)* by David Piachaud, London School of Economics. According to researcher, children's lives have been transformed over the past century. Family incomes have increased,



children lead more solitary lives, attitudes to childhood have changed, new products have been developed and commercial pressures on children have increased. Deborah L. Roedder, studied on *Age Differences in Children's Responses to Television Advertising: An Information Processing Approach (1981)*. According to the study, age differences in children's response to television advertising are scrutinised from an information point of view. Jaspal Singh and Namrata Sandhu, studied on the *Impact of Television Commercials on the Social and Moral Behavior of Indian Viewers – Empirical Evidence (2011)* However, there exists no consensus concerning the impact of television commercials on the social and moral behaviour of viewers.

## **Methodology**

### **(i) Design**

The design of the study is survey research based. A sample survey is conducted in the urban and rural areas of Silchar, in order find out the overall impact of television advertisements on school going children of Silchar.

### **(ii) Population and sample of the study**

The population of the study includes children between age group 2-11 years, residing in both urban and rural areas of Silchar respectively. The total sample constitutes 500 children, 245 and 255 from the urban and rural areas of Silchar. The parents of the children of age group 2-7 years are also included in the study as children of this age group cannot provide the exact details.

### **(iii) Sampling technique-**

The study employs a stratified random sampling technique. The universe of the study comprises of all the school going children of both urban and rural areas of Silchar. The town is divided into 28 Wards that governs urban areas of Silchar and 11 Gaon Panchayats governing the rural areas of Silchar. Through stratified random sampling the urban and rural areas are divided into several sub- population called 'strata', the wards and village panchayats. From every ward and village panchayat one school is selected both from urban and rural areas. A total number of 39 schools from urban and rural area are selected through lottery method. The class registers bearing the roll number is used to select the samples at a sampling rate of 1/5 having a sampling interval of 5. Randomly a starting point is chosen, for example, the student bearing roll number 1 and the subjects numbered 6, 11, 16, 26, and 31 and so on.

**(iv) Variables**

Sl. No.	Variables	Categories	Description
1	Age group	2- 11 years	2-4years
			5-7 years
			8-11years
2	Residential Background	Urban and Rural	

**(v) Method of data collection-**

For collection the data, a schedule was framed for the children for collecting the required data. It was served to the age group 8-11.

A schedule bearing the similar structure as the previous is also employed in order to collect data from the parents of the children of age group 2-7 years.

**(vi) Pre testing of the tool**

The tool is pre-tested on 30 accidentally selected students from all age groups from both urban and rural areas. The purpose for pre-testing the tool is to check the clarity of language, ease in responding and average time taken to respond.

**Findings and discussion**

Out of 245 respondents from urban areas 60 belong to the age group 2-4 years, 70 belong to 5-7 years and their parents answered the questions. And 115 children belong to 8-11 years. 23.33% of children between 2-4 years watch TV less than 30 minutes a day, 26.67% watch for an hour every day and 30% of them watch 2-3 hours a day. Majority of the urban children of age group 5-7 watch 2-3 hours a day. The parents of children belonging to rural area of age group 2-4 years answer that majority of the children watch TV 2-3 hours a day. The children of 8-11 watch similarly as the urban children for 2-3 hours a day. 51.67% of kids of urban areas watch TV with their parents and majority of the children of age group 5-7 and 8-11 watch TV alone which offers a free allowance for them to watch any kind of media content. Around 7.75% of urban children watch TV with their neighbours as they do not have an access to television. Greater part of the rural children Of 2-3 years (51.68%) watches TV with



their parents and many children (41.42%) watch alone. Similarly 33.91% of children of 8-11 age groups also prefer to watch TV and around 16.87% of the total rural respondents watch TV with their neighbours as they do not have an access to TV which is higher than the urban population.

Among the urban children cartoons are extremely popular among all age groups this is evident from their responses. Entertainment as well as music channels are also popular but lesser than cartoons. Around 78% of the children watch cartoon channels, so they are more exposed to the characters shown there and the products endorsed by these cartoon characters which may imbibe bad food habits in children (Anand Nawathe, Rohan Gawande, Sudhir Dethe, 2007). Other channels that cater information only occupy a minimal space in the preference of children. Similarly in the rural areas children of all age group are attracted towards entertainment channels. But a negligible percentage watches news and informative channels which is lower than the urban areas. Watching the ads and buying a product is related to one another. They want to buy the product whenever they see an ad or whenever they go out for shopping. Some children are less demanding in nature as they wish to have the product of their choice during occasions only. Very few children consume non-branded products. When the ads are featured a good number of respondents from all age groups pay attention to the ads which is evident when they say that they watch ads without winking their eyes. But majority of the children of the age group 5-7 and 8-11 tend to shuffle the channels when ads are featured. And some of the children are escapist in nature as they compare themselves with the characters featured in the advertisement. Rural children are more influenced by the ads as the frequency of children demanding for advertised products is higher in rural areas. Buying a product when they go out for shopping is lesser in the rural part and number of children buy the non-advertised products as compared to the respondents of the urban areas.

**Table 1: Perception of children regarding advertisements**

Category	Age	Exaggerate facts	Ads are always true	Ads are TV programmes	Ads are not reliable	Not meant for children	Total
Urban	2-4 years	0 (0)	41.66(25)	50 (30)	3.33 (02)	5 (3)	100(60)
	5-7 years	1.42(1)	38.59(27)	31.42(22)	21.43( 15)	7.14 (5)	100(70)
	8-11 years	20.86(24)	20 (23)	12.18(14)	44.35	2.60 ( 3)	100(115)
Rural	2-4 years	0(0)	50(20)	50 (20)	0(0)	0(0)	100(40)
	5-7 years	0(0)	57.58(19)	24.24 (08)	12.12(04)	6.06(02)	100(33)
	8-11 years	13.18(24)	37.91(69)	4.39 (08)	39.56(72)	4.94(09)	100(182)
Total							500



The majority of urban children of 2-4 years are unable to understand the underlying functions of advertisement, they watch and believe them and 50% of them are unable to distinguish between the ads and TV programmes. The children of 5-7 age groups also rely on the information disseminated through the ads and a minimum number of respondents feel that ads exaggerate the facts for promotion of the product. And a large number of respondents of age group 8-11 feel that ads are not reliable. Kara Chan (2001) opines that older children had more consumer experience. Every advertisement is an exaggerated and emotionally highly charged brief burst of information, which is directed to a specific target group (Bergler, 1999).

The rural respondents of age group 2-4 cannot differentiate between ads and TV programmes and believe in whatever is shown. Even 57.58% rural children of 5-7 age groups believe in whatever is shown in the ads which is quite higher than the urban children of the same age group. Oates, Blades and Gunter suggest that young children may not understand the link between advertising and commercial profit. For 37.91% of children between 8-11 years the ads are reliable and for 39.56% ads are not reliable and only 13.18 % believe that ads exaggerate the facts. The understanding capability of children increases with the progression of age. More children in a study (52%) showed explicit understanding of what an advertisement is than the younger children in the Pine and Nash study (32%), suggesting age-related increases in knowledge (Pine, Nash, 2002). Between four and seven, they begin to be able to distinguish advertising from programmes (K. Katke, 2007).

**Table 2: Buying behavior of children**

Category	Age	Every time ads are featured	During occasions	While shopping	Rarely demand for advertised products	Buy non-advertised products	Total
Urban	2-4 years	23.33 (14)	15(09)	35(21)	25(15)	1.67(01)	100(60)
	5-7 years	30(21)	10(07)	30(21)	20(14)	10(07)	100(70)
	8-11 years	24.34(28)	24.34 (28)	23.49(27)	24.34(28)	3.49 (04)	100(115)
Rural	2-4 years	42.5(17)	10(04)	10 (04)	05(02)	32.5(13)	100(40)
	5-7 years	42.43(14)	3.03(01)	30.30 (10)	12.12(04)	12.12(04)	100(33)
	8-11 years	25.28(46)	14.83(27)	15.93 (29)	31.87(58)	12.09(22)	100(182)
Total							500

The present study shows positive relationship between watching the ads and buying behaviour of the children. In the urban areas children do not buy a product if it is not advertised on TV or the advertisement is not attractive. Some of the children do not buy a product if celebrity featured in



the ad in not impressive. Children in the UK who watched more commercial television requested significantly more items (K. J. Pine, Penny Wilson, Avril S. Nash, 2007). The present study shows positive relationship between watching the ads and buying behaviour of the children. In the rural areas majority of the children do not want to buy a product if it is not advertised on TV or the advertisement is not attractive. Maximum numbers of children do not buy a product due to its unavailability in their place which is higher than the urban areas and some of the children do not buy a product due to financial problems. Some of the children do not buy a product if celebrity featured in the ad in not impressive.

When asked the parents of children if their child helps them while making any shopping decision, in 55% of the cases it was found that the child used to influence the buying decision of their parents particularly buying clothes, food items, toys, FMCG items including cosmetics and fashion accessories (Anand Nawathe, Rohan Gawande, Sudhir Dethe, 2007).

**Table 3: Food habit of children**

Category	Age	Homemade food	Packaged fast food	Anything given by parents	Advertised Health drinks	Advertised beverages	Total
Urban	2-4 years	36.67 (22)	45(27)	11.67(07)	0(0)	6.66(04)	100(60)
	5-7 years	38.57(27)	38.57(27)	10(07)	8.58( 06)	4.28(03)	100(70)
	8-11 years	26.08(30)	48.69 (56)	15.65(18)	6.09(07)	3.49 ( 04)	100(115)
Rural	2-4 years	40(16)	57.5(23)	2.5 (01)	0(0)	0(0)	100(40)
	5-7 years	57.58(19)	30.30(10)	12:12 (04)	0(0)	0(0)	100(33)
	8-11 years	53.85(98)	28.02(51)	11.54 (21)	2.74(5)	3.85(07)	100(182)
Total							500

Majority of the urban children consume fast food as well as soft drinks. But it must be mentioned that home-made food is the second preference given by the children. Only a few of them want to consume the health drinks. In the rural area the home-made food is the first preference given by the children. But fast is also very popular among the rural children. And only a few of them want to consume the health drinks. Television pumps in lot of junk food and snack advertisements. Indian child on an average get exposed to not less than 20 attractive messages of these product. More time spent with television viewing more exposure to these messages repeat advertisements message result into placing the brand on top of the mind will result into buying the brand illustrated in the advertisements (K. Katke, 2007).



**Table 4: Gratification achieved after buying the advertised product**

Category	Age	Possessiveness	Mental satisfaction	Status consciousness	Competitiveness	Utility satisfaction	Total
Urban	2-4 years	10 (06)	61.67(37)	05(03)	11.67(07)	11.67(07)	100(60)
	5-7 years	25.78(18)	31.43(22)	10(07)	17.15( 12)	15.71(11)	100(70)
	8-11 years	17.40(20)	39.13 (45)	13.04(15)	10.43(12)	20 ( 23)	100(115)
Rural	2-4 years	17.5(07)	70(28)	0 (0)	12.5(05)	0(0)	100(40)
	5-7 years	42.43(14)	30.30(10)	0 (0)	15.15(05)	12.12(04)	100(33)
	8-11 years	26.39(48)	44.50(81)	3.85 (07)	11.53(21)	13.73(25)	100(182)
Total							500

A good number of respondents feel a sense of possessiveness when they buy an advertised product, majority of them become mentally satisfied after buying the product, some of them try to maintain their status and buy the product to maintain the competition and some of the children become happy with the usage of the product. A good number of respondents feel a sense of possessiveness when they buy an advertised product which is higher in the rural areas, majority of them become mentally satisfied after buying the product, only a few of them try to maintain their status and is lower in the rural areas and some of them buy the product to maintain the competition which is similar as the urban area.

**Table 5: Perception of children regarding function of advertisements**

Category	Age	Create pressure for consumption	Create awareness	Ads implement healthy habits	Have adverse impact on health	Generate a sense of responsibility	Total
Urban	2-4 years	40 (24)	21.67(13)	18.33(11)	13.33(08)	6.67(04)	100(60)
	5-7 years	41.42(29)	14.29(10)	14.29(10)	22.86( 16)	7.14(05)	100(70)
	8-11 years	16.52(19)	54.79(63)	16.52(19)	4.34(05)	7.83 ( 09)	100(115)
Rural	2-4 years	60 (24)	05(02)	10 (04)	20(08)	5(02)	100(40)
	5-7 years	63.64(21)	12.12(04)	9.09 (03)	12.12(04)	3.03(01)	100(33)
	8-11 years	29.12(53)	39.57(72)	23.08 (42)	5.49(10)	2.74(05)	100(182)
Total							500



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