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RESEARCH ARTICLE

EFFECT OF MEDIA ON THE FOOD SELECTION AND PURCHASE IN CHILDREN 7 TO 9 YEARS

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ABSTRACT

Media advocacy has been defined as the art and science of working with the news media to enhance the portrayal of health, thereby potentially changing public opinion and influencing social norms. Although television has the power to educate on nutrition, exercise, and a wide variety of health related issues; it can also be a negative force through images and advertisements, which influence viewers to make poor food choices or to overeat. It has an effect on people of all walks of life-right from childhood to the elderly.

Aim: To study the effect of television on the food selection and purchase in children 7 to 9 years.
Methodology: 702 children from various categories of schools which represented their financial background were selected by purposive sampling from Nasik city. A questionnaire was given to them to elicit information regarding the selection and purchase decision of food, consumption of food in front of the television.

Result: 17.1 % of the entire sample always have their food in front of the television. 61% of the total children make their purchase decisions of some of the food items depending on the advertisement seen on the television. The International school children are most influenced by the advertisements seen on the television.

Conclusion: The influence of media, television in particular, is capable of being positive despite many of the negative images as long as audience makes good choices and use ability to think critically.

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INTRODUCTION

Media consist of several different types of communication channels : Television, radio, cinema, newspapers, magazines, and Internet-based Web sites. The Indian media was initiated since the late 18th century with print media started in 1780. About 100,000 people work in the creative media industry in India, and they influence a population of 1.15 billion people. (Wikipedia) Today, media is in our lives no matter where we go. From Television, radio, and the news, to magazines, newspapers, and the internet, media plays a big role in the spreading ideas, norms, and styles to people. Media spreads information really quickly to millions of people. Media is around people no matter where they turn, and they face it on a daily basis in some form. Health media advocacy has been defined as the art and science of working with the news media to enhance the portrayal of health, thereby potentially changing public opinion and influencing social norms, (Wallack *et al.*, 1996). Many people have their own definition of fitness. The problem is that most people have subconsciously picked up their definition of physical fitness from the media. The media tends to give us the wrong perceptions about almost everything. (eg The ideal weight of a model , an adolescent girl etc).

We subconsciously pick up on the subtle innuendos on fitness and they become lodged in our thinking process. Junk food advertising can be viewed with regularity on television. The whole "process" of watching television is not an active one. And most likely, the diet accompanying television-watching is high in sugar, fat and calories. Health and fitness related corporations spend millions on television ads for a reason: they work. (Ron Kaufman 2003). The effects of television viewing, computers and video games cannot be underestimated, these reach far into the foundation of the child's relationship to the world. They affect the child's values, their relationship to and estimation of other people, their relationship to themselves, their perception of reality (Julie Le Gal Brodeur *et al.*, 2007) Even regardless of the content watched, television, films and computer games are addictive, impoverish creativity and imagination, as well as keep them sitting in front of a screen instead of moving and playing, (Winn *et al.*, 2002).

Research suggests that food choices are, in part, affected by television advertising and that most television advertising is for food with questionable nutritional value. A study performed at Georgia State University shows a strong link between food preference in small children and colorful television advertising (Shin-Yi Chou *et al.*, 2006) Another done at Louisiana State University and presented to the

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American Heart Association shows that most ads during high child viewing hours are for sugary breakfast cereals, candy snacks, and fast food (Understanding Childhood Obesity *et al.*, 2011). Researchers also found that commercials didn't really even focus on the food, but on lifestyle and "having fun." (Health Assist). A study conducted by the nonprofit Kaiser Family Foundation found kids are exposed to about 18,000 advertisements a year on average and that slightly more than one third, or 34 percent of those advertisements, were for candy and snack foods. Another 28 percent were for cereal and 10 percent were for fast food. A smaller portion of the advertisements were for dairy products and fruit juices. But of the nearly 9,000 advertisements reviewed during the five months covered by the study, none were for fruits or vegetables, the foundation said, noting this was especially troubling given the childhood obesity epidemic in the developed countries. The study did not evaluate how many other food ads kids see via other media including print, online, in-store and in-school marketing (Parija *et al.*, 2007). A study by Foster *et al.* (2008) linked socioeconomic status to both television watching and obesity--in other words, both television watching and obesity may be independent factors that are connected by a third factor such as income, parental education and knowledge of nutrition, availability of parental supervision for activity, etc (Gary *et al.*, 2008)

Aim and Objectives

The study aimed to examine the effect of media on the food selection and purchase in children 7 to 9 years.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

702 children from three different categories of schools namely, Govt aided English Medium schools, Private International English Medium schools and Marathi Medium Municipality schools of Nashik city were selected by purposive sampling. The financial background of the children attending the schools was different and ranged between low income to high income group, with high income group children attending the private International schools and low income group children attending the municipality schools. A questionnaire was given to them to elicit information regarding their food habits, television viewing, consumption of food in front of the television, likes and dislikes, food selection and purchase, fast food and junk food consumption.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis was done by using SPSS software version 16.0. The data obtained on different parameters was coded and entered in SPSS sheet for further analysis. Pearson and spearman correlations were applied to the data for finding associations. A prior, an alpha value of <0.05 was considered to be significant.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Effect of Media Vs Food Consumption of the Children

The eating habits of children as related to their parents' free purchasing power, watching television or the impact of

television were assessed. Fig 1 shows the frequency of food consumption in front of the television by the entire sample of children (702).

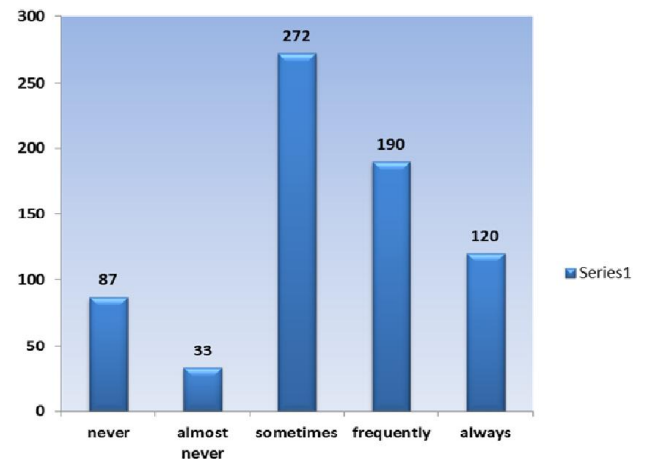


Fig. 1. Food Consumption in Front of the Television (Frequency)

It is observed that 272 children (38.7%) have their food sometimes in front of the television, 190 children (27.1%) frequently sit in front of the television while having food, 120 children (17.1%) always have their food in front of the television, while 87 children (12.4%) never watch television when having their food.

Fig 2 indicates the frequency of purchase decision made by the entire sample of children (702) based on television advertisement

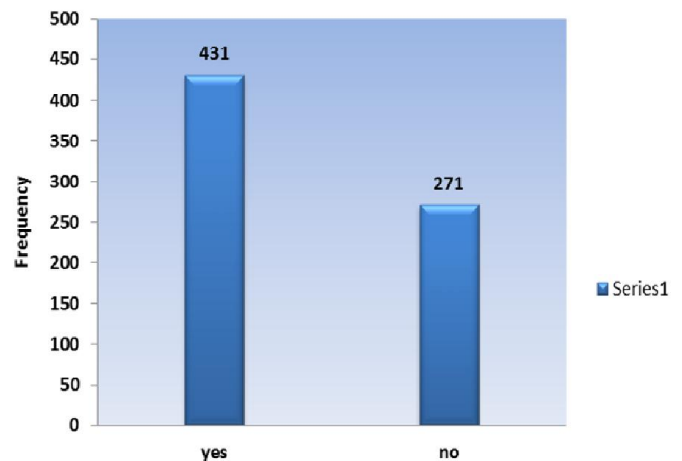


Fig. 2. Purchase Decision Based on Television Advertisement (Frequency)

The above figure also shows the frequency of purchase decisions of some food items depending on the advertisement seen on television. 431 children (61.0%) make their purchase decisions of some food items depending on the advertisement seen on the television, whereas 271 children (39.0%) are not influenced by advertisements seen on the television while making purchase decisions of some food items. Taras HL (1989) had stated based on their study that television advertisements tend to push foods that are energy dense and nutrient poor. Children request foods that are more frequently advertised on television and television viewing is co-related with calorie intake (Taras *et al.*, 1989)

Fig 3 represents the mean of food consumption sitting in front of the television by the children from different schools

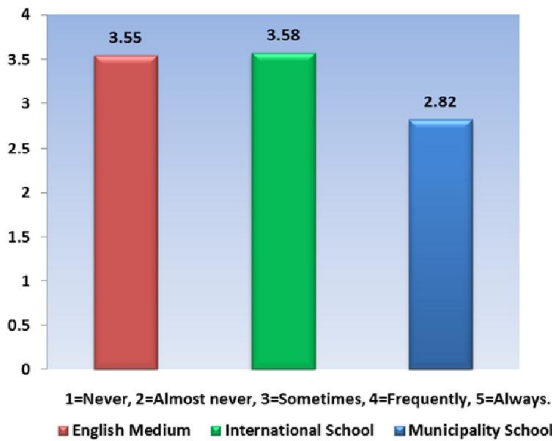


Fig. 3. Mean Food Consumption in Front of Television by Children from Different Schools

The fig 3 shows that, there is insignificant difference between EM (3.55) and IS (3.58) children regarding the frequency of the child eating his food in front of the television. From the fig. it is seen that the children from both the schools (EM and IS) ‘sometimes to frequently’ consume food sitting in front of the television. The children of MS however only ‘sometimes’ (mean 2.82) eat food in front of the television.

Fig 4 shows the mean of food purchase decision based on television advertisements by children from different schools

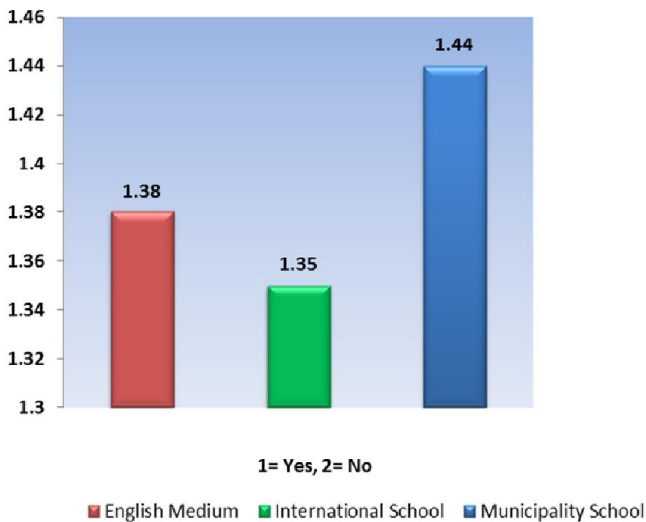


Fig. 4. Mean Food Purchase Decision Based on Television Advertisements by Children from Different Schools

The children from all the types of schools are influenced by the advertisements seen on the television and this influences their decision to purchase some food items. The IS children (mean 1.35) are most influenced by the advertisements seen on the television, followed by EM (1.38) and lastly the MS children (mean 1.44).

Purchasing Habits

To investigate whether the child required parental permission in purchase of snacks and sweets relevant questions were

asked in the questionnaire. The results are presented in figure 5 and 6. Fig 5 shows the food purchasing habits of the entire sample of children (702).

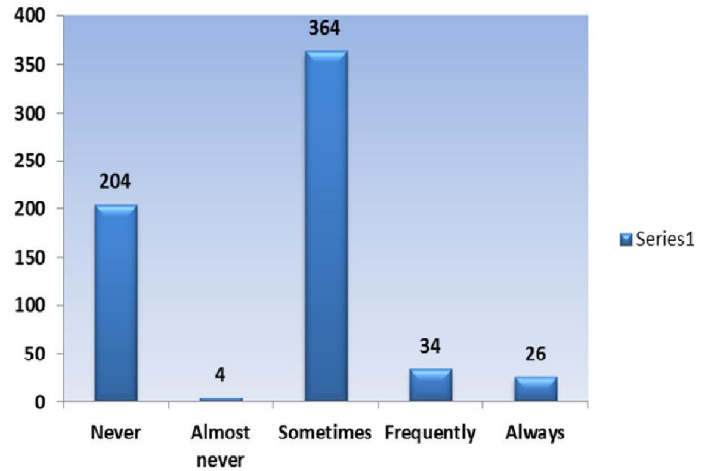


Fig. 5. Purchasing Habits of food (Frequency)

Frequency of how frequently the child can buy his own choice of snacks and sweets is also seen in fig.5. 204 children (29.1%) can never buy his / her own choice of snacks and sweets, 74 children (10.5%) can almost never buy their own choice of snacks and sweets, 364 children (51.9%) can sometimes buy snacks and sweets according to their choice and 26 children (3.7%) are always given the freedom to buy snacks and sweets of their choice.

Fig 6 shows the mean of purchasing habits of children from different type of schools.

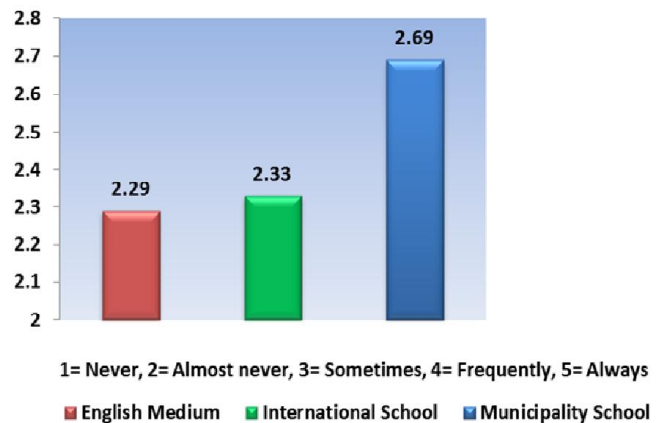


Fig. 6. Mean of Purchase Habits of Children from Different Schools

Fig. 6 shows the mean frequency of selection of snacks and sweets by the child’s own choice.

The EM children have stricter parents (mean 2.29) as compared to IS parents (mean 2.33) where frequency of buying snacks and sweets by the child’s own choice is concerned. The child can almost never buy sweets and / or snacks of his own choice. The MS children’s parents are liberal in comparison (mean 2.69) in dealing with the frequency of buying snacks and sweets of the child’s choice. They sometimes buy the snacks and sweets according to the choice of the children.

Conclusion

It's the perennial question of whether these products are being advertised because we want them or we want them because they are being advertised. Actually it is a little bit of both — and it's a reinforcing cycle. But efforts should be made to break this cycle. 17.1 % of the entire sample always have their food in front of the television irrespective of the type of school attended. 61% of the total children make their purchase decisions of some of the food items depending on the advertisement seen on the television. Out of the 702 children 29.1 % (n=204) can never buy his/her own choice of snacks and sweets. 3.7 % are always given the freedom to buy snacks and sweets of their choice. Income and media are strong influencing factors on the selection of food in children. The International school children who come from high income families are most influenced by the advertisements seen on the television, may it be of sweets or snacks. Children coming from English Medium schools have stricter parents as compared to International and Municipal school children where frequency of buying snacks and sweets by the child's own choice is concerned. The current media culture is complicated and very confusing (Jennifer *et al*, 2006)

The objective review of health communications in the popular media shows that while there is tremendous potential for the popular media to include positive health messages, it is a double-edged sword.

Recommendations:

- Educate people about the dangers of eating disorders through media.
- The influence of media on children, television in particular, is capable of being positive despite many of the negative images as long as good choices and critical thinking are used.

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