

JUNK FOOD TELEVISION ADVERTISEMENTS IN PAKISTAN AND EATING BEHAVIOR OF CHILDREN

Usama Javed*

MPhil. Scholar Department of Media & Communication Studies, The Islamia University of
Bahawalpur Usama.javed6@gmail.com

Sadaf Irtaza

Assistant Professor, Department Of Media Studies
University of Balochistan Quetta

Umer Javed

Faculty of Media & Communication Studies, University of Central Punjab, Lahore
u.javed@cyberpanel.net

ABSTRACT

Obesity in children is a worldwide health issue. The health of children has become a primary focus for the parents who seek healthy growth of their child therefore they research about a variety of topics, including obesity in their children. This particular research is part of a larger study which evaluated the Impact of fast-food TV advertisements on children's eating behavior. The focus of this particular project was to assess the reaction of children after watching fast food advertisement and to find out either advertisements persuade kids towards fast food consumption or not. It will also discuss how some of these advertisements were exaggerated to persuade children to instantly convince their parents to buy them fast food. It should first be noted that overall, children are prone to bad decision making because they cannot differentiate between right or wrong and healthy or unhealthy foods. Every fast-food advertisement was found to be exaggerating for consumption, as opposed to telling truth about the nutrition content of fast foods. This is an important finding because it is just as valuable, if not more so, for parents to prevent a disease in children as it is to detect it early. All fast food advertisement was considered when assessing persuasion in terms of consumption. All advertisement used more than 50% of the time when soliciting money. These results lend ideas for future research on such topics as well as ideas to better the current state of the diseases associated with fast food. The methodologies applied to this research are quantitative method that included questionnaire whereby 300 sample sizes were selected to fill the questionnaire. My study intends to investigate that does children's eating behavior change after watching fast food advertisement? The theory I used in this research is cultivation theory and I came to the conclusion through empirical research that fast food advertisements have a lasting impact on children, not only creating cravings in them, but also making them want fast food from their parents. Moreover, the results of the study support the claim that fast food advertising affects children.
Keywords: Obesity, Fast Food Advertisements, Children, Parents, Aggression, Mental Health, Physical health, Eating Habits.

INTRODUCTION

Children today consume more frequent meals and snacks compared to previous decades. Calorie intake has increased, driven by sugary drinks and high-calorie foods. The food environment plays a significant role, and interventions such as offering low-calorie options in parks, neighborhoods, and schools can help combat childhood obesity. The availability of unhealthy food outlets, such as convenience stores and fast food restaurants, is linked to higher consumption of sugary beverages and poorer dietary choices.

Childhood obesity is a worldwide problem with far-reaching implications. Understanding the reasons behind the rise in obesity rates, such as parental influences and access to quality food, is vital for prevention. Promoting healthy eating habits through family meals and societal initiatives can positively influence children's choices.

Fast food and its connection to obesity have been extensively studied. Factors such as fast food

consumption, sugary beverage intake, snack food sources, and portion sizes have been identified. Fast

food has gained popularity, contributing to the increase in obesity rates, especially among children in smaller, dual-income households who find fast food more convenient. The influence of advertising further affects consumer choices.

In terms of nutritional intake, children in Pakistan consume an average of 134.3 grams of sugar per day, with sugary beverages, sweets, and fruit juices being significant contributors. Sugary beverage consumption is associated with weight gain and can lead to obesity due to increased energy intake. Snack foods, including candies, chips, and ready-to-eat meals, also contribute to the obesity epidemic by providing excess calories.

Understanding the impact of the local food environment on eating patterns is crucial, particularly for parents. Research in Pakistan indicates that snack-food outlets along the route to school influence children's calorie, sugary beverage, and snack food/sweets consumption. This provides valuable insights into how the food supply in the community can shape children's diets.

Eating disorders, caused by factors such as meal scheduling, bad habits, and rapid eating, contribute to weight gain in healthy individuals. Obesity in children is associated with negative psychological and physiological outcomes, including academic difficulties and school absenteeism. Advertising has a significant impact on adolescents, influencing their eating habits and preferences. The global increase in obesity can be attributed, in part, to the extensive marketing of unhealthy foods, particularly fast food, which young children cannot differentiate from nutritious options. However, public health messages focused solely on nutritional content may not effectively change dietary behaviors.

The convenience and dislike of cooking are major drivers of fast food consumption. Increasing the availability of healthier options and making nutrient-dense meals more affordable can help reduce fast food intake. Cooking interventions and early exposure to food preparation can promote healthier choices. Policy measures like tax increases on unhealthy foods and conditional use licenses for restaurants can encourage the availability of healthier menu options. Age, gender, and marital status influence the frequency of fast food consumption, with singles and younger individuals being more likely to eat fast food.

Eating disorders and advertising impact weight gain, and addressing convenience and cooking preferences can help reduce fast food consumption. Policy interventions and interventions promoting healthier options are essential in combating obesity. Age, gender, and marital status also play a role in fast food eating patterns.

Young people in Pakistan show a higher tendency to eat at fast food outlets, suggesting a potential link between fast food consumption and individuals' perspectives on meals. Further research is needed to understand the relationship between fast food intake and important psychological, social, and mental qualities. Given the fast-paced lifestyle in Pakistan, it may be more effective to focus on improving the availability and selection of healthier options at fast food restaurants within recommended calorie limits rather than solely emphasizing the healthiness of fast food itself.

Childhood obesity and overweight are strongly associated with an increased risk of adult obesity and various health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, and certain cancers. Preventive programs should prioritize efforts to prevent childhood obesity and overweight. To address the widespread and uncontrolled advertising of fast food through television ads, policymakers and the community need to take more serious measures. These advertisements not only pose a threat to public health but also have a pervasive influence on the eating habits of children and adolescents. Regular consumption of heavily advertised unhealthy meals, including fast food, puts children at significant risk of various negative health consequences in the future.

Nielsen (2012) - Fast food advertising is pervasive and highly targeted, making it one of the most heavily promoted industries globally.

Jennifer A. et al (2019) - Childhood obesity is a growing global public health concern, affecting over 18% of children and adolescents worldwide. The rise in obesity rates has led to an increase in associated diseases and health complications.

Frans Folkvord et al (2016) - Pediatric obesity has been linked to the onset of heart disease in early childhood and is a significant issue, particularly in wealthier nations. Recent research highlights the urgent need for addressing undernutrition as well as preventative measures for obesity and diabetes.

Overall - The 21st-century child obesity epidemic poses a serious public health challenge, affecting both developed and developing nations. Immediate action is required to address the alarming increase in obesity rates and its associated health risks.

WHO (2012) - Childhood obesity has significant long-term social and financial consequences.

Obesity rates in the United States have nearly doubled in the past 50 years, with high prevalence among adults, adolescents, and juveniles.

Statement of the Problem

It is hoped that this research study would improve the literary framework already in place. With the participation and consideration of those components into current investigation, it is guiding the unknown places. The study may take a theoretical approach and determine the significance of commercials in shaping and altering young people's attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions about food. Additionally, this study, which emphasizes the importance of children's health, may throw light on the obligations of both the government and media authorities.

Because they are such a powerful tool for communication, advertisements can significantly influence how children think and behave. Finally, this study is likely to be beneficial for Pakistani society at large of the country. Accordingly, the present research may also help citizenry of Pakistan to comprehend the change of fast-food consumption in children

Research Questions

The research questions were developed as: -

Q1: Do fast food advertisement affects children eating behavior?

Q2: Does eating fast food lead to obesity?

Q3: Does fast food make kids more aggressive?

Q4: Do advertisements use cunning techniques to attract kids' interests?

LITERATURE REVIEW

S M (2006) there is numerous ways that food is advertised to children, but it is unclear what effect each one may have on the target audience. One illustration is food branding, a type of marketing typically used to target children and encourage them to build strong emotional bonds with a product's name or logo.

Hastings et al (2006) After reviewing the available data, a number of significant regulatory agencies in the US and Europe came to the conclusion that food advertising has a significant influence on how children eating habits and may even be directly responsible for the rise in obesity rates.

Valkenburg et al (2005) it is obvious that branding has a significant impact on children how they feel about food, and even more concerning, it's possible that we don't always have conscious control over how we feel about brands. Early on, children pick up on brand recognition.

Lapierre et al (2011) In two comparable experiments, children of a similar age reported liking snack foods more when they were served in containers with officially sanctioned cartoon characters on them rather than when they were served in plain containers.

M. D. Seitz et al (2008) Children's television marketing sometimes includes goods that are unhealthy for them, such as those with high quantities of fat, salt, or sugar that are deliberately advertised to them.

McAlister et al (2010). Children as young as three years old may recognize and form good perceptions of food and beverage companies that promote to them. Thirty-eight children aged three to four participated in a study in which they were presented 50 corporate logos with no extra mascots or product pictures. Half of the designs were created by companies targeted at younger children, while the other half were created by companies aimed at teens. Children correctly recognized 54% of the brands offered to young children, compared to just 24% of the brands promoted to older children or adults, suggesting that children are effectively targeted by child-directed marketing and that they identify goods with their brand logo. The children were given a picture and asked to describe it; the researchers then coded how well the children named the brand of the goods.

M. R. Longacre et al (2017) Emmanuel M. Taveras, Ph.D. (2006) On two separate plates, serve each kid half a McDonald's hamburger, half a McDonald's chicken McNugget, a quarter of a McDonald's fry, and three ounces of low-fat milk. Except for the packaging, there was no variation between the two product sets. One set included "normal" McDonald's meal packaging, whilst the other used white packaging with no branding or other indications on the exterior. The kids experimented with each component of both sets, debating whether they were comparable and which was superior. Children largely preferred branded items to non-branded versions, with the exception of the hamburger, which was scored equally highly by both sets of tasters. The number of TVs people possessed strengthened their devotion to well-known firms.

S French et al (2002) A spike in health-care costs as a result of these developments might have

major ramifications for the American people's future well-being and economic production. One of numerous possible affects on children's eating habits and food choices is nutritional advertising.

To be clear, it is S. Reyes (2003) Toys and other goods marketed at children as young as three are increasingly being used by food companies to develop a positive connection with the brand from an early age, increasing the possibility that the kid would seek it out in the future. This advertising campaign's goal is to improve customer like for and knowledge of the featured brand. Toy firms have joined up with the food industry to sell their products via playthings. The previous year, General Mills and Target stores partnered on a line of children's pajamas inspired by cereals like Trix and Lucky Charms. The line was exclusively available at Target.

According to Coon et al (2002) it is critical to investigate whether or not the marketing and promotion of food commodities to young consumers influences children's eating habits or weight. Between the mid-1970s and the early 1980s, there was a rush of study on the impact of food advertising on children's eating habits and preferences. The purpose of these study activities was to understand more about how the amount of time children spend watching television advertising influences their dietary habits and the types of food they request. newest investigation findings

Tucker et al (2002) On the effects of television food advertising on preschoolers' and school-age children' food choices came to the following conclusions: Many experimental investigations of children's food choices have shown that exposed children are more likely than non-exposed children to pick marketed food items. Several research have verified this finding. Numerous surveys, diaries, experimental trials, and in-person observations of mother-child pairs shopping have revealed that children's exposure to food television advertising increases the number of attempts they make to persuade their parents to buy certain foods; in other words, the more frequently children watch food television advertising, the more frequently they try to persuade their parents to buy certain foo. The number of times a product is requested by customers indicates how often it is marketed. The issue's intricacy may explain why there has been so little study on the influence of food marketing on customers' actual food consumption.

K. D. Brownell et al (2001) Many studies have been conducted to investigate how exposure to food advertising influences children's eating habits and food preferences, although the vast majority of these studies have relied on field experiments, survey research, or cross-sectional correlation studies. External validity is one possible advantage of doing correlational research. This is due to the wide spectrum of consequences that may be researched. The absence of supporting evidence connecting the two incidents is a fundamental issue. Longitudinal studies on how food advertising effects children's diets are scarce. Furthermore, no meta-analyses of research have been conducted to aggregate effect-size estimates from several studies into a single number. Furthermore, the bulk of the current work has focused on food ads on television. Regardless, the majority of indicators are pointing in the right direction.

AKTAŞ (2006) How kids are influenced to eat more or less by what they see on TV. He believes that the food children eat has a direct impact on the occurrence of illnesses such as diabetes and cancer later in life. He investigates the kind of meals that children like and how they respond to television ads. The data support this viewpoint. Commercials on television have a direct impact on children's eating habits.

The inclusion of a celebrity endorsement on a product's packaging was connected with a considerable increase in sales. This impact has also been seen in circumstances unrelated to food intake.

Bruce et al (2016) while it is possible that ads influence children's diets, the mechanisms behind this effect are complex and may vary depending on environment and person. Current studies using functional magnetic resonance imaging, however, show that when toddlers are exposed to television food advertising, their brains indicate considerably higher activity of the ventromedial prefrontal cortices. These cortices' functions include decision making, evaluating rewards, and exercising self-control.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher employed quantitative approaches to gather data for this investigation. Despite the fact that there are numerous methods for gathering data for quantitative research, the researcher chooses the survey approach since it is an easy way to gather data. Additionally, the survey method makes it simple to reach the population and offers more chances to get precise and first-hand data. Yes, a survey was used to collect the data. A questionnaire is a method for gathering data that entails a list of inquiries the majority of which are closed-ended and there are 22 questions and there answers are based on Likert

Scale. The survey was carried out online with Google Forms and was sent to parents in Pakistan. Based on the sample technique, the Google form URLs were sent to Parents via email, Whatsapp, Facebook Messenger, and Instagram. The need to swiftly gather data drove the adoption of web resources, and it is more practical today that the Covid-19 Pandemic is still there.

Data Collection and Research Instruments

Data collecting tools are the tools used to collect data for a research study. The researcher employed a questionnaire because this study was based on a survey strategy which contains information on the impact of fast food advertisement on children's eating behaviour.

Table 1: Fast food Advertisements influences children's eating habits?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	81	27
Agree	169	56.3
Neutral	40	13.3
Disagree	9	3
Strongly Disagree	1	0.3
Total	300	100
Mean Score	1.933	
Std. Deviation	0.742	

The above table demonstrates the statistics of the data on the question of: "Fast food Advertisements influence children's eating habits?" Hence, the result portrays that 169 (56.3%) people agree with the statement while 81 (27%) people strongly agree, 40 (13.3%) people are neutral whereas 9 (3%) disagree and 1 (0.3%) people strongly disagree with the statement. The mean score is 2.0967 and the std. deviation is 0.91476 which is analyzed via SPSS.

Table 2: Obesity among children caused by fast food?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	91	30.3
Agree	151	50.3
Neutral	41	13.7
Disagree	10	3.3
Strongly Disagree	7	2.3
Total	300	100
Mean Score	1.9700	
Std. Deviation	0.886	

The above table demonstrates the statistics of the data on the question of: "Obesity among children caused by fast food?" Hence, the result portrays that 151 (50.3%) people agree with the statement while 91 (30.3%) people strongly agree, 41 (13.7%) people are neutral whereas 10 (3.3%) disagree and 7 (2.3%) people strongly disagree with the statement. The mean score is 2.0967 and the std. deviation is 0.91476 which is analyzed via SPSS.

Table 3: Fast food TV Ads affects children's psychology negatively?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	59	19.7
Agree	159	53
Neutral	55	18.3
Disagree	20	6.7
Strongly Disagree	7	2.3
Total	300	100

	Javed, Irtaza, & Javed
Mean Score	2.1900
Std. Deviation	0.907

The above table demonstrates the statistics of the data on the question of: “Fast food TV Ads affects children's psychology negatively?” Hence, the result portrays that 159 (53%) people agree with the statement while 59 (19.7%) people strongly agree, 55 (18.3%) people are neutral whereas 20 (6.7%) disagree and 7 (2.3%) people strongly disagree with the statement. The mean score is 2.0967 and the std. deviation is 0.91476 which is analyzed via SPSS.

Table 4: To attract children's attention, fast food television advertisers use tricks and gimmicks?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	88	29.3
Agree	160	53.3
Neutral	42	14
Disagree	7	2.3
Strongly Disagree	3	1
Total	300	100
Mean Score	1.923	
Std. Deviation	0.7828	

The above table demonstrates the statistics of the data on the question of: “To attract children's attention, fast food television advertisers use tricks and gimmicks?” Hence, the result portrays that 160 (53.3%) people agree with the statement while 88 (29.3%) people strongly agree, 42 (14%) people are neutral whereas 7 (2.3%) disagree and 3 (1%) people strongly disagree with the statement. The mean score is 2.0967 and the std. deviation is 0.91476 which is analyzed via SPSS.

Table 5: Bivariate Correlations

		Watching Ads	Children Intention TV (Psychology or Thinking)	Eating Behavior
Watching TV Ads	Pearson Correlation	1	.624**	.550**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	300	300	300
Children Intention (Psychology or Thinking)	Pearson Correlation	.624**	1	.508**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	300	300	300
Eating Behavior	Pearson Correlation	.550**	.508**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	300	300	300

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 provide the correlation analysis between all survey respondents, taking into account all questionnaires from the target group. The positive correlation shows a good relationship between the population and the investigated factor. The values with a double star (**) indicates that the Correlation is significant at the 1% level of significance.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The results of the research study make it abundantly evident that ads have a substantial influence on the eating habits of youngsters. This is partly due to the fact that youngsters are unable to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy food options, and that they frequently do not have an understanding of what constitutes a balanced diet. This view is further supported by the results of questionnaires that

were distributed to parents. These results imply that schools should include instruction on nutrition programmes as part of their curriculum. Children have the opportunity to develop an awareness of the exaggerated promises made by advertising firms and an understanding of the underlying objectives behind commercials if they engage in activities such as these.

Not only is there support for the connection between eating at fast food restaurants and being overweight in my own research, but also in studies that were done in this subject in the past. It is common knowledge that fast food contains high levels of both fat and sugar, both of which, in excessive amounts, can be harmful to one's health. According to the proverb, "everything that is done to excess is bad." When what they want is taken away from them, children have a propensity to become hostile and obstinate by their very nature. The advertising industry takes use of this natural propensity by adopting crafty and exaggerated strategies to attract the attention of young people, particularly youngsters. These advertising have been created with the goals of expanding market share, increasing sales, and eventually increasing profits.

There is mounting evidence that children's exposure to commercials for fast food contributes to the epidemic of childhood obesity that is currently sweeping the globe. Numerous studies have shown that exposure to advertisements of this nature has a detrimental effect on the eating habits of children. Consuming fast food on a consistent basis is related with an increased risk of developing eczema, rhinitis, and asthma. In light of these findings, it is suggested that fast food businesses and advertisers place a greater emphasis on delivering accurate nutritional information and improving the overall quality of the food that they have available.

A significant portion of a child's time spent in school should be devoted to instruction on how to maintain a balanced diet. For the benefit of their health in the long run, it is essential to discourage youngsters from eating at fast food restaurants. The media has a tremendous impact on the dietary preferences of children, and parents frequently buy the products that are advertised to them in an effort to appease their children. The promotion of unhealthy foods in the media can, sadly, result in an increase in consumption of those goods. As a result, it is of the utmost importance to offer children a variety of nutrient-dense food options in order to facilitate their optimal growth and guarantee a healthier future for them.

REFERENCES

- Nielsen (2012) *Fast Food Marketing Ranking Table*.
https://www.fastfoodmarketing.org/media/FAST-FOOD_FACTS_2021-Results-v4%20FINAL.pdf
- Jennifer A. Emond, Meghan R. Longacre, Keith M. Drake, Linda J. Titus, Kristy Hendricks, Todd MacKenzie, Jennifer L. Harris, Jennifer E. Carroll, Lauren P. Cleveland, Kelly Gaynor, Madeline A. Dalton, Influence of child-targeted fast food TV advertising exposure on fast food intake: A longitudinal study of preschool-age children, *Appetite*, Volume 140, 2019.
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31078700/>
- Frans Folkvord, Doeschka J Anschütz, Emma Boyland, Bridget Kelly, Moniek Buijzen, Food advertising and eating behavior in children, *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, Volume 9, 2016, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S2352154615001564>
- Allen, R., Jones, W., & Hughes, A. (2019). The role African American parents play in childhood obesity in central mississippi. *Am Res J Hum Socical Science*, 2, 1-7. <https://www.arjhss.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/A2100107.pdf>
- The joint WHO/FAO expert consultation on diet, nutrition and the prevention of chronic diseases: process, product and policy implications. *Public health nutrition*, 7(1a), 245-250.
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/14972063/>
- Connor, S. M. (2006). Food-related advertising on preschool television: building brand recognition in young viewers. *Pediatrics*, 118(4), 1478-1485. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17015538/>
- Hastings G, McDermott LL, Angus K, Stead M, Thomson S. The extent, nature and effects of food promotion to children: a review of the evidence. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2006.
<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/43627>
- Valkenburg PM, Buijzen M. Identifying determinants of young children's brand awareness: television, parents and peers. *Appl Dev Psychol* 2005;26:456-68
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/222516467_Identifying_determinants_of_young_childrens_brand_awareness_Television_parents_and_peers

- Lapierre, M. A., Vaala, S. E., & Linebarger, D. L. (2011). Influence of licensed spokescharacters and health cues on children's ratings of cereal taste. *Archives of pediatrics & adolescent medicine*, 165(3), 229-234. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21383272/>
- Batada, A., Seitz, M. D., Wootan, M. G., & Story, M. (2008). Nine out of 10 food advertisements shown during Saturday morning children's television programming are for foods high in fat, sodium, or added sugars, or low in nutrients. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 108(4), 673-678. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/18375225/>
- McAlister, A. R., & Cornwell, T. B. (2010). Children's brand symbolism understanding: Links to theory of mind and executive functioning. *Psychology & Marketing*, 27(3), 203-228. https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/65039/20328_ft.pdf?sequence=1
- Dalton, M. A., Longacre, M. R., Drake, K. M., Cleveland, L. P., Harris, J. L., Hendricks, K., & Titus, L. J. (2017). Child-targeted fast-food television advertising exposure is linked with fast-food intake among pre-school children. *Public health nutrition*, 20(9), 1548-1556. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28416041/>
- Story, M., Neumark-Sztainer, D., & French, S. (2002). Individual and environmental influences on adolescent eating behaviors. *Journal of the American Dietetic association*, 102(3), S40-S51. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/11902388/>
- Coon, K. A., & Tucker, K. L. (2002). Television and children's consumption patterns. *Minerva Pediatr*, 54(5), 423-436. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12244280/>
- Roberto CA, Baik J, Harris JL, Brownell KD. Influence of licensed characters on children's taste and snack preferences. *Pediatrics* 2010;126:88–93. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20566614/>
- AKTAŞ ARNAS, Y. A. Ş. A. R. E. (2006). The effects of television food advertisement on children's food purchasing requests. *Pediatrics international*, 48(2), 138-145. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16635172/>
- Bruce, A. S., Pruitt, S. W., Ha, O. R., Cherry, J. B. C., Smith, T. R., Bruce, J. M., & Lim, S. L. (2016). The influence of televised food commercials on children's food choices: evidence from ventromedial prefrontal cortex activations. *The Journal of pediatrics*, 177, 27-32. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27526621/>