



Effects Of Digital Food Advertising and Its Influence on Children's Dietary Choices in Lahore, Pakistan

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Received: August 28, 2025; Accepted: October 24, 2025; Published: December 30, 2025

Abstract

The media plays a very crucial role in shaping minds and altering the behavioral effects on individuals. Advertising is the most persuasive medium in influencing people of any age. Digital media is now performing the role of strategized marketing techniques with innovative advertising content. It is most commonly used among children to watch different entertaining content including advertisements of their interests. Digitalized food commercials are targeting children who have the strength to develop behavioral changes and health issues. Children prefer unhealthy food, which may cause many diseases. The researcher had studied the effects of digital food advertising and its influence on children's dietary choices in Lahore, Pakistan. Researcher finds out marketing strategy of commercials and their effects on children, and has examined the influence of digitalized food advertisement on children's health. This research tends to study parents' role and their interest in their child's food preferences. Here, the researcher had applied two theories, cultivation and social learning theory. Methodology used by the researcher in this article is quantitative and involved conducting a survey method in which a questionnaire is used as a tool, and had applied convenient sampling technique was applied. The results show that the children's eating behavior is affected. So, it's having a greater impact on children's behavior, and after watching, children's eating patterns and their behavior are altered. Food commercials are making children stubborn and engaging them to buy certain products, which can, in turn, alter their behavior after watching food advertisements.

Keywords: Advertising, Children, Commercials, Digital Media, Food, Health, Marketing

1. Introduction

This research tends to study digitalized food commercials made for children based on healthy and unhealthy food patterns, in which children can't differentiate between them. Prioritizing unhealthy foods can cause numerous diseases that cannot be controlled by the parents, and then by the children later. Commercials have different marketing strategies that can change preferences as well.

The diet of the children depends on the preferences and intake of food, so the advertisers advertise foods according to children, and their health is compromised accordingly. Healthy foods are helpful in a way that can make a child's diet healthy. But, on the contrary to the unhealthy food, the diet can be affected. The Commercial's role is pivotal in setting the agenda. Watching digital media commercials, children's desire to eat the food that attracts them, like Cocomo, etc.

The researcher explains the beneficial and bad aspects of various food advertising. Colorful advertisements have a greater level of attraction, like Knorr noodles: this commercial is based on a school-going boy who avoids eating lunch and gives it to her pet. When her mother comes to know about the product, she gives him noodles for lunch, and he ignores the cat. This commercial depicts noodles are healthy and instant food for children's lunch. So, the preferences of children change accordingly. Although choosing different foods affects the dietary habits of children.

Story & French (2004) stated that intense marketing targets children, especially youngsters, seems to be primarily motivated by the goal to increase brand awareness and publicity, desire, and brand loyalty. Higher rate of different productive commercials is the prime time, this time basically highlights children's most-watched food commercials (Kelly, 2010)

Digitalized Food commercials play a role in grabbing their targeted audience. While watching some commercials, children's eating behavior grows unknowingly. And so on, the number of diseases can risk the diet. Child obesity is a major public health concern worldwide. (Cecil et al, 2012).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The impact of digitalized food advertisements on children's eating habits, behavior, and health is the main emphasis of this study.

1.2 Objectives

1. To find out children's eating behavior after watching digitalized food commercials
2. To find out the marketing strategy of advertisements and its effects on children
3. To examine the influence of food commercials on children's health
4. To study the role of parents in a child's food preferences

1.3 Research Question

RQ1: How does exposure to digitalized food advertisements influence children's dietary choices and eating behaviors?

RQ2: How do digital food commercials' strategies affect children's eating habits, and what role do parents play in this influence?"

1.4 Hypothesis

H1: Children's eating behavior changes after watching digital media commercials

H₀: Children's eating behavior does not change after watching advertisements

1.5 Rationale

The visual and audio environments in which we live are constantly filled with advertising. Advertising is a form of communication that aims to persuade a target audience and influence their behavior in relation to a commercial submission (Dang & Khurana, 2019).

A researcher's main focus is to study the digital media food commercials that influence children's food preferences. Either food advertising promotes healthy or unhealthy food. Unhealthy foods being promoted by advertisers can lead to various problems like cholesterol, obesity, diabetes, and uncontrolled food eating can also affect the health of the child. So, the researcher emphasizes advertising techniques that have a greater impact on child development, how their eating priorities change, and how the mindset alters.

2. Literature Review

Advertising plays a very important role in developing brand loyalty. Dang & Khurana (2019) stated that social media commercials for candy, snacks, and other junk food are the mainstays of child advertising. Whether marketing and advertising of food goods aimed at young consumers has any influence on children's eating habits or body weight is of utmost relevance. Most of the research on how food advertising affects children's eating habits and preferences was done during the middle of the 1970s and the 1980s. Most of the commercial time on children's television was given to food advertisements. There are no adverts for fruits or vegetables in any of it. Food commercials frequently rely on the attractiveness of flavor to sell items. They also link the products to fun, embrace the allure of competitions, and frequently stress the newness of the products. Many product advertisements relate physical activity to the items and highlight the health advantages of their use. The fact that the products include "essential nutrients" is frequently emphasized (Chen, Michalak, & Agellon, 2018). While social media is an advanced tool and is another medium in this digital era to provide insight to children about the product. Targeted Food marketing strategies and campaigns are now aimed at children and teenagers. (Mary Story., 2004).

Children under the age of eight have an inadequate ability to judge the reliability of the information they receive. Fast food items like snacks, burgers, etc, were the most advertised food, in which 28.3% were the healthy meals while 71.7% were traditional food items advertisement (Whalen, Harrold, Child, & Halford, 2017). Fruits and vegetables advertising increased modestly by 3.3% and 2.9%, respectively; however, just one essential food item (low-fat dairy items) was included in the top 10 food products with the most advertising.

Here comes the example of McDonald's advertisement, which sells the Happy Meal to its targeted audience. Meanwhile, the audience is attracted towards such a product and buys that for their child, so in this role, parents' preferences for their children matter. When given a snack while watching, children ate 45% more of it than those who didn't see the food advertisements. (Boyland & Whalen, 2015). When exposed to food advertisements, whether they were for unhealthy or healthy products, highly neophobic (fear-related) children consumed 11% (47 kcal) more food at a subsequent supplemented snack opportunity.

2.1 Marketing strategies of commercials targeting children

Marketing strategies aimed at young people, particularly youngsters, seem to be driven primarily by the need to improve brand identification, preference, and loyalty. Multiple platforms

are used to reach the audience (Story & French, 2014). Food sectors focus on brand-promoting strategies, which could help draw the customer's attention and ideally increase product sales.

Overweight and obesity have become increasingly common in recent years (Global status report on noncommunicable diseases, 2010). Children's obesity is a major global public health concern; it is estimated that 10% of school-aged children and an additional 22 million children under the age of five are overweight or obese. Although there are regional and national differences in the absolute frequency of pediatric obesity, the global obesity rate is increasing (Kelly, 2010).

Despite policies aimed at lowering its prevalence, childhood obesity is a serious public health issue in most wealthy nations. Variants in the fat mass and obesity associated (FTO) gene have so far been linked to common obesity in the strongest way. Although the risk of obesity increases as the food intake is much more than the recommended dose for children, and the preferences of food also depend on it (Cecil, Tavendale, Watt, Hetherington, & Palmer, 2008)

Obesity, which is defined as having an excessive amount of body fat and a higher risk of sickness, has become more prevalent in children and adolescents (Reilly & Wilson, 2006). Nowadays, food marketers have settled on the agenda of selling products by collaborating with different toy manufacturers. They promote the brand and food advertising among children by selling free toys to them.

Story & French (2004) suggest that Advertisers have the potential to influence children through their advertising techniques. Certain child feeding behaviors, such as exercising excessive control over what and how much children eat, may contribute to childhood obesity. Parents are the key to changing their child's food choices and intake. Nutrition is crucial for growth and development, health, and well-being during childhood and adolescence. A significant public health issue is the rise of overweight and obesity among children. In the US, 15% of children and adolescents are overweight right now, which is significantly higher. Nearly two-thirds (60%) of children who are overweight have one or more cardiovascular risk factors. Based on meta-analysis, kids who watched TV commercials about food (11 studies) and played video games (5 studies) consumed, on average, 60.0 and 53.2 kcal (95% CI), 31.5 and 74.9 more calories than kids who watched commercials about other things (Russell, Croker, & Viner, 2018).

Today's generations are way more concerned about brand loyalty, brand consciousness, and they are unaware of those marketing strategies that influence them to buy certain food. The most used product in the US and in Pakistan is soft drinks, and drinking multiple times a day can increase the calories, which can lead to orthopedic diseases. So, energy intake is important, but more importantly, children's awareness of the product is more important.

3. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the Theoretical Framework used in this research topic is the Cultivation Theory and the social learning theory. Both of these theories apply to this topic as children invest a lot of time in watching different social media channels, and getting attracted to them brings the connection between the viewer and the watchers. While children learn from observing their surroundings in which media plays an important role in shaping their mindset.

3.1 Cultivation Theory

According to (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986) , Television is a dominant tool of narrating stories. It is an important tool in our lives that shows a variety of content categorized in different ways according to their targeted audience. Every home is adhesive to the universal world through news, entertainment, advertisements, and other programs.

According to the socio-cultural theory of "cultivation," television has the power to influence viewers' opinions, attitudes, and values (Gerbner & Gross, *Living with television: The violence profile.*, 1976). The cultural indicators project comprised three parts, which are: an institutional process analysis indicates how media messages are created and distributed; a message system analysis indicates the actual message after distribution is being communicated by media; and lastly is cultivation analysis, which looks at how recipients' conceptions of the real world are influenced by exposure to media messages.

In this, there are two types of viewers: 1) heavy viewers are who spend a lot of hours watching television, and 2) light viewers are who spend fewer hours watching television. Cultivation effect is the relationship between viewers' ways of thinking and the amount of time they spend watching television. According to the cultivation theory, people watching television frequently will adopt the underlying themes presented on the media (SHRUM, 2017).

3.1.1 Application of Theory

In this study, the researcher finds out the relevance of the subject with a specific theory application. So, in this advanced technological era, television is being replaced by digital or social media, and children are prone to spending more hours watching digital content. So, Television is the medium where numerous contents are generated and depicted through it, but digital media is something more to it, in which the content takes its viral pace more a higher level and has a break with the number of advertisements in it. Studying digitalized commercials, which play an important part in role development, is influencing the audience. There are two watchers: 1) higher watchers and 2) lighter watchers. Heavy watchers spend a lot of time watching social media content, which can affect the audience, while lighter watchers are least affected compared to them.

Children watching the cartoon channels on social media have a higher risk of getting affected. Children spending 3 to 4 hours on this medium are highly influenced by food commercials, and the behavior of children changes; the preferences of children's food choices are also affected. So, Channels providing food digitalized commercials are more concerned with the parents as well, who are giving audience attraction towards the product. Not necessarily watching only cartoon channels, but also when the parents are watching any channels along with their children gives insight details about the product on which children become less aware of the healthiness of the product. They act the way shown. An example of this is COCOMO, which is a popularized commercial. Heavy watchers become too stubborn to buy this unhealthy product. On the other hand, commercials of healthy food like milk are beneficial for them. And in this, children drinking a lot of milk would be helpful for parents, and can make their bones strong. The reason is that Children's eating patterns change, and their preferences for choosing food also change, and

so they become choosy and moody as well. The health of those children who eat too much might affect their health.

Now, fewer watchers who spend a minimum time watching social media content compared to high watchers are not influenced by the commercials, because they don't have an interest in them. So, cultivation theory becomes suitable for this study because children spend a lot of time watching the content, while the content generator sets marketing techniques to sell the product and engage a lot of consumers.

3.2 Social Learning Theory

When psychologist Albert Bandura created the social learning theory in the 1970s, it opened up a completely new way to think about how people behave and what motivates them. The core concept proposed by Bandura was that human behavior can be influenced by three variables: the environment, a person's own thoughts and feelings, and the behavior itself. This process is called reciprocal causation, which explains that people may develop different behaviors from their environment or surroundings.

In 1961, Bandura performed an experiment with Bobo Doll in which one of three groups of children witnessed that the model was behaving aggressively towards the doll, so after seeing the act, many of the children performed in the same violent manner. After that, when the model was punished for the violent act, the children in the follow-up experiment showed decreased aggressive reactions. He explains that children learn and adopt the behaviors shown by others.

Social Learning Theory posits that people learn from one another, via:

- Observation; • Imitation; and • Modeling

3.2.1 Application of the Theory

Social learning theory, according to Bandura, defines that learning always occurs by giving attention or by observing certain things to understand them. Social learning theory applies to this study. Digital media is another medium through where children learn a lot. Commercials executed on this medium affect children when they observe the content shown on it. Social learning theory explains five points, including.

Children learn when they observe commercials thoroughly and pay attention to them. While the behavior disseminated from the commercials can grab the attention of the audience. When the children pay great attention to the subject, they will have a great influence on the behavioral changes. Secondly, if the attention is strong, they will try to learn that and implement it in their, so if the food commercials are affecting the children, it will also affect their behavioral changes, and it will also alter their food choices. So, observing can lead them to reproduce it. How it shows can be reproduced or re-enacted by the children. If the commercial is animated and it's showing how it works in Disney World, it could affect their imaginations, and so they will try to act it that way. After that, the attention grab towards the commercials might also give the motivation to accept that way, so children can learn and would grab it that way, either the food they choose would be healthy or unhealthy.

4. Research Methodology

Advertising techniques applied to different product sales are improving day by day. Advertisements are working more to entitle the products. Most selling products or demanding products are fast foods, either healthy bundles or unhealthy. This study aimed to examine the impact of digitalized food commercials on children's health, eating behavior, their food preferences, and food choices. For this purpose, the researcher will use the Quantitative Research Method. In this research method, the researcher will choose the survey method. The researcher will design an online questionnaire to find out the results, how it influences children. The researcher will conduct the research by using convenience sampling.

4.1 Universe

The researcher selected children of Lahore as the universe of research

4.2 Population

The researcher's population of interest will be Model Town, Link Road, and Walton Cantt.

4.3 Sample

The sample was parents of children, aged 8 to 14 years; the researcher selected parents because children of this age wouldn't be capable of responding to the questionnaire. Parents' ages can vary as they have children of a specified age group.

4.4 Sample size

The researcher had selected 250 respondents.

4.5 Sampling technique

In this study, the researcher used convenience sampling.

4.6 Tool

In this study, the Researcher applied the survey method and used a questionnaire as of research tool. The level of measurement of the questionnaire was nominal. The questionnaire was based on 23 questions. It is designed to measure the impact of digitalized food commercials on children in Lahore, Pakistan.

4.7 Pre testing

In this, the researcher did a pre-test on 10% of the sample size, which is 25 responses, to test the reliability of the data. The researcher conducted an online survey and collected the responses. After analyzing the collected data researcher takes it for the pre-testing procedure. Reliability results show that the value is greater than 0.05 and is considered accurate, so the researcher proceeded with the research study. The researcher applied Cronbach's alpha and found the reliability through statistics to get the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Reliability statistics is 0.734, which shows the reliability of the significant collected results. While Cronbach's alpha is

usually used in the research to test the reliability, where questions are designed in different Likert-type scales.

Table 1

Reliability Test

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.734	23

4.8 Data Collection and Results

The survey conducted by the researcher is based on 10% of the respondents' bin, which includes some demographic questions are demographics and another section is based on the questions regarding the researcher's topic 'Effects of food TVCs on children of Lahore, Pakistan.' Though the researcher has used the quantitative method in which the tool applied is a Survey to find the exact findings, facts, and figures in the form of numerical values based on bar charts.

5. Findings and Results

According to findings, digital media is the most watched platform by every individual. But in today's era, parents are replacing children's toys with digital platforms. So, these platforms watched by the children are 89.20%. And the frequency of watching content is high. Parents are concerned about their child observing content, so 21.6% of the parents tried not to let their children watch it.

Children get engaged in many of the social media platform commercials' content. Different kinds of commercials are designed which engage the viewers and enlighten them with their product. Mostly food commercials, either healthy or unhealthy, are strategized in a way that couldn't stop the viewer from buying the product, either for themselves or for their children. 61.20% of the food commercials are observed, and 60% of unhealthy food commercials are being watched by children, which might lead them to numerous diseases.

However, 18% of the parents agree on the ingredients shown in commercials, 42.8% of them do not agree with the ingredients. While 39.2% of them think that the ingredients shown in any commercials are satisfactory. Parents are more concerned about the health of their children. A child's growth helps parents to be vigilant and selective for their child's health. 41.2% of parents find out that bringing certain food home helps their child's health and growth. 59.2% of the parents say that children's eating behavior or their eating patterns change when they watch commercials and buy that certain product. 13.6% of them deny that it does not affects eating patterns, while 27.2% of the parents say that eating certain foods sometimes changes their eating patterns. According to the findings, parents' role can change children's food choices. 47.2% of the individuals say that children become stubborn about eating that certain food.

5.1 Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 predicts that children's eating behavior changes after watching TVCs or not. The Pearson correlation test was conducted.

H₁: Children's eating behavior changes after watching TVCs

H₀: children's eating behavior does not change after watching TVCs

Table 2

Preson Correalation Test

Test	Pearson Correlation
Sig (2-tailed)	0.01
N	250

The hypothesis was tested by Pearson correlation. The assumption significance value is less than 0.5, which shows the alternate hypothesis H₁ is accepted and the null hypothesis H₀ is rejected. So, this shows that food commercials shown on television have a greater impact on children's behavior, and after watching those televised commercials of food, children's eating pattern and their behavior change. Food commercials are engaging children to buy that certain product, and this could even make a child stubborn, which can in turn alter their behavior after watching TVCs.

6. Discussion and Analysis

The media has the power to change the perception, opinion, and taste of the viewers. While media containing any platform would be eligible for every age viewer. Media can be utilized in many different ways, but the procedure depends on the viewers. Any kind of platform can be utilized to get injected into the viewers. The researcher conducted the study based on the impact of advertising content, especially food TVCs, on children. So, researchers study demonstrated that televised commercials have having greater influence on children, changing their behaviors and food preferences.

Viewers play a very crucial role in society, preferably opting for media industries, the production houses are clear about the dimension on which genre the content could be made, and to get into the market for the high selling prices. It's an advantage to the media houses that they can get to know about the highest rating of any commercial or their marketing strategies as well as about the reviews to make amendments in the next project.

The study examined the effect of food advertising on children in Lahore, Pakistan. This study digs out the core purpose of explaining the impact on children after watching any kind of food commercials. The study focused on changing eating behavior in children after going through the commercials. Children watch television and observe the commercials keenly, so they have a greater effect on purchasing certain products. On the other hand, content makers are also more concerned with making food commercials more successful in their proposed agendas. They built up the marketing strategies and made them brand conscious by tagging the brand loyalty and sincerity towards their customers. Parents are more concerned to watch either what content to watch, but in the meantime, they don't focus on which kind of commercial is being observed by their child. Marketing strategies are another technique to engage customers to buy specific products. Pakistani TVCs are made up according to the children's mindset, because they like TVCs to be more colorful and have a lively feeling in the commercials. But they are not aware of the product, whether that is healthy or unhealthy. So, this is the main reason why children focus only on eating that certain food but are not aware that the product, either it is harmful or can cause health issues for them. After eating that product, they have to face serious issues, including obesity. This disease is very common among children and they are not able to overcome this disease. But this might be challenging for them to overcome. Although parents' role here is more crucial, because for them it is an alarming situation. Parents are the key in changing their child's eating pattern and behavior, so the study demonstrates that 84% of the parents say that they change their children's food choices, because parents' role in their child development is crucial. 4.8%, parents' role doesn't affect, and 11.2% of them think that sometimes parents' role is important in changing children's food choices. While parents are responsible for the upbringing of their own child

According to the study, children become stubborn in buying the product, so 47.2% of the children are stubborn to eat the food which they are being targeted by that specific commercial. And 2.8% of them defy, sometimes children do not prefer any other food other than that in which they are interested is 50%.

The majority of 53.6% of the parents agreed that it's difficult to overcome their child's stubbornness and to control their behavior. While 20.4% of them defy the idea that child listens to them while not being stubborn, so they don't have to overcome it. 26% of the parents say that maybe they could overcome their stubbornness. 38.4% of the parents say that what they provide to their child, they eat it. While 15.6% of them say that the child does not eat when parents give them food, and lastly, 46% of them say that sometimes children eat what parents give then sometimes they don't.

Different kinds of TVCs are made to engage their viewers towards the product. So, different commercials are based most commonly on food (either healthy, unhealthy, or junk), entertainment (including any form of entertainment), and technology (home appliances or newly invented technology). Food commercials are the most observed ones. 61.20% of the people watch food commercials, which might have an effect on children. While 29.90% of televised entertainment commercials are being viewed, and least 9.20% of the technology-based commercials are watched.

Very much important above all of the discussion is that children are having an impact of these commercials on them. So, 59.2% of the children's eating behavior or their eating patterns

change when they watch commercials and buy that certain product. 13.6% of children's observing is slow, so they don't change their behaviors and deny that it does not affect eating patterns, while 27.2% of the parents say that eating certain food sometimes changes the eating pattern. According to (Reilly & Wilson, 2006) children have an impact on their eating behaviors and so on to their health, having uncontrolled fats, which can lead to serious issues. Most of the children are obese and they cannot control themselves in eating.

The type of food commercials, whether healthy, unhealthy, or junk food, is more preferably watched and used. 31.20% of healthy types of food are preferred to eat. 21.20% of unhealthy commercials are observed. This graph clearly highlights majority of it goes for junk food. So, 47.60% of the junk food is more preferred by the children. At last, it is the fact that children adopt the behavior that society provides them and changes their eating behaviors.

Children's behaviors and attitudes are affected by any strong medium or platform that can alter their behavior. While children only opt for what's shown on television. Children observe from society, learn it, and reproduce the act by copying what they notice. He attentively learns by viewing and then performing the act. Viewers are having a greater impact because they act on what they observe. Children's actions also support how much they watch television. Their spending time watching television. They cultivate the behavior and attitude from the source. Those who are higher watchers and spend a lot of hours watching the content are more likely to adopt that pattern, although light viewers are not so much aware of the content.

7. Conclusion

The researcher has conducted research on the effects of food TVCs on children in Lahore, Pakistan. For this research, the researcher had conducted the quantitative method to measure the level of impact on children and their changing attitude, as well as their eating preferences. Although a survey method was conducted, the researcher found a strong relationship between children and food commercials. The majority of parents believe that their child has having strong connection with the television, which could have a greater impact on them. Parents believe that junk food is being bought due to the commercials shown on television. Their marketing trends and targeted audience are the main reasons that can mould children's behavior. Somehow, parents' role in changing their child's food choices is also important. Children learn what is told and shown to them. The researcher concludes the research by highlighting the main fact that food commercials are the main reason for adopting and changing preferences. Their eating behaviors also change. They shift their eating pattern from healthy to unhealthy and junk food, which could cause serious diseases, including obesity.

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