CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

Advertising is multi dimensional and has manifold aims to achieve. Leiss et al. (1986) believe advertising to be the most important social, economic and cultural institution in society – ‘a communication activity through which social change is mediated’. Chunawalla and Sethia (1987) have described it as a form of mass communication, a powerful marketing tool, a means of financing the mass media, an instrument of business management, a field of employment, a profession, a social institution and a component of eco system. In simple words, according to ASCI (Advertising Standards Council of India), an ad is defined as “any paid form of communication addressed to the public or a section of it, the purpose of which is to influence the opinions or behaviour of those to whom it is addressed”.

Advertisers have chosen TV as the predominant medium for reaching consumers to market their products for long. Dorr (1986) noted that TV is not only the most important medium of advertising but is also the most important source of information and recreation for the masses. TV’s superiority over other mediums of advertising is due to its tri-sensory appeal; auditory, visual and kinaesthetic that influences mental faculties more piquantly than any other media and its effects are enduring and everlasting (Archana, 1988). According to Oates et al. (2003), advertising aimed at children may not be exclusively transmitted via TV, but still TV is the most visible medium of advertising. Mc Neal and Ji (1999) found that children gave highest rank to ‘TV’ as a new product information source out of enlisted various sources (like parents, store visits, peers etc.), with parents scoring second place.

TV has become a more effective socializing agent in comparison to peers and teachers due to children’s extensive TV viewing (Huston-Stein and Wright, 1989). TV not only forms a part of family system but a part many can no longer imagine living without. It constitutes an important experiential component of a child’s development. TV competes with family, school, peers, religious institutions and society to provide role models and information that affect children’s beliefs, values, behaviour, attitude and lifestyle (Winick and Winick, 1979; Rogge, 1986; Verma and Larson, 2002). TV is a permanent fixture in the lives of children nowadays. The TV set is as familiar as
the faces of their family members – sometimes even more so. It entertains, informs and most importantly, keeps children company.

Before proceeding with our analysis of TV advertising’s impact over children, it is important to discuss some of the major changes in TV viewing options. These changes also shape advertising viewing patterns. There has been a rapid spread in TV programming, along with a concomitant growth in TV advertising. TV as a technology has changed the manner of conveying ideas to the people.

**Commercialization of TV in India**

TV was introduced in India in 1959 as a public service function of government with a motive to educate rather than to entertain. The first ad that appeared on “Doordarshan” was in 1976, but the era of commercialization of Indian TV began with the prime time sponsored serial in 1984. However, along with the aim of commercial revenue, the entertainment was kept socially meaningful and under government vigil. Indian viewers had access to only one national channel, “Doordarshan” with limited broadcast hours till cable TV in early eighties and satellite TV in June 1991 invaded their lives. The policy of economic liberalization of the then Congress Government in the country affected the electronic media considerably.

Reactively, “Doordarshan” brought many changes like increasing prime time slots for sponsored programmes, introduction of afternoon entertainment slots, new entertainment based channel “DD2” launched etc. So, it was almost that overnight India’s TV experience went into abrupt metamorphosis, from a single channel phase to multiple channels. Commenting on this S.S. Gill, a former secretary of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting wrote in a newspaper (‘The Times of India’, March 7, 1994) that instead of setting high benchmarks of excellence and taste, national channel was aping those channels which should be emulating its high standards. He added that first these private company channels corrupt people’s taste by exposing them to excessive violence and sex, and then they argue that this is ‘viewers’ choice’.

Almost all European countries experimented with broadcasting in similar manner like in India, but in America broadcasting has always been a commercial proposition. Broadcasting has always been obsessed with ratings there; no channel affords to take risk in quality programming, or to serve national interest in public affairs. Since
sixties, many Indian governments’ appointed committees recommended autonomy of electronic media, economic self sufficiency and commercial broadcasting as followed world over mostly. But it was only in February 1995 that Supreme Court of India held that government monopoly of airwaves was unconstitutional as it is against the fundamental right of freedom to speech. However, the history of broadcasting suggests that commercial viability of media while benefiting advertising industry proves detrimental in encouraging socially relevant and quality based programming. Mander (1978) comments that since the survival of all electronic media in America depends upon advertising, it is obvious that a minority of population (those who own corporate houses) determine which newspapers, magazines, radio channels and TV channels continue to exist. Also, as opined by Halberstam (1979), that starved of ad revenue media is doomed to die as advertising is the lifeblood of the media; it’s key to survival.

Impact of TV Advertising on Children

The impact of TV advertising is manifold. 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. The review of research suggests that the unintended, broader and cumulative type of impact accrues from exposure to large number of ads and over a period of time. Such an impact is long term and deep seeded. These effects are ads influencing the behaviour and mind-set of children. George Gerbner, “…..I care about trying to characterize accurately this new age into which our children are born……they are born into homes where TV set is on for several hours a day. They start viewing as infants. Most of the stories they hear are not told by parents, the school, the church or neighbours. They are told by a handful of conglomerates that have something to sell. That has a powerful affect….” (Quoted in Unnikrishnan and Bajpai, 1996, p.25). There has been a lot of debate on the influence that TV ads have upon children, but to assess the influence accurately it is mandatory to learn whether children are able to comprehend ads, to what extent and by what age they are able to achieve that.
**Children’s Understanding of TV ads**

Children’s understanding of TV ads begins with their ability to pick out ads from programmes. Previous research indicates that by the age of 5 to 6 years, most children are able to differentiate between ads and programmes (Ward, 1972; Palmer and McDowell, 1979 and Stutts *et al.*, 1981). However, Butter *et al.*, (1981) emphasized that recognizing commercials does not always mean that children understand the purpose behind TV ads. He found that 70 per cent of the 4 years old and 90 per cent of the 5 years old identified ads from programmes; but 90 per cent of the children could not clearly tell the difference between ads and programmes, although segregating the two was relatively simple. Past results verify that children are able to distinguish the two, but only if based on simple perceptual cues (“ads are short, programmes long etc.”) (Ward *et al.*, 1972 and Stephens and Stutts, 1982).

Some researchers argued that children’s understanding of TV ads’ develops at a younger age, although they cannot articulate all that they know because of limited language facility. Donohue *et al.* (1980) using non verbal test methods reported high levels of understanding among 2 to 3 year olds (75%). However replications of this controversial study, have not confirmed these results (Ballard and Campbell, 1983 and Macklin, 1985). Macklin’s (1987) critique and replication of Donohoue *et al.’s* (1980) study located understanding at approximately 8 years of age. Dorr (1986) suggests that a major change in children’s transaction with TV occurs between 6 to 9 years of age and a minor shift occurs around adolescence. She found that by the age of 7 or 8 years most of them know that not only ads but TV programmes also are not always a reality.

After segregating commercial from non commercial content, another milestone to be crossed in comprehending TV ads is to recognize the persuasive intent in them which is an important prerequisite to question and evaluate different ads. These abilities develop with age as a result of intellectual growth (Young, 1990). Several studies show that understanding the persuasive purpose of advertising is an important prerequisite for children to be able to question and critically evaluate ads (Dorr, 1986; Young, 1990 and Bjurstrom, 1994/95).

Kapoor and Verma (2005) located understanding at 6 years of age amongst Indian children. Unnikrishnan and Bajpai (1996) found that a majority of Indian children
recognized actual intent of advertising 8 years onwards, and by the time they reached 10 years plus age groups, they questioned the honesty in ads, that is, develop scepticism. Building on Piaget’s theory of cognitive development in children (as cited in Ginsburg and Opper (1989), where there were four groups in children: ‘sensing’ (birth-2years), ‘preoperational’ (2-7years old), ‘concrete operational’ (7-11years old) and ‘formal operational’ (11-adulthood), John (1999) developed a three tiered model of consumer socialization: the perceptual stage (3-7 year olds); the analytical stage (7-11 year olds); and the reflective stage (11-16 year olds). According to her during perceptual stage there is a general orientation towards readily observable features; focusing on single dimension, so children view ads as something entertaining and informative. The analytical stage is characterized by ability to analyze multiple dimensions they are now capable of looking at ads from their own perspective (assistive intent) and from advertiser’s perspective (persuasive intent). By the time, a child reaches reflective stage, thorough understanding of marketing practices develops that leads to sophisticated knowledge of advertising.

Oates et al. (2003) claimed by using qualitative approach that none of the 6 years old, a minority of 8 years olds and not all of 10 year olds were able to tell about understanding of the persuasive intent of advertising. Kunkel et al. (2004) reviewing the previous studies, clearly indicates that children do not identify the selling intent before 8 years of age. But even at this stage their ability is only to recognize persuasive intent not that these are biased messages that warrant scepticism. Many researchers (Wartella, 1984; Greenfield, 1984; Paget et al., 1984; Bousch et al., 1994 and Friestad and Wright, 1994) have opined that advertising knowledge of a more specific form, involving what tactics are used by advertiser, why they are used etc., emerge as child approaches adolescence, that is, 11-14 years. So, Bjurstrom (1994/95) and Kunkel et al. (2004) in their review based studies concluded that a sophisticated understanding develops only around the age of 12 years, when the child verbalizes the financial interests of advertising (Leibert and Sprafkin, 1988; Kunkel and Roberts, 1991 and De Bens and Vandenbruaene, 1992; cited in Bjurstrom, 1994/95 and Ward et al., 1977; Blosser and Roberts, 1985 and Edling, 1999; cited in Kunkel et al., 2004). Young (1990) pointed out that the level of education of the parents and the amount of time for which the children watch TV influences the age at which they can understand the purpose of TV ads. Bjurstrom (1994/95) presents another angle to the
picture by highlighting habits of parents, socio economic status of the family, educational level of parents, etc. Some of the areas relating to the impact of TV advertising are discussed as follows:

1. Children’s Beliefs and Attitudes towards TV ads

A large number of ads are aimed at children as they are the most impressionable group in any society. Children are not only seen as an attractive market segment (Pecheaux and Derbaix, 1999) but also an influential market as they exert influence on the purchasing habits of other family members (McNeal, 1992; Buckingham, 2000; Clarke and Smallbone, 2001 and Oates et al., 2003). Lowden (1999) states that the motto of today’s ad world is “Catch them young”, with the purpose to instil brand loyalty at a tender age so as to shape lifelong preferences. The past research indicates that although the effective ads can impress even the most rational adults, children are more vulnerable and advertising exerts substantial influence on their beliefs and attitudes. During the featuring of an ad, when an advertised product appeals to children, they are more likely to focus on the concrete aspects of the product and as a result overlook the abstract nature of relationship between the advertiser and the audience of the ad (Kunkel et al., 2004).

Robertson and Rossiter (1974) correlate a pattern that with increase in children’s understanding of selling motive of ads, there is a decline in trust and desire for advertised products amongst children. They found that percentage of liking of ads amongst children decreases dramatically from 68.5 for I graders to 55.9 for III graders, and further to 25.3 for V graders. Similar pattern is replicated in other studies where downward trend in liking and overall attitude towards ads in children from elementary to high school grades. There are other studies that report a decline in children’s purchase requests for advertised products as they grow older (Robertson and Rossiter, 1976 and Ward et al., 1977). Many studies corroborate that by the age of 8 years, most of the children develop cognitive abilities, not only to understand ads but also to recognize prejudice or dishonesty in them, and such feelings become stronger as they step into adolescence (Robertson and Rossiter, 1974; Bever et al., 1975; Rossiter and Robertson, 1976 and Ward et al., 1977). John (1999) suggests that as children grow older they make a transition, from viewers who find ads informative, entertaining and honest to the ones who see ads in sceptical and discerning manner.
So, the ability to recognize bias and deception in ads, along with a knowledge of advertiser’s persuasive intent, consequently leads to less trust and less liking of ads overall. Though the situation seems to be clear that only young children, below 8 to 10 years of age may be misled by TV ads and the older children are intelligent enough to be unaffected by them, but the scenario is not that straight forward. The earlier studies established relation between children’s understanding of advertiser’s selling intent or children’s negative attitude towards ads and decrease in desire for advertised products (Mc Neal, 1969 and Robertson and Rossiter, 1974). However Kunkel et al. (2004) quotes instances from recent research that children’s knowledge of advertising’s persuasive intent has small or no effect on their advertised product preference (Christenson, 1982 and Ross et al., 1984). Christenson (1982) noted that even after an educational presentation on ads was able to establish in the minds of children that ads have a persuasive agenda and they can exaggerate or be dishonest, it still had little effect on younger (I-II graders) or older (V-VI graders) children’s subsequent evaluation of the advertised good. Mc Neal and Ji (1999) found that not only TV got highest overall (77%) but also received largest first place (89%) ranking by children as new product information source. Also from the standpoint of age, the importance of TV as new product information source increases significantly as children become older. Robertson and Rossiter (1974) note that children’s ability to understand the persuasive agenda of ads does not imply immunity to ads, as the adults with same or higher cognitive defences often desire advertised products. Also Brucks et al. (1998) in his study involving (9-10 years old) children found that children’s advertising knowledge does not always serve as a cognitive defence because they may experience difficulty in retrieving stored information in their minds during viewing of ads on TV.

2. Children’s Product Preference and Buying Behaviour

Product preferences can be manipulated by exposure to an ad only once (Resnik and Stern, 1977 and Goldberg et al., 1978), though increased longing for the product over competitors is likely to be an outcome of repeated exposures (Galst and White, 1976; Robertson and Rossiter, 1977 and Gorn and Goldberg, 1982). Silverman et al. (1988) found that children’s positive attitudes towards an advertised product can continue even a week after the ad was last seen, although they may not be able to remember the ad. Atkin and Gibson (1978) and Stoneman and Brody (1981) conducted experimental
studies to compare children who were shown particular ads of a toy or a cereal with the other group who were not. Although about 50 per cent of control group children desired the given product, but statistically significant rise in the desire for particular products was seen amongst those children who saw the ads.

In contrast, Bjurstrom (1994/95) concludes illustrating various studies that though ads are important, they are not the most important factors in determining children’s desire for different products (Ward et al., 1977; Young, 1990 and De Bens and Vandenbruaene, 1992). Bjurstrom (1999) enlists main factors that have an important bearing in determining children’s choice of products, they are: how often they see the product on TV, their age, their socio economic or cultural background; including parents’ level of education, peer group influence and direct experience of various products.

3. Parent-Child Conflict

In India, a child is regarded as a blessing and most of the families are ‘child-oriented’. Parents save or invest for child’s future and sacrifice their own desires to fulfil children’s dreams and demands. According to the survey carried out by Unnikrishnan and Bajpai (1996), it was found that a large number of parents hated saying ‘no’ to their children, it was only when their children’s requests were unreasonable that they were compelled to refuse. Though it leads to children’s annoyance or sadness, it is not easy for parents also. Another area of concern is the impact on the parent-child relationship. The sheer volume of commercials on TV that influence the product choices and the intensity of these choices on children, and the fact that the parents cannot honour all purchase requests triggered by television advertising can lead to many conflicts between parents and children which can be avoided otherwise.

Halan (2002) supervised a survey by research division of Kidstuff Promos and Events Ltd. in India to find out that children who are nearly 35 per cent (according to Census, 2001 (0-14 years old)) of the Indian population, emerged as the key influencer in many household purchase decisions. It was seen that with the rise of age, awareness and pocket money, the intensity of likes and dislikes increased. Unlike the West, 13-15 years old children were more pestering in comparison to 6-12 years old. Children across all ages and cities had maximum say in food and beverage products. There was no gender skewness in influencing parents and not many differences in different
socio-economic profiles. Research in the West shows children’s purchase requests from parents lead to high success rate and as age of child increases, the requests get limited but the parental yielding rises (Ward and Wackman, 1972; Frideres, 1973; Galst and White, 1976; Atkin, 1978 etc.).

Parents obviously cannot honour all TV ads triggered purchase requests. Yukl and Fable (1990) and Wimalasiri (2004), found that children use various influencing tactics to persuade parents to comply with their requests. Robertson (1979) found the parent-child conflict arising out of refusal to child’s purchase influence attempts is the biggest and worrisome side effect of impact of ads. Atkin (1975) found that more than 50 per cent of children reported arguing or becoming angry when their request for a toy was denied. Substantiating the results with another similar study, Atkin (1978) observed high rates of child disappointment and anger in response to the majority of parents’ refusals at the super market to requests for cereals. Both Galst and White (1976) and Atkin (1978) found that amount of TV viewing was related to the frequency of children’s purchase requests at the super market. Other studies to confirm such patterns were by Sheikh and Moleski (1977) and Goldberg and Gorn (1978). Moreover research across different cultures confirms similar patterns. Robertson et al. (1989) conducted a cross cultural study based on families from Japan, England and US which shows a significant relation between children’s amount of TV viewing and their purchase requests, although this relationship was highest in US. Buijzen and Valkenburg (2000) noted that TV viewing was deeply related to Dutch children’s Christmas gift requests.

Kunkel et al. (2004) concluded on the basis of many of the earlier mentioned studies and other research that frequent purchase requests associated with children’s advertising exposure puts pressure on parent-child interaction. In contravention Bjurstrom (1994/95) concluded on the basis of various studies (Ward et al.; Young, 1990 and De Bens and Vandenbruaene, 1992) that ‘TV commercials are an important but hardly the most important factor’ in determining children’s product requests to parents as he pointed out a host of other factors like frequency of seeing a product on TV, age of the child, socio-economic and cultural background, direct experience of various products, parents (including parents’ education level) and peers.

4. Materialism
Materialism is a tendency to focus only on material possessions, ignoring emotional and spiritual needs. It is a preoccupation with acquisition of goods and regarding them as basis for determining one’s personal worth; to seek bliss through physical possessions. As Baran et al. (1989) puts it that people develop a mindset that ‘you are what you buy’. It is seen that most of the TV ads produce images that material possessions are worth striving for and their consumption holds key to happiness in life. Adler et al. (1997) registered stronger materialistic values among children (4th to 7th graders) who watched more TV than among their classmates who watched comparatively less TV. Similarly, Moschis and Moore (1982) and Greenberg and Brand (1993) have found that among 6th to 12th graders, viewing of ads was significantly linked to materialism in them. Unnikrishnan and Bajpai (1996) reported that in India with the rising number of middle class, “consumerism is the new religion of the day, and its most devout followers are children” (p.19). It was found that 65 per cent of the total children (8-15 years old) surveyed felt that they needed the products they saw on TV, with the middle class children way ahead (72.18%) of upper (43.05%) and lower (57.30%) income segments. Although adults are not above the influence of advertising; which promote the philosophy of salvation through consumption, children are more susceptible and the version of happy life drilled into people’s mind through ads is better internalized by children.

On the contrary, Bjurstrom (1994/95) suggests that it is doubtful that demand for goods can be regarded as an indicator of materialism. He finds that results reported are based only on interviews of mothers (Kinsey, 1987 and De Bens and Vandenbruaene, 1992), so the studies reflect mothers’ attitude towards ads instead of children’s actual values. Young (1990) pointed out that it was difficult to demonstrate the effects of advertising in this respect.
5. Westernization

Westernization is the aimless aping of western dressing style, looks, mannerisms, lifestyle and their culture in whole. Barnouw (1978) holds the view that a commercial is likely to promote not only a product but a philosophy, a way of life and a view of the world. The unlimited access that international media conglomerates have to Indian sky has definitely contributed in bringing the Indian culture under the influence of western culture. Unnikrishnan and Bajpai (1996) observed that most of the ads for products that are aimed at upper income segment have western influence (music, locales, models, their dresses etc.), while goods that are targeted at lower income group have Indian flavour to them like folk music, traditionally dressed models etc.

6. Stereotyping

Television today is the first and foremost storyteller, unlike olden days when parents, schools and books told most of the stories. Because television typically devotes very limited time to character development in the stories, they resort to stereotypical characters. Stereotypes are conventional or standardized images or conceptions. They are generalizations or assumptions that are often based on misconceptions. They fall back on commonly known and often one-dimensional elements of portrayal. Portrayal of women and people from certain sects in stereotypical roles or occupational roles, under-representation and lower status given to women and people from certain sects, etc. are just a few instances of the stereotypes that affect children. The concern is that children who are continually exposed to television’s stereotyped roles may develop conceptions and perceptions about people that reflect the stereotypical images they see in the media. Studies have shown that children typically imitate the behaviour of the TV characters much the same way that they imitate the behaviour of parents and adults in their life.

Many studies that surveyed the image of men, women, various ethnic groups and minorities as presented in ads, have confirmed that in most cases advertising contributes in sustaining stereotypes. Nowak and Andren (1981) carried out a content study of ads since their evolution from 1950 to 1975, and concluded that advertising failed to represent the changed status of women in society. However Goldstein’s (1992) content analysis study gave proofs that women were shown in a less stereotyped way than before. As found in Bjurstrom’s review based research
(1994/95), content studies have concluded that as far as ads directed towards children are concerned and especially toy ads show highly stereotyped gender images (Macklin and Kolbe, 1984 and Rajecki et al., 1993). Similarly, Bjurstrom reviews that analytical content studies have shown that ethnic minority groups were under represented in ads (Goldstein, 1992), but as the segmentation of market rises the minority representation in ads was also on rise (Wilson and Gutierrez, 1985). Though on the basis of research review it is neither easy to isolate the effects of TV ads on the attitudes of children concerning gender or ethnic minorities, nor it is difficult to state that TV ads are one among other factors that reinforce such stereotypical notions.

7. Aggressiveness and Violence

Mustonen and Pulkkinen (1997) define TV violence as actions causing or designed to cause harm to oneself, or to another person, either physically or psychologically including implicit threats, non verbal behaviour and outbursts directed towards animals and inanimate objects. Although conventional wisdom maintains that ads should be pleasant so that they put viewers in a good mood (Fowles, 1996), many ads like battery, motorcycles, toys, energy drinks, soft drinks, food supplements, tyres etc. use violence as an emotive response plank (Unnikrishnan and Bajpai, 1996). As ads are brief, sometimes the violence shown in them is disregarded but it should not be missed that due to their regular recurrence children watch them repeatedly. Research substantiates that comic violence also lead to violence (Wilson et al., 2002). In fact violence tends to immunize children to violence; they fail to register it as something which is to be avoided, as they see lot of it in glamorized or comic way and the characters miraculously rising scratch free even after getting badly hurt. Greer et al. (1982) points out that TV ads with lots of action, tension building music, a fixed tempo and rapid image changes contribute to increasing younger children’s aggression regardless of content. Children sometimes react by feeling disturbed, over excited or frightened. The National Media Institute on Media and Family, United States (www.mediafamily.org) suggests that advertisers use jolts and tricks to engage emotions of people, using violence and sex coupled with technical tools such as special effects, quick cuts, camera angles and music. All this helps in getting the orienting response, which means instinctive reaction to pay attention to any sudden or unusual stimulus. Macklin and Kolbe (1984) and Carpenter (2005) found that most of these ads with violent acts also lead to gender stereotyping.
Carpenter (2005) quoted various studies (Hoek and Sheppard, 1990; Hoek and Lawrence, 1993; Anderson, 2000; Maguire et al., 2000; Larson, 2001 and Tamburro et al., 2004) that establish links between children’s aggressive behaviour and TV advertising. In contravention Bjurstrom (1994/95) in his review based research points out that even if links were there they could only be short term (Goldstein, 1992 and De Bens and Vadenbruane, 1992). Analytical studies of TV ads undertaken in US and UK have shown that violence was relatively uncommon in ads aimed at children (Goldstein, 1992; cited in Bjurstrom, 1994/95).

8. Unhealthy Eating Habits

Impact of TV ads on children’s eating habits is one of the most exhaustively studied areas of advertising’s effects. Atkin (1981) points out food ads not only influence food preferences but also shape the basic nutritional beliefs in particular and attitude towards food in general. The size of advertising industry in India is Rs.16300 crore out of which snack food market constitutes Rs.4500 crore, and branded food Rs.1300 crore. In India, only 2 per cent of the amount of a food company’s budget goes into research and development of the product against 50 per cent into advertising (Nawathe et al., 2007).

It is seen most of the time in food advertising especially related to snacks, sweets, fast food, etc. that nutritional aspects of food are not emphasized upon and children make decisions purely based on the non nutritional criteria (taste, appearance, premium offers etc.) and thus nutrition does not remain a salient dimension of evaluating food products for them. Many studies mostly undertaken in US, have indicated that TV ads directed at children for candies, snacks, sugared cereals and for such other food items (mostly high in fat, salt, sugar and cholesterol values) outnumber ads for healthy food products (Young, 1990 and Barcus, 1980 and Kunkel and Gantz, 1992 cited in Kunkel et al., 2004). It is well documented that such ads are particularly effective in persuading children to like and request products (Galst and White, 1976; Goldberg et al., 1978; Taras et al., 1989 and Borzekowski and Robinson, 2001). Gorn and Goldberg (1982) conducted a study on 5 to 8 years old children at a 2 week long camp by dividing them into two groups. One group of children was shown ads for fruits and fruit juices, while others viewed ads for a sweetened drink. Consequently, children’s food and drink choices were significantly influenced by the ads they saw. However, Cantor (1981) in his study indicates that the influence of an ad for healthy foods can
be overcome when an ad for a snack food is shown immediately afterwards. Jacobson and Maxwell (1994) suggest that general belief that eating habits formed during childhood often persist throughout life highlights implications of food ads’ influence in this realm. Many researchers have also linked the rise in childhood obesity to the food advertising (Dietz, 1990; Troiano and Flegal, 1998 and Horgen et al., 2001 cited in Kunkel et al., 2004).

Bjurstrom (1994/95) presents another angle to the picture by highlighting certain contradictory research results that the effects of TV ads in this respect are far less than series of other factors; and that the influence of TV ads can be significant only under special circumstances (such as the eating habits of parents, socio economic status of the family, educational level of parents, etc.).

Parental Viewpoint on TV Ads

Indian parents seem to be far more acceptable of the TV ads aimed at children than the Western parents, who have taken TV ads and children related issues more seriously; and have voiced opinions through various channels from time to time. It can be one of the reasons why government regulations and self regulatory framework is relatively more stringent and specific there in comparison to India.

Mukherji (2005) found that urban middle class mothers in India have positive attitude towards advertising, unlike their western counterparts whose attitude is highly negative and sceptical. Further, Unnikrishnan and Bajpai (1996) found in their survey done in capital of India, New Delhi that many parents were relieved and felt that they could leave it to TV and TV ads to teach and prepare children for the outside world. They feel that children learn from ads: explicitly they remember slogans, jingles, brand names, etc. and insist their parents to buy advertised goods, and implicitly ads affect their thoughts and lifestyle. Unlike their counterparts in US, (Greenfield, 1984) who tend to fear the teaching potential of ads, as they feel advertisers have perfected their teaching techniques; Kapoor and Verma (2005) substantiated the argument that Indian parents comparatively hold an overall positive view of TV advertising in their study.

Advertising Control and Regulations
The Indian marketing and advertising professionals, following the practice duly recognized in almost fifty countries around the world (including USA, UK, Australia, Japan, Brazil, China etc.), took the initiative of setting up a council in October 1985, Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) to self regulate the content of advertising. ASCI is registered under Section 25 of Companies Act 1956 as a non-profit company. The ASCI Code of Conduct specifies that all advertising should be (1) legal, (2) decent, (3) honest and truthful, along with (4) a sense of social responsibility to the consumers, especially children/minors and (5) fair to the competition. The Code is drawn up by people in professions and industries in or connected with advertising, in consultation with the representatives of people. The Council is managed by a Board of Governors consisting of 16 elected members constituted by 4 each from advertisers, ad agencies, media and allied professions and consumer researchers (http://www.ascionline.org/goals/roleasci.htm).

The ASCI encourages people to complain against ads which they find false, misleading, offensive or unfair and ensures that each complaint gets a prompt consideration by an impartial and independent Consumers Complaints Council (CCC), appointed by Board of Governors. The CCC comprises of 21 members, 12 from civil society comprising eminent consumer activists, renowned educationists, prominent journalists, lawyers, doctors, engineers etc. and 9 from within advertising industry and allied professions. The CCC has been able to decide upon the complaints within a period of 4 to 6 weeks. The recent statistics suggest in as many as 85 per cent of the complaints upheld against TV ads, the advertisers, sponsors or channels have confirmed in writing to have forthwith complied with the decisions of CCC, either by withdrawing or modifying appropriately the ads. If the advertiser refuses to accept the verdict of the CCC, then the council uses its good offices with media owners, particularly its members, and advises them of such offending ads, which are in contravention of the ASCI Code. The ASCI earlier was releasing ads through print media only, newspapers etc. informing consumers about their existence and inviting them to complain to them at no cost against ads that they find objectionable. A national awareness campaign, in December 2009 was launched through ads on TV, radio and print to make people aware of their right to report offensive ads. The grievances can be lodged to ASCI through a toll free number, its website and through written complaints (http://www.ascionline.org/regulations/code.htm.in).
Consequently, since January 2010, a sudden surfeit of complaints (more than 220 per month) is there, but the number of ads against which action has been taken is still in single digits every month (http://www.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/new (July 16 2010)).

It also has now sought support of the concerned associations such as Indian Broadcasters Forum (IBF) to persuade TV channels to adhere to code as well as implement decisions of the CCC in this regard. The Government of India awarded legal recognition to ASCI on 2nd July 2006 vide a notification in The Gazette of India: Extraordinary {Part II- Sec 3(i)}; to make sure that at least as far as TV ads go, they abide by the ASCI Code. The amendment made in Cable TV Network (Amendment) Rules, 2006 now states, “No ad which violates the ‘Code for Self Regulation in Advertising’, as adopted by the ASCI, Mumbai, for public exhibition in India, from time to time, shall be carried in the cable service”. It has been invited by the Government of India on every committee dealing with ads. It has also won international recognition when it got the European Advertising Standards Alliance (EASA) Silver award in its very first year of joining that organization. EASA is a non profit organization based in Brussels, which promotes high ethical standards in commercial communications by means of effective self regulation, while being mindful of national differences of culture, legal and commercial practice (http://www.easa-alliance.org/India/page.aspx).

Public debates about the extent to which advertising should be controlled, particularly on TV, have always focused on one of the most vulnerable audiences- children. As a result, many nations world over have initiated various moderate to stringent measures to keep a vigil on ads appearing on TV (http://www.appcpenn.org /reports/2000 and www.kff.org/). Greece bans toy advertising on TV until after 10 p.m. Australia allows no ads during programmes aimed at pre-school children (www.youngmedia.org.au). Norway does not permit ads during children’s programming. In Belgium there is no advertising 5 minutes before or after programmes for children (Organization for Economic Growth and Development, 2001). Sweden bans advertising to children who are less than 12 years of age and has defended its policy by citing examples from academic research of Bjurstrom (1994) and Edling (1999) that children under 12 years have difficulty in understanding the purpose of advertising. In UK the Independent Television Commission (1998) regulates ads on TV through its Code of Advertising
Standards and Practice and under this very code there are specific guidelines for advertising to children (www.itc.org.uk/ and www.ofcom.org.uk/codesguidelines/broadcasting/advertising/advertising-standards/children?a=87101). In US, the advertising industry has a set of self regulatory guidelines administered by the Children’s Advertising Review Unit (CARU) of the National Council of Better Business Bureaus to promote honest advertising sensitive to special nature of children (www.bbb.org/us/children-advertising-review-unit). As with all self regulatory standards, the compliance is voluntary. An independent evaluation has found compliance of CARU’s guidelines in 96 per cent of selected cases, however, at the same time suggested that many guidelines are too vague to be subject to empirical assessment (Kunkel and Gantz, 1993). Also, Federal Trade Commission (FTC) is the agency for regulating all kinds of advertising regardless of its medium of distribution (www.ftc.gov/speeches/). The FTC in 1978 considered prohibition on all TV ads to young children based on comprehensive research review produced by National Science Foundation, US (Adler et al., 1997). The affected industries took their case to Congress which sided with them. This decision of the Congress sets US apart from many other developed countries that have banned all TV advertising directed to young children like Canada (www.media-awareness.ca/.../statistics/), Australia and UK.

NEED OF THE STUDY

This study is an attempt to find the impact of TV advertising on children. In order to achieve this objective, based on the fieldwork in the region of Punjab, 400 children and their mothers’ understanding, opinions and attitudes towards TV ads were studied. It is done with a thought that of all the segments of TV audience, children deserve special attention as they are most likely to accept, believe and orient their lives according to the TV ads.

There are various studies that substantiate this thought. Aimee Dorr (1986) opined that TV stands out from other media as it can present more life like content and is generally used more in comparison to others. These characteristics make the medium important for everyone and especially for children. Oates et al. (2003) described TV as a major source of ideas, information and entertainment and the most visible form of advertising. A survey carried out by ‘Pathfinders’ (1989), a subsidiary of an Indian advertising agency, ‘Lintas’ on 4000 Indian children and Mathews (2000) revealed the reasons for more advertisers and producers’ focus shifting on children. Nowadays
children have more money at their disposal than before, they are a major influence in the family’s brand choice in many product categories, and also brand loyalty instilled at their tender age goes a long way.

Concerns about ethics and appropriateness of advertising to children have always been voiced by various government and non-government bodies. Despite the academic research on such subjects, many areas remain ambiguous and contested. An attempt has been made to make this study exhaustive covering children’s TV viewing patterns, their understanding of TV ads, factors that contribute to their likings of ads, behavioural influence of ads on them and their attitude towards ads. There is an additional aspect of mothers’ attitude towards ads and how they feel that ads influence their children. Although, children are said to be reflection of their parents, it is seen barring few studies not many have considered parents’ viewpoint towards TV ads to get a better understanding of impact of TV ads on children and their opinion towards TV ads. In this study focus has been just on mothers and not on both the parents; not only because of mothers’ indelible influence on children but also they were easily approachable and including fathers may have led to inconsistency in the results.

Also, this study concentrates on urban children as they are from a strata that despite being a minority; are a vital segment from the corporate angle. The population mostly belongs to a group that does not have to face financial constraints to fulfil their ad triggered desires.

Concern about children’s ability to comprehend and evaluate advertising messages has stimulated substantial research and heated debate since the early 1970’s in the West. In India it has been hardly over a decade that research focus has been on children and advertising, therefore, there are still many truths to be unveiled. Further, India has an entirely different culture and context. It has been known as a tradition bound country but with the sudden opening up of economy, freedom of media, proliferation of TV and radio channels and IT revolution; many societal taboos and inhibitions have been shed or are in the process of being shed. In such a dynamic scenario it is more important to know the impact ads have upon children.

OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of the study are as under:
1. To study the ability of children to understand TV ads.

2. To find out children’s attitude towards TV ads.

3. To highlight intended and unintended effects of TV advertising on children’s behaviour, values and attitudes.

4. To determine various factors those contribute to children’s likeability of TV ads.

5. To analyze parents’ attitude towards TV ads, and to investigate their opinions regarding the impact of TV advertising on children.

**ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY**

This study has been divided into seven chapters. The first chapter that is, the present one is introductory in nature. It specifies the theoretical and empirical viewpoint of children and parents, and legal provisions regarding the topic. It also explains the relevance and objectives of the study.

The second chapter reviews the available literature on the subject. It includes research contributions directly or indirectly related with the topic. The studies have been reviewed in chronological order.

The third chapter explains the research methodology employed in the present study. It describes the universe of the study, sampling design, data collection tools, data analysis methods and limitations of the study.

Chapters four to six are devoted to data analysis, interpretation and findings of the study. Chapter four discusses children’s TV viewing habits, their comprehension, understanding and likeability of ads and the behavioural influences of TV ads on children.

The fifth chapter analyzes gender-wise and age-wise responses of children to a list of twenty six statements related to their attitude towards TV ads. It also describes the gender-wise and age-wise factor analysis of the same statements.

In the sixth chapter, attitude of mothers towards TV advertising and the impact they feel that TV ads have upon children is gauged. It studies the education-wise and working status-wise responses of the mothers to a list of thirty two statements.
It also, describes the education-wise and working status-wise factor analysis of the same statements.

The final chapter presents a summary of findings and conclusions. It winds up with suggestions for the product manufacturers, the ad makers, the TV programme makers and the regulators of TV ads in India. Certain recommendations for the parents in particular and the society in general have also been included.