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INFLUENCE OF ADVERTISING IN MEDIA ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF YOUNG INDIAN CONSUMERS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ORGANIZED FAST FOOD OUTLETS

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ABSTRACT

The young Indian consumers are unique in terms of their population size and characteristics. According to Government of India's youth portal, the current percentage of population under 25 years of age in India is 51% and the percentage under 35 years of age is about 66%. The researcher attempts to analyse the influence of advertising in media on the perceptions of Indian youth with special reference to organized fast food outlets. The present study has considered the following media carrying advertisements of organized fast food companies, namely: newspaper, magazine, television, radio, internet, mobile phone, pamphlet/brochure, hoarding and banner. The sample consisted of 320 respondents in the age group of 15 to 24 years living in Mumbai city. Multistage sampling technique was adopted to select the required sample respondents. A structured questionnaire was used for collecting the data. Structural equation modeling was used for analyzing the influence of advertising in media upon the consumer perceptions. Television, newspaper and banner advertisements were found to have significant influence upon the perceptions of youth.

KEYWORDS

Advertising media, Consumer perceptions, Fast food, Young consumers, Youth.

INTRODUCTION

Business organisations all around the world use advertising to disseminate the information about their products and services to their target customers. The ability of advertising and other promotional methods to deliver carefully prepared messages to target audiences has given them a major role in the marketing programs of most organizations (Belch and Belch, 2003). The messages transmitted by the advertisers are sensed, selected and attended by the consumers. Further, these external sources of information are interpreted and given meaning from the consumer's perspective. These are nothing but 'perceptions', the process by which an individual receives, selects, organizes and interprets information to create a meaningful picture of the world (Harrell, 1986). Once an individual selects and attends to a stimulus in the form of advertisement, the perceptual process comes into play thereby organizing, categorizing and interpreting the incoming information. From the marketer's and retailer's point of view, it is important to understand how the target customers interpret the advertisement transmitted by them. It is a challenging task for the marketers to measure or influence consumers' perceptions since these are highly individualistic in nature. Things can get more challenging and daunting when the customers to be focused and targeted are young. Having grown up in an even more media saturated, brand conscious world than their parents, the youth respond to advertising differently and prefer to encounter marketing messages in different places or from different sources (Khermouch and Green, 2001). Many companies are recognizing that the most global segment of all the consumer segments is the youth of the world, as they show amazing similarities in tastes, interests, language and attitudes (Parmar, 2002). The multinational organizations realize the fact that one of their major marketing challenges is to tap into the youth segment which shell out huge amounts of money on different products and services. In the Asian region, youth from India deserve special attention due to the enormity of their size. When compared to the previous generation, the contemporary Indian youth are experimentative, daring, financially more secure and more educated with a modern outlook (Nair, 2010). The young consumers are going to be big spenders from now on. Much of the retail boom is already being driven by them. Consumption of items like sports shoes, apparels and cell phones are shooting up because of them (Ramaswamy and Namakumari, 2009). Among the different products and service offerings, fast food has received significant attention and interest from the Indian youth. The fast food sector is gaining acceptance primarily from Indian youth and is becoming part of their lifestyle (Goyal and Singh, 2007). By the year 2016, the Indian fast food market is forecasted to have a value of 18567.7 million U.S. dollars, an increase of 63.9% since 2011 (Marketline, 2012). This indicates huge opportunities for fast food companies of both national and international origins. There is no wonder that the number of organized fast food outlets are increasing rapidly on a pan India basis. In such a case, there is likely to be intense competition among different fast food brands to gain the attention and patronage of young Indian consumers. In order to encounter this competition, the fast food companies resort to advertising to position their products and services in the minds of consumers. This could be the reason why, almost all the organized fast food players frequently telecast colorful advertisements in the television medium while making effective use of other advertising media as well. There is no doubt that these organizations shell out huge amounts of money in coming up with these advertisements in different media. Now, the major question in focus is whether these advertisements are able to capture the attention, interest and thereby influence the perceptions of young consumers in a successful manner. As in several aspects of life, it is the perception that matters in a marketing context in which brand names and company names trigger association and images. Perception is unique to each individual and it is not just objective reality. Different individuals may have their own version of brand description based on their perception (Rameshkumar, 2011). Hence, this study is an attempt to investigate the influence of advertising in media on the perceptions of young Indian consumers with special reference to organized fast food outlets.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Advertising research has shown that the context surrounding the advertisement has many effects on consumer's perceptions of and reactions to the advertising content (Dahlen and Edenius, 2007). Creative and innovative advertisements may serve the purpose of capturing the attention of its target consumers; but they are still costly. Apart from this, it is quiet a difficult task to gain the attention of young consumers. Youth of the present era very well realize the fact that advertisements are strategies employed by organizations to sell their products and services. Only a handful of advertisements with creative themes manage to enjoy the attention of these youngsters. The present age of globalization also sets up the stage for intense competition among different organizations to gain the market share. Too many advertisements of the same product or service category under different brand names in the same medium result in information overload. Such a situation may result in confusing the customer rather than aiding him/her in the buying decision making process. Different advertising media vehicles carry advertisements sponsored by fast food companies. Only those advertisements with the potential to hook the youth upon their innovative themes

manage to stand apart distinctively from the clutter. An advertisement is considered to be effective when it manages to get the attention of its target consumers and also is successful enough to influence their perceptions towards the concerned products and services. When this influence occurs at the perceptual level of a consumer there is a high probability that he or she will purchase/experience the concerned product or service. The current study attempts to address the research problem pertaining to the extent of influence of advertisements on perceptions of youth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Earlier researchers (Pollay et al. 1993) have reported that younger audiences think of advertising as an information source more than do older audiences. Coulter et al. (2001) found that feeling good about an advertisement made the respondents feel good about the advertised offering. It was also revealed that the entertainment aspect of advertising could lead to increased trust in advertisers, manufacturers and retailers. On the other hand, the researchers also indicated that due to its prevalent, intrusive and repetitive nature, advertising might be perceived as a powerful negative force as well. Kim et al. (2010) attempted to investigate the consumer perceptions on web advertisements and motivating factors to purchase from online shopping. They opined that consumer's perceptions of the attributes of web advertisements would tend to influence their intention to purchase from online shopping sites. Dean (1999) found that complete product information was rarely available to consumers especially when viewing advertisements. Product cues in advertising are important to consumers in making inferences, reducing uncertainty and forming product preferences. If there is an abundance of cues, only a few will be fully processed due to the limited capacity of the human processing system. Bacher (2003) was of the opinion that sponsored marketing communications including advertising had the potential to reorganize the way in which the consumer perceives and appreciates the brand. But the same author reported that current practice of marketing communications and advertising simply cannot, has not and will not routinely cause such necessary mental reorganizations. Most of the previous studies on fast food advertising focused upon the influence of the advertisements on children's fast food consumption and the resultant obesity (Andreyeva et al. 2011; Henderson and Kelly, 2005). Apart from this, studies on fast food mainly focused upon consumption patterns and characteristics of fast food consumers (Goyal and Singh (2007); Oyewole (2007)). Studies specific to the perception of fast food advertisements and its influence on youth are lacking. Hence, the current study attempts to address this research gap by focusing upon the influence of fast food advertisements on the perceptions of young Indian consumers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

POPULATION AND SAMPLING FRAME

The population for the study comprised of young consumers in the age group of 15-24 years in the city of Mumbai, India. The sampling frame for the present study included youth visiting the organized fast food outlets in the study area. Four brands of fast food outlets were considered namely Mc Donald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), Pizza Hut and Dominos. These fast food chains were considered due to their immense popularity among young consumers and the occurrence of high footfalls in their fast food outlets. The sampling frame comprised of total 1974 respondents (total footfall of young consumers visiting all the outlets considered for the study (approximately) in a day as per the information given by the outlet service personnel).

SAMPLE SIZE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

A sample size of 306 was determined by using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size table. To be on the safer side, 320 respondents were contacted. Out of 320 responses, 312 were found to be usable. Multistage sampling technique was used to select the required number of sample respondents. In the first stage, the study area was selected as the city of Mumbai by purposive sampling. In the second stage, each of the four organized fast food outlet chains (Mc Donald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), Pizza Hut and Domino's) were classified as different strata. Following this, the number of outlets to be considered from each stratum were calculated in proportion to the total number of outlets. Each outlet was selected using lottery method. In the third stage, the number of respondents to be involved in the study were calculated in proportion to the total number of footfalls occurring in all the outlets. Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents coming out of the outlets.

DATA COLLECTION

The researcher designed a structured questionnaire by adopting items for measuring perceptions from the studies of Oyewole (2007) and Makgosa and Mabalane(2011). Further the researcher sought the opinion of the respondents regarding the influence of advertising in media sources of information using 5 point Likert scales (Very high- 5, High- 4, Neutral - 3, Low - 2, Very low- 1).

CONTACT METHOD

Intercept method was used to collect the primary data from the respondents coming out of the selected fast food outlets and willing to take part in the survey.

DATA ANALYSIS

Principal components factor analysis and structural equation modelling was applied to analyse the primary data by using SPSS 18.0. and AMOS.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

The respondents comprised of 51.92 % of males and 48.08% of females. The mean age of the respondents was 22 years. 81% of the respondents were college students. 19% of the respondents were employed. The mean monthly household income of the respondents was Rs. 32,245.

FACTORS UNDERLYING PERCEPTIONS OF YOUTH TOWARDS ORGANISED FAST FOOD OUTLETS

Previous researchers have conducted studies to identify the factors underlying perceptions of respondents towards fast food outlets (Oyewole (2007); Makgosa and Mabalane (2011); Lee and Ulgado (1997); Goyal and Singh (2007)). Results of these studies highlighted the emergence of hygiene, empathy, comfort of facilities, availability, nutritional value, unique experience, price, reliability, social outing, nutritional awareness, food taste, variety, seating space and ambience as factors underlying the perceptions. The present study used principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation to identify the factors underlying the perceptions of respondents. Six resultant factors emerged in the study namely - Hygiene and reliability, Health consciousness, Courteousness, Unique experience, Comfort and Convenience and Price as shown in Table 1.

INFLUENCE OF ADVERTISING IN VARIOUS MEDIA ON PERCEPTIONS OF YOUTH TOWARDS FAST FOOD OUTLETS

Structural equation modelling was used to study the influence of advertising in various media on perceptions of youth. The undesirable condition of multicollinearity was verified for the independent variables before the conduct of structural equation modelling. Drawing inferences from structural equation modelling might be a problem if the independent variables have high correlations among each other.

TABLE 1: PERCEPTIONS OF RESPONDENTS TOWARDS ORGANISED FAST FOOD OUTLETS: SIX FACTORS SOLUTION

Factors	Reliability (Cronbach's α)
Hygiene and reliability	0.719
Health consciousness	0.726
Courteousness	0.722
Unique experience	0.811
Comfort and Convenience	0.809
Price	0.814

The presence of high correlations among independent variables may lead to inflated squared multiple correlations (R^2) in regression analysis. High correlation values lying above 0.8 or 0.9 are to be scanned for detecting the presence of multicollinearity. It was found out that none of the correlation estimates exceeded the value of 0.8 as highlighted in table 2 indicating the absence of multicollinearity within the predictor variables. The advertisements in media sources formed

the exogenous variables (independent variables) namely: Television, newspaper, magazine, internet, pamphlets, hoardings, banners, FM Radio and mobile phones. The perception of youth towards relevant attributes of fast food outlets namely: 'hygiene and reliability', 'health consciousness', 'courteousness', 'unique experience', 'comfort and convenience' and 'price' formed the endogenous variables (dependent variables). Statistical tests for goodness of fit for the models were also carried out by analyzing the values of Chi-square, GFI, AGFI and RMSEA. All these values were found lying within the acceptable range for the relevant models indicating goodness of fit (Table 3).

TABLE 2: BIVARIATE CORRELATIONS AMONG PREDICTOR VARIABLES FOR CHECKING MULTICOLLINEARITY

Independent Variables	Television	Newspaper	Magazines	Internet	Pamphlet	Hoardings	Banners	FM Radio	Mobile phones
Television	1.00	-0.56	-0.78	-0.31	-0.117	0.122	0.153	0.05	0.043
Newspaper	-0.56	1.00	0.761	0.605	0.687	0.242	0.169	0.12	0.395
Magazines	-0.78	0.761	1.00	0.564	0.677	0.173	0.149	0.08	0.286
Internet	-0.31	0.605	0.564	1.00	0.633	0.383	0.315	0.14	0.556
Pamphlets	-0.12	.687	0.677	0.633	1.00	0.241	0.233	0.08	0.310
Hoardings	0.122	0.242	0.173	0.383	0.241	1.00	0.743	0.27	0.368
Banners	0.153	0.169	0.149	0.315	0.233	0.743	1.00	0.29	0.314
FM Radio	0.055	0.116	.085	0.145	0.087	0.275	0.296	1.00	0.312
Mobile phones	0.043	0.395	0.286	0.556	0.310	0.368	0.314	0.31	1.00

TABLE 3: GOODNESS OF FIT STATISTICS FOR THE MODEL

Parameters	Obtained values	Cut-Off values
Chi-Square	40.083(p=0.077)	P > 0.05
GFI	0.967	> 0.90
AGFI	0.918	>0.90
RMSEA	0.044	< 0.05

Table 4 highlights the standardised regression coefficients (β) signifying the influence of media advertisements on perceptions. It is observed that **Television advertisements** ($\beta = 0.142$, t-value = 3.354, $p < 0.05$) and **Banner advertisements** ($\beta = 0.225$, t-value = 3.568, $p < 0.01$) had a significant and positive influence upon the perceptions of youth in terms of 'hygiene and reliability' associated with fast food outlets. This indicates that television advertisements and banners highlighted messages related to hygiene and reliability of organized fast food outlets which influenced the perceptions of youth in a positive direction. The media advertisements explained for a variation of 5.1% (R^2) within the dependent variable 'hygiene and reliability'.

TABLE 4: INFLUENCE OF ADVERTISING IN MEDIA ON PERCEPTIONS OF RESPONDENTS TOWARDS ORGANISED FAST FOOD OUTLETS

Independent variables - Advertising in media	Dependent variables -Standardised Coefficients					
	Hygiene & Reliability	Comfort & convenience	Courteousness	Health	Unique experience	Price
Television Advertisements	.142*	.159*	.089	.060	.236**	.040
Newspaper Advertisements	-.002	.159	.047	-.501**	-.142	-.378**
Magazine Advertisements	-.043	-.034	-.108	.091	-.168	.221*
Internet Advertisements	.073	-.055	.061	.040	-.062	.218*
Pamphlet Advertisements	-.044	-.029	.015	-.128	-.029	-.111
Hoardings	-.179	-.235**	-.092	.013	-.014	.138
Banner Advertisements	.225**	.266**	.171	.013	.113	-.196
FM Radio Advertisements	-.004	.092	-.086	.068	-.054	-.018
Mobile phone Advertisements	-.008	.001	-.024	-.016	-.048	.028
R^2	0.051	0.083	0.034	0.261	0.215	0.089

* Significant at 0.05 level, ** Significant at 0.01 level, *** Significant at 0.001 level

Television advertisements ($\beta = 0.159$, t-value = 3.894, $p < 0.05$) and **Banner advertisements** ($\beta = 0.266$, t-value = 4.368, $p < 0.01$) were also found to be significantly and positively influencing the perceptions of youth with respect to 'comfort and convenience' offered in fast food outlets. The predictor variables explained for a variation of 8.3% (R^2) within the dependent variable 'comfort and convenience'. Further **television advertisements** ($\beta = 0.236$, t-value = 6.321, $p < 0.01$) had a significant and positive influence upon the 'unique experience' offered in fast food outlets. Fast food organizations of both national and international origins aggressively target the young consumers with their colourful advertisements. These advertisements mainly showcase the fast food outlets as a place of ultimate recreation offering a treat comprising of colourful aesthetics, visual images, pleasant music and delicious fast food dishes. **Television advertising** makes effective usage of audio and video messages to such an extent that youth easily perceive the fast food outlets and cafes as destinations of 'unique experience'. The predictor variables explain a variation of 21.5% within the dependent variable.

Newspaper advertisements ($\beta = -0.501$, t-value = -8.509, $p < 0.01$) had a significant negative influence upon the perception of youngsters with respect to health related aspects of fast food items. This could be implying that newspaper advertisements highlighted minimal contents related to health aspects, nutritional value and calorie contents of fast food. The media sources of information contributed to a variation of 26.1% within the dependent variable 'health consciousness'.

Moreover the perceptions of youngsters towards prices of fast food items are negatively influenced by referring to **newspaper advertisements** ($\beta = -0.327$, t-value = -0.022, $p < 0.01$). It appears as if the prices of fast food highlighted in these newspaper advertisements were perceived to be high by the Indian youth. On the other hand magazines and internet had positive significant influence upon perceptions related to price. The advertising sources contributed to a variation of 8.9% within the dependent variable. On the other hand advertisements placed in magazine and internet media significantly and positively influenced the price related perceptions of youth.

Advertising in media such as **FM Radio, mobile phones and pamphlets** were found to have no significant influence upon the perceptions of young consumers. It could also be observed that the predictor variables (advertising in media sources) on the whole contributed to a maximum variation of 26.1% (R^2 Value) within the dependent variable 'health consciousness' followed by variation of 21.5% within the dependent variable 'unique experience'. This indicates that exposure to different media advertisements considered for the present study resulted in maximum variation and influence upon the perceptions of youth related to health and unique experience associated with organized fast food outlets. More and more fast food companies are trying to portray their fast food dishes as healthy options for the consumers owing to the increasing discussion and research activities at the global level relevant to the harmful health effects of fast food consumption.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Fast food companies may have to use advertising themes focussed upon 'hygiene and reliability of outlets', 'health consciousness of youth', 'courteousness of service personnel', 'unique experience associated with the outlets', 'comfort and convenience of the outlets' and 'prices of fast food dishes'. Organised fast food restaurants can make effective use of television and banner advertisements, since these were found to have significant and positive influence upon perceptions of youth related to 'hygiene and reliability', 'comfort and convenience' and 'unique experience' associated with fast food outlets. Creative and innovative advertisement themes telecasted or displayed through television and banners are bound to gain the interest of youngsters. None of the media vehicles were found to be influencing the perceptions related to 'courteousness of service personnel'. Hence, fast food companies may try to incorporate themes related to this perceptual aspect in their advertisements. The advertisements carried in media vehicles other than television and banners namely newspaper, pamphlets, hoardings, FM radio and mobile phones were found to have either negative or absolutely no significant influence upon the perceptions of youth. Hence fast food companies may take steps to understand the shortcomings (if any) and suitability of these media vehicles to make effective usage of them.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

From the present study, it is concluded that advertisements in media possessed significant influence upon the perceptions of youth towards organised fast food outlets. Despite of this influence, the concerned organisations may attempt to come up with advertisements which stand out and attract attention. Only such unique advertising strategies can help in countering the clutter of advertisements in media. The present study was conducted among youth belonging to the city of Mumbai, India. Hence the generalization of results to young consumers belonging to other geographical areas should be done with caution because of vast cultural diversity in these markets. Further studies could be conducted among Indian youth with special focus on service offers other than organised fast food outlets such as education, fitness centres, and beauty parlours/salons to name a few. Such initiatives could benefit the national and international marketers in tailoring their marketing strategies to focus and serve the youth consumer segment in an effective and efficient manner.

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