



ISSN: 0975-833X

RESEARCH ARTICLE

DIGITAL FOOD MARKETING TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AND ITS AWARENESS AMONG PARENTS - A STUDY IN HYDERABAD

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 07th June, 2017
Received in revised form
13th July, 2017
Accepted 15th August, 2017
Published online 30th September, 2017

Key words:

Mobile apps, Digital medium,
Online Marketing.

ABSTRACT

In an age when people use Twitter rather than the newspaper for the latest updates, digital media is overpowering traditional media in many ways. Things are no different when it comes to marketing, where businesses are leveraging the advantage of new-age media solutions to enhance business impact and build their brand. Today, paid media (e.g. TV, radio or print commercials) are not seen as being on par with earned media (e.g. third-party blog posts, etc.) or owned media (e.g. company websites). Given the success of digital and social media platforms, these media are no longer considered 'path-breaking'; rather, they are now seen as 'standard' marketing channels. Although eating habits and the causes of obesity are complex and are affected by many factors. This research identifies that the cause of obesity in children and young people is their attraction towards HFSS food advertised through digital marketing tools.

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Citation: Dr. Rahela Tabassum and Raghaveni, T. 2017. "Digital food marketing to children and young people and its awareness among parents - A study in Hyderabad", *International Journal of Current Research*, 9, (09), 57694-57697.

INTRODUCTION

Digital marketing is the promotion of products or services via one or more forms of electronic media other than Broadcast media. Digital Marketing is often referred to as 'Web Marketing', 'Online Marketing' or 'Internet Marketing'. However the term Digital Marketing has become very popular overtime particularly in certain countries. But in U.S, it is still called as Online Marketing. In Italy it is referred to as Web Marketing. In U.K and other countries it is a common practice to call it as Digital Marketing after 2013. Digital media helps brand to reach customers in a personalized way. It is noted that the marketing budget is expanding. According to World Economics, 2015 digital media is growing tremendously and the traditional media is declining. Digital marketing is an umbrella term for the marketing of brands using digital technologies, which not only includes the Internet, but also mobile phones, display advertising, and any other digital medium. Digital marketing differs from traditional marketing in that it involves the use of channels and methods that enable a company to analyze marketing campaigns and understand what is working and what isn't – typically in real time. Infact search engine marketing, e-commerce marketing, social media marketing and content marketing are becoming more and more common in this digital era. It also extends to non internet channels that provide digital media such as SMS (simple

messaging system) Digital marketers monitor things like what is being viewed, how often and for how long, sales conversions, what content works and doesn't work, etc. While the Internet is, perhaps, the channel most closely associated with digital marketing, others include wireless text messaging, mobile instant messaging, mobile apps, podcasts, electronic billboards, digital television and radio channels, etc.

Importance of digital marketing

It's not enough that the company knows their customers; infact they must know them better than their competitors so that they can communicate with them. The company should know where, when and how their customers are most receptive to their messages. To do that, an organization needs a consolidated view of customer preferences and expectations across all channels – Web, social media, mobile, direct mail, point of sale, etc. Marketers can use this information to create and anticipate consistent, coordinated customer experiences that will move customers along in the buying cycle. The deeper is the company's insight into customer behavior and preferences, the more likely that the managers can engage them in lucrative interactions. Today's consumers are more knowledgeable and tech savvy. Digital media is so pervasive that consumers have access to information any time and any place they want it. Gone are the days when the messages people got about organizations product or services came from the company which produces it and consisted of only what the company wanted them to know. Digital media is an ever-

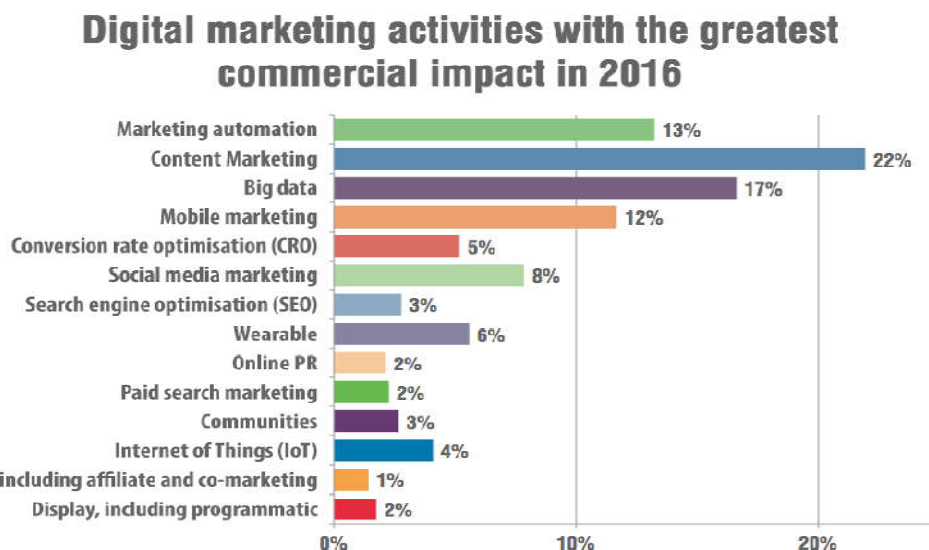
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growing source of entertainment, news, shopping and social interaction, and consumers are now exposed not just to what your company says about your brand, but what the media, friends, relatives, peers, etc., are saying as well. And customers are more likely to believe these groups than the company. Customers want brands they can trust, companies that know them, communications that are personalized and relevant, and offers tailored to their needs and choices. Though Digital Marketing is still at its nascent stage, large and small companies are looking to execute digital marketing campaigns in future at greater intensity. With an increase in number of mobile and internet users, there is a greater potential for digital media to disseminate information to the tech savvy generation of consumers. It is estimated that Digital advertising in India is expected to grow at a compounded annual growth of rate of 20% over 2014-18 to an impressive \$862 million (PWC report). Though there is a likely chance in growth of Digital media, traditional media like newspaper and Television has a key role to play in reaching the target audience. As the broad band penetration in India is low Digital media would only serve as a supplement to traditional media (According to PWC report the TV advertising is growing at 12.8% and likely to hit \$5 billion which is six times as big as Digital media and the News paper advertising is also likely to grow by 7.7% and may hit \$3 billion which is four times more than Digital). Face book group in 2013 began Food Talk India with only 50 people on the list who loved food and wanted to chat about what they try new and where they go out to eat in New Delhi. Within six months the number had grown to 18000 in six months. This shows tremendous growth in tech savvy consumers and their dependent on Digital media.

Digital marketing performance indicators:

Take a look at the graph from the survey, 'Digital marketing activities with the greatest commercial impact in the year 2016:



Source: Survey by smartinsights.com

Marketers believed that the most promising Digital marketing activities of 2016 are content marketing, marketing automation; Mobile marketing and Big data. They are considered as the most promising digital marketing tools. However Marketers face new challenges and have many opportunities to explore and increase their digital marketing campaign. It is predicted that content marketing is going to be

the upcoming Digital marketing strategy. Currently the marketers are focusing on articles than on interactive content. This is because content such as podcasts, info graphics, videos and slide shows takes comparatively longer time to produce than curated articles. Therefore the internet is flooded with millions of articles. But when one analyzes the situation from Users point it can be seen that the consumers would rather like to watch an engaging video than to read a 3-4 page article. The firm can have a win-win situation if it has fewer articles and more interactive content. Marketers can beat the competition by creating more interactive content. Earlier creating such content was time consuming and tiresome. But today it's easy with availability of online and offline tools.

Websites of top food and drink retail brands

Aims of this study

It has been observed that the basic knowledge is missing about digital food marketing that children and young people are exposed to in Hyderabad, and about parent's knowledge and attitude on this topic.

- 1) This study aims at identifying the digital food and drink marketing directed at children in Hyderabad.
- 2) It focuses on the parent's awareness and views in Hyderabad of Digital food marketing.
- 3) Is it ethical to advertise HFSS foods through digital media to children and young people in Hyderabad?

Research Methodology

The study is exploratory and descriptive in nature. A structured Questionnaire with closed ended questions was used to collect information from respondents. Likert's five point scale was used to record responses. Random sampling technique was used to select the sample from the population. The data was

collected from 278 respondents who are the parents of children in the age group of 12-16 years. The questionnaires were also sent through mails and the respondents have sent the filled in questionnaires to the researcher. Out of 300 questionnaires the researcher was able to receive only 278 completely filled Questionnaires, thus making the sample size as 278.

Review of Literature

Although eating habits and the causes of obesity are complex and are affected by many factors, systematic reviews of research have consistently found that food marketing plays an independent causal role (Cairns, 2013; Cairns *et al.*, 2009; 2013; Galbraith-Emami and Lobstein, 2013; WHO, 2016). The media landscape has been changed profoundly by digitization, as have marketing activities (Mulhern, 2009), and marketers report that digital marketing has a powerful capacity to amplify advertising effects. Facebook reports that its ads increase target audience reach, ad memorability, brand linkage and likeability, compared to television alone (Facebook, 2015), and Facebook ads across 14 campaigns generated nearly triple the ad recall compared to control groups (Gibbs and Bruich, 2010). Marketers take advantage of these rich digital data to create 'unprecedented intimacies' between them and children (Montgomery *et al.*, 2012). This is a concern as Australian research has found that teen boys are more vulnerable to ads for unhealthy foods (Cancer Council Australia, 2015), and hence may be targeted more than girls. Three quarters had positive attitudes to advertising in general and two thirds had negative views of HFSS food advertising to teens, compared to over 80% of the general public who agree with the government broadcast regulations (Heery *et al.*, 2014). They voiced particularly strong concerns about celebrities (including sporting heroes) promoting unhealthy foods – a marketing tactic that experimental research has found affects children's unhealthy food consumption (Boyland *et al.*, 2013; Dixon *et al.*, 2014) – parents viewed this as false advertising for unhealthy foods, describing it as misleading. In the US and the UK, a handful of studies indicate that parents are largely unaware of digital marketing techniques and effects. UK parents of children 12 and under had little awareness of food marketing online, and only talked about safety, not marketing, in their Internet guidance to their children (Cornish, 2014; Newman and Oates, 2014). In the US, parents also had low awareness of digital food marketing practices and reacted negatively (Ustjanskas *et al.*, 2010). It has been found that users are turning online for both emotional support and as an information source on the western society (Joinson; Wellman, 1999).

Analysis

Parents' awareness and views about digital food marketing

The research found that the parents were aware of food advertising done on TV and outdoor media. But only few parents were aware of food advertising about HFSS done through Digital media. Though the parents had a positive orientation towards advertising but they felt that the teens saw too much advertising. Moreover the kids and the young people in Hyderabad were influenced by these ads for foods high in salt, sugar and fat and this has been identified as one of the major cause for obesity during this age.

Time spent on digital media

It has been observed that most of parents are of the opinion that their kids spent a lot of time playing games online, watching videos on YouTube and the other social media and get tempted with those ads on food which has high salt, sugar and fat content. Moreover they pressurize their parents to purchase these foods which actually are the major cause of

obesity and cancer. The Marketers find these digital media as the most successful advertising tool to reach the target audience as it has image appeal, exclusivity appeal and can boost the company's profitability. It has been observed that most parents talk to their children regarding food advertisement and they also tell their children that these ads don't always tell the truth and it just try to sell products to its target audience. Moreover very few parents are aware of online advertisement and they insist their kids not to click on ads 'online or use an ad blocker. A very few respondents insisted their kids to click to 'skip ads online.

Awareness about HFSS content food

Parents talk to children about general advertisements and never knew about the advertisement targeted to kids about HFSS food. These ads have a lasting impression in the minds of the target consumers and they demand such food to their parents. These foods are high in fat, sugar and salt content which have been identified as one of the major cause of obesity in kids. These ads are misleading and encouraging children to eat unhealthy. Very few parents insist their children to make their own decision and 'tell them not to be influenced by ads, have an open and independent mind.

Parent's opinion on digital food advertising

Though the parents believed that advertising is a useful source of information, but teens see too much advertising and are falling prey to unhealthy food habits. Parents believed that food advertising is a major cause of bad eating habits in kids. Parents are of the opinion that if unhealthy foods are not advertised, their teen's eating habits would have improved. Food ads for sweets, chips and drinks should be banned completely. Children and youngster should not see ads for foods that are high in fat, salt or sugar. This can greatly help to tackle the problem of obesity which has actually reached the alarming stage. Kids are influenced by ads for hot dogs, chips, wafers, mountain dew, colas, kurkure's etc. According to a report these foods are reported to be having high content of salt and sugar. The attraction towards this food combined with the sedentary lifestyle of children and young people has led to obesity issues, food advertising and teens.

Conclusion

It has been observed that the websites of food and drink retail brands have much content directed at children and young people. Facebook is a single platform which is very popular with children and young people in Hyderabad and is also a location where advertisers are very active. Moreover it has been identified that the parents are largely unaware of Digital marketing efforts directed to their children. Even though the parents discuss with their kids on how they spend time in watching TV, Playing Digital games and on Social media sites but had little awareness of food marketing online which influence their kids in purchasing HFSS food. This is ultimately affecting their kids by making them obese. Generally parents felt that the interactive digital marketing tools like branded apps and games were meant for enjoyment and did not constitute advertising. When the researcher explored the parents view it has been observed that the parents were shocked that their children are vulnerable to social dynamics and emotional appeals of digital food marketing. Parents of young teens in Hyderabad are largely unaware of

this marketing directed at their children in digital media. And they felt that the responsibility lies with them to help children make good food choices.

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