

Don't Let Advertising Affect You!

Young people, especially teenagers, have become increasingly important market for advertisers, and therefore, not surprisingly, much TV advertising is aimed at teenagers.

Teenagers, and even young children, are acknowledged to require special consideration in respect to advertising, as they are less able than older people to understand fully the intent of advertising or its persuasive techniques and are therefore less able to judge it critically.

However, the extent to which such considerations are enshrined within regulations codes of practice, whether internationally or nationally, varies considerably. For example, Sweden and Norway do not permit any TV advertising to be directed towards under- 12 year-olds, and no advertisements at all are allowed during programmes for pre-school children and, in the Flemish region of Belgium, no advertising is permitted 5 minutes before and after programmes for kids. Sponsorship of programmes for children and teenagers is not permitted in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

The highest level of advertising for teenagers and young children is in Australia- an average of 34 adverts per hour. The second highest is USA. UK has the highest level of advertising to under-18s within Europe.

Consumer organizations expressed concerns about marketing techniques such as promotional gifts, as well as sponsorship, teleshopping and premium rate services, targeting younger audience. Lack of adequate enforcement of advertising regulations and lack of attention towards consumer organisations is the problem in many countries.

Alcohol

Alcohol marketers appeal to young people, by developing familiar, sweet-tasting products. That's happening now in the 'alcopop' market, where brewers are falling over themselves and falling with liquor companies, too- to roll out hard lemonades and other fruit-flavoured concoctions that resemble familiar soft drinks- in taste and, often, in look- more than alcoholic beverages. They go down easy and help introduce young people to other alcoholic drinks. Teenagers know about 'alcopops' a lot more than adults do, and they, actually, use them more.

Industry data too, reflect the significant participation of underage users. Alcohol marketers say that they have voluntary standards that prevent them from targeting consumers younger than the legal purchase age.

They claim to avoid pitches that primarily appeal to teenagers.

Yet in reality, nearly one quarter of people aged 18-20 drink coolers, including spirit-based, pre-mixed beverages.

And that's not even counting many of 15-17 year-olds!

Yet, when one reaches 21, former teens become potentially valuable consumers and legitimate targets for aggressive promotions to drink.

The sad reality is that underage drinkers probably consume more than their proportional share of the products. And they actually consume around 10% of all the 'alcopops' sold, if not more.

Millions of underage drinkers regularly absorb hundreds of millions of pounds in advertising for alcohol. Those messages wave through all the media and countless marketing arenas. They mirror youth culture and relate directly to the interests, motivations and aspirations of young people.

The alcohol industry spends more than £1 billion on advertising each year. Teenagers see an estimated 75,000 adverts for alcohol by their 16th birthday. The industry argues that advertising only influences brand choices and that it does not encourage drinking. However, a 1996 study found that alcohol consumption rises as advertising increases. Researchers believe that exposure to alcohol advertising may affect the frequency of alcohol consumption, estimating that teenagers drink 10-30% more after seeing alcohol advertisements. Several other studies also link children's beliefs about drinking to alcohol advertising.

Aside from teenagers and young adults, alcohol advertising can appeal to very young children. For instance, the Budweiser frog campaign, introduced in 1995, is highly recognisable among young children. In just over a year, children's familiarity with frogs' "Bud-weis-er" slogan nearly equalled their recognition of Bugs Bunny's signature greeting "What's up, Doc?"

In 1996 children named Budweiser beer commercials amongst their favourite advertisements. Although recognition disparity between Budweiser frogs and Saturday morning characters may come as a surprise, most children watch TV during the hours of 7 and 8 pm, illustrating how easily alcohol advertising reaches underage TV audience.

Tobacco

Similar to alcohol advertising, cigarette advertisements tend to appeal to teenagers and young adults, not excluding children, by emphasizing youthful vigour, sexual attraction and independence. A 1992 Gallup poll reported that 74% of the public believe that tobacco advertising and promotions are meant to encourage children to smoke. In fact, studies show that young people may be more influenced by advertising than older consumers, and that tobacco advertisements and promotions are the most persuasive influences on children and teenagers to start smoking, surpassing peer pressure. In 1994 the Surgeon General's report concluded that cigarette advertising appeared to increase young people's risk of smoking. Also, recently released documents from R.J. Reynolds's tobacco company establish that the company intended to direct their advertising towards children as young as 14.

Despite the ban on TV commercials, tobacco advertisements reach consumers through other media.

Feature

The tobacco industry was once the largest advertiser on billboards, until a 1998 settlement agreement eliminated them, and it's currently the second largest advertiser in print media, including magazines and newspapers.

The alternative venues are quite successful in reaching children, considering that 90% of all young smokers choose the three most heavily advertised brands. A 1993 survey revealed that Marlboro decreased in popularity between young adults by almost 9%, while Camel gained more than 5%. This shift in preference also coincided with the introduction of Old Joe Camel's cartoon image, which has become widely familiar among young children. In a possible response to state investigations regarding cigarette advertising in magazines, the tobacco companies Phillip Morris and Brown & Williamson voluntarily plan to remove advertising from 40 magazines with large youth readership.

Food

Food advertising comprised the largest category of advertised products to children and young people in virtually all countries.

Confectionary, breakfast cereals (mainly sweetened) and fast food restaurants overall accounted for over half of all food advertisements. Confectionary was the largest category, comprising nearly a fifth of all food advertising.

Other types of food that are advertised are savoury snacks, dairy products, ready-prepared foods, soft drinks, cakes and deserts.

Participating consumer organisations have expressed concern about the negative effect, such as largely unhealthy diet of commercials for food high in fat, sugar and salt may have on teenagers and young children's health and nutrition.

Advertisements for healthier food, such as fruits and vegetables, are either non-existent or extremely few in number.

The highest levels of confectionary advertising are in Greece and the UK- four times more than in Germany and over 35 times as much as in Sweden. The USA and Australia top the league for breakfast cereal advertising. The most prolific advertiser is Mc Donald's, with adverts for the fast food chain found in virtually every country. Other widely advertised brand names are Nestle, Kellogg's, Mars and Cadbury's.

A nutritional analysis for this study of foods advertised on TV to young audience in the UK found that 62% of advertisements are for products high in fat, 50% are for those high in sugar, and 61% high in salt.

In most participating countries there are few or no specific rules concerning food advertising to teenagers and young children beyond the rules that must apply to all advertising.

Also, American studies prove that children influence on estimated 72% of family food and beverage purchases.

Children aged 7-12 spend approximately £2.3 billion of their own money on snacks each year, while teenagers spend £1.3 billion at fast food restaurants alone.

The UK food industry spends £36 billion a year on advertising, making it one of the largest advertisers in the UK economy.

The two things that are sold to children and teenagers most on TV are toys and food, and 98% of food advertising is for products they don't have to eat, non-nutritive things.

Food marketers also use cartoon and movie characters to attract children to their product. Food advertisements, particularly those to young children, should pay regard to considerations of oral health. They should not encourage frequent consumption throughout the day of products liable to cause tooth decay, such as acidic drinks, and those containing sugar, or associate products with situations such as bed- time. Confectionary adverts must illustrate a toothbrush logo, to remind children to brush their teeth.