

Impact of Television Food Advertisements on Pester Power: Parent's Perspective on children's behavior

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ABSTRACT

Advertising is critical to the success of any marketing campaign. However, achieving success by unethical means is dubious. While the advertising business abides by certain regulations, such as those governing infant foods and alcoholic beverages, it is not obvious that they practice ethically. The number of marketing directed towards vulnerable groups such as children exemplifies this pitiful condition. The reason for this is that children are not yet developed enough to correctly comprehend commercials and respond appropriately. Thus, children's actions may change as a result of their television viewing habits and exposure to advertisements. With this backdrop, the purpose of this study is to determine the effect of children-targeted food television advertisement on pester power. Align with research ethics, responses from parents were gathered regarding their perceptions of the effect of child-targeted food commercials on pester power. On the basis of positivism, a quantitative survey was conducted by delivering over 200 questionnaires to parents in the Colombo district who were selected using the non-probability convenience sampling approach. The descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression were used to analyze the data. The study discovered that children have a modest level of pester power and children-targeted television food advertising have a significant positive effect on pester power. This study contributes to the body of knowledge about children's television viewing patterns, children-targeted advertisements, and pester power by elaborating on existing literature. As implications, the study suggests relevant authorities to regulate advertisements directed at children, business

organizations to exercise self-control in targeting vulnerable groups, parents exercise control over their children's television viewing behavior, and educators educate children about evaluating the contents of advertisements, which will ultimately result in the avoidance of conflict between children and parents as a result of pestering.

Keywords: Children, Advertisements, Children targeted advertising, Food advertisements, Pester power

1. Introduction

Today's business world is competitive (Hanssens, 2018) making it tough for marketers to generate sufficient demand for their products (Bayighomog et al., 2020). Thus, marketing and communication efforts inevitably gravitate toward susceptible demographics (Stanton and Guion, 2013). Targeting children is another attempt by business organizations to leverage children's influencing ability to influence their parents' purchase decisions (Brinson and Holiday, 2021). Children have developed into a highly profitable market segment, (Pinto et al., 2021) serving as both a purchaser and an influencer for a variety of consumable products (Lati et al., 2017).

The media's influence on children has an effect on family purchasing behavior and results in increased pester power among children (Galdolage and Wijesundara, 2007). As note by Lawlor and Prothero (2011), Pester power refers to children's capacity to coerce their parents into purchasing products, particularly those advertised in the media (Lati et al., 2017). Television, as a prominent medium of information and communication, primarily targets children (Bryant et al., 2007) due to its superior capacity to reach this demographic in comparison to other mediums (Kearney et al., 2021). Children are often drawn to television commercials for their inventiveness (Kearney et al., 2021), image quality, colors, animations, music, and utilization of models they admire (Abbatangelo-Gray et al., 2008).

When it comes to advertising directed at children, many children acquire their own thoughts and tastes regarding the foods they wish to eat as a result of exposure to these adverts (Lati et al., 2017). Then, naturally, children will approach their parents for those food items to which they have been exposed via commercials, a phenomenon known as 'pester power.' (Galdolage and

Wijesundara, 2007). Due to the fact that youngsters are unaware of the realities of such products and family budgets, pester power can have a detrimental influence on the child-parent relationship (Lati et al., 2017).

According to a study done by the Australian government's Department of Social Service in 2019, the number of advertisements that children are exposed to varies with their age. Thus, youngsters between the ages of 0 and 2 years old are unable to distinguish between advertisement and legitimate programming. However, youngsters in the age range of 3-6 years old can distinguish between television programs and advertisements and also have a sense of what advertising is attempting to convey. Between the ages of 7 and 11, children may recall television advertisements they've seen and can recognize some persuasive strategies, such as adverts exaggerating how good items are, although they may not always realize that the products are not as good as advertised. However, when youngsters reach the ages of 12-14, they can comprehend the objective of advertising without having the ability to judge certain forms of advertising, and they can comprehend how markets work and how consumers respond to advertisers' claims. As Huang et al. (2016) reported, in middle European countries, Swedish children account for 3% of youngsters who complain about what they see on television. This low percentage is a result of the Swedish government's tight prohibition of child-targeted food television commercials. According to Huang et al. (2016), a positive association exists between kid media exposure and pester power

According to scholars, most parents are 'sometimes' agree for food requests of children. Food related pester power may contribute to generate different adverse consequences such as weigh and diet of the child. Huang et al. (2016) in such a backdrop, World Health Organization prohibited the marketing of foods rich in saturated fat, trans fat, added sugar, or salt on television. However, practically many foods related children targeted television advertisements are visible in Sri Lanka.

Though children are susceptible to food products they see on television and that pester power influence on the child-parent relationship in practice, scholarly attention devoted to understanding this phenomenon is quite limited, particularly in the Sri Lankan context. To address this research gap, this study aims,

RO1: To examine the level of pester power among children in Sri Lanka.

RO2: To examine the effect of children-targeted television advertising on pester power of children.

Following that, the paper discusses the conceptual underpinnings of the investigation, before delving into the methodology and concluding with the findings and discussion. Thirdly, theoretical, and practical contributions, as well as limitations and future research objectives, are discussed.

2. Literature Review

This section begins by presenting a brief theoretical overview about the advertising and importance of children as a target audience. Next quality of information, entertainment, content credibility, likability of advertising, emotional and persuasive pestering are discussed as forceful dimensions in a television advertisement. Finally, the pester power among children is discussed.

2.1. Children targeted advertising

Even though technologically advanced innovations such as internet is getting popular as mediums of communication, still television is the most powerful communication tool in marketing (Abbatangelo-Gray et al., 2008). Advertising plays a vital role as a marketing tool (Hackley and Hackley, 2021) that companies use to get attention, make awareness, remind and motivate consumers about their marketing offerings (Bamfo et al., 2019). Advertising is used to attract company's target audiences (Brinson and Holiday, 2021) and television advertising is viewed as the most belonging and major model for the transmission and reception of video content than other media of advertising (Bamfo et al., 2019). Advertising is the action of calling public attention through a chosen media done by an identified sponsor (Shapiro et al., 2021).

As Huang et al. (2016) noted children participation in family purchase decision is increasing due to exposure to television advertisements. However, understanding of the communication purpose of advertising improves with children's age (Brinson and Holiday, 2021). Galst and White (1976) recognized the efficiency of television advertising in determining the purchase-related behavior of children. Television advertisements targeted at children push them

to annoy their parents' due to increased desire to acquire the advertised products (Folta et al., 2006). Due to the constant exposure of children to television advertisements, some of them are able to differentiate between good and bad products and are in the situation to encourage their parents' easily to purchase products they desire (Kristensen et al., 2005). According to O'guinn and Shrum (1997) advertising is a high influential communication method to inform children and young people about products and encourage them to purchase.

2.2. Children as a Target Audience

According to (Bamfo et al., 2019) all businesses today are trying to transmit brand messages attractively to the market which can make high influence over family buying decisions. Therefore, marketers target children as a most vulnerable market segment to influence their parents to buy things they need.

As Udo and Nwulu (2015) found, most of children's purchase related requests are triggered by models who endorsed products in advertisements. Marketers use attractive child models or characters to get the attention of children towards the advertisement. Viewing to such television advertisements lead to children's product requests, through forcing parents' purchasing decisions (Bamfo et al., 2019). However, children below seven years find difficult to understand the commercial intent of advertisements and believe everything as truth (Lati et al., 2017). As Bartholomew and O'Donohoe (2003) note choosing children as target audience of television advertisements is inappropriate.

2.3. Children targeted television food advertising

Children pass through five stages of their development which can be categorized as observing, making requests, making selections, assisting parents in family decisions and making independent purchases (McNeal, 1999). Marketers try to get the benefits of using children's requesting power to enhance demand towards their products. At present, most of the time advertisers target young children using the same content given to adults through their commercials (Galdolage and Wijesundara, 2007) and they mainly consider the factors such as social values, interests, attitudes and level of exposure to advertisements (Robertson and Rossiter, 2006). Lati et al. (2017) also observed a strong positive correlation between TV viewing time and purchase influencing attempts of children.

Most of the children targeted food advertisements promote unhealthy food choices which cause childhood obesity and non-communicable diseases in long-run (Institute of Medicine Committee on Prevention of Obesity in and Youth, 2005). In many countries, there are no proper restrictions on preventing such marketing attempts (Mello, 2010). However, as Matthews (2007) note, some of the countries practice regulations over children targeted unhealthy food advertising. According to Bamfo et al. (2019), when studying about advertisements, it needs to identify four constructs namely, quality of information, entertainment, content credibility and likability.

Quality of information: Quality of information included the information provided through advertising such as align with quality standards, accuracy of information, timely relevance (Bamfo et al., 2019), and usefulness of information (Siau and Shen, 2003). Information given in the advertisement should be capable enough to get the attention of consumers for a product that offered by the marketer (Dutta-Bergman, 2006). Information embedded in advertisements effects the attitude of consumers and have the power to change their perceptions and behaviors (Blanco et al., 2010). When comes to the children audience, they are vulnerable to comprehend the information given and therefore, always believe that advertisement provide correct information (Gulla and Purohit, 2013).

Entertainment: One of the main attributes of advertising is entertainment. Kids are enjoying and imitating catchphrases and jingles of some brands (Bartholomew and O'Donohoe, 2003). This technique may arise desirable feeling among children and give a better understanding about child parent's relationship (Bamfo et al., 2019). Though advertisements are good in entertainment quality, it may cause to enhance pester power among children (Wanninayake and Chovancová, 2012). When audience feel that there is some form of enjoyment attributed with the advertising, they feel attracted to it and this can enhance their positive attitude towards the product being advertised (Bamfo et al., 2019). According to Bamfo et al. (2019) advertising mostly create a positive attitude toward that media and celebrity is the successful way of attracting the audience members.

Content credibility: Younger children are more confident about the picture quality of the advertisements (Chan and McNeal, 2003) while older people consider the credibility and truthfulness of the message. Credibility of the

television advertisement is influenced by different circumstances, more especially by the company's trustworthiness and the bearer of the content (source of the advertisement) (Lafferty et al., 2002). Credibility has been opened long discussion, as advertising is normally criticized for the eroding credibility, manipulation and promotion of materialism (Bamfo et al., 2019).

Likability: Likability towards the advertisement depends on children's attitude towards television advertisements and nature of the product being advertised (Bamfo et al., 2019). In the previous literature, it has been noted that children like TV advertisements with animated characters which engages their attention (Gulla and Purohit, 2013) resulted into strong recall and high levels of recognition advertisements. Most of the children targeted TV advertisements use attractive colors, animations, music and models to get the attention of the child audience (Lati et al., 2017).

2.4. Pester power

Pester power is the capability of children to force their parents into buying them products, especially items advertised in the media. It is unfaithful behavior of children who pester, harass, and nag their parents' or guardians to purchase something for them, typically food items or branded goods (Abbasi et al., 2020). Pester power typically takes place with children from speaking age up to approximately 15years old (McNeal, 1999). It is noticed that children have different approaches when influencing to purchasing different products, which may vary with socio demographic backgrounds of families (Kumar, 2017).

According to Procter and Richards (2002) 'nag factor'; 'the tendency of children, who are bombarded with marketers' messages, to unrelentingly request advertised items are higher. According to Galdolage and Wijesundara (2007), marketers also work hard to increase their product's nag factor. Thus, impression of 'unwarranted interruption' and 'pestering' often proves to be one of the most successful influencing techniques (McNeal, 1999). Pestering can be recognized with its nature as 'persuasive pestering' and 'emotional pestering' (Anitha and Mohan, 2016).

Persuasive pestering: Persuasive pestering involves with the idea of expressing rationally about purchase request through pleading and requesting the things they want to purchase (Palan and Wilkes, 1997). Some parents purposefully

avoid children when shopping to avoid persuasive pestering (Haselhoff et al., 2014). According to (Anitha and Mohan, 2016), children change their approaches of persuasions time to time and when they grow up, reduce or reject persuasion.

Emotional pestering: Children in early ages display this pestering technique by expressing anger, lovely words, being nice and affectionate etc. To execute emotional pestering technique children require a smaller number of cognitive abilities and therefore use of emotions like anger can be in the forms verbal or non-verbal mediums (e.g., crying) (Anitha and Mohan, 2016).

3. Conceptual Framework

According to the reviewed literature, the researchers developed following conceptual framework which explain the study variables and hypotheses.

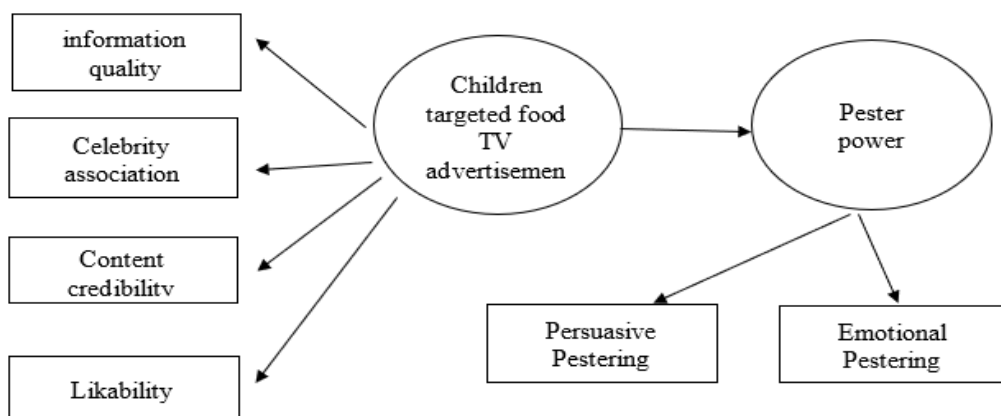


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

4. Methodology

The main purpose of this study is to measure the impact of children targeted food advertisements on pester power. Positioning the study within the positivistic research paradigm, a quantitative survey was carried out to collect primary data using predesigned self-administered questionnaires.

The population is recognized as parents who have their children between the ages of 3 to 15 years old living in western province, Sri Lanka. A sample of 200

was selected based on non-probabilistic convenience sampling technique. Constructs were operationalized through a rigorous literature review and scales were developed with five-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. Expert opinions were taken with the aim of further improving the research instrument which was followed by a pilot study.

The collected data were initially checked for missing values and outliers. The questionnaires which had more missing values were omitted while few others with fewer missing values were imputed with median (Little and Rubin, 2019). In the next stage, the dataset was examined for possible outliers, which occur in a sample mainly owing to data entry error or extraordinary observation (Hair et al., 2010). As Hair et al. (2010) suggested, all the outliers were closely monitored, though not removed from the data set since it could be the true responses of respondents in 1-5 Likert scale.

The next step in the data screening process aimed to test the dataset for normality assumptions. Normality implies that data distribution for an individual construct fits with the shape of a normal distribution. In this study, skewness and kurtosis are within the value ± 2.56 (Hair et al., 2010) and therefore recognized as normally distributed.

Next, the data were checked for validity and reliability before the main analysis. Internal consistency of the items was measured using Cronbach's alpha and validity was ensured through content validity, construct validity and discriminant validity. The analysis was mainly done using descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression techniques.

4.1. Validation of Measurement Properties

Exploratory factor analysis was carried out with the data reduction purpose and to ensure the uni-dimensionality nature of the data. It shows the weak indicators which are correlated with two or more factors.

Table 1: Factor Analysis

	Components					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
QUA1	.874					
QUA2	.856					

QUA3	.870					
ENT1		.869				
ENT2		.890				
ENT3		.912				
CRE1			.850			
CRE2			.917			
CRE3			.893			
LIKE1				.878		
LIKE2				.853		
LIKE3				.795		
PER1					.715	
PER2					.817	
PER3					.842	
PER4					.865	
PER5					.655	
EMO1						.846
EMO2						.821
EMO3						.819
EMO4						.859
EMO5						.908

Accordingly, all the factor loadings are greater than 0.5. and haven't found any cross loadings. Therefore, it was concluded that Uni- Dimensionality is satisfied.

4.2. Test of validity

Validity can be measured by studying the content validity, criterion validity, and construct validity (Sekaran, 2006, p.203). This study ensures the content validity since all the indicators (independent variables and a dependent variable) developed using well-established literature. Convergent validity was ensured by checking factor loadings, squared multiple correlations, average variance extracted, composite reliability etc.

Table 2: Convergent validity

Dimension / Variable	Convergent Validity Test					Cronba ch's Alpha
	KMO > 0.5	BTS		CR > 0.7	AVE > 0.5	
		Significan ce < 0.05	Chi - Square			
Information Quality	0.724	0.000	228.261	0.901	0.751	0.833
Entertainment	0.728	0.000	295.364	0.920	0.793	0.867
Content Credibility	0.713	0.000	294.798	0.917	0.787	0.864
Likability Advertising	0.687	0.000	188.056	0.880	0.710	0.795
Persuasive Pestering	0.829	0.000	400.469	0.887	0.613	0.833
Emotional Pestering	0.865	0.000	626.821	0.929	0.724	0.904

As shown in table 2, KMO value of all were greater than 0.5, Sphericity test for Bartlett is also significant. AVE values were greater than 0.5, and CR values were greater than 0.7. Therefore, convergent validity of respective dimensions was satisfied. Cronbach's alpha coefficients of all variables also were greater than 0.7 indicating internal consistency of the data.

Discriminant validity

Table 3: Discriminant validity

QUA	QUA	CRE	LIK	PER	EMO	
QUA	0.751					
ENT	0.489	0.793				
CRE	0.471	0.384	0.787			
LIK	0.436	0.529	0.356	0.710		
PER	0.379	0.423	0.421	0.429	0.613	
EMO	0.403	0.231	0.366	0.320	0.570	0.724

All squared correlation among all dimensions were lower than the AVE on the individual dimensions which is satisfying discriminant validity. Therefore, all the variables satisfied with the discriminant validity.

4.3. Reliability Analysis

Table 4. Reliability Analysis

Dimension/ Variable	Cronbach's Alpha value > 0.7	Number Of Indicators
Information Quality	0.833	03
Entertainment	0.867	03
Content Credibility	0.864	03
Likability Advertising	0.795	03
Persuasive Pestering	0.833	05
Emotional Pestering	0.904	05

According to table 4. dimension under consideration were satisfied the standard. In here reliability of the dimensions of the independent variable (Children Targeted Food Television Advertising) have been measured and reliability of the dependent variable (Pester Power) have been measured separately. The Cronbach's Alpha values over 0.7 emphasizes the reliability of questions are high.

The following table summarizes the sample profile of the study.

Table 5: Sample profile of the study

Respondent's characteristics		Frequency (n)
Age	20-29 years	71
	30-39 years	88
	40-49 years	32
	50-59 years	9
Monthly family income	Below 20,000	20
	20,000-50,000	97
	50,000-100,000	74
	More than 100,000	9
Employment status	Business owners	27
	Employed	140
	Unemployed	25
	Retired	8

4.4. Descriptive analysis

Table 6: Descriptive statistics

	Mean	Std. Dev	Rank by
	Statistic	Statistic	Mean Value
Information Quality	3.827	0.899	5
Entertainment	4.163	0.798	1
Content Credibility	3.913	0.881	4
Likability Advertising	4.039	0.747	2
Persuasive Pestering	3.955	0.771	3
Emotional Pestering	3.826	0.942	6

According to the above table, mean value of Entertainment is the highest (4.163) indicating that parents perceive that children targeted TV advertisements are high in entertainment quality. Similarly, according to the parent's perception, most of the children targeted advertisements are likable. Mean values of information quality of the advertisement was the least and recorded as 3.82. According to the respondents mean value of the Pester power is for persuasive pestering and emotional pestering are 3.995 and 3.826 respectively, indicating high level of pester power among children.

4.5. Hypothesis Testing

Objective 1: Examine the Level of Pester Power among children in Sri Lanka.

Researchers developed a decision criterion indicating,

- 1.00-2.50 - Low level of pester power
- 2.50-4.00 - Moderate Level of pester power
- 4.00-5.00 - High level of pester power

According to the mean value analysis (table 7), pester power among children is recognized as 3.89, indicating a moderate level of pester power among children. One sample T -Test has performed to test the statistical validity of this finding.

Table 7. Mean Value of Pester power

Test Value	3.0
Mean Difference	0.39
Mean Value	3.89

Table 8. One Sample T Test

	Test Value = 3.0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
PESTERPOWER	6.860	199	.000	.39045	.2782	.5027

According to the table 8, ($t=6.86$, $p<.05$), cause to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, it is concluded that Sri Lankan parents perceive that pester power prevails at moderate level among children.

Objective 2: Examine the impact of children targeted television food advertisements on pester power of children

To test this hypothesis, a simple regression analysis was performed. The model become significant at $F=246.109$, P , 0.05 (refer table 9)

Table 9. ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	70.900	1	70.900	246.109	.000b
	Residual	56.752	197	.288		
	Total	127.652	198			

Table 10. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.745 ^a	.555	.553	.53673

According to the model summary (Table 10), the R square value is 0.555 and it indicates that 55.5% of dependent variable (Pester Power) is explained by the independent variable (Children targeted television advertising). In this research study, only one independent variable has been considered and it explains 55.5% of total variance of the dependent variable because this is the most considerable variable that may impact to the dependent variable.

Table 11. Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.576	.215		2.681	.008
	ADVERTISING	.832	.053	.745	15.688	.000

According to the table 11, the Sig. value of the independent variable is 0.000 which is less than 0.05, it can reject null hypothesis. Therefore, it is concluded that children targeted television food advertising has strong positive significant impact ($\beta=.832$, $p<.05$) on pester power.

5. Discussion

In this study, the main purpose was to examine the impact of children targeted television food advertisements on pester power. Apart from that, level of pester power among children was examined. Accordingly, level of pester power among Sri Lankan children are high (mean=3.89, SE=0.39). Further, exposure to television food advertisements show a strong and positive impact on pester power ($\beta=.832$, $p<.05$).

When compare our research findings with the available literature, McNeal (1999) note that observing, requesting, selecting, assisting parents with family decisions, and making independent purchases as most important stages of children's family buying decisions. Galdolage and Wijesundara (2007) mentioned, advertisers frequently target young children with the same content as adults and also Lati et al. (2017) discovered a large positive association between television viewing time and children's attempts to influence family buying decisions.

Past research has studied the variables like family structures, pester power and purchase outcomes independently (Anitha and Mohan, 2016). Even though different consumer socialization agents have made their own impact in equipping the child with information, which has been widely studied, the purchase outcome can significantly vary due to the level of pester power

between the said parent and children. The main aim of children targeted food advertising is to properly inform consumers of quality information, entertainment, content credibility and likability tailored to consumers' needs and interest to encourage buying behavior (Bamfo et al., 2019). The majority of food commercials directed at children promote unhealthy food choices (Institute of Medicine Committee on Prevention of Obesity in and Youth, 2005). However, there are insufficient safeguards to prevent such marketing tactics (Mello, 2010). As Matthews (2007) notes, some countries regulate advertising directed at children regarding unhealthy foods.

Bamfo et al. (2019) found information intrusiveness and likable of adverts having positive and significant impacts on children purchase behavior. The study also recommends provision of quality, accurate, reliable, and timely information about products as well as employing popular and likable celebrities in the television advertisement. The implication is that those constructs of television advertisement is an important determinant of children pestering behavior. Gulla and Purohit (2013), revealed that the children's positive attitudes toward advertising leads to pester power and it has a significant impact of parent's buying behavior.

As McNeal (1999) note, pestering is often with youngsters from the time they begin speaking until they reach the age of about 15 years and used to persuade parents to purchase various things (Kumar, 2017). According to Procter and Richards (2002), the 'nag factor'; 'the proclivity of children bombarded with marketers' advertisements is increased. According to Galdolage and Wijesundara (2007), marketers also make a concerted effort to raise the nag factor of their products. Thus, the impression of 'unwarranted interruption' and 'pestering' is frequently one of the most effective persuasion strategies (McNeal, 1999).

5.1.Theoretical Implications

This study fills a theoretical void by addressing a timely topic that has received little attention in scholarly work, particularly in the Sri Lankan context. It contributes to the theory by identifying the effect of exposure to television food advertisements on children's pester power. The study discovered a moderate level of pester power among children and a strong positive effect of exposure to

television food advertisement on pester power. Further the study contributes by broadening the literature surrounding children targeted advertising and pester power.

5.2. Practical Implications

As practical implications, this study provide insights to marketers, policy makers, business organizations, parents, and educators. Marketers needs to realize that children are in their formative years of their life and any advertisement which delivers the message incorrectly can make this segment adopt the product which can harm their future. Thus, they need to target this segment for marketing or communication purpose with utmost care, respecting to the business ethics. Policy makers can also use these insights in developing policies aiming at protecting children from the negative effects of undesirable advertisements. It provides important insights for business organizations to be self-controlled and rethink about the ethics of targeting children in their advertisements. Parents should exercise control over their children's television viewing behavior, and educators should educate children about evaluating the contents of advertisements, which will ultimately result in the avoidance of conflict between children and parents as a result of pestering.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The current study is limited to the western province in Sri Lanka and is confined to a sample chosen based on non-probability convenience sampling method. Future researchers can conduct Island-wide study for a randomly chosen sample to enhance the generalizability. This study can further extend to explore the impact of TV viewing behavior, exposure to general advertisements and respondents' behavioral changes resulted with exposure to advertisements.

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Competing Interests

The authors declared no competing interests.

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