

# Attitude towards Advertisements: A Study on Tweenagers

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## ABSTRACT

As per the research, an average viewer sees 47 advertisements a day making it 17155 advertisements in a year. Gaining an understanding of the tweenagers' (children between the ages 8 and 12) attitude toward TV commercials is important to marketers for two reasons. First, these children are believed to be capable of developing psychological constructs, making comparisons, and forming impression. Second, marketers are discovering that it is a segment with immense marketing potentials. Compared to their predecessors the tweenagers are more affluent and have many choices. They have significant influence on the purchase behaviour of their parents. Keeping these in view, marketers of many consumer products all over the world have targeted this segment although few of the researches are being done keeping this category in view. The present study is, therefore, targeting this group to analyze the attitude of tweenagers towards advertisements. The study focused on gender flexibility of tweenagers by classifying them as high and low gender flexible and the attitude associated with it.

**Keyword:** Tweenagers, Gender Flexibility, Attitude, Advertisements

## INTRODUCTION

Advertising is a paid form of non-professional presentation of goods and services to a group of people by a recognised sponsor. It is important because it creates awareness of existence of a product and a sense of urgency to consumers by informing them on sales and offers. It also helps businesses in keeping up with the competition in the market and acts as a form of sales promotion method.

Advertising plays a very important role in today's age of competition. It is one thing which has become a necessity for everybody in today's day to day life, be it the producer, the traders, or the customer. Nowadays, advertisement is the tool which many companies and enterprises use to inform prospective customers about their products and services. It is for everybody including kids, young, and old.

## Advertising to Children

In an era of diverse marketing and advertising platforms, entertainment, and modern culture, children from all over the world are exposed to a great number of marketing and advertising activities. Children represent a huge market for advertisers. In addition to the purchasing spend they represent and the influence they exert on their parents' shopping decisions, children who have not yet formed their tastes, desires and preferences become an ultimate target for advertisers and remain as such throughout adulthood.

There is no escaping the fact that we live in a commercial world. This brings with it the potential risk of children viewing harmful or inappropriate material. However, while not everyone will agree, it is generally accepted that children are legitimate consumers who have the right to see and hear what advertisers have to say.

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Kids are bombarded with advertisements from every possible source: billboards, posters, clothes sporting characters or brand-name labels, TV commercials, websites, and radio blurbs. Often, even though kids don't have their own income, yet advertising is aimed directly at them. Statistics show that children are a rich market for advertisers.

Reliable statistics on the significance of advertising in children's lives and their roles as consumers is difficult to come by. Several statistical estimates of advertising and consumerism's significance in children's lives have attempted to quantify this influence.

Today, companies spend nearly \$17 billion annually marketing to kids. That is more than double what it was in 1992. In 1983, they spent \$100 million (Christine Lagorio).

Marketing firms and advertisers are looking to a younger demographic, increasingly targeting tweens and even younger children. And these kids have huge control over the flow of parents' spending. Statistics show 8- to 12-year-olds spend \$30 billion of their own money each year and influence another \$150 billion of their parents spending (Lagorio).

The average child watches about four hours of television a day and sees more than 20,000 commercials a year, often for high-fat, high-sugar, and high-salt snacks and foods.

### How Children Respond to Advertising

Several studies on children and advertising (termed consumer socialisation research) have examined children's ability to discern deception in advertising. When asked whether commercials always tell the truth, older children tend to be skeptical. The findings are startling: 88% of third graders and 97% of six graders believe that advertising does not always tell the truth (Deborah Roedder John, 2009). By contrast, only half of kindergartners believe that advertising never or only sometimes tells the truth. The overall results of the research show that skepticism about advertising develops early in childhood and increases as children get older—perhaps as a result of their increased understanding of the persuasive intent of advertising, more developed experiences with television itself, and parental influences.

There are at least two other areas of psychological research that are relevant to understanding children's comprehension of advertisements. Piagetian developmental psychology provides an understanding of a series of cognitive phases through which children develop. These theories conclude that children prior to 11 years of age lack adult-like reasoning that allows them to understand the role of commercial messages as not simply informative but also persuasive and to distinguish clearly commercials from programming materials.

Advertisements today are not so much about the products but rather about the character of the consumers and how they should feel when they use or possess the advertised product. Messages to children are all about the happiness, social status or success which accompanies the possession or consumption of a certain toy or type of food.

### Decision Making Skills in Children

Children assume the role of consumer decision makers at a young age. As they grow older, they develop more sophisticated decision-making skills and abilities and also develop a greater awareness of different information sources which they deploy in a more flexible manner depending on need (Moore & Stephens, 1978; Moschis & Moore, 1979). Children utilise attribute information in evaluating products and adapt their decision strategies to the nature of the choice environment they face.

### Tweenagers Market in India

In India today, the tween is more aware, more informed, more demanding than ever before. Couple that with rising household incomes, and increased tendency to expiate parental guilt over not spending enough time with the kids by splurging on them, the tween market is booming and is expected to grow exponentially. Market survey clearly indicates that they are not only fast emerging as consumers who can be targeted independently, but they are also playing a major role in making brand purchase decisions for the household.

As a result, marketers of diverse product categories are trying to find ways to capture the attention of two very distinct audiences through one message. They must appeal to the adult purchaser, as well as to the tween who

could end up influencing that purchase. No wonder so many TV commercials feature tweens. Asian Paints has them, HDFC Standard Life has them, Surf Excel, Maruti Esteem, SBI Infrastructure Fund, Airtel, Radio Mirchi, Ira Diamond Jewellers have them in their ads.

Financial institutions like ICICI have introduced services exclusively for children. The bank has developed a service called Young Stars. To make the product popular among children, it is approaching schools. The programmes were held in all major metros, and 500 schools hopped on board. For something as ordinary as paint, tweens are being targeted, like Nerolac Disney, a service offered by Nerolac Paints. The service gives the consumer the choice to get rooms painted with Disney characters. “Before launching this service, we conducted research in the top four metros in the country and decided to offer 12 designs/characters to the children,” says C Venugopal, General Manager, Marketing, Nerolac Paints. “These characters were approved by the parents. We did not want anything that the parents didn’t approve of”.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Children’s Role in Marketing

David Buckingham, author of the government report on the ‘The Impact of the Commercial World on Children’s Wellbeing’, has suggested that children have acquired increased spending power and are thought to influence the purchasing habits of family members (Buckingham, 2009). However Tinson & Nancarrow (2007) opined that whilst children do have an influence, they are not the final decision makers. Other research has shown however that children tend to frequently make independent purchases by the age of eight i.e. a tweenager (McNeal & Yeh, 1993; Marshall 1997).

### Children Attitude Towards Advertisements

The average 8 to 13 year old child watches, on average, of over 3 ½ hours of television a day. Children under the age of 11 or so have not fully developed their abilities to acquire, encode, organise, and retrieve information. This means in practice that they do not have adult-like abilities to use the information in commercial messages (O’Barr, 2008). However, another study revealed that from the age of 8 onwards, children develop some knowledge about

advertising, some skepticism as they realise that ads are not only entertaining and informative but are sometimes untrue (Roedder John, 1999). This means that children above the age of 8 years understand the fact that what they see in TV advertisements may not always be credible.

One study found out that children can be effective decision makers, as they are capable of forming attitudes on the basis of information presented in television commercials (Deborah, Brian & Bobby, 1983). It was also established that TV advertising may also increase the habit of unnecessary purchasing and materialism among children. It affects children by increasing their food consumption pattern, shifting their attitude and leading towards unnecessary purchasing or materialism (Latif & Zain, 2011).

### Effect of Advertising on Children

The advertisers prefer to advertise their products to children due to its deep impact. In view of the children’s importance of influencing purchase decisions the advertisers not only target them at home through television but also target them through advertisements in class rooms and schools (Barcus *et al.*, 2004).

Children may be able to form an attitude towards the advertisement if they could understand the purpose and intention of TV advertising. This in due times, helps them in forming an image of the product. And, later on when children reach the age of 8 years, their awareness to advertising gets refined; they tend to assess the messages in true perspective and are capable of responding to commercial advertisement in an established and informed approach (John, 1999). The age of 8 to 10 years possesses an elementary understanding of the advertising purpose (Bartsch & London, 2000). And when the children are between age group of 8 to 12 years, they develop the ability to recall and make valuable use of the information stored in their memory, although this skill is not formed entirely until now. Evidence of the effectiveness of these attempts to lower the total influence of TV advertising on the child is somewhat mixed, but most studies find no or rather small effects of parental concern (Adler *et al.*, 1997). Besides TV commercial, and its other forms, other considerable factors in making the purchase decisions are peer group, friends, parent and direct experience. Some factors which also contribute in purchasing decisions of the children are their age, socio-economic status

and cultural background including the parents' level of education (Galst & White, 1976)

### Children Attitude towards Advertisements with Gender Related Content

Only one marketing study has examined children's attitudes with respect to gender content in advertising. Kolbe & Muehling (1995) examined children's awareness of gender related content in commercials depicting traditional and non traditional gender-role stereotypes. The findings indicated that children were, in general, aware of the gender of the child actors in the commercials. However, children's opinions on whether males or females should appear in a remote control car commercial indicated differences among boys and girls. When girls watched the commercial with a "male child actor," they had divided opinions on whether "only boys" or "boys and girls" should appear in the commercial. On the other hand, boys who watched the commercial with a "male child actor" indicated that "only boys" should be in the commercial significantly more often than that "boys and girls" should be in it.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To find the tweenager's attitudes towards advertisement with gender related contents.
2. To find the influence of gender flexibility on tweenager's attitudes towards advertisement.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Method

To test the hypotheses, a  $3 \times 3$  experimental design was developed, using print ads created for the purpose of the study. This factorial design had two treatments: characters in the ad (only male, only female, or both male and female) and product (masculine product, feminine product, or neutral product). School bags are chosen as the product category. Nine different stimulus ads were created. All aspects of the ads i.e. the context, colors, fictitious brand name, word copy etc. were exactly the same in all of the ads. Only the mix of characters and product gender were manipulated in each ad to reflect the two treatment conditions. In addition, care was taken to

use gender-neutral colors, context, and words.

### Sampling Procedure

Children were shown each of the ads and asked to indicate whether the ad was more for boys, more for girls, or for both boys and girls. Children in the study were recruited from a government school located in the city. A sample of 100 is obtained, in which 50 were girls and another 50 were boys. The age limit taken is 8-11 years.

### Data Collection Procedure

For data collection, the questionnaires containing those nine stimulus ads and a feedback form were distributed to the children during the weekdays. The children were informed that they should look at an advertisement and then would complete a questionnaire. When they were instructed, the children opened their folders and examined the advertisement. After all of the children had turned their advertisements over, the researcher instructed them to take out the questionnaire. To ensure that all participants would be able to understand the questionnaire, the interviewer read each question, waiting for children to answer, then proceeded to read the next question, and so forth. At the end of the data collection process, children who participated in this process were given a pencil as a reward for their participation.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### Objective 1: To Find the Tweenager's Attitudes Towards Advertisement with Gender Related Contents

Children's attitude toward the advertisement is measured with following questions answered by the participants in the questionnaire.

- How much did you like the ad?
- How did looking at the ad make you feel?
- How exciting was the ad to look at?
- Would you say this ad is good or bad?

Participants indicated their responses by circling one of five choices on a five-point Likert-type smiley face scale with verbal labels anchoring the responses (e.g. Very

good, Good, Average, Poor, Very Poor). The reliability of the scale, using Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.781.

Nearly all advertisements have some element of gender content-for example, gender of the character or gender of the product. The influence of gender flexibility on children's attitudes toward a particular advertisement, therefore, is only fully understood in conjunction with examining the nature of the specific gender content in that advertisement.

**Table 1: Effects of Characters and Products on Believability.**

		<i>Product</i>		
		<i>Only Male</i>	<i>Only Female</i>	<i>Both Male and Female</i>
Character	Masculine	66	14	20
	Feminine	00	76	24
	Neutral	24	06	70
	Mean Score	30	32	38

The experiment has two independent factors: characters and product. Each factor has three levels. The mean score for product (refer Table 1) indicates that neutral product is more believable than product for only male and product for only female. However, if we inspect the data and look within the levels of the factor, we find that boys find advertisement for male only as more believable and girls find advertisement for female only as more believable. This is an interaction effect because the believability score of the advertising factor differs at different values of the other independent variable i.e. the gender.

### Objective 2: To Find the Influence of Gender Flexibility on Tweenager's Attitudes towards Advertisement.

To understand the gender flexibility a shortened version of the COAT-AM (Children: Occupation, Activities, and Traits) scale developed by Liben and Bigler (2002) is used to measure tweenager's beliefs about people other than themselves. Specifically, the scale measures tweenager's knowledge about gender stereotypes by asking questions about the appropriateness of occupations, activities, and personality traits for men and women. The shortened version contains 10 items each for occupation, activities and traits. For the occupation and activity items, respondents indicated whether it was appropriate for

“only men,” “only women,” or “both men and women” to do; for the personality trait items, respondents indicated whether the trait was appropriate for “only boys,” “only girls,” “both boys and girls,” or “neither boys nor girls.”

To find the influence of gender flexibility on tweenager's attitudes towards advertisement the following hypothesis was made.

**Hypothesis 1(Ho1):** When exposed to advertising with gender content, tweenagers with high gender flexibility will not have significantly more positive attitudes than tweenagers with low gender flexibility.

A median split was utilised to categorize tweenager as either “high” or “low” on gender flexibility. The median was 26; scores less than 26 were categorised as “low” and scores higher than 26 were categorised as “high.” For testing whether the classification is valid or not, discriminant analysis was performed. The results of discriminant analysis are given below:

**Table 2: Wilk's Lambda**

<i>Test of functions</i>	<i>Wilk's Lambda</i>	<i>Chi-square</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
1	0.218	148.572	1	0.000

The low value of Wilk's Lambda shows high significance i.e. more discriminating power of model. Thus, 0.218 is an indicator of the model being good and the value is significant as  $p < 0.05$  at 1 degree of freedom. The Chi square value of 148.572 ( $df=1$ ,  $N=100$ ) is significant at 1 degree of freedom ( $p < 0.05$ ), showing that there is significant differences in expected and observed frequencies (refer Table 2).

**Table 3: Classification of Results**

	<i>Gender Flexibility</i>	<i>Predicted Group Membership</i>		<i>Total</i>
		<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	
Original Count	Low	72	3	75
	High	0	25	25
%	Low	96.0	4.0	100.0
	High	0.0	100.0	100.0

a.97.0% of original grouped cases correctly classified.

Table 3 shows the number of data points from the original data set, which is classified by the model correctly. The closer it is to 100, the better will be the model. According

to the table, 97% of the original grouped cases are correctly classified.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) technique is used to test the hypothesis 1. The test results are shown in the below mentioned tables.

**Table 4: Test of Homogeneity of Variances**

<i>Levene Statistic</i>	<i>df1</i>	<i>df2</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
3.584	1	398	0.059

One of the assumptions of conducting the ANOVA test is that there should not be homogeneity of variance. Levene's test results shown in Table 4 show that homogeneity of variance is not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). So we are confident that the population variances for each group are approximately equal.

**Table 5: ANOVA**

	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Between Groups	96.901	1	96.901	112.120	0.000
Within Groups	343.977	398	0.864		
Total	440.877	399			

The value of F-ratio and level of significance is explained in Table 5. It is found that F-ratio value is equal to 112.120. It is statistically significant at 5% level of significance. Given that  $p < 0.05$ , the null hypothesis is rejected which means when exposed to advertising with gender content, tweenagers with high gender flexibility will have significantly more positive attitudes than tweenagers with low gender flexibility.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study was conceptualised to understand the tweenager's attitudes towards advertisement that have gender related contents. On the basis of the tweenager's responses for the advertisement shown to them, it can be concluded that boys find advertisement for male only as more believable and girls find advertisement for female only as more believable.

The tweenagers exposure to advertisement with gender related content supports the importance of examining the

influence of gender advertising. Studying tweenager's attitudes related to advertising. Studying the influence of gender flexibility is also important because previous advertising researchers shows that the degree of flexibility develops over relatively narrowage ranges in childhood. Thus, how a five-year-old responds to gender content in an advertisement might be entirely different from how an eight-year-old responds; yet advertisers who are unaware of the potential problems assume that children will respond similarly and so produce just one ad with appropriate gender content for one child but not the other. The results support gender flexibility being significantly related to attitude towards the advertisement. It can be concluded that gender flexibility have much influence on attitude of tweenagers towards advertisement. When tweenagers are exposed to advertisement with gender related contents, it can be found that tweenagers with high gender flexibility will have significantly more positive attitudes than tweenagers with low gender flexibility.

## SUGGESTIONS

The results support that gender flexibility is significantly related to attitude towards the advertisement. Specifically, the higher the degree of gender flexibility, the more positive children's attitudes are when viewing advertisements with gender content. Thus advertising professionals can take directions to design advertisements that will foster children's positive attitudes toward advertisement. However, professionals should also understand that the degree to which a child has developed gender flexibility is also important in determining whether or not the type and extent of gender content will be significant.

## DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The results and findings of this research present good opportunities for future research. The attitude of tweenagers towards brand can also be studied by replicating the research in terms of the brands. Since the study is performed in limited geographical area, the broader geographical areas can be considered for further research. The cross-cultural examination of the issues discussed can also be studied. This study is limited to tweenagers (of certain age group), so different age groups can also be considered for understanding the attitude of the children in general.

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