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Advertising Message Processing Amongst Urban Children:  
With Reference To TV Advertising in Pakistan.

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## **Abstract**

*The current study extends the knowledge of cognitive processing of advertising messages by urban children in Pakistan. Data were collected from 230 children in age bracket 7 - 12 years, drawn by using the cluster sampling approach. Structured questionnaire using three point rating scale was used. Data analysis showed that children's capability to understand, decode and process advertising messages is directed not only by their own cognitive capabilities at different age levels but also through societal and personal backgrounds. Some communal and social customs related to tolerability and aptness of human behavior also manipulate the processing of advertising messages by children of either sex. Some other factors including the model liking, role played, story, and jingle will not only influence liking or disliking of some specific advertisements and therefore its decoding. At this age group, it was not appropriate to use advanced psychometric techniques for study, so, a simple three a point scale was used for data collection. Further research may explore other insights by using development in measuring tools and techniques. How advertising messages are decoded by children and which are important sources of persuading and influencing is a topic not explored much in Pakistan. Therefore, the study would add some insights for good understanding the children's capabilities to process and ultimately scheming valuable communication approaches.*

*Key Words:* Advertising, Cognitive Processing, Communication, Pakistan, Children

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## Introduction:

The purpose of this study is to identify how Pakistani urban children process television advertising messages, assess research which reveals advertising post effect, and understanding of cognitive processing of different advertising messages by them. There are a lot of discussions, describing impact of advertising on children, either in negative or in positive way, but it is also important to understand how they process advertisements and react subsequently? Now a day, advertising is penetrating into the life of almost every person, and children due to their vulnerability are their most awful victim. A survey of 2400 children aged 7–12 years in six countries, including China, Japan, France, the UK, Germany and the USA, specified that their estimated annual spending power ranged from US\$1.7 billion in Germany to US\$11.3 billion in the USA. The study results also identified dynamic contribution of children due to influencing heavily the family purchase decisions for a number of products (Carey et al., 1997).

Ofcom's media audit shows that nearly 72% of children in age group 8-15 have access to digital TV, 64% have access to the internet at home, half possess video games, and 65% have cell phones (it also include 49% of children in 8-11 age group (Ofcom, 2006). Though, they make use of diverse media types in their daily life, television is considered to be the most well-liked medium, absorbing a major part of children's time, nearly up to 13.9 hours a week, but higher watching time for those belongs to ethnic minority (15.2 hours) and (15.5 hours) for people having low income (15.5 hours) (Ofcom, 2006; Livingstone, 2002 and Rideout, 2003).

Since a couple of years back, television in Pakistan has changed from a single-channelled, home-grown, Govt. controlled network to a system offering a lot of new channels, options and unparalleled access to domestic and foreign programs. Children are exposed to an overwhelming amount of advertising as there are little regulations controlling the programme to the advertisement ratio. As total population of Pakistan is 169 million and 43.40% are children of age group between 11-14 years (Federal Bureau of Statistics, 2008). Nearly 66% of Pakistani households have one or more teenagers. 30% of the household contain children under the age of 10 year who will be the next generation. Out of this population, 30 million are adolescents (10-19 year old). Girls aged 20-24 years married by the age of 18 are 32%. 30% of teenagers in Pakistan have never gone to school, although this figure is greater for girls i.e. 44% and 36% for adolescents living in rural areas of Pakistan (office of the population association of Pakistan, 2008).

The study is important to both marketers and public policy officials. Marketers are keen to know about their advertising effectiveness and at the same time policy officials to protect the children concerns. Following study is imperative, due to lack of empirical substantiation on this area in the setting of children from Asian ethnicities. Concern about children's ability to comprehend and evaluate these messages has stimulated substantial research and heated debate since the early 1970s (McNeal 1987; Young, 1990).

Many studies have been conducted in the children's advertising area (Meringoff, 1980). However, while there is compelling evidence that a well-crafted advertisement can persuade children that a product is desirable (Gibson, 1978, and Calder 1983).

### **Research Framework:**

The paper is based on an empirical research on advertising message processing by Pakistani children aged between 7- 12 years. A literature survey was reviewed for understanding process of cognitive developments in children, role of the family, peer, family influences and his or her own attitude towards advertising. The external environment and other factors present naturally in their lives are also considered as factors influencing their outlook towards media and advertising messages. The paper is divided into four sections. The first section explains the introduction. The second section contains review of literature, objectives and the methodology. The third section is devoted to analyzing the data collected. The final section contains findings, conclusion and managerial implications.

### **Pakistani Perspective:**

Total population of Pakistan is 169 million, and 43.40% are children of age group between 11-14 years (Federal Bureau of Statistics, 2008). Nearly 66% of Pakistani households have one or more teenagers. 30% of the household contain children under the age of 10 year who will be the next generation. Total Pakistani population of 169 million contains nearly 30 million adolescents (10-19 year old). Girls aged 20-24 years married by the age of 18 are 32%. 30% of teenagers in Pakistan have never gone to school, although this figure is greater for girls i.e. 44% and 36% for adolescents living in rural areas of Pakistan. Approximately one third of adults work in either paid or unpaid employment (excluding housework) but lot of adolescent girls holds housework activities (Office of the Population Association of Pakistan, 2008). Out of the total population nearly 37.50% of the population lived in urban areas in year 2000, as compared to the 26.40% in year 1975 and estimated 56.73% in 2025 (United Nations Population Division, 2000).

## Literature Review:

Television advertising is a form of advertising in which goods, services, organizations, ideas, etc. are promoted via the medium of television. Through television, advertisers can reach a wide variety of consumers. Children are exposed to a devastating amount of advertising as there is a little regulation controlling the advertising. Through television, advertisers can reach and influence the customers' minds. Developmental researchers have shown that, while very young children engage in one-dimensional thinking, by age seven they tend to depend on multiple dimensions for a given task (Sicgler, 1996b).

*Though, children make use of diverse media type in their daily life, television is considered to be the most well-liked and trendy medium, absorbing a noteworthy part of children's time, nearly up to 13.9 hours a week, but higher watching time for those belongs to ethnic minority (15.2 hours) and (15.5 hours) for people having low income (15.5 hours) (Ofcom, 2006; Livingstone, 2002; Rideout, 2003).*

Research has shown that children six-year-olds have been found to combine dimensions according to averaging and adding rules in a variety of perceptual domains (Anderson, 1980). Within consumer behavior, Peracchio (1992) found that the use of stimuli and response formats compatible with younger children's (ages five and seven) encoding and retrieval abilities reveals enhanced learning capacity, as do increased exposures.

However, whether young children are able and willing to integrate distinct media (i.e., advertising and direct experience) is less clear, and it is an issue we examine using natural stimuli in the present study. Now a day, we no longer fear the dangers of adulation; we have forgotten the power of images to lock up our thoughts to the only finite dimension of what can be seen (O' Guinn Allen, 2000).

Over a number of years in the past, many models and constructs have been discussed in the marketing and advertising literature, each having objective of trying to understand the processes used by consumers to make brand or product evaluations when they are exposed to advertisements (Muehling et al., 1993). These works have investigated relationships among cognitive responses directed towards the brand, advertisement, brand attitudes, and finally purchase intentions and behavior. A review of the literature states that involving attitude towards advertisement influence brand attitudes and also supports the advertisement-brand attitude relationship across different media and product types (Muehling et al., 1988).

In the 1960s, researchers expanded this scope of study on children to include their understanding of marketing and retail functions, their influencing role in parent's purchase decisions, relative influence of parents and peers on their consumption patterns (Berey and Richard, 1968). Though these studies are not many in number, they are extremely important for introducing the area of children's consumer behavior to the marketing audience.

According to Ward (1972) *consumer socialization is "a procedure of acquiring skills, knowledge, and attitudes by young people relevant to their working as consumers in the market."* By the late 1990s, the area had accumulated a lot of research. Empirical data is now available on children's growing dominance as consumers, including their knowledge of products, brands, advertising, shopping, pricing, decision-making strategies, parental control and negotiation approaches (McNeal, 1964; Berey and Richard, 1968; Ward, 1972; Hawkins and Coney, 1974; Ward, 1977; Robertson, 1979; Gorn and Renee, 1985; Roedder, 1981, 1999).

A lot of research has been conducted concerning the ways in which children acquire the gender appropriate behaviors and there are specific researches conducted on the possible influences of television advertising upon a child's perception and subsequent rebuilding of gender role-play (Smith, 1994). The question of whether television influences children is debated frequently. Most studies reveal that more time children spend watching television, the more they are influenced by it (Strasburger, 1993).

Parental control of TV viewing is expected to lower the number of hours a child watches TV and thereby the cumulative experience a child has with TV advertising, which in turn might have a negative effect on the child's understanding of TV advertising (ward, 1972). This way, as intended by the parents, control of TV viewing may lower the total effect of TV advertising on the child, but it may also have the opposite effect. Evidence of the usefulness 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 (Berey and Richard, 1968, Ward, 1972).

Children learn personality and behavior patterns through the imitation of their own parents' attitudes and behaviors. It has also been observed that children will acquire the patterns of behavior more rapidly where there is an attractive model whose behavior is rewarded (Smith, 1994). Children's comprehension of advertising messages is dependent on (1) their ability and skill to distinguish between commercial from non commercial content (2) they must be skeptical towards the persuasive intent of advertising within the limitation of their

knowledge. This process of assessing TV commercials is known as cognitive growth and intellectual development (John, 1999; Young, 1990).

One of the major reasons for television advertising is to change the attitude and behavior of the audience. Adults while watching television advertisements comprehend them through a process known as a cognitive filter. This process includes the following steps: (1) the viewers presume that there is a different perspective between the source of the message and the receiver of the message (2) the intentions of the source are always persuasive (3) there is bias in all the persuasive messages and (4) interpretation strategies must vary from biased message to unbiased message (Roberston and Rossitter, 1977). But, once the children reach a level of understanding advertisements through all these four processes of interpretation, they have developed mature comprehension process of interpreting advertising messages (Carroll, 1984; Flavell, 1977; Selman, 1971).

Children below 7–8 years group lack the ability to understand the television commercial's cognitive development process. Egocentrism is the common trait of this age group, which means that this age group lacks the ability of perceiving another person perspective (Carroll, 1984; Flavell, 1977; Selman, 1971). They tend to believe what they are told and may even assume that they are deprived if they do not have advertised products. Children's beliefs, desires and motives are not fully developed until they are 6-years old (Wellman, 1990). Therefore, they lack the ability to fully comprehend advertiser's persuasive intents at this age group (Friestad & Wright, 1994).

By the time the children reach the age of 8 years, their responsiveness to advertising gets sophisticated, they tend to evaluate the messages in true perspective and are capable of responding to commercial advertisements in a mature and informed way (John, 1999). The age of 8 to 10 years possesses a fundamental understanding of the purpose of advertising (Bartch and London, 2000). The children between 8 and 12 years develop the ability to retrieve and make effective use of the information they have stored in memory, though this ability is not fully developed yet. Comparatively, children below the age of 8 years are not very comfortable in retrieving the stored information. However, a certain degree of prompting would make it easier for children below 8-years age group to retrieve and utilize stored information (Roedder, 1981).

Piaget's theory related to cognitive development is widely acknowledged and well known framework for characterizing the shifts in basic cognitive abilities in children. Four stages of cognitive development in children which proposed by Piaget can be applied to television (Roedder, 1999). Children of age less than 2 years experience a 'sensory-motor' stage, in



which their understanding and acts reveal that objects on television seemed to be different to those experienced in actual life.

At the pre-operational stage, the children start developing the symbolic thoughts but are still very focused on the perceptual properties of stimuli, which enable them to speak regarding their experience of television (Ginsburg et al., 1988). Preoperational children tend to be perceptually bound to the easily observable aspects of their environment, unlike concrete operational children, who do not accept perception as reality but can think about in a more rational way.

Children in age group 7 -12 (this stage is called concrete operational), children make the first move to keep a non-representational pattern of thinking which make them enable to comprehend the medium's symbols and conclude adequately to label on storylines presented. Gradually, children build up certain levels of perception (television media understanding), that let them realize the hunks and fragments which form a television programme and how they are connected (Signorielli, 1991: 28). Children in age group 12 and older are supposed to make comprehension of television programmes in an identical approach to adolescents (Lemish: 2007, Hodge and Tripp, 1986).

Although not established with certainty, there is substantial evidence that by approximately 8-years of age, most children have at least a preliminary understanding of advertising intents (Macklin, 1987). Traditionally, it has been assumed that once children understand the persuasive purpose of advertising they become more skeptical and are then capable of resisting its appeal (Rossiter and Robertson, 1977).

There are information-processing theories of child development, which go further than Piaget's theory and provide explanation about the type of cognitive abilities evidenced by children as they mature (Roedder, 1999). However, they all share a focus on children's developing skills in the areas of gaining, decoding, organization and retrieval of information. Literature on consumer behavior, about the information processing characterizes children as belonging to one of the three segments – strategic processors, cued processors and limited processors – based on the information skills they have (Roedder, 1981).

Studies in the other countries of the world vary from their counterparts in Europe or America in terms of different aspects like parental control, family values, norms of social behavior, materialism, gender behavior and exposure to media. It is acknowledged by the researchers that important developments in consumer socialization do not become visible in vacuum but take place in a social context including the family, peers, and media. Parents create direct opportunities by interacting with their children about purchase requests, giving them pocket

money and taking them to shopping tours (Ward, 1977). Peers are another source of influence affecting consumer beliefs from early in their life and continuing through teens (Moschis and Churchill, 1978).

Also, mass media and advertising make available information about consumption and the value of material goods. Gorn and Reene (1985), Martin and Gentry (1997) and Robertson et al.'s (1979) findings related to these topics express the same views.

### Objectives:

Specific objectives of this study include:

- (1) To understand the context in which children are exposed to media and advertisements, like parental control, peer presence etc.
- (2) To observe whether children understand the advertising message and are there any differences on the basis of age, gender and family status.
- (3) To find out whether advertisement elements like endorsers, music, slogans etc. influence processing and understanding of advertising messages by children.

### Conceptual Framework:

For developing a framework of study, the existing literature was reviewed under these categories:

- a. Customer socialization of children
- b. Gender Issues
- c. Psychographic factor
- d. Media effects in understanding advertising intents by children

In this research, my focus is on the advertising message processing by the urban children living in Pakistan. In this study, Childrens ability to decode, process and understand advertising message will be dependent variable and independent variables are customer socialization of children, gender issues, and psychographic factor. Conceptual framework has been adopted from the study conducted by Millan Agnihotri and J.S. Panwar (2006).

### Methodology for the study:

The study targets children between 7 and 12 years of age as respondents. But, to include children into our study, we have put the following conditions:

- 1) They should come from a household which has access to a television set.
- 2) Should be studying in a school (English or Urdu medium school).

The information processing theories of child development provide explanation about the type of cognitive abilities evidenced by children as they mature. Based on their processing skills, children could be classified into three categories: limited processors, cued processors and strategic processors (Roedder, 1981). Children belonging to the cued processor category were mainly selected for the study because they are capable of using verbal cues for the storage and retrieval of information. Children below 7-years of age have limited processing skills and children above 12 uses a variety of strategies for storing and retrieving of information almost similar to the grown-up people (Selman, 1980).

### Date Collection:

The study will be based on primary data. The study will be conducted in the schools located in Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Rahim Yar Khan, Bahawalpur and Multan (major cities of Pakistan). Efforts were made to give fair representation to both the genders, children going to the English medium as well as Urdu medium schools and children from different income groups as well. It was decided to have at least 25 valid responses from each school, totaling to a sample size of 223 for the study. A Cluster sampling approach was used to get data from cities mentioned above.

### Instrument:

The research will be based on primary data. Study will be of qualitative as well as quantitative in nature. Data will be collected through structured verified questionnaire. But we will also conduct some interviews from the parents with their prior permission in order to get data about their children. Questionnaire was adopted from the study of J.S. Panwar and Milan Agnihotri (2006). The questionnaire has three point rating scale. Data will be collected through various schools in the selected areas.

### Sample Size:

A Cluster sampling approach was used to get data. Although great care has been put to give equal representation to both the genders and mediums e.g. English and Urdu. Of the total 223 respondents, 115 will be males and 108 will be females. The sample represents children from both English and Urdu medium schools. In all, 140 students from English medium and 83 students from Urdu medium schools were decided to include in the study.

### Data Analysis Method:

Data was entered, edited and analyzed by using the SPSS. Statistical tools such as weighted average and Factor Analysis was applied to analyze the data. The scope of this research is limited to understanding and interpretation of advertising message by children (selected from schools of specified cities).

### Analysis of Data:

The data for time spent by the children for watching television are given in Table 1. The table reveals that the maximum time spent by children on watching TV is between 30 minutes and one hour on the weekdays. On weekends and holidays, this time is extended to one to two hours or more. TV watching also depends upon the nature of the program being watched. For example, cricket or football match is a full day's program, while some are serials, but timing of watching TV also vary from time to time e.g. from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. and from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. From this table it is cleared that children in Islamabad, to some extent, spend more time watching TV as compared to other cities. TV watching is restricted more in Rawalpindi and Rahim Yar Khan, while in Islamabad, Bahawalpur and Multan; parents are somewhat broadminded in this regard.

It was found that an average female child watches less TV as compared to a male child of her age. Possibly, a girl child spends more time on other activities like studies or household work. Concerning medium of schooling, it was found that no difference exist in the TV watching habits of children from the Urdu and the English medium schools. Data also imply that younger children watch TV more as compared to older children. This is because older children are may be busy with other activities like games or they have to spend more time on their studies.

Table 2 point out that preference of children also depends upon the type of programs. As the child grows, choices also alter from programs for children to those that are for the adults. The table reveals that Cartoon Network / wiz kids programs are the most favorite programs for the

school going children in 7 to 8 year age group, followed by cricket / football. On the contrary, children in the 11 to 12 year age group prefer to watch TV drama serials. Generally, all of these programs carry commercials/advertisements and promotional messages varying from 5 to 40 seconds duration. Children below the age of ten almost not watch any educational program.

**Table No.1**

**Time spent on watching TV: city wise data**

<b>Time spent per day</b>	<b>Islamabad</b>	<b>RWP</b>	<b>Bahawalpur</b>	<b>Multan</b>	<b>*RYkhan</b>
less then 30 minutes	17.0	10.0	6.0	10.0	12.0
30 minutes to one hour	27.0	50.5	37.0	40.0	53.0
One to two hours	25.0	21.0	17.0	21.0	15.0
Two to three hours	31.0	18.5	29.1	26.0	20.0
Three to six hours	0.0	0.0	0.9	3.0	0.0

*\*RYKhan stands for Rahim Yar Khan*

**Table No.2**

**Preference for TV programs by different age groups**

<b>Programs</b>	<b>7-8 years</b>	<b>9-10 years</b>	<b>11-12years</b>
Boogie woogie	03	09	07
Cartoon Network	09	21	20
Cricket	18	08	24
Drama Serials	04	26	50
Serial for children	06	06	03
Educational Programs	---	---	04
Movies	---	---	05
Total	40	70	113

**Parental control over setting daily priorities:**

Parents in Pakistan take care of their children's lives including their studies and career options. With such care, they also have a lot of influence on children's thinking and world views. Table 3 gives data on parental control on prioritizing daily activities of children. We have cross-tabulated this with medium of schooling, gender, and categories based on

socioeconomic. It is also observable that children from higher socioeconomic strata normally attended English medium schools, while children from lower socioeconomic strata attended Urdu medium schooling. In terms of controls, the study did not find any major difference between parents sending their children to English medium schools and those sending them to Urdu medium schools.

Females, however, seem to be more self-regulating in setting their day's priorities. One of the reasons is that socially, girls are possibly more responsible than the boys and anyhow boys like to spend more time outdoors, therefore, a need to set the daily priorities for boys. The table also relates that children in the upper segment of the socioeconomic classification (SEC) have more freedom in deciding their daily activities as compared to children in other segments. It is probably a sign of the parents' attitude giving more attention to child's demands and respect for the individuality.

**Table No.3**

**Who sets the priority for child's activities?**

Priority by (total sample)	Priority by (medium of schooling)				Priority by (gender)			
	Total	Percentage	English	Urdu	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Child	78	35.0	50	28	78	27	51	78
Parents	85	38.1	58	27	85	54	31	85
Together	60	26.9	32	28	60	34	26	60
Total	223	100.0	140	83	223	115	108	223

**Parental Control over Media Usage:**

The study expose that parents are inclined to control the media time usage of children, especially time spent on watching television, across different segments and cultures. There may be three possible reasons for this: first, they think that the programming on television is not tailored for children; second, the child should also spend time doing some physical activity, exercise, games or study; third, most Pakistani households own single television set. Out of a sample of 223, some 190 respondents said that parents manage or control their media timings.

This finding is in pointed contrast with situation in developed countries. According to a Sunday telegraph report (25 July 2004, p. 9), in the UK, about 67 per cent of all primary school children aged between 5 and 11 years and 87% of secondary school children aged between 12 and 16 have their own television sets in their bedrooms, away from any parental

control. The data collected on children’s attitude towards parental control on media expose that on the one hand they comprehend that parents try to control media usage for the sake of their studies and eyesight; but, on the other hand, they also have a kind of feeling that parents just want them to study harder so that they can tell about their feeling amongst their social peers.

Some have even asked about the behavior, as parents themselves see a lot of TV but expect children not to watch it for longer time. Children also think that parents do not consider them as liable and mature, therefore want to control their media viewing patterns. Children disagree that watching television has any effect on their demands for new and advertised products.

With such a diversified response, it was thought that a factor analysis of all these responses using principal component analysis method might lead to grouping of attitudes towards parental control on media usage. To make sure that factor analysis is suitable for this kind of data generated in the study, *Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO)* and *Bartlett’s tests* were performed. The value of KMO measure of sampling adequacy obtained from the analysis was 0.612, indicating that sample size is enough for principal component analysis. Similarly, the Bartlett’s test of sphericity indicated that the variables are correlated, so, factor analysis can

**Table 4**  
**Factor analysis of children’s attitudes towards parental control of media:**

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loading			Rotational Sum of Squared Loading		
	Total	variance	Cumulative percentage	Total	variance	percentage	Total	variance	percentage
1.	2.501	23.012	23.012	2.501	23.012	23.012	2.424	22.213	22.213
2.	1.877	18.212	41.224	1.877	18.212	41.224	1.923	19.135	41.348
3.	1.011	10.457	51.681	1.011	10.457	51.681	1.112	10.333	51.681
4.	0.947	9.475	61.156						
5.	0.842	8.418	69.574						
6.	0.748	7.478	77.052						
7.	0.525	7.247	84.229						
8.	0.460	6.598	90.897						
9.	0.379	4.793	95.69						
10.	0.303	4.310	100.00						

be applied here. Table 4 and Table 5 contain the output data from factor analysis. The factor loadings having eigenvalues more than 1 account for about 52 per cent explanation in terms of attitudes of respondents.

**Table 5**

**Component matrix in the factor analysis on parental control of media**

Variables	Component		
	1	2	3
Reactions to the statement			
Because they feel that most of the TV programs & Internet contents are not for kids.	<b>0.815</b>	0.242	0.266
They feel that by watching TV and spending a lot of Time with internet you will get spoiled.	<b>0.721</b>	0.324	0.187
Your demand for the buying things gets increased by TV and internet.	<b>-0.732</b>	-0.411	0.231
They should in fact let you take your own decisions on watching TV and using internet since you have grown up	<b>0.517</b>	-0.470	0.311
They are irrational and do not understand that you gave grown up.	0.471	<b>-6.01</b>	1.31
They want you to play outdoor games instead	<b>-0.462</b>	0.322	-1.01
They are worried about your eyesight.	0.332	<b>0.732</b>	-0.159
You do not understand their behavior since they themselves spend lots of time watching TV.	0.315	<b>-0.521</b>	0.220
You also feel that these TV programs and internet sites are not for you.	-0.551	<b>0.480</b>	0.301
They want you to just study and score good marks so that Their parents can tell this to their friends.	0.312	-0.310	<b>0.721</b>

Note: Extraction method: principal component analysis. The values in bold indicates that the Significance of loading of row variables on the respective “factors” (columns). They are the highest values in each individual row.

The factor analysis gives three divergent attitudes of children towards parental control on media time usage. They are as follows:

(1) Parents want to be in total control of media exposure of children without elucidation any reason to them.



(2) Parents are anxious about their health, studies and career as well.

(3) Parents are irrational in exercising controls.

The negative loadings indicate opposite reactions of children for the feelings of their parents.

### Understanding of Advertising Intent:

Another important research objective was to answer whether children understand the advertising intent and are there any differentiations on the basis of age and gender? Further analysis was necessary to answer these questions. The data were analyzed to learn more about their attitudes and feelings towards advertising in general and external factors influencing them in forming these attitudes. Table 6 gives information regarding respondents' understanding of advertising intent. It is evident from the table that children find advertisements entertaining. However, they understand that basic objective of advertisements is to inform about the products and also to persuade them to buy those products. And very interestingly, they also know that media vehicles carrying advertisements gain financially from the advertisements.

**Table 6**

#### **Children's understanding of advertising intent**

Statement Context- Ads shown on TV	Agree frequency	Disagree frequency	Not sure frequency
Because advertisement are entertaining	138	80	0
So that parents can watch them & buy you things	121	100	0
So that you watch them and choose things for yourself	158	61	0
So that your parents can easily be persuaded by you to buy certain things	94	112	0
So that everybody should know what is Available in the market	176	30	0
To fill in the gaps between programs TV channels and newspaper and magazines earn money by showing the advertisement.	92	119	0
	116	100	0

## Attitudes and Feelings towards Advertising:

The literature survey suggests that children from the age of 6 years onwards start viewing advertisements with a little disbelief. With more than 80% of the respondents feeling that advertisements are always half-truth, the study validates the findings of earlier researches. It means children view advertisements with skepticism and they have a belief that advertisements either overstate or do not give the true picture. However, about 17% children believed that advertisements tell them the truth. Influences on attitude towards advertisements are formed while children interact with parents and through their own experiences when they visit market place or through their use experiences.

The friends and peer opinions also play a vital role in shaping their attitudes towards advertisements. The data collected for the study suggest that more than 49 per cent children form the attitude due to their own experience, followed by the collective influence of parents and friends (15 per cent) and the influence of the peer groups (15.2 per cent). Essentials creating likeability towards an advertisement and their importance Advertisements are made up of different elements, like message, endorser/source, music, slogans and songs. Likeability is a function of all these elements and personal traits of a child and even more. Data collected was analyzed to understand what children like in an advertisement. These responses cannot necessarily be the only liking factors; therefore, the responses have been ranked as per the preference for the most liked elements.

Table 7 exposes that the most important reason for liking an advertisement is “likes for the model”. This is in line with the findings of literature survey that likeability towards the models may create liking towards the advertisement which could afterward be transferred to liking towards the brand. Music, song and slogans also emerge as other elements which create likeability towards advertisements. Maybe, a reason why advertisement jingles, tunes and slogans are learnt by heart and used by children in their social communications. Another remark that can be made from the table is when it comes to likeability of a TV commercial; the peer group influence and the product usage by the family are not applicable.

In Pakistan, advertising to children is not prohibited by law; nevertheless there are certain codes of conduct approved by the PEMRA (Pakistan Electronic & Media Regulatory Authority) in this regard. In practice, however, it has been observed that most advertisers, including the multinationals operating in the country, avoid the spirit of such codes while adhering to them.

**Table 7**

**Elements creating likeability towards advertisements**

Attitude towards Advertisement Endorsers and Source:

The data have been analyzed to understand attitude of children towards the advertisement or message source and to find out if there are any differences in terms of SEC. Data regarding attitude towards endorsers and source are presented in Table 8. A look at the table describes that socially highly regarded sources like doctors, engineers and scientists often make positive attitude towards advertisements.

Similar responses are generated when a celebrity endorses the product. It has also been found that parents are greater influencers in terms of building an attitude towards a brand or advertisement. It is also appealing that one can actually keep apart children on the basis of their attitudes and liking towards the source or endorser of advertisement.

Element	Rank 1 (frequency * 6)	Rank 2 (frequency * 5)	Rank 3 (frequency * 4)	Rank 4 (frequency * 3)	Rank 5 (frequency * 2)	Rank 6 (frequency * 1)	Weighted Average (1+2+3...6)/6
Model	105	82	26	03	0	10	193.88
Music and songs	70	61	61	10	2	16	169.83
Slogans	20	61	76	13	14	35	138.50
Liked by family members	23	13	31	34	50	72	100.17
Liked by best friend	03	02	19	98	64	42	97.33
Already sing the product	02	04	10	65	93	48	78.83
Total	223	223	223	223	223	223	

**Table 8****Attitude towards endorsers and source**

Statement	Agree frequency	Disagree frequency	Not sure frequency
An advertisement where a doctor, a scientist or a successful sportsman advocates a product is a truthful adv.	132	75	0
Products with good advertisement are good products.	61	155	0
Good looking models generally Advocates good products.	102	110	0
Famous personalities will always advocate good products.	139	80	0
Famous companies make good products	140	78	0
Advertisements seen most often are of good products	78	137	0
You like an advertisement because the advertised product is already used in your house	168	53	0
Your parents are the best judge of a good or a bad product	198	21	0
There is no relationship between likeable advertisement and a good product	81	137	0
Advertisement featuring children of your age impress you more	104	107	0
You do not know the exact reason as to why you like an advertisement	92	128	0

**Research Findings and Conclusions:**

The study reveals that socioeconomic background of the family plays a major role in the understanding of advertising intents by children. This finding is in line with the findings of studies in the US, wherein it was reported that children from less educated and especially from lower socioeconomic strata were not capable to understand the advertising intents

properly (Roedder, 1999). It also identifies that family and peer communications affect the interpretations and understanding of advertisements by children. The medium of instructions at the school also had considerable relation to the child's ability to understand advertising intent.

Age of the child is another important factor impacting upon the ability to decode an advertising message. In terms of parental control, it was observed that in most cases, parents proceed as gatekeepers for children's media exposure and making prioritization of their activities; therefore, they form an important audience for any communication related to children's products, services or activities. Media time usage, especially television watching by children, is highly controlled by parents; however, females appear to be more independent in terms of prioritizing their media interactions.

Children have three different kinds of attitudes towards the parental control on media:

- (1) Not allowing them to take their own decisions
- (2) Cautious about their well being
- (3) Irrational in exercising controls.

It was also noted that in most households, consumption of electronic media is a group activity; therefore, the attitudes towards messages from electronic media tend to be influenced by the family and peer-group opinions on the message.

For efficient message delivery to children, it is valuable to segment them on the basis of culture and environment with which they interrelate, e.g. medium of schooling, society in which they live, etc. relatively segmenting them on the basis of age or gender. Majority of the children believe that there is always some amount of overstatement in the advertisements. This disbelief may have come from own experience of product / service quality, or may have been stimulated by other's influence and experiences.

Friends, other social circle and parents also play a significant role in influencing children's attitudes towards advertising, making them attentive about the hidden aims in commercial. Children from higher socioeconomic background could understand the advertising intent better than the children from lower socioeconomic strata, meaning that the environment and exposure play an important role in this regard. The elements like models, jingles, slogans and product itself are the most often discussed elements amongst children. As discussed earlier in this section, the finding that social and economic background of a child plays an important role in the understanding of the advertising intent by the child is in line with the studies done in the West on similar issues. Similarly, the skepticism towards exaggerations in advertising claims is also in line with the findings of the researches conducted in the West. The liking of

an advertisement because of likeability of the endorser/protagonist or because of good music is a universal phenomenon, as the findings from this study match with that of Western studies. However, media exposure of a Pakistani child is largely managed or controlled by the parents, which may not be the case in the Western world where almost every person have its own television set in his bedroom, but in Pakistan majority of the household have a single tv set.

### **Recommendation for Marketers:**

Though it is proposed that further research needs to be done for the validation of findings of this study, there are some findings which could be of interest to marketers. The most important thing is to understand that children cannot be treated as one mass; therefore, it is not appropriate to segment them just on the basis of their age or gender. We need to use more sophisticated variables like attitudes, culture and family environment for targeting advertising messages at them. Parents are gatekeepers between children and media (especially the television); therefore, some socially acceptable alternative medium of communication needs to be explored if one wants to communicate to children directly in an acceptable manner.

The advertisement message directed towards children has to be entertaining and not necessarily comic. A message narrating only the product attributes or benefits may not work well with children rather an alteration is necessary for them. Likewise selection of model or endorser is equally important for messages directed toward children. Creating word or mouth or buzz about an advertisement through unconventional channels could work in favor of the marketer, as advertising is a part of popular culture for children.

### **Research limitations:**

At this age bracket, it was not appropriate to use advanced psychometric techniques for study. So, a simple three a point scale was used for data collection. Further research may explore other insights by using development in measuring tools and techniques to gain better insight.

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