

# Animated Advertisements and Children: An Analysis of Consumer Behavior

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## Abstract

*This research report aims at analyzing the trend of using animations in advertisement of products specifically targeting children with special focus on selected brand examples. The researchers have assessed the impact of animated advertisements on direct and indirect consumers (children and parents) illustrating influencer-decision maker relationship and how it is manipulated by several brands for their advantage. Focus group activity was conducted in different schools (strata-wise) where inputs from both children and parents were taken. Feedback from marketers and advertisers has also been incorporated to illustrate effects over brand recall and sales of those, which have used animated advertisements. Finally, the research identifies influence of advertisement, more specifically of animated advertisements over children and their choices, their demands from parents, and overall brand recall and sales.*

**Keywords:** *Consumer behavior, animated advertisement, influencer-decision maker relationship, focus group activity*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

One of important tools available to marketers by which they can influence behavior is advertising. Several brands are utilizing variable influencers like using females in male-oriented products, kids, brand ambassadors, experts etc. Keeping in alignment with this, another trend that is recently getting significant importance is the usage of animated characters or ambassadors in the form of successful stories. Dentonic originated this trend, way back in early 1980s, with its famous advertisement showing Dentonic persona and an animated monkey. Later, it was revived by Mortein with its famous character 'LUI'. The effects of such advertisements are significant as:

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- Children associate with the brand easily.
- It modifies their behavior positively or negatively, like washing hands after watching safeguard advertisements is a positive change; whereas, involvement in undue wrestling is a negative factor.
- It becomes major influencer and children can manipulate buying behavior of their parents resulting in positive affects on sales of those brands.

The objectives of this research are to:

- Discuss the effects, if any, of advertisements on consumers in general.
- Explore positive or negative behavioral changes in kids, if any, when they are exposed to animated advertisements specifically targeted them.
- Evaluate influencer–decision maker relationship with respect to the brand's animated advertisements.
- Obtain views of parents with respect to such animated advertisements on their kids' behaviors and demands.
- Assess the success ratio of animated advertisement realized in form of sales or brand recall.

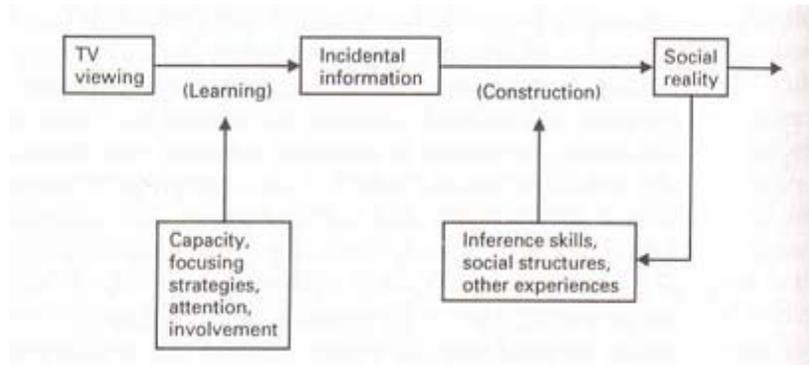
The research is qualitative in nature and is based on the data gathered through both secondary and primary sources. Stratified sampling method (convenience basis) was used. Sample unit was children and their parents who are influenced by children's convictions towards these brands due to animated advertisement. The research was restricted to Karachi only. Focus group activity was planned in case of children and parents, whereas, meetings were held with relevant marketers to acquire their feedback.

As the center of attention was children, it was decided to conduct focus group activity in schools to assess the behavior of children and their parents. Schools were selected from each stratum. Total sample size is 95 (63 children, 32 parents). Inputs were taken from marketers and advertisers pertaining to influence of animated advertisements (versus general advertisements) over sales and brand recall.

## **2. Advertisement: An Overview**

Advertisements have grown multidimensionally and have encompassed several factors that act as influencers. Questions generally arise, then, that whether influences are positive or negative. For the advertising sector, arguments, which maintain that advertising does influence us often, cut both ways. The advertising sector is of course dependent on these arguments in relation to the clients, but the debate about the negative effects of advertising sometimes looks at them as a trap. 'The greater the ability of advertising to influence us, the greater, of course, is the likelihood that it will have negative effects' (Bjurstrom, 2000).

**Figure 1: Cultivation Theory**



Source: Hawkins and Pingree (1983)

As the cultivation theory implies, TV advertising has major effects on opinions, attitudes and behaviors of the audiences, the results are even grave in the case of children.

### **3. Effects of Advertising on Children**

The question whether advertising should be directed to children and, if so, how it should be governed, has always generated debate. The advertising industry has targeted children as consumers for nearly three decades and the debate surrounding advertising and children has existed for nearly as long (Hoek and Laurence, n.d.).

Some researchers claim that children are especially vulnerable to advertising, thus making it inappropriate to treat them as responsible consumers in the same way as adults (Condry, 1989). The advertising industry has responded to these arguments by citing the benefits exposure to advertising may bring to children. For example, advertisers have claimed that advertising presents information that enhances children's social development, thus, helping to prepare them for adulthood (Schneider, 1987). Independent researchers have also argued that advertising does not rely only on negative role models or images, but instead frequently features characters opposing injustice, as well as people who display kindness, sensitivity and a concern for others (Bassett, 1991).

Children are effective influencers among family purchasers, pestering their parents to buy products that they neither need nor really understand. Many vulnerable families succumb, spending dollars they can least afford. Pester power often works (Young Media Australia, 2007). Refusals, in these cases, can result in conflicts between a parent and a child and, ultimately may even undermine their relationship (Robertson, 1972; McNeal, 1987). The ASA (Advertising Standards Authority, New Zealand) Code on Advertising to Children sets out a number of guidelines which, amongst other things, states that advertisements 'should not

clearly portray violence or aggression', 'should not encourage anti-social behavior' and 'should not [urge children] to ask their parents to buy particular products for them' (Hoek and Laurence, n.d.).

Researchers appear united that children imitate what they see, especially actions performed by people or characters they hope to emulate. Advertisers using children's heroes thus have a particular responsibility to exercise scrupulous care over how these role models behave. While the majority appears to do so, a minority could improve the standard of their monitoring (Hoek and Laurence, n.d.). Many researchers have started from the assumption that advertising contributes to providing children and young people, as they grow up, with knowledge and expertise that is important for them as consumers (Smith and Sweeney, 1984).

#### **4. Animated Advertisements and Children**

When a product and its trademark are presented on the TV in the form of a short cartoon with an exciting storyline, it is not easy for children to be critical or even to identify the purpose of the amusing cartoon (Bjurstrom, 2000).

Animation is often used in advertisements that may have a certain appeal that is difficult to achieve with actors or mere product displays. For this reason, an animated advertisement (or a series of such advertisements) can be very long running, several decades in many instances. A notable example is the series of advertisements for Kellogg's cereals starring Snap, Crackle and Pop (Wikipedia, 'Television advertisement').

This, at least, illustrates one significant aspect of stereotyping in television advertising, specifically, the use of animated spokes-characters as product representatives. Such effects may be greater than those associated with other aspects of advertising largely because of the memorability and popularity of animated spokes-characters (Peirce and McBride, n.d.).

#### **5. Animated Advertisements in Pakistan**

The trend is not novel and has its roots since early 1980s. As mentioned above, Dentonic toothpowder remarkably capitalized on this strategy and gained significant mind and heart share. The trend then saw decline but later on was rejuvenated by Mortein and its character 'LUI' did wonders. The children were highly influenced and Mortein received immense popularity, resulting in peak sales.

In between Ding Dong, King Kong, Tiger and several other confectionary items (Hilal and Candy Land playing vital roles) were seen using animated advertisements which ultimately convinced many in the field that it is a brilliant tool when it comes to attracting kids. The major turnaround was visualized when Procter & Gamble along with Saatchi & Saatchi created invincible character of Commander Safeguard. The success was well received and

advertising gurus started trying their hands over animated advertisements and now a war between several characters can easily be envisaged.

## **6. Data Analysis and Findings**

Focus group activity was conducted in schools visited. The analysis is merged as per critical areas focused upon. Questionnaires were developed separately for children and parents. Marketers and advertisers were interviewed and their findings are shown separately.

### **6.1 Association with and Purchase of Brands Due to Animated Advertisements**

#### **6.1.1 Parents**

- More than 80% of the parents were unable to recall any other advertisements of these brands except for the animated ones. One of the most significant cases was of Tetra Pak milk, which has greater recall with respect to their previous advertisements showing importance of milk, that too in tetra pack. 10% could recall advertisement of Safeguard backed by doctor. 92% of the total agreed that animated ones are more effective in case where target audience is children. It grabs children's attention and in most of the cases influences their demand pattern.
- 85% of the total interviewed were buying Ding Dong, as their kids loved it due to the taste. The influencing factor in this case was not an animated character, as most of them stated.
- 38% of the total were buying Safeguard as they thought it good for hygiene, 40% bought it because it was demanded by their kids (thanks to Commander Safeguard and his team), 10% bought it as it was recommended by their relative or doctor.
- 25% were buying Lifebuoy due to their own choice because they considered it to be good, 10% were buying it due to the demand of their children, stimulated due to Lifebuoy's scheme of 'Buy Lifebuoy and become part of the germ-buster team'. 88% of the total sample believed that Lifebuoy advertisement did not have an impact due to it being animated; rather it caught attention due to its sales promotion tool.
- Tetra Pak milk is still in its infancy as parents had variable choices. Majority believed that the product purchase is dependent on the parents more than children but also appreciated the effort in form of Milkateer campaign launched, which did indulge their child and resulted in demand for the product.
- Telefun advertisement interestingly has the highest recall due to its animation and jingle, but unfortunately a negative one. For parents, the product should be banned. Children were greatly influenced by the advertisement not due to the character but features of the service and were using this service even if they were not permitted to.

### 6.1.2 Children

- 98% were unable to recall any other advertisements of these brands except for the animated ones. 2% could recall advertisement of Safeguard backed by doctor. 95% of the total agreed that animated ones are more effective and likeable in case where target audience is children.
- 75% were crazy after Commander Safeguard campaign, 25% of them were crazy after either 'Dirty or Dirtoo' and the remaining loved 'Commander' for being brave, friendly and sensible. 78% loved its jingle too.
- Lifebuoy Germ Buster was unable to get more share of love pie as 45% thought it had copied Safeguard campaign. 50% felt that the main character was a kid and not the germ itself. 58% of the total loved the jingle.
- Ding Dong was thought to be childish by 65% of the total, though 28% loved the creature and thought it was cute.
- Telefun was likeable in the beginning but now it is facing downward trend. 20% thought either the character or jingle was good. 45% hated it completely.
- Milkateer campaign was a complete animated story, 65% liked the main character that was a kid and wanted to be Milkateer. 40% children really loved the character named 'Kharoos' (the milkman).
- 85% of the total were buying Ding Dong due to its taste; younger ones liked it due to the jingle and story lines.
- Mostly kids liked Commander Safeguard, therefore, 75% were demanding from parents to buy Safeguard but they also commented that their parents also believed it to be the best. 30% were afraid of 'Dirtu', 'Algam' or 'Kachra Rani', therefore, considered Safeguard as a shield against them. 35% kids were forcing their parents to buy Lifebuoy so that they can qualify to become one of the Germ Busters. Approximately 16% kids were also exposed to their sales promotion activity and had given audition for the same. 10% were using it because of their parents.
- 28% kids were interested in Telefun; majority were threatened by their parents not to use it.
- 85% loved the complete storyline of Milkateer and appreciated both characters (girl and boy). Out of the total, 55% people are exposed to different Tetra Pak milk available, but the choice is dependent on their parents.

## **6.2 Positive or Negative Effects on Children's Actions and Behavior**

### **6.2.1 Parents**

- 88% gave credit to Commander Safeguard for teaching their kids cleanliness and increased concerns for hygiene.
- 18% thought that Ding Dong teaches importance of intellect and sense of responsibility.
- 75% thought Tetra Pak has taken a very good step of introducing animated version because it has not only indulged children but has also been able to create liking for milk in them.
- 25% thought that overall animated advertisements improve retention and then children can learn rhymes well.
- 35% thought it makes kids arrogant and they demand for things, which they even do not need.
- 38% commented that it supports violence and increases wrestling, specifically in case of Safeguard and Lifebuoy.
- 10% thought it is totally ridiculous and makes kids stick to television. Almost all parents hated Telefun advertisement and wanted it to be banned, because they thought that by influencing kids, this company has made them stick to phones and make them call unnecessarily.

## **6.3 Influence on Consumers' Buying Patterns (Influencer–Decision Maker Relationship)**

### **6.3.1 Parents**

- 85% of the total interviewed were buying Ding Dong, as their kids loved having them due to taste; animated character though was not a big push factor.
- 38% of the total were buying Safeguard as they thought it is good for hygiene, 40% bought it because it was demanded by their kids, 10% bought it as it was recommended by either their relative or doctor. 25% were buying Lifebuoy due to their own choice because they considered it to be good, 10% were buying it due to demand of their children.
- 10% let their children use Telefun services, but unwillingly, as it is costly; but they believe with growing age, the significance of this service declines.

- Purchase of Tetra Pak milk is generally parent-dependent, but recent Milkateer campaign has involved their children and resulted in demand for the product. 55% are exposed to buying Tetra Pak milk. The influence generated by kids is 10-15% (which parents feel is a good signal as children used to avoid milk more often).

#### **6.4 Effects on Consumer Buying of Products Associated with Animated Characters**

- 10% kids had bought Telefun character shaped sharpener. All lovers of Commander Safeguard owned complete Safeguard kit. In total, 70% children had bought it, irrespective of the strata. Recently, Lifebuoy is providing Germ Buster kits to those who are giving auditions for the advertisement. Almost 16% children had the costume.
- Milkateer costume is currently not available in the market but there is a high demand for it. Two kids have got the costume made on their own for the annual drama festival, which was held in their school.

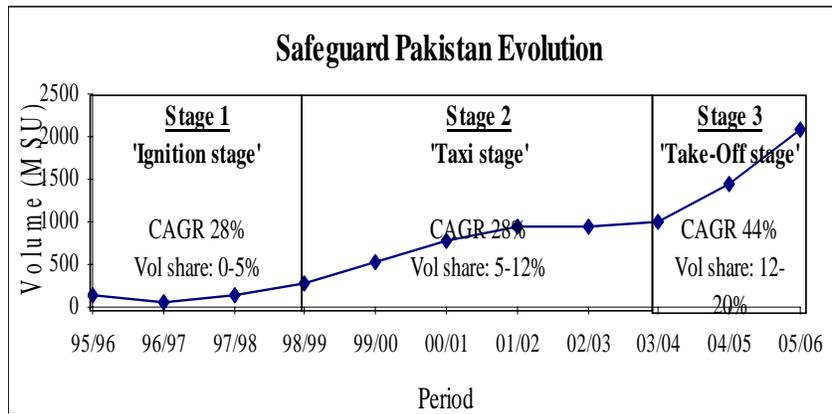
#### **6.5 Perspectives of Marketers and Advertisers**

Out of five brands chosen for the research, this section focuses upon three of them i.e. Lifebuoy, Safeguard and Tetra Pak. Since Ding Dong and Telefun were using animation from the beginning, comparative assessment was not existent.

##### **6.5.1 Safeguard**

The following data analysis is based on the feedback provided by a P&G employee (who requested to keep his name confidential) in the interview and the material, which was given as a reference.

**Figure 2: Safeguard Pakistan Evolution**



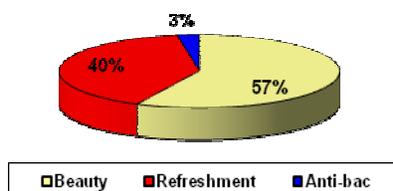
**Table 1: Safeguard vs. Lifebuoy**

<b>Safeguard</b>	<b>Mar'04</b>	<b>Mar'05</b>	<b>Mar'06</b>
P4W Usage	24	28	37
Top of Mind	21	22	28
Brand Awareness	51	66	70
Ad Awareness	25	31	38
<b>Lifebuoy</b>	<b>Mar'04</b>	<b>Mar'05</b>	<b>Mar'06</b>
P4W Usage	33	35	25
Top of Mind	13	15	8
Brand Awareness	40	51	46
Ad Awareness	14	14	13

**Table 2: Year-Wise BT Profit Ratio of Safeguard**

	<u>FY 03/04</u>	<u>FY 04/05</u>	<u>FY 05/06</u>
<b>Volume</b>	<b>997</b>	<b>1435</b>	<b>1970</b>
IYA	105	142	137
% of Nos	16%	11%	11%
BT Profit (\$M)	340	2,546	5,600
BT Profit %	2%	11%	20%

**Figure 3: Distribution of Soap Market (Shares categorically)**



Germ protection was rated to be at ninth position out of ten in the priority list. Safeguard took initiative, conducted focus group of two important targets, mothers and children.

The findings moved their communication towards Commander Safeguard's Tic-Tic mantra. As a result, the scenario considerably changed after the introduction of this mantra. Currently, there are more than 2 million soldiers and this was even celebrated in late 2007 by launching limited addition SKU of Safeguard.

**Table 3: Scenario Before and After the Tic-Tic Mantra**

ORS Break outs	Before	After
Convincingness	29%	40%
Related Recall	74%	73%
Germ Removal Recall	65%	64%
Longer Lasting Protection	21%	49%
Superiority Recall	22%	36%

### 6.5.2 Lifebuoy

After successful repositioning of Safeguard, the increasing popularity of Commander Safeguard pushed reactive Lifebuoy's sales to decline. The company realizing the loss started working on its promotional campaigns.

Through its 'Germ Buster' image built via advertisement and activations, Lifebuoy has been able to create new customer portfolio ('Unilever Annual Report 2007', n.d.). Lifebuoy focused heavily on building its germ kill credentials through a successful 'Lifebuoy Germ Buster' activation and a re-launch of the product (*UPL Accounts 2006*, n.d.).

This campaign was different from others as it suggested a real life hero. The germs were animated but fighters were kids. This factor along with its impressive jingle took children away from Commander Safeguard for some time. Children are also provided with an opportunity to become part of the Germ Buster team for their upcoming advertisement and the eligibility criteria is to buy Lifebuoy antibacterial soaps. This has increased sales of Lifebuoy and enhanced brand equity.

### 6.5.3 Tetra Pak

Before the recent animated campaign, the target audience was elders (parents). Later, it was realized that milk is very important for children and even though parents motivate their children a lot, their consumption is very low.

In words of Ehmer Kirmani, CEO, Media Idee (who was contacted via email):

I am impressed at the launch of Milkateers by Tetra Pak. Bravo! To the marketing team

and Sharp Images (production house) for producing a superb work and growing the industry further. Yet, today animation houses like Post Amazers produced Safeguard and are now working for Hollywood, H2O is going from strength to strength with Lifebuoy being a massive hit and now we have a new series by Sharp Images which is going to be a definite hit (if it has not become one so far). This is true professionalism at its best and I complement the Tetra Pak team for taking this step.

Tetra Pak's step towards animated campaign was well received and has been able to leave an impression in the audiences' minds. It is though too early to assess the impact and probably in six month's time period, one would be in a better position to gauge its effect.

## **7. Conclusion and Recommendations**

It was interesting to note that effects of animated advertisements were greater than general advertisements, especially in case where products were targeted towards children.

Girls were less vulnerable than boys as far as impact of animated advertisements was concerned. Girls considered these to be more childish. Nonetheless, few girls were found crazy about 'Kachra Rani' and 'Dirty'. Recently, Milkateer is showing a female member as a major influencer and the character has gained popularity amongst girls.

There were as such no critical differences when it came to reception of these brands within different strata. Though age-wise, there was a major difference as kids above seven years thought it was childish; and interestingly in few cases, also children below age five also believed the same.

The effect was more registered in Safeguard whereas Lifebuoy is making difference with its real life hero image. Milkateer has started very recently; therefore, it is early to assess its success. Telefun saw a highly negative trend and was the most irritating brand when it comes to parent's choice. Parents also complained that Telefun pushed kids to use phones unnecessarily; raising the bills substantially.

Few parents loved Ding Dong and Commander Safeguard characters themselves (10-12%) and they critically appreciated Safeguard and Milkateer's campaigns to be good attempts to develop children psyche. Milkateer's campaign made those kids drink milk who used to give tough time to their parents, which is a good signal.

It was observed that animated advertisements have at least improved kids' reception, retention and learning that they remember most of the jingles. Teachers have also appreciated this fact and have given credit to animated advertisements.

It was recommended by most of the audiences that animated advertisement do have critical effects, therefore, marketers should use it very cautiously and should deliver moral at the

end. The campaigns should have moral behind it and must have some boundaries.

All in all, advertisement does have a remarkable impact and if target audience is children then there is no better tool than animation but if it is over done, then the strategy loses its charm. There should be a moral alongside entertainment so that long-term sustainability of the brand can be ensured.

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