

Junk Food Generation

Every year March 15th is observed as World Consumer Rights Day (WCRD) to signify the passage of the Consumer Rights Bill by John F Kennedy, the then President of the United States. The Bill virtually gave the consumer movement a fillip throughout the world. The Consumers International (formerly IOCU) has been observing the WCRD around a particular theme with a view to make the event more focused. The theme chosen for the WCRD 2009 is Junk Food Generation. The topic has been chosen in the wake of increasing health effects of junk food on children. Many studies have concluded that junk food is leading to obesity among children and unless action is taken to regulate junk food generation, soon there will be a whole generation with obesity related diseases.

Apart from junk food generation the question of promoting junk food through advertisements in the mass media, particularly TV has come in for serious scrutiny. Studies conducted by institutions involved in community health, consumer groups including Consumers International have found that increasing number of TV adverts and other promotional programs targeting children has led to increase in consumption of junk foods. On this occasion the Consumers International has evolved a Code for the media. Besides, companies involved in manufacturing and supplying junk food have been asked to provide complete, truthful information by way of labels on the products.

The Consumers International's Asia Pacific Office, has carried out a survey of influence of television advertisement relating to junk food on children. Six Asian countries namely India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and Philippines and South Korea were included in the study. The main findings of the study are listed below:

Nutrition knowledge

73 per cent of Pakistani children perceive soft drinks to be healthy for frequent consumption. In the Philippines 80 per cent of children and 71 per cent of parents, drink soft drinks



at least once a week, as do 71 per cent of South Koreans

40 per cent of parents and 63 per cent of children in the Philippines believe fast food to be fit for frequent consumption

Current legislation

All six countries have legislative frameworks governing advertising in general and most have guidelines for advertising to children in particular. Only the Philippines and South Korea have laws pertaining to the advertisement of fast food and confectionery.

South Korea and the Philippines are the only two countries to have specific regulations pertaining to the sponsorship of children's programmes.

The vast majority of parents from all six countries are in favour of a reduction of the number of advertisements during children's broadcasting.

The power of television

Children are exposed to an overwhelming amount of advertising as there is little regulation controlling the program to advertisement ratio. In Malaysia 30 per cent of children watch over 8 hours of TV a day during holidays and are exposed to over two and half hours of advertisements a day. 73 per cent of Pakistani children claim to love advertisements, as do 68 per cent of Filipino children.

Food advertisements

In India, 40-50 per cent of advertisements during children's programming were for food. For Pakistan, the Philippines and Malaysia the percentage of food advertisements varied between 50 to 75 per cent

Pester power

More than 50 per cent in all countries surveyed say that their children are an important factor in influencing their purchasing decisions. Indian, Malaysian and Pakistani parents cited 'child's demand' as the primary reason for buying a product

Create screen savvy kids

What parents can do to make children avoid getting influenced by TV food advertisements

- Talk about TV food ads with your children. Help them question why they make TV food ads and the techniques used to make products appeal to them
- Limit your child's screen time (including TV, internet and computer games) to less than 2 hours per day
- Have 'screen-free' zones in the bedrooms
- Encourage healthy eating. Limit heavily advertised foods, such as chocolate, lollies and fast foods in the home
- Become involved. Voice your concern if you are concerned about the high level of TV food ads promoting unhealthy foods, lobby for changes to TV food advertising regulations.

(Adapted from TV Food Ads: Educate & Advocate)

SHOP ONLINE AT YOUR RISK

There was a time when shopping was considered a pleasure. Visiting various shops, collecting more information, comparing prices, arguing with the salesperson were some of the weekend moments people enjoyed. Particularly on the eve of a festival shopping was eagerly awaited which, topped the 'to do list'. With globalization, shopping pattern has changed. Consumers prefer to shop for all their requirements under one roof. The hazards of parking vehicles, crowds, lack of time and a host of other reasons have made consumers to keep away from traditional market places. The mall culture is catching up all over the country.

On the other hand the computer savvy young generation has taken to online shopping. Though online shopping has its own advantages, its dangers over take the benefits. Unfortunately consumers have not realized the hazards of online shopping. A number of cases are reported wherein products ordered by the consumers are delivered late or not delivered at all. Hundreds of consumers have

complained about the differences in the product delivered and that was ordered. Though websites promise exchange without any extra cost, seldom it is so.

The study about online shopping conducted by the Consumers International (CI) is an indication of the safety nets that needs to be incorporated for online shopping. The study involving several websites found that over half (55 per cent) of sites failed to provide information about the



currency of their content. This means that in case of health advice sites, the consumer cannot judge whether the advice is based on the latest research. Almost 50 per cent of finance and health advice sites failed to provide full information. Only 41 per cent of sites that recommended prices gave sources for their prices. Even when

sites did give information, it was not always comprehensive or specific. Health and financial advice provided on the website should not be taken for granted or safe. Almost half of the websites surveyed did not warn the consumer looking for health and or financial services information that they should consult a professional before taking a decision.

The study has found that a majority (62 per cent) of sites contain claims which are vague and unspecific. Some sites claim to offer a service that they don't provide, using the net to attract business and obtaining personal information. Next time when you shop online be careful while providing personal information. Less than 61 per cent of sites that collected personal information had a privacy policy.

The findings of CI clearly shows that consumers are being put at risk by misleading, inaccurate or incomplete information. There is an urgent need for consumers to be alerted to the potential detriment brought about by a lack of credibility on the web.

Regulating Food Advertisements Recommendations

1. **Restrict advertising for young children under the age of 12**



This portion of the population is exceptionally vulnerable to being manipulated by advertisements. For this reason, Sweden bans advertising for children under 12 years, arguing

that if children are not fully aware of the purpose of advertising and do not have the ability to question it critically, advertising should not be addressed to them. Similar policies have also been implemented in Australia, Canada and the UK.

2. **Reduce the number of junk food ads during children's programming**

Food habits are formed at a young age and are difficult to change. For this reason, repetitive exposure to adverts encouraging overeating, large portions, and the consumption of foods high in sugar, salt and saturated fat need to be cut down. South Korean legislation limits its advertisement ratio to 10 per cent of program time and imposes a maximum limit of 30 seconds per advertisement.

3. **Identification and separation of advertising**

There is a critical need for advertising to be clearly distinguishable from other program contents. The Broadcasting Commission of Ireland, in its draft Children's Advertising Code, has required broadcasters to alert children when a commercial break is beginning and ending.

4. **Improve the effectiveness of regulating bodies**

Regorous enforcement of advertisement regulations is necessary to ensure compliance and improve the effectiveness of regulatory bodies.

5. **Monitor health messages in advertisements**

Consumer awareness about diet and nutrition has largely improved over the past decade. However, advertisers know how to manipulate consumers and to use the ambiguity of scientific terms to distort the nutritional value of food and drink products. Health messages in advertisements and on packaging need to be monitored to eliminate misleading promotion.

6. **Health messages should be made mandatory for advertisements promoting junk foods**

7. **Balanced diets should be actively promoted via advertising**

TV Food Ads: Top 3 facts

Most TV food ads are for foods that are high in fat, sugar and/or salt. Foods commonly advertised include fast food, chocolate and confectionery

Many TV food ads are for 'extra foods' that healthy eating guidelines say to eat in small amounts.

TV food ads can influence children's food preferences. A review of 122 studies showed that food advertising influences what children want to eat, what they ask their parents to buy and what they actually eat.

(Adapted from TV Food Ads: Educate & Advocate)

Approaches to Consumer Education

Over the years consumer education has been viewed from different perspectives. Though each of them are important on their own merits, an ideal approach would be to include all the possible angles to consumer education. Given the fact that a consumer is likely to be influenced by a host of factors, consumer education should include all that influences him and shapes him. The four important approaches to consumer education are (a) Economic (b) Health and Safety (c) Social-cultural (d) legal & (e) Environmental.

Economic aspect: This includes the analysis of a product in terms of its price, cost, availability of a cheaper substitute etc.

Health & Safety: This refers to the information about the contents of

the products like additives in case of food products. The effects of their use, the quality marks, if any, accuracy, clarity of the instructions for its use etc

Socio-cultural aspects: This would include those factors which the consumer as well as his fellow



consumers such as setting trends or altering a habit in the consumption of a particular brand, acceptance of the use of the product in the community in particular and the society at large,

the effect of large scale consumption of the product on the economy of the country etc

Legal aspects: The factors under this aspect are the level of consumer satisfaction, the mandatory requirements of labeling and packaging, terms and conditions of sales/purchases etc. This would also include factors such as returns, replacements and compensation etc in case of complaints

Environmental aspects: The effect of consumption of a product on the environment would include factors such as the disposal of by-products, effluents, recycling of wastes, bio-degradable packaging, pollution and use of scarce resources etc.

(Adapted: Consumer Eye, CI, Malaysia)

HOW TO HANDLE YOUR COMPLAINTS

Despite being intelligent, well informed and careful while you shop grievances cannot be ruled out. The very fact that the manufacturers, dealers and sellers are equipped with better skills and information puts you in a disadvantageous position. There is no level playing field. Further your own apathy and buying habits lands you in trouble. For every grievance there may be a solution. But not necessarily in the Consumer Forums or consumer organizations. As a consumer you need to equip yourself the skills of handling your own complaint. Experience shows that consumers will gain more benefit if they pursue their case on their own.

But very rarely one comes across a consumer who knows how to bring the erring trader to book. Once a consumer feels she is cheated, either she resigns to fate or tries to make use of the law. Plenty of cases of cheating do not merit going to consumer forums, given its nature, amount involved etc. At the same time one cannot ignore the loss suffered. For such of those consumers, knowing how to handle complaints on their own is the best solution.

There are certain steps which a consumer has to take for handling her own complaint. Assume that the refrigerator, mobile handset or a TV set you have purchased is defective. The first step is to stop using it. Do not meddle with it yourself. Nor give it some mechanic near your place for repair. Instead take the defective set to the seller from where you purchased it. Experience shows that telephone calls and emails do not work. Explain the defects and ask for repair or replacement. These days sellers are directing purchasers to customer care centers. Do not agree for this. It is the responsibility of the seller to collect and send it to customer care center. Assert your right.

If this does not give results, write a letter about your problem and ask the seller to get the defect removed. Surrender the

product and take an acknowledgement. If the seller refuses to acknowledge, do not part with the equipment. As a second step send a letter under registered post acknowledgement due. Do this even if you are at a walkable distance. Mark a copy of the letter to the manufacturer. Preserve a copy for your record. At any cost do not part with the original receipts, vouchers, bills, guarantee cards etc.

Your problem should get sorted out at this stage. If not, find out whether there is any voluntary consumer organization in your locality. There are some consumer help lines which can be used. Write to them and seek their intervention. Consumer organization will forward your complaint to the dealer and manufacturer. If the consumer organization is of good standing the grievance will be settled quickly. Or else they will help you in filing a complaint in the consumer forum. The organization itself can appear on behalf of you.

You can also make use of the media. A number of newspapers and magazines carry consumer columns, consumer grievances etc. wherein the grievance is published and a copy sent to the manufacturer. This will have a powerful effect on the manufacturer. A number of complaints are solved this way.

Handling your own complaint is not as difficult as you assume to be. All it requires is some dedication, a few minutes of your time and perseverance. Of course prevention is better than cure. Do not be carried by advertisements. Avoid impulsive buying. Do not believe telephone calls which say that you have won an award and you need to collect that evening at a five star hotel. Remember no lunch is free. Preserve documents. Keep your consumer eye open.



MIND YOUR MEDICINE

20 Questions to ask your doctor

- Before you take any medicine, find out how it will act in your body, and how it will help your medical problem
- Read up from books, or ask your doctor or pharmacist about any possible side effects of the medicine prescribed. This will help you to be on the alert, recognize any such symptoms immediately and take remedial action
- Keep a record of all the medicines you take for how long and for what purpose (You can also do this for someone you are looking after - an elderly person, for example)
- If you are seeing a doctor and are taking another medicine as well, mention this to him or her. This will help guard against adverse interactions between the two medicines (This precaution also applies to buying medicines over the counter)
- Stick to a doctor you trust. In this way, dosages, directions and the risk of any interactions can be checked in time
- Seek natural cure as far as possible. This is the only way to avoid medical foul-ups and blunders, now a frighteningly common occurrence

To ensure that the medicine (or treatment) given to you is suitable for you, don't be afraid to ask questions. Here are 20 important questions to ask when you go and see a doctor.

Before the prescription is written

1. Is there an alternative to treatment with medicines for my condition?
2. How can I help myself, apart from taking the medicine?
3. What kind of medicine is it?
4. How will it help me?
5. How important is it to take this medicine?
6. Is it new? If so, what advantages does it have over older products?

Before the consultation ends

7. How and when should I take the medicine?
8. How can I tell if it is working?
9. For how long should I take the medicine?
10. What may happen if I don't take it?
11. What if I miss a dose?

12. Is it likely to have any unwanted effects?
13. What should I do if these effects occur?
14. Should I see you again?
15. What will you want to know from me then?

When medicine is dispensed

16. Can I take other medicines with it?
17. Are there any foods or drinks I should avoid?
18. Can I drive after taking the medicine?
19. Where should I keep the medicine?
20. What should I do with my leftover medicine?



(Adapted from 'The Right medicine', WHICH?)

Consumer Educators Network (CEN) activities

CREAT in collaboration with Karnataka State Pharmacy Council, Consumer Care Society and Chair on Consumer Law and Practice of NLSIU, had organized a day's workshop on 'Drug Safety and Consumers' on 24th December 2008 on the occasion of National Consumer Day. The program was held at KSPC conference hall, Vijayanagar, Bangalore. Over 35 participants attended the program.

The objective of the workshop was to educate and empower teachers who are in charge of running consumer clubs in schools. The workshop was inaugurated by Dr. Jaga Shetty, Drugs Controller of Karnataka. Presentations on the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, Drug Information Centre, How to read labels etc were made. Shri. D.A. Gundu Rao, President of the KSPC, Dr. Ashok Patil, Associate Professor of NLSIU and Mr. Y.G. Muralidharan, CREAT were present. Shri. Ravindranath Guru, Secretary of Consumer Care Society, proposed the vote of thanks.

A set of papers and guides for consumers about the use of medicines and handouts for school students about drug safety were distributed. Those interested in obtaining the papers may contact CREAT

Presentation on 'How to be a Smart Shopper'

The RV Girls High School, Basavanagudi, Bangalore, had organized the valedictory of the activities of the consumer club on 5th March 2009. Mr. Y.G. Muralidharan, CREAT, was invited to make a presentation on 'How to be a Smart Shopper' and also distribute prizes for the winners of various activities conducted by the RV Girls High School Consumer Club.. Mrs. Padmini, Head Mistress, presided.

For Further details contact :



CREAT CONSUMER EDUCATORS NETWORK

No.239, 5th 'C' Main Remco Layout, Hampinagar, Bengaluru-560104 Tel : 91-80-23357280,

E.mail : info@creatindia.org, creatorg@sify.com,

Website : www.creatindia.org