

**ADVERTISING ETHICS TO CHILDREN:  
A STUDY OF MARKETERS' APPROACH AND  
PARENTS' EXPECTATION IN INDIA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of the research is to evaluate the impact of the current advertising ethics to children on brands and parents' expectations. To achieve this, analysis of the literature of parental expectations was done and awareness levels of brand marketers were evaluated by the researcher and advertising ethics followed by the companies was thoroughly assessed. Considering the context of the study, the researcher used qualitative research method for data collection and interviewed ten brand marketers with the knowledge of Indian advertising landscape to understand their views on the ethical practices currently being followed in the industry. Due to the nature of this research, non-probability sampling was used to recruit the brand marketers. The interviews were semi-structured in nature and narrative research design was carried out. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the collected data. This research also consists of recommendations based on the analysis, the future scope, and the limitations of the study.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Research Background

Advertising intended for children has been going on for a long time and it has adapted itself from a frowned upon practice to an essential part of marketing for companies. According to Lapierre *et. al.* (2017), companies spend a huge amount of money each year to advertise their products to children. This is intended to influence the minds of the children and thereby influencing family decisions to purchase their products. In this way, companies look for a lifetime of brand loyalty from these customers. As per the study of Nelson (2018), new forms of advertising like vlogs, influencer marketing and unboxing videos have catalysed the need for assessing the effects of advertising on children. From the opinion of De Jans *et. al.* (2017), it can be identified that the advertising landscape has changed drastically over the years. Children in the present era are exposed to advertisement messages conveyed through different channels. Watching vlogs on YouTube, reading articles on websites, playing games on mobile phones and viewing ads on Facebook has enabled marketers to effectively convey their messages.

From the study of Preston (2005), it has been established that children use advertisements for the purpose of feeding their hunger for knowledge. Children have inquisitive nature which leads them to find out and learn the meaning of the brands. Therefore, companies through advertising seek to explain to them about their products, what they can do with the product and why they should have it. Therefore, this leads to the importance of ethical consideration while targeting children through advertisements. Grad (2015) analysed that the reason

behind ethical considerations in advertising to children are twofold. Firstly, children are the most vulnerable group and secondly, children are the preferred target audience for marketers (Grad, 2015). Due to this, ethical considerations are important or it can affect the brand negatively.

The advertising industry that targets children and teenagers is a multibillion-dollar industry (Radelsky *et. al.*, 2020). The advent of the digital era has opened a sea of opportunities for marketers to market products to children in various ways. However, it has been found that advertisements for children sometimes lead to negative behavior (Terlutter and Capella, 2013). Furthermore, it is also found that children are also vulnerable towards the persuasive effects of advertisement (Livingstone and Helsper, 2006). Apart from this, the study of Ferando *et. al.*, (2015), has revealed that marketers tend to exploit the vulnerability of children by creating persuasive advertisements. Such situation is found to have increased conflicts between children and their parents, which results to children feeling unhappy by not getting what they desire after watching an advertisement. In India, there are a number of laws that look over advertisements related to children, like, Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles and Infant Food Act and Cable TV Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995 (Vadehra, 2010). However, it can be seen that the issues pertaining to advertisement are very neglectful. Other than the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and voluntary groups such as Advertising Standards Council of India and Advertising Agencies Association of India there are no strong regulatory bodies that can look after the ethical practices of advertising to children. Therefore, to identify the significance of ethical considerations regarding advertising to children in India is a crucial aspect. As per the research of Rawat *et al* (2015), advertisements

impact society and especially the children significantly by virtue of its overwhelming influence on the media.

## **1.2 Research rationale and significance**

As the advertising industry that targets the children has become huge in size, the marketers intend to target the children for increasing sales of the products. In all the previous research works, it can be seen that advertising to children has both positive and negative impact and it is important to target the children in an ethical way. However, in the previous research works the perspective of India in the light of ethical advertising practices and its maintenance by the regulatory authorities has not been extensively researched (Grad, 2015). Hence, this has become the rationale for conducting this research work. It has been found that in India, the regulatory authorities fail to implement strict measures to control unethical practices while showing advertisements to children (Mehta and Bharadwaj, 2021). Despite having laws and regulatory bodies, the compliance of the rules has been widely neglected (Young *et. al.*, 2003). Therefore, this study intends to add the implication of such activity on the Indian audience and the possible measures that can be taken to ensure ethical practices are maintained to the previous research works. The aspect of parental attitude has not been focused adequately in the previous research works. Therefore, the addition of this research work to the previous studies, is interesting and important due to the addition of as first-hand information regarding the marketer's approach to ethical considerations and expectations of the parents from advertisements.

This research work will be of immense value since the study will include primary data collected from marketers to gain the perspective of them towards ethical considerations and also from parents to analyse their expectations from the advertisements. The inclusion of such information will be highly significant for this research work as well as for market researchers who seek to research on the importance of ethical consideration in advertisements for children. Apart from this, the data from this study will also help in studies which seek to understand the influence of advertisement during the growth and development stages of a child.

### **1.3 Research questions, aims and objectives**

#### **Main Research Question**

What are the present advertising ethics implemented by the marketers to address the rising ethical expectations and concerns of the parents from the brands while targeting their children?

The aim of the research is to evaluate the impact of the current advertising ethics to children on brands and parents' expectations.

#### **Sub Research Questions**

1) How much awareness do marketers have regarding the advertising ethics they must adhere to when targeting children?

**Objective:** To evaluate the awareness levels of marketers about advertising ethics.

2) How do marketers take advertising ethics into account when developing advertisements for children?

**Objective:** To assess the advertising ethics followed by the companies.

3) How can the ignorance of advertising ethics while advertising to children exert a negative impact on the company?

**Objective:** To analyse the negative impact of not implementing advertising ethics to children.

#### **1.4 Research methodology**

The researcher will conduct interviews of 10 brand marketers who have the knowledge of Indian advertisement landscape. Non-probability sampling was used to recruit these marketers and the sample size is restricted to 10 brand marketers due to the fact that the target audience in India is less than other broader demographics and also due to time constraints. In this case, the participants for the interview will be recruited on LinkedIn, and an invitation will be sent to the participants via the messaging system of the platform. A checklist will be made prior to searching the participants for the interview that will encompass inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria will be that the participants should have the knowledge of Indian advertising landscape, and the Participants should be experienced and established as a brand marketer in India. Potential Participants will be given a consent form for sharing their information for this study prior to the inclusion of participants for the

interview. The interview process will begin on a virtual platform once the participants acknowledge the aims and objectives of the study and signs the consent form.

## **1.5 Dissertation structure**

The structure of the dissertation is,

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Details of the background related to the research area will be provided that depicts what has been researched on the subject area of the topic historically. Clear aim and objective of the study will be provided that helps in guiding the research work. The rationale behind the choice of this subject matter and what value it can provide will be stated.

### **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Review of the published works that previous researchers have put forward relating to the area of the study will be provided. Identification of the gap in existing studies will be stated.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

Details of the methodology that will be chosen to collect data will be written down. The ways in which the data will be analysed will also be provided in detail.

### **Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis**

The results of the data collection will be presented in this chapter. The analysis of each data and the main findings of the analysed data will be provided.

**Chapter 5: Discussion**

A discussion will be made aligning the information that will be found and the aim and objective of the study, analysing whether these have been satisfied or not.

**Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendation**

Detailed conclusion of the entire research work will be provided. The limitations that the study encountered will be written down. Recommendations will be given to readers for further improving the study.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

Advertising is one of the most important aspects of any business. Every year, organizations all around the world spend billions of dollars to advertise their products. Among diverse demographics, children are a huge consumer market with direct purchasing power for food, sweets, clothing and toys (Chaudhary, 2016). This is due to the large sums of money they invest and the purchasing power they have over their family in a variety of ways. With rising wages, nuclear families, and fewer children in the family, children's roles are becoming more important, even when purchasing expensive items such as a vehicle or planning a vacation (Chaudhary, 2016). As a result, everyone from the advertiser to the direct seller is targeting children or indirectly their parents through children (Chaudhary, 2016). Children form relationships with companies at an early age and whether or not they are carefully sold to, this emotion will endure a lifetime. Therefore, it is critical to communicate positively with this demographic in an ethical manner because their purchasing power will be influenced in the future (WARC, 2020).

Children's paid advertising largely consists of ads for toys and food products, the majority of them are heavy in cholesterol and high calories and have less nutritional value (Calvert, 2008). According to the World Health Organization, one of the major factors to the risk of child health is marketing efforts aimed at children. As they lack the cognitive ability to grasp the persuasive aim of ads, children under 8 years of age may be more sensitive to advertising (Calvert, 2008).

Advertisements, on the other hand, assist children in developing social engagement tools that will encourage self-expression and social conformance in both themselves and their families. It also assists youngsters in learning about the societal significance of businesses (Preston, 2005). Furthermore, the economic component of the social responsibility model necessitates the socialization of children as consumers to sustain the retail buying cycle, which is critical for economic well-being (Preston, 2005).

## **2.2 Ethical consideration for advertisements**

Ethical considerations are important for audiences who are unable to handle sensitive information; therefore, it plays a major role while targeting children (Grad, 2015). Customers are the most valuable assets for companies and any sort of dishonesty by the marketers can be harmful for the interest of the companies (Sachadeva, 2015). Advertising ethics are the guiding principles for marketing professionals. Hence, ignoring ethical issues during campaigns can be considered to be dishonest and as a result it can be harmful for the long-term interests of the companies (Sachadeva, 2015). Ethical consideration is important for all the businesses during formulation of their marketing strategies. It can be understood that focusing on the ethical issues during advertising campaigns actually makes the actions of a company attractive to the customers. Unethical behaviour of the companies can decrease brand loyalty (Lee and Jin, 2019). One of the most important objectives of marketers is to increase brand loyalty, which, if it decreases due to unethical practices, would have a negative impact on their interest. These companies will not be able to gain a competitive advantage, resulting in a reduction in their capability to make more revenue (Lee and Jin, 2019).

Dishonest promotion and marketing practices of the organisations are harmful for their reputation. It impacts the relationship of the companies with their customers negatively (Alshurideh *et. al.*, 2016). Therefore, it is important for the companies to focus more on the long-term relationship with their customers by practicing ethical actions in their promotional activities. Positive relationship with the customer is very important for any company. Good relationship with the customers helps in providing satisfaction to them (Hassan *et. al.*, 2015). Customer satisfaction can increase loyalty of the customers as well as servicing quality of the companies (Muhammad *et. al.*, 2016). It can be understood that customer loyalty is crucial for retaining the existing customers (Madhani, 2014). Therefore, it is evident that ethical practices of the companies can help them to increase customer satisfaction and thereby retaining them. Therefore, to satisfy the customers, expectation of the customers and the service provided by the companies are the most important determinants. Companies must understand the ethical expectations of the customers during their advertisement campaigns and act accordingly to get a competitive advantage over their rivals (Nobar and Rostamzadeh, 2018).

### **2.3 Ethical perspective of the marketers regarding advertisements**

The field of "ad ethics" is gaining popularity among academics (Lee and Jin, 2019). Advertising is expected to become the most ethically challenged part of marketing (Shabbir *et. al.*, 2018). Critics of advertising have expressed worries about stereotyped repetition and unfettered consumerism, as well as its deceptive and compelling tendency (Shabbir *et. al.*, 2018). Similarly, the most widely held belief is that people should decide whether

advertisements are unethical. Eventually, the spirit of all effective advertising lies in the regard exhibited to the individual for which this advertisement is made. There cannot be a commonly used viewer or intelligence source evaluation of the internal mechanism of ad ethics. Even though numerous analyses have investigated the customer's perspective with respect to specific situations in ad ethics, varied results of attitudes to advertising routinely find marketers to be among the least trusted professions, as perceptions of ad ethics are based on their conceptions of advertisers (Sama, 2019). It is impossible for such an advertising industry to predict the unintentional repercussions of unethical ads without already acquiring a better knowledge about consumer complaints about advertising (Brusoni and Vaccaro 2016). Consumer attitudes of an immoral or unethical advertisement campaign can result in a variety of unfavourable results, spanning from apathy towards marketed goods to more serious acts such as divestment or requests for government regulation (Brusoni and Vaccaro, 2016).

Despite the importance of customers, it is believed that their perspectives are not adequately represented in the definition of "ad ethics," and also that individual customers, not advertising companies, those who generate and promote advertisements, as well as the authorities, has to be the ultimate authority to constitute effective advertising procedure (Nadeem *et. al.*, 2019). As the marketers are willing to sell their products to people of all ages and backgrounds, they need to follow certain rules and regulations. It can be identified that the companies try to attract people with different moral speeches and attractive visuals as certain countries have some strict rules for every kind of advertisement (De Cicco *et. al.*, 2020). The media and advertising departments of different regions specify certain rules and regulations for continuing their ad in the marketplace. Though there are many businesses

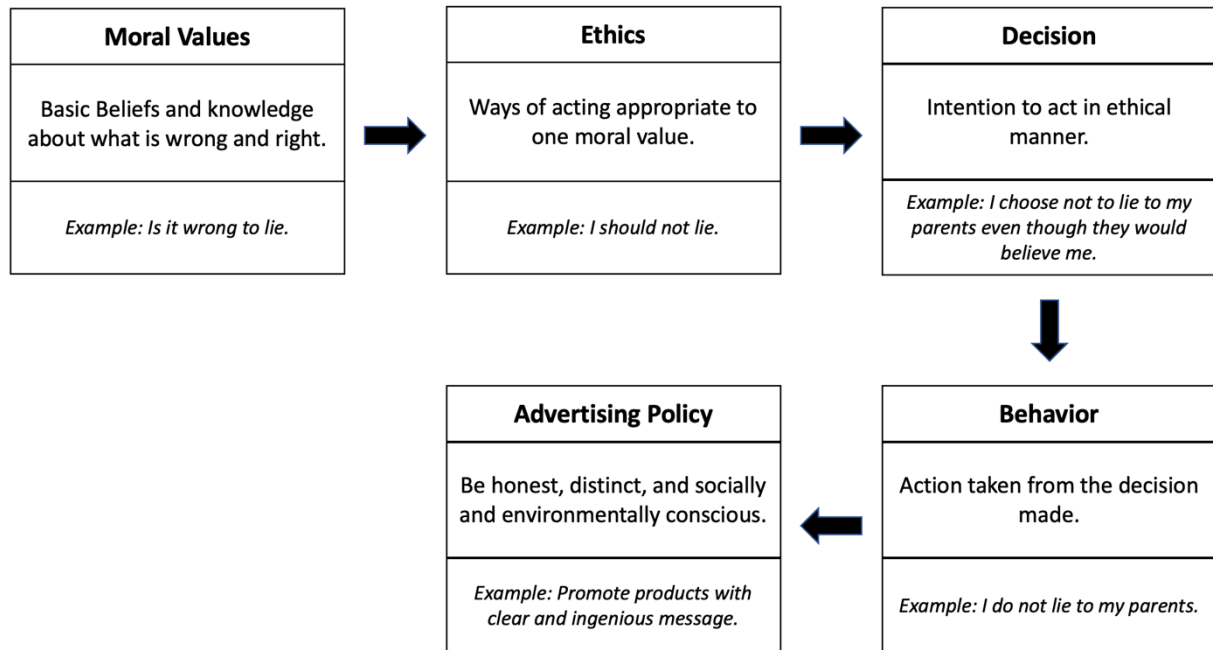
who do not follow the instructions from the government or higher authorities, the companies as well as the advertisement makers focus on money rather than promoting valuable content for the audiences (Van Quaquebeke *et. al.*, 2017). The perspective of ethical standards in the advertisement industry varies from product to product (López Jiménez *et. al.*, 2020). Baby products and teenager products have different viewpoints and mindsets for advertisement, but on the other hand, the contents in the products for adult usage have more flexibility in their scripting or languages (Sekeres, 2009). As a result, the goal is to solve this shortcoming by identifying the target audience's general perceptions about ad ethics (López Jiménez *et. al.*, 2020).

## **2.4 Advertisement ethics for child products**

Products being used by children are gaining market capitalisation with the enactment of advertisements based on child products (Kunkel *et. al.*, 2004). In Indian cities, people get inclined towards child products due to advertisements, however, there are several limitations for child advertisements that safeguards child abuse (Bhatt and Bapna, 2017). Apart from that, on a worldwide stage, advertisement based on child products also helped to be dominant among competitors and sustain in the world of digital shifts (Calvert, 2008). Further, referring to the advertising ethics that can restrain several obligations such as child abuse, discrimination of mindset and there are several ways in which advertisement can be refined especially with respect to children.

### **2.4.1 Ethical proposition for advertising child products**

Ethical standards for advertising child-based products can help to attain positive health states and it can put an end to the discrimination of children's mindset. In addition, raising the standards of advertisement ethically with respect to children should be limiting unhealthy and manipulative backgrounds (Singh and Soni, 2014). Besides, advertisements can be developed in a way that can give knowledge about the product and simultaneously procure customer attractions. Apart from that, the advertiser can approach with an unbiased mindset for attaining the betterment of the children since the future depends on them. Child-based products and its advertisement technique can be acquired in terms of social responsibility (Preston, 2005). Additionally, since half of the advertisements for child-based products are on food items, biased and unhealthy food advertisements can have a negative impact on the brand image and long-term growth (Preston, 2005). Moreover, the brand reputation can get stigmatized since the parents are generally conservative with respect to their children and products that negatively affect the children could get eliminated from their macro audiences which are children. Thus, advertisement should be developed in a manner of making the audience aware about the product segment or sharing the right descriptions in order to attract them but not in a manipulative and unethical manner (Shabbir *et. al.*, 2018).



**Figure 1:** Ethical norms for advertisement

(Source: Nina and Duman, 2012)

The ethics of advertising, as portrayed in Figure 1 above, consists of several stages that are attainment of moral values, ethics, decision, behaviour, and advertising policy which can help to create a positive environment in the ethical norms for advertising. Moral values and ethics are distinct in terms of how they influence people's actions and decisions. The same reasons apply to businesses that should have an advertising policy in place. To begin with, moral values are fundamental ideas and knowledge about what is good and bad. Moral value is derived from a person's religious background, beliefs, culture, and education (Nina and Duman, 2012). Second, ethics are behaviours that are consistent with one's moral values. People learn moral values from their cultures and apply them to daily decisions in order to distinguish between good and bad. People build a strategy to act and be ethical by combining moral values and ethics (Nina and Duman, 2012).

## 2.5 Parents' concern over ethical regulations of advertisements

**Content:** Whether focusing on the scripts or the subject matter, advertisements are very important for the brands as the parents mostly focus on better content for purchasing any product for their children. The reliability and the validity of the product is essential as it completely depends on the product itself. If the content of an advertisement is not suitable for the children or if it is having any explicit content, then the parents will surely avoid that advertisement (Klitzman, 2017).

**Visual:** Visuals and presentation are the soul of any advertisement. The sales and demand of the product also depend on the attractiveness of the advertisements and the responses that it gets from the parents. The products which have been visualised on the presentation requires proper monitoring and outlook as it can create a huge customer base in the marketplace (Youn and Shin, 2019). While focusing on the visuals of the product, focusing over the guidelines and ethics of the advertisements of child products are also necessary before implementation (De Jans *et. al.*, 2018). The advertising companies therefore focus on the creative visuals for attracting the parents.

**Quality:** Quality is one of those factors which cannot be easily justified by the advertising (Correa *et. al.*, 2019). The quality of any product can only be judged after proper usage. Though that is not possible before purchasing, some companies plan their advertisement in such a way that it gives the proper demonstration of the quality of the product (Correa *et. al.*, 2019). Though different types of people are considering different

elements in the advertisement for their children, quality is a common factor that has been considered by most of the parents across nations.

**Price value:** The price of any product is mostly visualised in the advertisement, especially in terms of child products. As a result, they are mostly focused on the products that are good in quality as well as meet their budget. There are some products which are not in this trend, such as baby food (Hudders and Cauberghe, 2018). Advertising essentials such as baby foods and other medicines are not subjected to maintain their prices on a large scale as the products already have demand in the market because of their nature.

**Brand value:** The brand value of any product creates a different demand base in the marketplace. For example, the successful companies like Jinny and Jonny, Nestle and Johnson & Johnson already have their required customer base in the marketplace which has created a barrier for the new firms to develop their business through advertisements (Kelly *et. al.*, 2019). Parents choose those items because they believe the quality will be higher or that the firms will adhere to the correct ethical requirements for advertising children's products.

## **2.6 Ethical norms of child product advertisements in India**

**Attractive visuals:** There are some issues and some crucial differences in the perceptions of the Indian parents and the parents from the western countries. Attractive and colourful visuals are one of the main attractions in the advertisements for the Indian parents (Islam and Goni, 2020). Mostly, the parents focus on the colourful presentation and usage of

different kids' elements in the advertisements. It not only creates attractiveness in the advertisement, but also helps to build sustainable demand of the product in the marketplace.

**Price:** In developing countries like India, parents like to consider the price of any product before buying it with the influence of advertisements in a major way. The price that has been displayed over the advertisement helps the Indian parents to consider the product. They can even understand whether they are capable of purchasing it or not (Kelly *et. al.*, 2019).

**Offers and discounts:** Many offers and discounts are being availed through advertisements and it can be used by the organisations to target specific demographics (Appel *et. al.*, 2019). It is understood that offers attract Indian parents as they are more concerned about the price of the products (Singh and Banerjee, 2018).

## **2.7 Ethical expectations and reaction of Indian parents based on advertisements for children**

**Expectations:** Since majority of the parenting has been done by the mothers in India in respect of their children, most of the marketers who advertise child products target mothers (Sarkar, 2015). The primary focus of the advertisers for child products is to have a positive engagement with them. Indian junk foods or fast foods primarily targets the mothers since it shows that it requires more time to prepare day-to-day meals. Additionally, it works as a manipulative background that foreshadows customer engagement in an unethical

manner. Due to this, ethical standards are being questioned to some level and the parents expect the brands to be more responsible (Dubey and Rana, 2019).

**Reaction:** The advertisements for child products are developing day by day. Some parents agree that commercials targeting children are beneficial, because advertisements boost their proclivity for advanced products. The advertisements urge them to purchase the product shown through different mediums. The majority of parents agree that ads aimed at children younger than six should not be blocked, but the content should change from just showcasing the product to sharing important information that will benefit their kids. In recent years, show buyers have begun to place a premium on advertising because it is the most effective way for sponsors to reach out to potential customers. Nowadays, advertisements play an important role in encouraging customers to buy products and services (Singh and Banerjee, 2018). Several parents agree that their kids do not understand the fundamental motivation of brands. The more they have seen advertisements, the more they are drawn in. Customers are the most important aspect of every firm as the current market is dominated by them (Singh and Banerjee, 2018). As a result, in order to attract parents, companies must first create a superior comprehension for the product they are trying to sell.

## **2.8 Issues faced by the marketers for not complying with the ethical consideration**

### **2.8.1 Negative impact on the customer-brand relationship**

Marketers not complying with ethics is destructive for the customer-brand relationship. In case the brands do not give importance to the ethical aspect during their

marketing campaigns, it may affect their relationship with the customers (Lee and Jin, 2019). It can be harmful for customer engagement of a company, and it can be understood easily that poor customer engagement can reduce the sales of an organisation. The experience of the customers and their engagement with any brand has a reciprocal relationship (Sudirman and Patwayati, 2021). Hence, it is clear that the bad experience of the customers regarding their expectations from the brands about ethical consideration can very much affect the customer engagement of the companies. Consequently, the companies can face problems related to reduction in sales.

### **2.8.2 Negative impact on brand reputation**

Truth and transparency are the two most important aspects to be followed by the companies for marketing ethically (Hyken, 2019). The frequency of misleading advertisements has increased in the recent past for attracting more customers (Nuseir, 2018). Misleading advertisements that provide false positive information about the brand actually causes increasing negative experience of the customers. This bad experience of the customers affects the brand reputation and decreasing brand reputation can affect customer loyalty (Nuseir, 2018). Reputation of a brand helps in understanding the capability of a firm to provide good service (Loureiro *et. al.*, 2017). Hence negative impact on the reputation of a brand because of unethical advertising campaigns can affect the profitability of a company.

### **2.8.3 Negative impact on sales**

According to Grönroos (2009), not fulfilling the promises made during the marketing activities of the customers can affect the reputation of a company and it can also impact the sales of that company negatively. Therefore, the companies with good reputation can successfully retain customers in the long run and the sales of these firms also remains almost similar (Jain and Singh, 2002). Big organisations monitor their reputation actively in order to maintain their sales and try to retain a positive reputation (Weiss *et. al.*, 2015). It can therefore be said that unethical advertising campaigns can also affect the sales of the companies (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** Effects of not complying with the ethical consideration during advertising campaigns

(Source: Author's own delineation)

## 2.9 Mitigation strategy for the issues faced by the marketers

Customer brand relationships can be improved by enhancing customer engagement. Providing better quality services to the customers by following ethical principles are important for improving the relationship of the brands with their customers (Suárez *et. al.*, 2017). Providing correct information to the customers can be helpful for improving customer satisfaction and it is helpful for the marketers to mitigate the issues related to customer brand relationship (Suchánek and Králová, 2018). Understanding the needs of the customers and

fulfilling the needs accordingly is important for improving relationships with them (Camilleri, 2017). It can therefore be said that the companies need to understand the expectations of the customers regarding the ethical consideration.

Increasing brand awareness by better advertising campaigns along with providing better quality services can improve the reputation of a brand (Chierici *et. al.*, 2018). Providing better services to the customers is a crucial part of increasing brand reputation. It can be understood that providing true facts about a company is also a part of providing good services to the customers (Chierici *et. al.*, 2018). Therefore, it can be said that providing true facts about the company and following the ethical aspects of advertising can be helpful for solving problems related to the reputation of the brands. Another aspect of increasing brand reputation is to fulfil the promises made during the advertising campaigns so that the customers can be satisfied with the services of the brands (Litvin *et. al.*, 2018).



**Figure 3:** Mitigation strategies of the problems

(Source: Author's own delineation)

## **2.10 Literature gap**

There is a lot of information in the previous researches regarding ethical issues of advertising to children. Advertisers are faced with a slew of challenging moral dilemmas, and knowing how to make these choices isn't always simple. Third parties (e.g., public interest organizations, competitors, media experts etc.) are quick to criticize whatever decisions marketers make (ANEJA, 2014). In the present scenario, advertising ethics is much valued by society in India and the rising consumerism, environmentalism and a monopolistic competitive market make it a guiding philosophy for successful companies across industry segments (Chatterjee, 2007). Since the marketers are always criticized for the decisions they make, it is important to understand their perspective to find a solution for this. However, there is a lack of proper market-based evidence and detailed information about the perspective of the marketers regarding ethical consideration while targeting children in India. This research will focus on closing the gap in knowledge by fulfilling the aims and objectives of the study.

## **2.11 Summary**

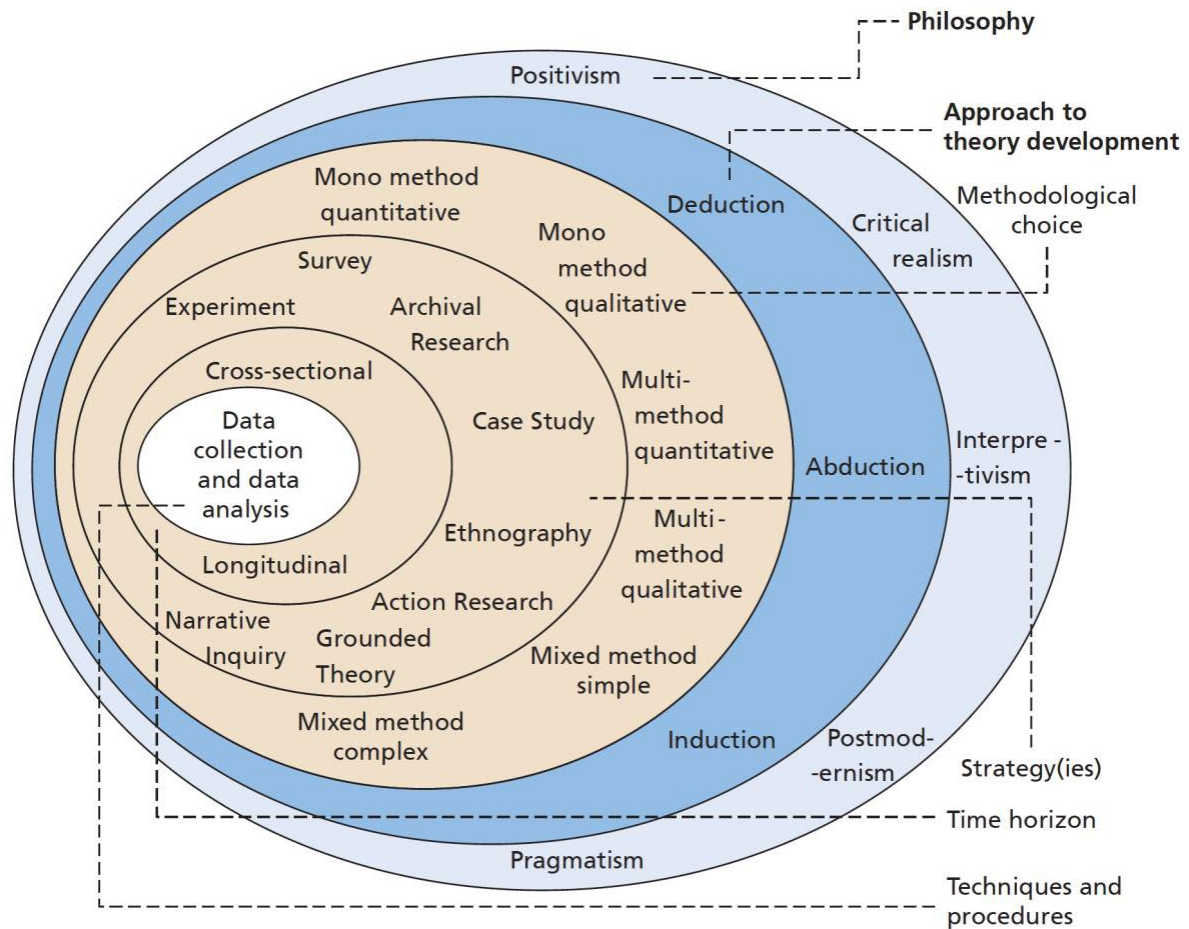
Ethical standards for promoting children's products can aid in achieving positive health states and prevent prejudice against children's brains. Ignoring advertising ethics can be regarded dishonest, and as a result, it can be detrimental to a company's long-term interests. As parents are often conservative when it comes to their children, the brand's reputation may be harmed. Thus, advertisement should be done in a way that can attract audience by making them aware about the product segment or sharing all the right descriptions and not in a

manipulative and unethical manner. The ethics of advertising is divided into numerous stages, including the development of moral values, ethics, decision-making, behaviour, and advertising policy, all of which can contribute to the creation of a favourable environment for advertising ethics. Establishing parental views of ethics can give useful information that can assist advertising function in a consistent manner when it comes to ethical violations.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

Research methodology carries utmost significance in respect of engaging with the elements encompassed in the subject area and it also helps to achieve dynamicity in the research outcomes. A researcher can obtain results that are attributed to acknowledge a new phenomenon by interacting with research methodology (Scholtz *et. al.*, 2020). Furthermore, this study, which was based on the ethical considerations of advertising to children in India, has a potential to contribute to the current literature by narrowing the knowledge gap. As a result of incorporating methodology, a new phenomenon has emerged while considering the subject area in a generalized manner. In this case, for indulging with a systematic methodological approach, Saunders research onion has been followed which helped in acquiring an in-depth methodology for the research study.



**Figure 4:** Saunders research onion and its dimension

(Source: Saunders *et. al.*, 2019)

As stated by Saunders *et. al.* (2019), the research onion is helpful for establishing the elements and concepts of research study while also pursuing theoretical development of the study. As a result of using the research onion in this study, researchers are able to gather ideologies in a stipulated time frame while still meeting the goals and objectives.

Reiterating the research questions, aims and objectives

### Main Research Question

What are the present advertising ethics implemented by the marketers to address the rising ethical expectations and concerns of the parents from the brands while targeting their children?

The aim of the research is to evaluate the impact of the current advertising ethics to children on brands and parents' expectations.

### **Sub Research Questions**

How much awareness do marketers have regarding the advertising ethics they must adhere to when targeting children?

**Objective:** To evaluate the awareness levels of marketers about advertising ethics.

How do marketers take advertising ethics into account when developing advertisements for children?

**Objective:** To assess the advertising ethics followed by the companies.

How can the ignorance of advertising ethics while advertising to children exert a negative impact on the company?

**Objective:** To analyse the negative impact of not implementing advertising ethics to children.

### 3.2 Research philosophy

Research philosophy is attributable to exposing the research components and its efficacies in a generalised manner. A researcher can develop the thinking ability for acquiring reliable knowledge with the help of research philosophy (Žukauskas *et. al.*, 2018). There are several kinds of research philosophy which helps accommodate precise and authentic data sets in the study, such examples are positivism, interpretivism, pragmatism and more. However, in order to interact with the data sets of this study, ***interpretivism research philosophy*** has been taken into consideration. As per the research of Chowdhury (2014), interpretivism research philosophy is responsible for indulging with the social contexts in a study and it also accounts for observing the social complexities in a research study. In this case, this researcher has managed to indulge with social contexts in the form of gathering information for ethical consideration of advertisement to the Indian children. Thus, considering the context, interpretivism research philosophy has provided required outcomes for procuring a new phenomenon and to get aligned with the aim and objective of the study.

### 3.3 Research approach

Research approach and its consideration in a study helps in obtaining information from the dissection of the datasets in an in-depth manner, besides, it is responsible for shedding light upon the assumptions of a research study (Osuagwu, 2020). Furthermore, the research approach is divided into three types, each of which addresses the resonance of data development: inductive, abductive, and deductive research (Kennedy, 2018). In this context, for considering the subject area and its associated background of the datasets, an ***Inductive***

**research approach** has been taken. The inductive research approach is responsible for converting data to theory and to make observations on the research study and its associated concepts (Woiceshyn and Daellenbach, 2018). Thus, considering the benefits of an inductive approach, the research is going to accommodate data sets and develop theoretical backgrounds for procuring new phenomena. Inductive research approach is important for addressing ethics in advertisements and generating theories based on the data sets acquired, while keeping the study's goals and objectives in mind.

### **3.4 Research methodology**

According to Regnault *et. al.* (2018), choice of research methodology is crucial because it recognizes dimensions of research from a broad perspective, as well as determining the intensity of research methods that is both standard and informative. There are three types of research choices that can be made to acquire standards in study, that are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Further, considering the context of the study and the strategy for the research **qualitative research methodology** has been undertaken, which is primary in nature. Qualitative research methodology is accountable for delving into complex concepts in the topic and comprehending data sets in a coherent manner (Ojebode *et. al.*, 2018). In this case, the research study has acknowledged the complex environment and the challenges in the ethical advertisement concept through the qualitative research method.

### **3.5 Research strategy**

Research strategy can be of many types such as survey, interview, case study, thematic analysis and other strategies associated with conducting a precise research study. For this study, research strategy has been chosen in the form of conducting *interviews* based on the subject area. Interview research strategy helps to gain knowledge from expressions of the participants and is capable of handling complex datasets with ease (Brayda and Boyce, 2014). Being a primary data set, which is qualitative in nature, it helped in indulging with research aims encompassing the knowledge of ethical advertising and considering the perspective of the marketers in this context. These interviews are semi structured in nature so that the researcher is able to probe the participant for more details. As per Abutabenjeh and Jaradat (2018), research design is used to create a relationship or link between the variables of a study that consists of dependent and independent variables. The application of research design is also divergent in respect of narrative research design, grounded theory, case study and others. For this particular research study entailing the ethical consideration of advertisement to the children, *narrative research design* has been chosen. Narrative research design is responsible for narrating the experience and to instigate the inquiry based on datasets gathered (Wolgemuth and Agosto, 2019). As the nature of the research question is subjective, the interviews were performed in a semi-structured manner that invited participants to narrate their experiences and opinions.

### **3.6 Sampling technique**

The research study has gathered the required information by conducting interviews of 10 brand marketers who have the knowledge of Indian advertisement landscape. The sample size is restricted to 10 brand marketers owing to the study's time restrictions and the fact that

the target population in India is less than other broader demographics. In this case, the participants for the interview will be recruited on LinkedIn, and an invitation will be sent to the participants via the messaging system of the platform. A checklist has been made prior to searching the participants for the interview that encompassed inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria were the participants having knowledge of advertisements, and it has ensured that the participants are experienced and established as a brand marketer in India. Potential participants were given an information form as well as a consent form for sharing their information for this study prior to the inclusion of participants for the interview. The interview process began once the participants acknowledged the aims and objectives of the study and signed the consent form. According to Saunders *et. al.* (2019), there are several methods for selecting a sample population, the two most common being probability and non-probability sampling. **Non- probability sampling** will be used for this study since it is most commonly connected with studies where random probability sampling is impractical owing to time or expense constraints. Furthermore, within this type of technique, **purposive sampling** has been chosen. Purposive sampling is used to identify participants who are most likely to provide relevant and valuable data (Kelly, 2010) and it is a method of discovering and selecting cases that will make the most use of limited research resources (Palinkas *et. al.*, 2015). Since marketers are the ones that do market research, set targeting parameters, and execute advertising campaigns, they are the most relevant participants for this study.

### **3.7 Time horizon**

According to Saunders *et. al.* (2019), a research could be conducted in two different methods: longitudinal or cross-sectional. The term "longitudinal" refers to a study that lasts a long time.

They are sometimes referred to as 'series of snapshots' since they evaluate the same sample units over time. Cross-sectional analysis refers to examining a phenomena at a certain moment in time. When a researcher is working on a limited timeframe, cross-sectional research is generally opted. The term "snapshot" of the population may be used to describe data that is gathered from individuals at one particular point in time (Burns *et. al.*, 2016). Due to accessibility and time restrictions, a ***cross-sectional design*** with an interview approach was adopted in this study.

### **3.8 Data collection process**

The researcher contacted all participants via LinkedIn to describe the research project. Participants were given a brief overview of the study's goals and objectives, as well as the conditions for participation. Email addresses and phone numbers were exchanged prior to the interview. The researcher booked an appointment with the participants once they confirmed their willingness to take part in the study, and after collecting their consent on a document, everyone was questioned separately. The researcher restated the study's aim by reciting the interview process and confirmed the participant's consent to participate before starting the interview. To get the most helpful information, the interviewer remained neutral and non-judgmental, conducted the interviews in a relaxed and friendly manner, encouraged the Participants to continue the conversation to avoid awkward pauses, and kept focused on the issue from beginning to conclusion. Following the interviews, the researcher evaluated the audio recordings and transcriptions to confirm that all information was properly documented. Before starting the analysis, inaccuracies in the transcript were fixed.

### 3.9 Data analysis

**Thematic analysis** is a method for identifying specific patterns or themes in qualitative data (Braun *et. al.*, 2006). Prior to doing the thematic analysis, it was necessary to answer a few questions and make certain decisions. Making a decision about what constituted as a theme in this study was critical for the researcher. The researcher wanted to figure out what the most common and important bits of information in the interviews would be. The researcher concentrated on categorizing the data in terms of its relevance to the broader research topic.

### 3.10 Ethics

Adhering to the principles of ethical consideration and its accommodation in a research study helps in restraining any kind of misconducts in a study. Also, it is responsible for being conservative with the research outcomes and its data sets (Sng *et. al.*, 2016). Thus, considering the context of the study and the research strategy, which is interviews, ethical consideration has been made for providing anonymity to the interview participants. In this case, the datasets gathered from the participants have been collected by following the GDPR and college guidelines. The information obtained during the interview process is kept strictly confidential. All recordings and transcripts will be password protected and they will be erased once the study is done. The participants have not been compelled to provide any information, and they will be informed that their participation in this study is completely voluntary, and that they can opt out/discontinue at any time throughout the interview process without any consequence.

### **3.11 Summary**

The researcher has made efforts to effectively stress each and every component of the study. This research employs an interpretivism philosophy and an inductive approach. A cross-sectional survey with a qualitative research design was adopted as the research strategy. The data was gathered from both primary (interviews with 10 brand marketers chosen using a purposive sample technique) and secondary (parental attitudes towards advertising) sources. The rationale for selecting this methodology were given, along with the advantages and disadvantages of the alternatives. The research method helped the researcher complete the qualitative study and provide the best possible answers to the chosen research objectives and research questions.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

### 4.1 Introduction

Following the collection of data relevant to the research topic, data analysis will be performed, and results of the research will be recorded. Thematic analysis, as mentioned in the preceding chapter, will be used to do this. Thematic analysis is the most popular type of qualitative data analysis, and it is used to analyse a collection of texts such as interview transcripts. According to Braun & Clark (2006), data is collected, processed, and interpreted using thematic analysis by looking for various patterns and interpretations in qualitative data. It is used by the researchers to analyse the data obtained in order to find common themes - ideas, subjects, and patterns that emerge. The findings from the brand marketers' replies, as stated in methodology, will be given in this chapter and utilized to examine their point of view.

**1. Familiarize yourself with the data** - The data was gathered through interactive techniques; therefore, the author had some prior knowledge of the data as well as some early analytical views and interests. As the researcher was conducting qualitative research, it was critical to keep reading and re-reading the transcripts. Taking the time to transcribe the interviews was critical since it laid the framework for the subsequent analyses (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

**2. Generating initial codes** - In the second step, it was critical to build preliminary codes based on the data's growing trends and concepts. As the early codes were data driven, an

inductive technique was utilized to generate them. It entailed grouping the data into relevant categories to aid in the development of themes for the following stage. Also, as the research was based on views, the transcribing and coding procedure had to be done manually, and behavior and attitudes had to be thoroughly watched (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

## 4.2 Coding

Table 1 consists of Participant names, interview dates, and Participant IDs. Participants will be identified by their Participant IDs in this chapter.

**Table 1:** Participant Name and ID

<b>Participant ID #</b>	<b>Participant Name</b>	<b>Interview Date (dd/mm/yyyy)</b>
1	Participant 1	03/08/2021
2	Participant 2	03/08/2021
3	Participant 3	04/08/2021
4	Participant 4	04/08/2021
5	Participant 5	04/08/2021
6	Participant 6	06/08/2021
7	Participant 7	06/08/2021
8	Participant 8	07/08/2021
9	Participant 9	08/08/2021
10	Participant 10	08/08/2021

**ID#:** Participant ID

**Q#:** Question Number

**Response:** Participant's answers in condensed form

Table 2 consists of condensed answers for Participant - 1.

**Table 2:** Coding for Participant 1

ID#	Q#	Answers	Codes
1	1	Ethical code has been in our industry for a long time but only some companies are very carefully following it. Theoretically, I'm not sure what goes into it but I do understand the basics.	Basic Awareness
1	2	Ethics in advertising are a kind of rules or principles which needs to be followed so that we can be transparently communicate to our audience. Any ad that doesn't make false claims is considered to be ethical.	Rules/Principles  Transparency  No false claims
1	3	Most of the advertisers are very particular about the script being attractive to children. Many brands in India targeting children have mascots to grasp the kid's attention or they use the cartoon characters of a famous show to influence them. We know that children follow whatever the cartoon characters asks them. don't think the brands are following ethics but things are slowly changing now.	Attractive script  Usage of mascots/cartoons  No ethics followed

1	4	We look at our old advertisements and see how we can improve. We focus more on storytelling and we would always try to be relevant. Emotions play a major role. So, our story always involves a kid consuming our product and being happy.	Past learnings will be used  Good script  Incorporating happy emotions
1	5	Our aggressive marketing have always worked with the children cohort. As a brand marketer, I am happy that I have achieved or over achieved my targets. As an individual, it comes to my mind that we are making use of their innocence.	Dual thoughts  Feeling dilemma
1	6	Brand marketers like us usually face the heat from the top management. Issues depend on the mistakes we make. It could result in immediate sales drop or even boycotting of products.	Expectation is unclear  Criticism  Boycotting
1	7	We always make sure not to hurt the sentiment of parents but we've never considered their expectations before developing an ad. I'm sure if parents are not satisfied, it will definitely impact the sales negatively.	Never considered parents

			Negative impact on sales
1	8	Good brands know how to improve their sales on a short term. If we think about long-term success of a company, I think an ethical brand will have a big advantage.	Belief in ethics  Long-term success

Table 3 consists of condensed answers with codes for Participant - 2.

**Table 3:** Coding for Participant 2

ID#	Q#	Answers	Codes
2	1	Every brand must be ethical these days to stay competitive in the business world. I don't exactly know what to do/what not to do as these instructions come from the senior management.	No awareness
2	2	Advertising ethics is a set of values which should be followed by the advertisers. Companies must not try to exaggerate or brag about their products or make fake claims.	Set of values  No fake claims
2	3	In India, we have ASCI which is a body formed to make sure that the advertisements are conformed to the Code for Self- Regulation. I believe that brands do take ethics into account to avoid facing any issues.	Strict advertising body  Ethics followed

2	4	<p>When we brief the creative agency, we have a lot of discussions to make sure the script is tailored exactly to the children's liking. Commercial for kids usually needs approval from the senior management. We just try to keep the communication simple so that children can understand what we're trying to say.</p>	<p>Good ad script</p> <p>Top Management approval</p> <p>Simple communication</p>
2	5	<p>The ethical dilemma we've had is about targeting them and not about our commercial. We always try to avoid targeting children using third party data as we don't know if they've sourced it legally or not.</p>	<p>Feeling dilemma</p> <p>Questionable data sources</p>
2	6	<p>As a company, they might face legal issues which involves a large fine or other penalties. If they keep repeating it, it might become a criminal charge. The credibility of the company and the marketers goes for a toss. Marketers might be criticised for initiating that campaign and there are chances that the consumer might boycott the product for being unethical.</p>	<p>Legal Issues</p> <p>Brand Credibility affected</p> <p>Marketers are criticized</p> <p>Boycotting</p>
2	7	<p>If parents are not happy, children are not going to be exposed to our advertisements which in turn reduces our sales and also the brand reputation takes a hit.</p>	<p>Impact on sales and brand reputation</p>

2	8	It will provide a positive working environment and improves the happiness and satisfaction level of employees. Everything will be transparent and employees will be treated well. Happy employees will work better which in turn benefits the company on long-term basis.	Positive work environment  High satisfaction levels  Belief in ethics
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Table 4 consists of condensed answers with codes for Participant - 3.

**Table 4:** Coding for Participant 3

ID#	Q#	Answers	Codes
3	1	If a brand cannot back up their claims they're making in an advertisement, it is unethical. Also, beliefs vary from person to person.	Backing up claim  Beliefs may vary
3	2	When an ad is created, a company must stay neutral and never be biased towards a certain gender, race, caste etc..	No bias
3	3	No, the brand that I work for never considers advertising ethics. We don't have a proper team to look after these issues. Since our creative is simple and mostly revolves around the product, we have not faced any issues so far.	No ethics followed  Followed by top brands
3	4	We conduct our market research and based on that, we'll inform the ad agency to shoot the commercial. The creative	Market research

		script will be written in such a way so that the ad is memorable. Our ads for children will be colourful and pleasing the eyes.	Platform knowledge  Attractive ad
3	5	Me, as a brand marketer, have not had any ethical dilemma while creating an ad. Usually, the creative goes for approval to our MD for approval.	No ethical dilemmas
3	6	Some brands sell unhealthy food items like oil fried fast food which might have ethical issue for their ads. When they aggressively sell their products to children, the brand's credibility is gone. Since our ads are straight-forward, we have not seen such issues.	Impact on brand credibility
3	7	We have not considered what parents expect from our ads. We create ads only to attract the kids. I'm sure if parents are not satisfied, it will affect our sales. We are not illegally trying to sell anything but if parents think we are unethical, we will have look for ways to sort that issue.	Never considered parents  Impact on sales
3	8	The major challenge for any business is sustaining for a long time. An ethical business can go beyond sales and look into the other dimensions to be sustainable.	Sustainability  Belief in ethics

Table 5 consists of condensed answers with codes for Participant - 4.

**Table 5:** Coding for Participant 4

ID#	Q#	Answers	Codes
4	1	I know the ethics that a company must follow as a whole but I don't know about advertising ethics. I always focus on creating a good ad that connects well with our audience.	No awareness
4	2	Sorry, I don't know any guiding principles about advertising ethics. According to me, if we don't hide any information or cheat using fake statements, we are being ethical.	No knowledge about principles  No fake statements
4	3	I don't think they consider ethics while targeting this sensitive age group.	No ethics followed
4	4	We just try to work on an attractive ad with a good storyline. We have seen that humour and cartoon characters works well for us. Our ad agency know the process to be followed. Choosing an ethical ad agency is really important according to me.	Attractive ad  Good storyline  Selecting ethical ad agency
4	5	Our ad doesn't have any false claims. It is just funny. So, we have not had any ethical dilemmas targeting kids.	No ethical dilemmas
4	6	We don't think so much about these issues. If we don't lie about what we sell, we won't face any major problems.	Losing loyal audience

		Bigger brands might lose their loyal audience.	
4	7	Satisfaction level of parents affect the customer-brand relationship and reputation of brands.	Impact on customer brand relationship and reputation
4	8	I believe in ethics. Brands that I know have ethical guidelines but they don't really execute it. Ethics comes at a cost but brands don't like their budget to be spent here.	Belief in ethics  Brands don't allocate budgets

Table 6 consists of condensed answers with codes for Participant – 5.

**Table 6:** Coding for Participant 5

ID#	Q#	Answers	Codes
5	1	Ethics means always putting people first. Employees should be treated well within an organisation.	Focus on people
5	2	We have laws set by a common advertising body. Advertising ethics is actually a standard that is set within an organisation beyond what the law requires us to do.	Setting standards beyond law
5	3	We always try to be ethical. For children, we just target parents in our advertising process. We all know kids use their parents phone which helps us reach out to them directly but measurement is always a challenge.	Following advertising ethics  Measurement is a challenge

5	4	We select a good script and go for the shoot with our brand ambassador. Our audio jingle is very catchy. We are sticking to the same jingle but the visuals are getting better year due to advancements in technologies.	Choosing good ad script  Catchy audio  Better visuals
5	5	No, I believe that our brand has been doing all the right things to be ethical in every way possible. We don't look at the sales angle all the time. During COVID, we focused more on showing empathy in our communication than having a call-to-action.	No ethical dilemma
5	6	Anything wrongly initiated by us directly goes to twitter and LinkedIn. Sometimes, we start a campaign with good intention but it ends up in causing damage to our reputation. We need to be careful whenever we communicate to the audience.	Complaints on social media  Damage to reputation  Boycotting
5	7	I can't recall any specific research done with parents. They know what's good for their child and if they have concerns about the product or advertisement, they'll definitely stop their kid from purchasing the product.	Parents not considered  Impact on sales
5	8	I believe that the HRs has designed our policies well. Our organisation is well structured and the rules are strict. Our	Belief in ethics

		company has been successful for a long time and I think this is one among the reason apart from the sales numbers.	Long term success
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Table 7 consists of condensed answers with codes for Participant - 6.

**Table 7:** Coding for Participant 6

ID#	Q#	Answers	Codes
6	1	Advertising ethics means communicating responsibly. Any inaccurate information conveyed by the brand to the customers is considered unethical.	Responsible communication
6	2	An ethical advertisement is honest, accurate and authentic. Advertiser's goal should be to serve their customers by telling the truth and having high ethical standards.	Honesty High ethical standards
6	3	Marketers in India are serious about advertising ethics in the past decade. We certainly focus more on advertising ethics and you could see it in our ads in the past decade. We have transformed into a brand that's socially responsible. We don't advertise to vulnerable age groups anymore as it goes against our policies.	Ethics followed Responsible brand Strict policies
6	4	Our marketing communication is not towards anyone below 12 years of age. The creatives won't be designed to attract them. We don't even advertise or sponsor content that's intended for children. Nutritional values or allergens will	Targeting above 12 years

		mentioned on the creative. We won't use influencers or celebrities.	No sponsorship on child content
6	5	We don't have any ethical dilemmas. One among our new strategy is to target only parents. This helps parents to make informed decisions about the food and drinks they buy for their children. Our three pillar promise is that we'll develop the product responsibly, we'll communicate responsibly and we'll sell responsibly. Based on this, parents can know if it is suitable for kids.	No ethical dilemmas  Targeting parents  Responsible brand
6	6	It can lead to legal issues. A company shouldn't indulge in such illegal activities. It could lose reputation or the brand could even be destroyed. A company can be ethical and also increase sales.	Legal issues  Impact on reputation
6	7	We understand what parents expect from us. In the past 4-5 years, our needle has moved from just increasing sales to being a responsible brand.	Parents considered
6	8	I definitely believe that a brand that has a long term goal should be as ethical as possible. Ethics will determine a company's reputation. It takes a lot of time to develop ethics within an organisation but doing so will do more than just improving business, it will change lives.	Belief in ethics  Determines a company's reputation

Table 8 consists of condensed answers with codes for Participant - 7.

**Table 8:** Coding for Participant 7

ID#	Q#	Answers	Codes
7	1	Any established company would have ethical policies in place. It's basically following the rules set by the Indian advertising board.	Rules of advertising board
7	2	There are some rules set the Indian advertising board on how to advertise. These rules are called advertising ethics. A company should disclose all information on the ad without having any hidden details.	No hidden motive
7	3	Established companies are following ethics when they advertise. They actually advertise to people who take care of the children, be it parents or caretakers.	Followed by top brands
7	4	Based on the objective of the campaign, we decide the theme of the campaign. Then we'll start discussing the script of the TVC. Once it gets approved by our MD, we discuss the budget to shoot and deliver the final commercial. For children, we just try to have an attractive visual with a catchy tone.	Campaign theme discussion  Senior management approval  Attractive visual

7	5	I haven't thought about ethics being an issue for the ads I'm working on. The scripts are approved by the higher management. Though I've been given the task to manage the brand, I honestly don't have control over these things.	Senior management approval
7	6	If a consumer takes a legal action, the marketer could be investigated by the advertising standards council. Unethical practices may provide quick increase in sales, but they lose consumers and employees in the long run. It is difficult for a company to regain its reputation after unethical acts are made public.	Legal action  Loss of consumers and employees
7	7	We, as parents, know what is good and bad for a child but they don't listen to us. Due to this, I have hated few brands and I always found another substitute for their needs. I'm sure it has affected my relationship with those brands. As a marketer, I have actually not considered parents opinion before developing ads. We don't have budgets to do such ad testing.	Impact on customer brand relationship  Parents not considered
7	8	Yes, organizations with a strong ethical image will have an easy time getting funded by attracting investors, and expanding into foreign markets. These are short term benefits. On a long term, they could attract good talent because of this, which is beneficial for the company.	Belief in ethics  Attracts investors

Table 9 consists of condensed answers with codes for Participant - 8.

**Table 9:** Coding for Participant 8

ID#	Q#	Answers	Codes
8	1	Advertising ethics is just a part of the overall ethics followed in an organisation. Leadership team must be ethical so that the employees will be encouraged to be ethical in all their actions. They must have it instilled in their company's culture and values.	Culture and values
8	2	To be an ethical advertiser, they must encourage equality in their ads, be honest in their communication, and be empathetic.	Equality  Honesty  Empathetic
8	3	In India, I don't think marketers take children seriously. They treat them like just another normal demographic but children can be attracted easily through ads. If you look at the mission statements and value statements, most of the companies will look like they have ethical policies in place. Some of them actually don't follow any of these.	No ethics followed
8	4	We'll try to understand what's trending among kids, what's the most watched show. We'll tie up with that show and make limited edition products by changing the packaging of our products. It will be reflected in our ads and this attracts them more than showing just normal ads.	Brand tie-ups  Attractive packaging

8	5	I sometimes have mixed thoughts about how I have to be loyal to my brand and follow instructions knowing that it might be unethical and end up being untruthful to the targeted consumers.	Truth or loyalty
8	6	The company's reputation will be spoilt in such a case.  Marketers will be criticised for this campaign and they will find it really difficult to get a new job as everyone in the industry will get to know about this. One cannot be 100% sure if his campaign is ethical. It is subjective.	Impact on reputation  Criticism  Beliefs may vary
8	7	We have not checked with parents before developing advertisements. We do that for product development but advertisements are decided by the management. I'm sure it will affect the customer brand relationship if parents think that we are unethical.	Parents not considered  Senior management approval
8	8	Brand loyalty is important for long term success of an organisation. People don't trust businesses these days.  They trust only their family and friends. If you want them to trust you, there's only one long term solution to this problem – being ethical.	Improves brand loyalty  Belief in ethics

Table 10 consists of condensed answers with codes for Participant - 9.

**Table 10:** Coding for Participant 9

ID#	Q#	Answers	Codes
9	1	If the advertisements are transparent without any hidden motives and products are properly described, it is called an ethical advertisement. Meaning can differ from person to person but everyone understands the basics of it.	Transparency Beliefs vary
9	2	Following ethics in advertising means a company shouldn't exaggerate about its goods, lie about their offering, target/exploit vulnerable groups, ads shouldn't be biased or stereotyped, apply pressure to buy their products immediately.	No exaggeration No lying No stereotyping No pressure tactics
9	3	Kids don't know to differentiate between shows and commercials. Marketers make use of this and bring in characters from the show to attract them. As kids grow up seeing these cartoons, our brands will registered in their minds. According to me, advertising ethics are not being considered by any of the marketers. I'm not even sure if half of the marketers know about how to ethically advertise.	No cognitive development No ethics considered
9	4	Briefing the agency, getting scripts, seeing which one suits our objective well, deciding budget, going for the shoot	Script discussion

		and then testing the ad with a small sample of people before going live. We also run a controlled testing to record the responses before and after the campaign. This helps us analyse the effectiveness of the campaign.	Ad testing
9	5	We trust our product and we just show the features of the product in the ad that is easy for a kid to understand. So I haven't had these kind of dilemmas in my mind.	No ethical dilemma
9	6	Consumers are not like before. They take things seriously even if a small thing goes wrong in an advertisement. Some Indian brands tried to break the barriers of caste and religion but they failed miserably. They hurt the Hindu sentiment unintentionally. Boycott hashtags were trending for almost a month and no brand wants that.	Hurting sentiment  Boycotting
9	7	We actually do consider. Parents don't want their child to get exposed to advertisements. It only increases the monthly expense and most of the foods advertised are not even nutritious. I'm sure if parents are not satisfied, a brand will have a negative image in front of consumers which automatically affects sales.	Considers parents  Impact on sales
9	8	It is already proven that ethical businesses are successful. You need to focus on sales but that doesn't mean you'll have to go the wrong way. Customer loyalty is important for long term success. If you're ethical, customers will	Belief in ethics  Improves customer trust

		trust you more and stay loyal.	
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Table 11 consists of condensed answers with codes for Participant - 10.

**Table 11:** Coding for Participant 10

ID#	Q#	Answers	Codes
10	1	Businesses must show that they have certain values in the ads as it makes buyers feel like the brand cares for their requirements.	Values
10	2	Ethical ads give buyers the knowledge they would require to make an educated decision about which products to purchase and how they will enhance their lives whether they definitely need the product or just want them.	Provides knowledge Disclose all information
10	3	It totally goes down the product they're selling. It's almost surely moral to promote regular tooth brushing, frugal thinking, or good food. It might be immoral to promote age-inappropriate items, junk food, addicting games. Unless, you're promoting these products, you need not worry not being ethical.	Building an ethical product Aggressive advertising is unethical
10	4	We target parents so that they can make an informed decision for their child. Our ad consists of the nutritious content, sugar levels and calories of our products. It is	Ethics followed Parents are

		quite straight forward for us. Inform parents about our offering and buying it or not is under their discretion.	targeted
10	5	We are always being very safe with our approach. Our commercial is as thoroughly checked by a team of experts sitting in our office before going live. As we reach out to parents, we don't have any ethical dilemmas while targeting them.	Safe approach  Thorough evaluation  No ethical dilemma
10	6	Clearly our brand image will be affected in the eyes of the customers. If it proved that the company has breached the laws of the local consumer protection laws, the government might impose fines.	Impact on brand image  Government fines
10	7	We consider parental expectations before developing our product. We are a responsible company and we wouldn't indulge in any unethical practices. Parents are not vulnerable and hence we did not ask them before developing advertisements. Our ads are purely informative without any hidden motive.	Parents are not considered  Informative ads
10	8	Ethics benefits in shaping the organisational culture and behaviour of workers that influence the organisational performance in the market. A company that focuses on ethics will win in a long run.	Shapes organizational culture  Belief in ethics

**3. Searching for themes** - The next step was to group the different codes into suitable themes and then compile all the applicable coded data extracts into those themes. The researcher analyzed the relationships between codes and formed relevant themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

**4. Reviewing themes** - The following phase is critical in ensuring that there is sufficient evidence from the interviews to support the development of a theme. It's crucial not to choose a topic that lacks sufficient evidence to support the conversation. The researcher ensured that each topic was distinct from the others when creating it.

**5. Defining and naming themes** - Themes were established and enhanced further in the sixth step. It was critical to determine the core of each theme and decide which component of the data each theme represented. It was critical to keep the themes' names short, crisp, and easy to grasp for the reader.

**6. Producing the report** - Finally, the report's final analysis had to be written. The researcher used vivid examples by citing passages of text from the interviews to demonstrate the themes in the data. The researcher moved beyond describing the data to arguing what the data means regarding the study.

### **4.3 Main themes**



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No false claims</li> <li>• Set of values</li> <li>• Responsible communication</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No ethics followed</li> <li>• Abiding strict advertising body</li> <li>• Followed by established companies</li> <li>• Building an ethical product</li> </ul>	Theme 2 - Current scenario of ethical consideration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campaign theme discussion</li> <li>• Good script</li> <li>• Selecting an ethical ad agency</li> <li>• Attractive visuals</li> <li>• Catchy audio</li> <li>• Simple communication</li> </ul>	Theme 3 - Framework for developing advertisements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dual mind</li> <li>• Having dilemmas</li> <li>• Truth or loyalty</li> </ul>	Theme 4 - Ethical dilemmas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Criticism</li> <li>• Boycotting</li> <li>• Government fines</li> </ul>	Theme 5 - Negative consequences of unethical practices

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal issues</li> <li>• Losing loyal audience</li> <li>• Complaints on social media</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents not considered</li> <li>• Impact on sales</li> <li>• Affects brand credibility</li> <li>• Impact on customer brand relationship</li> </ul>	Theme 6 - Impact on brands by unhappy parents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improves customer trust</li> <li>• Shapes organizational culture</li> <li>• Belief in ethics</li> <li>• Attracts investors</li> <li>• Long term success</li> </ul>	Theme 7 – Building strong ethical ethos

### **Theme 1 – Marketers’ Awareness**

The first theme revolves around the concept of marketers’ awareness. The first step for a marketer to follow advertising ethics in an organization is to be aware of it. Using thematic analysis, a set of repetitive words were discovered to understand the opinion of majority of the marketers.

Participant 1 said that “Ethical code has been in our industry for a long time but only some

companies are very carefully following it. Theoretically, I'm not sure what goes into it but I do understand the basics." Participant 2 said that "Every brand must be ethical these days to stay competitive in the business world. I don't exactly know what to do/what not to do as these instructions come from the senior management." Moreover, Participant 5 said "I know the ethics that a company must follow but I don't know about advertising ethics. I always focus on creating a good ad that connects well with our audience." Moreover, Participant 9 said that "If the advertisements are transparent without any hidden motives and products are properly described, it is called an ethical advertisement. Meaning can differ from person to person, but everyone understands the basics of it." Participant 10 said that "Businesses must show that they have certain values in the ads as it makes buyers feel like the brand cares for their requirements. Customers want to feel like they're contributing to something greater, that they're changing the world. By acting ethically, businesses may encourage their aspiration to connect with their customers and, as a consequence, make a difference." Participants 1, 2 and 5 work in an organization that is a start-up or an SME (Small and Medium Enterprise). Participants 9, 10 work in big successful organisations. It is evident from the responses that brand marketers from the established organisations have more clarity on advertising ethics whereas marketers working in a start-up or SME have basic awareness of the advertising ethics or its guiding principles that needs to be followed by an organisation.

### **Theme 2 – Current Scenario of ethical consideration**

The second theme is centred on the premise of ethical consideration in the current scenario. This helps in understanding if the marketers in the present are considering ethics while developing advertisements for children or any vulnerable age group.

Participant 1 states “Most of the advertisers are very particular about the script being attractive to children. Many brands in India targeting children have mascots to grasp the kid’s attention or they use the cartoon characters of a famous show to influence them. We know that children follow whatever the cartoon characters asks them. don’t think the brands are following ethics but things are slowly changing now.” Participant 7 states “Established companies are following ethics when they advertise. They actually advertise to people who take care of the children, be it parents or caretakers.” However, Participant 6 states “Marketers in India are serious about advertising ethics in the past decade. We certainly focus more on advertising ethics and you could see it in our ads in the past decade. We have transformed into a brand that’s socially responsible. We don’t advertise to vulnerable age groups anymore as it goes against our policies.” From marketers’ viewpoints, it is understood that most of them don’t consider advertising ethics while developing an advertisement. Some of the marketers are aware of the advertising body of India and its rules but others just focus on the elements on the ad that attracts children. Marketers in SMEs believe that top brands do consider ethics and based on the response of Participant 10, it is clear that they are following it.

### **Theme 3 – Framework for developing advertisements**

The third theme is based on the idea of advertisement framework. This enables us to understand if there’s a checklist or framework used by the marketers for developing an advertisement.

Participant 1 states "We look at our old advertisements and see how we can improve. We focus more on storytelling and we would always try to be relevant. Emotions play a major role. So, our story always involves a kid consuming our product and being happy." Participant 3 states "We conduct our market research and based on that, we'll inform the ad agency to shoot the commercial. The creative script will be written in such a way so that the ad is memorable. Our ads for children will be colourful and pleasing to the eyes." Meanwhile, Participant 6 states "Our marketing communication is not towards anyone below 12 years of age. The creatives won't be designed to attract them. We don't even advertise or sponsor content that's intended for children. Nutritional values or allergens will be mentioned on the creative. We won't use influencers or celebrities." The responses show that marketers mainly focus on the ad storyline, visuals and audio jingle. They trust the ad agencies to do their work once the script is confirmed. In certain cases, where established brands are involved, it is seen that they do a proper market research, set policies for responsible advertising and do ad testing before going live.

#### **Theme 4 – Ethical dilemmas**

The fourth theme revolves around the concept of advertisement framework. We'll be able to identify the ethical dilemmas faced by the marketers before developing an advertisement for children based on this information.

Participant 1 states "Our aggressive marketing has always worked with the children cohort. As a brand marketer, I am happy that I have achieved or overachieved my targets. As an individual, it comes to my mind that we are making use of their innocence." Participant 2

states “The ethical dilemma we’ve had is about targeting them and not about our commercial. We always try to avoid targeting children using third party data as we don’t know if they’ve sourced it legally or not.” However, Participant 10 states “We are always being very safe with our approach. Our commercial is as thoroughly checked by a team of experts sitting in our office before going live. As we reach out to parents, we don’t have any ethical dilemmas while targeting them.” From the responses, it is understood that some brand marketers have ethical dilemmas about developing certain type of ads and the way they source data. On the other hand, few brands have laid out a proper plan by considering advertising ethics. Hence, they don’t have any ethical dilemma while developing advertisements.

#### **Theme 5 – Negative consequences of unethical practices**

The fifth theme is based on the idea of the negative consequences of not following advertising ethics.

Participant 3 states “When they aggressively sell their products to children, the brand’s credibility is gone. Since our ads are straight-forward, we have not seen such issues.”

Participant 6 states “It can lead to legal issues. A company shouldn’t indulge in such illegal activities. It could lose reputation, or the brand could even be destroyed. A company can be ethical and also increase sales.” Participant 9 states “Consumers are not like before. They take things seriously even if a small thing goes wrong in an advertisement. Some Indian brands tried to break the barriers of caste and religion but they failed miserably. They hurt the Hindu sentiment unintentionally. Boycott hashtags were trending for almost a month and no brand

wants that. “ Participant states “Clearly our brand image will be affected in the eyes of the customers. If it proved that the company has breached the laws of the local consumer protection laws, the government might impose fines.” Most of the marketers have a unique response to the effects of following unethical practices but all are agreeing to the point that it negatively affects the brand. The varied responses include impact on brand reputation, losing loyal audience, impact on brand image, boycotting and government fines.

### **Theme 6 – Impact on brand by unhappy parents**

The sixth theme revolves around the idea of parents and their expectations of how the ads must developed and disseminated to their children and also the impact on the brand if they fail to do so.

Participant 1 states “We always make sure not to hurt the sentiment of parents but we’ve never considered their expectations before developing an ad. I’m sure if parents are not satisfied, it will definitely impact the sales negatively.” Participant 2 states “If parents are not happy, children are not going to be exposed to our advertisements which in turn reduces our sales and also the brand reputation takes a hit.” Participant 10 states “We consider parental expectations before developing our product. We are a responsible company and we wouldn’t indulge in any unethical practices. Parents are not vulnerable and hence we did not ask them before developing advertisements. Our ads are purely informative without any hidden motives.” Based on the responses, it is clear that only 10% of the brands consider parents’ expectation before developing advertisements. However, all the marketers state that unhappy parents will negatively impact the brand in terms of sales, customer-brand

relationship or brand reputation.

### **Theme 7 – Building strong ethical ethos**

The seventh theme discusses the beliefs of the brand marketers about building strong ethical ethos in an organisation.

Participant 1 states “Good brands know how to improve their sales on a short term. If we think about long-term success of a company, I think an ethical brand will have a big advantage.”

Participant 2 states “It will provide a positive working environment and improves the happiness and satisfaction level of employees. Everything will be transparent and employees will be treated well. Happy employees will work better which in turn benefits the company on long-term basis.” Participant 10 states “Ethics benefits in shaping the organisational culture and behaviour of workers that influence the organisational performance in the market. A company that focuses on ethics will win in a long run.” From the responses, some believe that it will provide a positive work environment, some think it will help in shaping the organisational structure and few of them think that customer loyalty will increase. It is clear that all brand marketers believe that having a strong ethical ethos will benefit the company in a long run.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSIONS

### 5.1 Discussions

Regarding the research topic, this chapter discusses the findings and analysis section's findings and results. By referencing to the previous research in the literature review chapter, this chapter also examines the implications of the results of this research.

In order to answer the research question, this chapter will evaluate prior research and contrast it with the findings examined in the analysis of the data collected in the previous chapter.

#### **Research Objective 1:**

*To evaluate the awareness levels of marketers about advertising ethics.*

As illustrated in the previous chapter, most of the participants have basic awareness about advertising ethics and its principles and importantly, Participants from the established brands have high levels of awareness. When the Participants were asked about advertising ethics, few of them have spoken about "truth". By reviewing the existing literature, according to Cohan (2001), advertisers have a moral responsibility to "speak the truth" about the goods or services promoted, according to advertising regulations. Another Participant stated that advertising ethics demonstrates a company's transparency. According to Plaisance (2007), transparency, or true straightforwardness, is more than a fancy term; it encompasses most of what it means living a moral life. Some of the Participants have also replied that it is a set

of values to be followed by an organisation. 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the Participants believe that ethics is a set of values and principles of a company. According to Spence and Heekeren (2005), “ethics refers to a set of norms, guidelines, standards, and virtues of character that teaches and guides interpersonal and intrapersonal behaviour”. Based on the existing literature, it is certain that the marketers in India have the basic knowledge of advertising ethics. However, according to the responses, it also shows that brand marketers in SMEs are unaware of advertising ethics since those are handled by the senior management.

**Research Objective 2:**

*To assess the advertising ethics followed by the companies.*

It is clearly understood in the previous chapter that most of the brand marketers believe that advertising ethics are not followed in the Indian advertising industry. According to their responses, it is evident that the brand marketers clearly start with their past learnings to understand their mistakes in the previous campaigns. To develop an ad for children, brand just focus on a good storyline, catchy audio jingle, attractive visuals and simple communication. They don't have any framework that considers ethics while creating advertisements since they don't find a need or budgets to set it up and review. Referring to existing literature shows that there has been many instances where mothers have considered the ads to be unethical and held negative attitudes towards advertisements (Singh and Soni, 2014). Due to this, screen time has been reduced for the children and so is the exposure of the outside world. It is also understood that marketers themselves are in an ethical dilemma if they must be true to the audience or be loyal to their organisations when they approach this age group.

**Research Objective 3:**

*To analyze the negative impact of not implementing advertising ethics to children.*

As discussed earlier, a brand must have a good reputation so that the users stay loyal to the company which in turn positively impacts the sales in a long-run. The Participants believe that unethical practices will affect the organisation in many ways. 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the Participants believe that it affects the customer-brand relationship. Upon viewing the existing literature, the findings of Sudirman and Patwayati (2021) depicts that the experience of the customers and their engagement with any brand has a reciprocal relationship. Hence, it is clear that the bad experience of the parents regarding their expectations from the brands about ethical consideration can very much affect the customer engagement of the companies. 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the marketers believe that it will negatively impact their credibility. As per the viewpoint of Loureiro *et. al.* (2017), reputation of a brand helps in evaluating the capability of a firm to provide good service. Hence, negative impact on the reputation of a brand because of unethical advertisements can negatively affect the company. Also, almost 50% of them believe that their sales will be affected if the parents are unhappy. The study of Weiss *et. al.* (2015), shows that big organisations monitor their reputation actively in order to maintain their sales and try to retain a positive reputation. It can therefore be said that unethical advertising campaigns can also affect the sales of the companies.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 Conclusions

The researcher's aim of this study was to evaluate the impact of the current advertising ethics to children on brands and parents' expectations. The researcher went through the literature and studied topics such as customer-brand relationship, brand transparency, brand reputation, values of an organisation, responsible communication, ethical dilemmas, unethical behaviours and parental expectations in general.

The data from interviews that was acquired from brand marketers was analysed in order to come up with the best potential outcomes based on the research topic and relevant finding elements. Most of the participants have basic awareness about advertising ethics and its principles and especially, participants from the established brands high levels of awareness ***(Objective 1 has been met)***. It has also been observed that the marketers of the successful organisations make sure that advertising ethics are considered especially in case of advertising to children ***(Objective 2 has been met)***. It is clear that most of the marketers do not consider parental expectations but they do believe if parents are unhappy, it negatively affects the brand in many ways such as sales, customer-brand relationship and credibility ***(Objective 3 has been met)***.

### 6.2 Recommendations

Organisations are recommended to set up a team of experts specialised in advertising ethics or must hire an external consulting agency to form their own internal standards on top of

laws of Indian government. It is suggested that they follow these guidelines for developing advertisements and also, they must conduct a compliance assessment every year to understand their mistakes so that they don't repeat it. Advertising ethics are currently highly regarded by Indian culture, and growing consumerism, environmental awareness, and a tough competitive market make it a guiding principle for successful businesses across industries (Chatterjee, 2007). Due to this, few established brands have already started working towards it. Owing to its controversial practices, Nestle has been strongly criticised by the consumers and the public organisations (Wolf, 2015). By learning from their mistakes, they have been following ethics on a serious note as most of their products are meant for children. It is not just limited to framing the ethical guidelines within the organisation as every year, they do a compliance assessment with the help of a consulting company called Ernst and Young to understand if they have followed the guidelines set by themselves and the government.

### **6.3 Future scope**

Since children's market is growing every year, companies that manufacture products customized to the requirements of children continue to sell them by attracting them through advertisements despite ethical concerns. Previous researches have already focused on parental attitudes towards advertising to children and this research focuses on the marketers' approach to understand their viewpoint. It is evident that there's no proper framework currently being followed in India for developing advertisements to children. Based on the findings of this study, future researchers could develop a mitigation strategy for avoiding such ethical issues while targeting this vulnerable age group by considering parental concerns.

#### **6.4 Research limitations**

The research had a limitation in terms of how precise the sample had to be. The researcher was completely reliant on the assistance of brand marketers. The process of recruiting ten suitable participants took a long time. It was also tough for the researcher to organize each interview at a certain time since the marketers have been under a lot of stress since they started to plan for their Festival campaigns in India. Another shortcoming mentioned by the researcher was a lack of time to conduct individual interviews. Due to time restrictions, the author believed that few interviews were hurried.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. How would you define advertising ethics that should be followed by every organisation?
2. In your opinion, what are the guiding principles of advertising ethics? Please explain.
3. What are the ethical considerations that marketers take into account creating advertisements for children?
4. What is the framework/checklist that you follow while developing advertisements for children? Please explain.
5. Please explain about some of the ethical dilemmas you've had targeting vulnerable groups like children.
6. What are the issues that marketers face while developing advertisements without ethical consideration?
7. Have you considered what parents anticipate from commercials targeting their children before making them? What would happen if parents are not satisfied with your ads?
8. What is your opinion about adopting a strong ethical ethos in a company?