

Food ads for kids feed on social prejudices

14/01/2021



Advertisements targeting Indian children reinforce social biases by featuring girls less than boys, says a study.

ISTOCKPHOTO

Advertisements can have a great influence on how children think and behave. However, they are not always immune to depicting regressive social norms. A study of food commercials on children's television channels in India finds flaws in how they represent gender. These ads feature boys a lot more than girls and portray mothers instead of fathers as the main providers of food at home. One way the commercials do go against Indian society's biases is by showing kids engaged in sports just as much as studies. The study, by Ritu Mehta and Apoorva Bharadwaj of Indian Institute of Management Calcutta, looks at 81 ads shown in February 2018 on five popular children's TV channels—Pogo, Nick, Hungama, Disney, and

Cartoon Network. These ads promoted products such as candies, biscuits, and beverages among children of ages 5-12. The study finds that the main child character in these ads is more often a boy than a girl, reflecting Indian society's traditional preference for male children. The ads also show the mother as the caregiver at home, deciding what the kids should eat. Just one ad showed the father making the same decision. This aligns with traditional ideas of how household labour should be divided between parents in the kitchen. The fact that just as many ads showed children in academics as in athletics is surprising because Indian society favours academic achievements over those in sports. Ads, in this way at least, promote healthier, all-round development of children. The authors say that ads should balance their commitment to their commercial agenda with their duties towards the society. Advertising products to children in a responsible way by showing children of both genders and showing dads contributing to housework will help their personal growth and bring about a gender-equal society.

Source: <https://epaper.livemint.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=1510d161449>