Role Of Children In Family Purchase Decisions And Impact Of Advertising

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Abstract

Children constitute an important target market and merit attention from a marketing perspective. Children constitute three different markets: the primary, the influencer, and the future market. For some products children are primary buyers, they sometimes purchase a product themselves or select the product before it is purchased by the parents. For other products, which are used by the entire family unit, they may influence purchases made by the parents or in other case children wield direct influence or pester power by overtly specifying their preferences and voicing them aloud. The amount of influence exerted by children varies by product category and stages of the decision making process. This ‘passive dictation’ of choice is prevalent for a wide variety of daily consumed product items as well as products for household consumption. Also, decision making in households is seen to change with the mere presence of children.

A supportive family system also means that grandparents, uncles and aunts play a very vital role in ensuring that children do not fall prey to advertisement and marketing gimmicks very easily. It is a war between marketers and the family, where the marketer is using money & resources to entice children and the family uses its strength & values to protect the children. We can continue to hope the family wins.

Keywords: Advertisements, Children, Consumer, Influencer, Pester power, Psychology

1. Introduction

In India it has always been a belief that a healthy society raises children to be responsible citizens rather than just consumers. Creating healthy, happy families means spending time together rather than spending money. It's probably impossible to completely shield children from marketing messages. However you feel about it, marketing is an inevitable part of the world we live in. Still, parents can give their children tools to help them cope with the barrage. The Government can also help by coming out with few regulations that will ensure that unethical targeting is stopped. Special care needs to be taken in case of the food and beverage industry, entertainment industry and advertisement in education. Indian parents are luckier than their counter parts in the world because when explained the ill effects of certain commodities children are likely to listen. This counseling requires a lot of time and patience, which most working parents lack. An over worked parents does not have the time to reinforce every day the ills of aggressive marketing to the children and tend to give in on days when they are tired. Growing Children view an estimated 10000 acts of violence each year. Each year, teenagers view nearly 15000 sexual references, innuendoes, and jokes. Data like these are alarming, but are the media actually responsible for episodes of child aggression, teen homicides, and increased rates of teenage drug use and sexual activity. Or, as the entertainment industry maintains, do the media merely mirror an increasingly violent, drug-oriented, and sexualized society.

Children watching athletes in television commercials thought that the athletes paid to be in the advertisements to promote themselves rather than the products. They believed children in advertisements were real rather than paid actors and they often confused advertisements with news items. Generally they did not understand the commercial intent and manipulation behind advertisements. Young children, in particular, have difficulty in distinguishing between advertising and reality in ads, and ads can distort their view of the world. Additionally children are unable to
evaluate advertising claims. For marketers, kids represent a lucrative demographic with enormous amount of market.

Marketer tries to draw children’s attention through various means like TV, Magazines, Stickers, etc. Obviously attracted children by the marketing practices; get adversely affected most of the time. A comprehensive approach is needed that involves voluntary actions on the part of industry, regulation policies on the part of government and advocacy strategies to bring a stronger voice and more attention to our imperative to arrest childhood obesity. Marketing activities should not directly nor indirectly incite nor condone violent behavior, other dangerous or reckless behavior or make improper use of violent effects, fear or superstition. Marketing should not encourage to acts of violence, victimizing or the like; nor should it contain representations of murder, violence, abuse or other criminal actions. To conclude, it is not only in the hands of food companies or Government or the interested groups at large to create a healthy society but a more patronage and sustaining is required from the consumers themselves to make the world a better place to lead a quality life.

2. Role of Children in buying
Marketers pay special attention to children, who are considered as the most vulnerable audiences because they enjoy advertisement to the maximum extent. Children initially take advertisement as entertainment and having soft heart; force their parents for product purchase. Parents today are willing to buy more for their kids because trends such as smaller family size, dual incomes and postponing children until later in life mean that families have more disposable income. As well, guilt can play a role in spending decisions as time stressed parents substitute material goods for time spent with their kids.

The complexity of the factors typical to the Indian marketing environment such as the prevalence of a Joint/extended family system, gifts of durables as dowry, large rural markets, etc., means that studies need to be designed more systematically to capture the effects of all variables important in the Indian family context. Children in India may not have the purchasing power comparable to their Western counterparts, but they are still the center of the universe in the Indian family system, and they can actually pull the parents to visit a place time and again. Children are an enormously powerful medium for relationship building in India. They not only influence markets in terms of the parental decision-making to buy certain kinds of products, they are also future consumers. Hence more investigation of children’s roles in family decision making is imperative.

Children represent an important demographic to marketers because they have their own purchasing power, they influence their parents' buying decisions and they're the adult consumers of the future. Today's kids have more autonomy and decision-making power within the family than in previous generations, so it follows that kids are vocal about what they want their parents to buy. "Pester power" refers to children's ability to nag their parents into purchasing items they may not otherwise buy. Marketing to children is all about creating pester power, because advertisers know what a powerful force it can be. Nagging can be divided into two categories— "persistence" and "importance." Persistence nagging is not as effective as the more sophisticated "importance nagging." This latter method appeals to parents' desire to provide the best for their children, and plays on any guilt they may have about not having enough time for their kids.

As against Pepsi some years ago, Coca-Cola has emerged as the favorite brand of fizzy drink for kids in India, while Britannia is the most favored biscuit brand. In chocolates Cadbury’s has beaten Nestle to being the kids’ favorite brand. Among chips, the kids prefer PepsiCo’s brand Lay’s Shift in target audience has happened on account of the fact that in middle and upper income families, television has come to occupy prime space. TV viewing has even replaced dinner table conversation. Nuclear families, working parents and latchkey kids in the metros mean that children get to spend very little time with either parent. Many spend their free time watching television or surfing the Internet. Driven
by guilt, parents tend to lavish gifts on their children a little too often, and they give in to the demands of children more easily than they would have otherwise. A recent review of how children are socialized into consumers characterizes three broad stages of development, corresponding to the ages 3 to 7 (perceptual stage), 7 to 11 (analytical stage), and 11 to 16 (reflective stage). Each stage captures shifts in youths’ knowledge, development, decision-making skills, and purchase influence strategies. Older children are often divided into two segments based on lifestyle stages: “twins” and teens. Twins (also called “young teens”) encompass those youths who are no longer “children,” but not yet “teenagers.” The precise age cut-offs between twins and teens vary: twin is more of a state of mind than a specific age, when youths are caught developmentally between childhood and adolescence.

3. Impact of Advertising on Children
Marketer tries to draw children’s attention through various means like TV, Magazines, Stickers, etc. Young children, in particular, have difficulty in distinguishing between advertising and reality in Ads, and Ads can distort their view of the world. Additionally children are unable to evaluate advertising claims and obviously attracted children by the marketing practices; get adversely affected most of the time. Advertisers not only feature cartoon or other characters from children's television programs to gain their endorsement for their products (known as host selling) but they sometimes even place those advertisements in the breaks of the television programs about those characters, thus blurring the distinction between programming and advertising and taking advantage of the affection children feel for those characters. Television advertising makes up about 70% of the total amount spent on advertising to children in the US but total advertising expenditure makes up only about 15% of the total amount of money spent on marketing to children.

4. Tips on talking to kids about advertising
4.1 Distinguishing advertising from reality
Until the age of six or seven, children have difficulty distinguishing advertising from reality and may not understand that Ads are there to sell something. In fact, children watching TV often find the commercials more engaging than the programs. Talking to children about advertising from an early age encourages them to become active - not passive - consumers of commercial messages.

4.2 Explain how advertising works
Talk about how the job of marketers is to play on human insecurities by creating Ads that imply their products will improve our lives and bring us happiness. Have kids make a list of the good things in their lives (the things they value) and then make a list of the things they wish they could buy. Have them compare the "real life" list with the "wish" list.

4.3 Point out the tricks of the trade
Explain that advertisers use many methods to get us to buy their products. Some common "tricks of the trade" include pulling on our heartstrings by drawing us into a story and making us feel good; using misleading words, such as “the taste of real . . .”, “studies have shown” and "for a limited time only"; making exaggerated claims about a product; and using cartoon characters or celebrities to sell products or brand names.

4.4 Explain how marketers target young people
Look for examples of how marketers try to build brand loyalty in young children. Talk about cross-marketing - show how the release of a new kids' movie is usually preceded by a huge marketing campaign involving tie-in toys, fast food, clothing and books. Explain how marketers target image-conscious pre-teens and teens with messages about being "cool" and attractive.

4.5 De-construct food advertising
Most food advertising aimed at kids is for fast food, candy and pre-sweetened cereals. Point out misleading language in food commercials, such as a description of a sugary cereal that is "part of a
nutritious breakfast” or "natural fruit roll-ups" that don't contain any fruit. Explain how food is prepared by special artists to look perfect in ads. Talk about how fast food restaurants use tie-ins with popular movies and TV shows in order to attract kids.

4.6 Talk about the value of money
One of the most important lessons we can teach our children is how to be smart about money. Our consumer culture promotes spending over saving, so we have to counter that message on a regular basis by discussing purchasing decisions and money-management skills with kids.

4.7 Discuss how to be a wise and responsible consumer
Show kids how to comparison shop, read reviews and investigate warranties. Talk about the effect of mass consumerism on the environment. Encourage them to think about ways they can cut down on buying nonessential consumer products.

4.8 Co-view television with children
Parents should ensure that the kid is accompanied by some elder person in the house. This can help them to keep a close watch & control over the wrong messages getting explored to their kids. Not only this but also it will help in spotting the problem at the root and clearing all the doubts and quarries of their children on the spot.

4.9 Role of government
Some countries are taking steps towards protecting children from Ads. Many European governments have placed restrictions on television commercials targeting kids. But in India we do not seem to understand the problem. The problem is not just the pervasiveness of marketing campaigns aimed at children, but the skill with which they wield their charms. As advertisers are making their pitches to younger and younger audiences, many of whom are just learning to walk, companies are beckoning to psychologists for assistance. Parents feel that the Government must bring in regulation on what the advertiser can show and whom the marketer can target.

Parents feel that using a child to market everything from diapers to houses is very wrong. Advertisers have time and again used children in the advertisements and portrayed them as having a say in every decision taken by the parents. This portrait gives a false impression to children that their parents must involve them in all important decision in the family and if the parents did not do it they took it as a sign of neglect by the parents. The Governments use of children in advertisement has generated a lot of resentment among parents who feel that the Government must be a regulator and should not become a violator itself.

5. Conclusion
Children are effectively fitting into the consumer role owing to time pressures and income effects in dual career families. Moreover, exposure to mass media and discussions with parents ensure that children are not only aware of the new brands available, but also know how to evaluate them on various parameters. While younger children clearly affect parental behavior and purchases, adolescents have full cognitive development and an understanding of the economic concepts required for processing information and selection. An analysis of children as consumers helps in the formulation of marketing strategies by identifying the motivations, interests, and attitudes of children, who show the greatest involvement in making purchases in a specific product category. It has been seen that they act as purchasing agents for the family and are delegated the task of purchasing products which they themselves do not consume. Products for which children act as purchasing agents should be identified to help marketers understand the features that are preferred by these purchasers and to help direct appropriate messages towards them.
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