
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PESTER POWER AND PARENTS BUYING BEHAVIOR IN THE CONTEXT OF TELEVISION ADVERTISEMENTS TARGETING KIDS: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

Priyal Singhvi, Dr. Harsh Purohit

Abstract : The term “pester power” means the nagging ability of children to purchase the product they desire due to some reason. Pester power marketing targets children who unable to purchase products for themselves, nag, pester and beleaguer their parents into purchasing products for them. In today’s scenario the urban children comparatively are more connected, informed, and have gained the potential to influence their parent’s decision. Impact of marketing activities (specially advertising) targeted at children is very important and sensitive issue for the society and marketers. Of all marketing weapons, TV advertising has the leading impact as its exposure is more, and is the most attractive media for children. Nowadays, there is competition among marketers to grab the consumer’s attention, especially kids. Today’s children can recognize hundreds of brand names and logos. A child’s attraction towards television increases with age. While television is a good medium for imparting knowledge and education, it can also be harmful considering the impact it leaves on the minds of children. Marketers try to plant the seeds of brand recognition in the minds of young children with the hope that these seeds would grow into long-lasting relationships. Advertisers of children’s television used to appeal to the parents but now they appeal directly to children, who do not have the emotional or cognitive tools to evaluate what’s being sold to them. The primary objective of the study is to understand the influence of pester power on parents buying behavior in the households of Jaipur city.

Key Words: Advertising, Children, Marketers, Pester Power, Television.

INTRODUCTION

Since the advent of commercialization, every company has predetermined goals before starting a business. The most significant objective of the companies is to make profits and to sell their products

successfully. Marketing race to put the brand on the top of the mind, creating brand equity, maintaining the brand loyalty has extended its influence on children to a extent that it has lost its path and walking on the unethical grounds, leaving our children in vulnerable conditions. As has been shown several times in the literature, some children are able to distinguish between programs and commercials and are aware of the intent of TV advertising, whereas others are not [1]-[6].

There is a general concern of parents and other societal actors, that TV advertising may have a negative, intended or unintended, influence on children [7]-[10]. Specifically, TV advertising may lead a child to select material objects

over more socially oriented alternatives, potentially increase parent-child conflict and may lead to a more disappointed, unhappier child [9]. One of the reasons behind this parental concern is that children can be exploited more easily if they do not understand the differences between television programming and commercials and if they do not know the selling intent of commercials. If children understand the intention of commercials and are able to distinguish them from programs, however, the potential effect of advertising might be reduced. First, understanding of TV advertising allows children to use cognitive defences, such as producing counter arguments [11]. Second, the recognition of the difference between programs and commercials allows them to avoid or break of commercials by zapping to another channel, as it has been shown that children zap at least as much as adults do [12], [13]. Hence, whether or not children have an understanding of TV advertising is an important issue to investigate, both from the parent’s standpoint as understanding may prevent negative influences on the well-

being of their children, and from the advertiser's standpoint as it will alter the effectiveness of their TV commercials.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Advertisement is one of the major tools that all business firms use for persuasive communication and its effectiveness depends on the extent to which the advertising message is received and accepted by the target audiences. With regard to the above, a brief review of some of the relevant literature is as under:

Sheoliha opined that Indian marketers are becoming more complex day by day, but a new phenomenon which is gaining prominence is 'advertising to children'. Today, kids have more self-sufficiency and influencing power in the family in purchase decision. Even corporate has realized the power of schools in promoting their products, and naturally companies like McDonald's, Pizza Hut, Lilliput and many more successful players have attained a good market share [14].

Mukherjee showed that advertisements have three types of effect on children's tender minds—cognitive effect, attitudinal effect and behavioral effect. Children readily get attracted to the advertised products due to their observable features, but their consumer knowledge of the same does not exceed beyond the surface level. The impact of advertisements on the various age groups of children varies depending on their knowledge of the existing brands, parental supervision, mode of delivery of the advertisement and other variables. Parents, advertisement visualizers, marketers and government have to make a concerted effort to reduce the negative impact of advertisements on children [15].

Children are very susceptible to advertising, for example, McDonald's Happy Meals came with a free "Smurf" character in July 2002, one of nine characters which children were encouraged to collect (Parents' Jury 2002). Solomon argues that children are targeted directly with messages of what food products to buy, which will influence them to pester their parents when shopping [16]. Parents often find it difficult to deny their children food that features their favorite cartoon characters or celebrities that they have seen on television [17]. Jensen also found that purchase requests by children are strongly stimulated by commercials or by friends who have purchased the product [18]. The Indian context is replete with practical examples of success of advertisements targeting children. The Asian paints kid's creative advertisement, Esteem's "my daddy's big car", Mc Donald's happy meal, surf excel 'Daag Achchey hain' advertisement, and 'my Daddy strongest', Dhara cooking oil are examples of such advertisements popular in India.

Pester Power Marketing

Pester power marketing tactics are intentionally designed to get children to request products by exploiting age-related vulnerabilities. For example, as per industry research "licensed characters are particularly appealing to children from pre-school age to eight or nine years-old, at which point children will request fewer foods based solely on the licensed character." This corresponds to consistent scientific research findings that children under the age of eight are developmentally unable to understand the persuasive intent of advertising. Companies like McDonald's use licensed characters because they have an established appeal and are effective with young children who are unable to even recognize advertising. Pester power marketing is a highly effective, highly sophisticated, and well-funded marketing tactic that enlists children as third parties to induce parents to purchase products. For example, the Happy Meal toy and the resulting pester power is so crucial to McDonald's business model that McDonald's historically has paid more for the inedible packaging and Happy Meal toy than for the food contained in the Happy Meal. "Figure 1" describes a typical pester power transaction:



Figure 1: Pester Power Transaction

As illustrated above, pester power marketing is unique because the marketing targets children, but the ultimate purchasers of the products are adult parents or caregivers.

HYPOTHESIS

On the basis of above review we hypothesized following relationship between

TV advertisements targeting kids and its impact on the buying behavior of parents.

H1: Children try to copy the TV advertisements.

H2: Children insist for buying advertised products.

H3: Children are influenced from TV ads showing products which carry gift offers.

H4: TV Ads widens the children's choice and enhances the knowledge.

H5: Ads negatively impact the behavior of children.

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire comprising 19 questions were distributed to parents having children in the age-group of 8-10 years in Jaipur city.

RESULTS

All results obtained against each item are

Measures

Questionnaire was prepared in English for the full understanding of respondents (parents) and special attention was paid on language to make it as easier as possible to understand. Data was inferred and tabulated using simple excel program and percentages are given for clarity of results. To check the understanding of questionnaire a pilot testing was done on a group of 50 parents and the results were 95% satisfactory that parents buying behavior is to a great extent influenced by the 'pester power'. Following questions were asked in the questionnaire from parents (see Table I).

Table I

1.	Does your child enjoy watching television advertisements?
2.	Is cable available at your home?
3.	Does your child have TV in his/her bedroom?
4.	Are you an active participant in what your child views on television?
5.	Does advertising widen your children's range of choice in a particular market?
6.	Do you think that television advertisements targeting kids is right?
7.	Does your child try to copy the TV ads?
8.	You care for your children choice while shopping?
9.	Does your child pressurize you to buy unnecessary products due to attractive advertisements?
10.	"Children are rational enough to understand the message of the advertisement"?
11.	Does your child is also influenced by his peers?
12.	Do television ads affect the health of children and lead to obesity?
13.	Does your child accompany you while going for shopping?
14.	What do you think that whenever you denied your child purchase, it often lead to parent-child conflict?
15.	Does your child show strong response to premium/gifts/discount offers in television advertising directed to them?
16.	A product with a good advertisement, but with poor quality, disappoints you?
17.	Did you ever want to try something because you saw its commercial on TV?
18.	Do ads negatively impact the behavior of your children?
19.	Do television advertisements make your kid a good buyer?

given in numbers and with percentages to elaborate the findings of study. Table I presents the parent's responses with 19 item questionnaire.

DISCUSSION

On asking parents, does their child enjoy watching TV ads; 76% replied YES while 19% said that SOMETIMES their child watches TV ads and 5% reported NO. So this finding has insight for advertisers and marketers that the children of this particular age-group i.e. 8-10 years are too much exposed to TV ads.

Also the findings regarding availability of cable at home; 95.5% people have cable connection in their home while 4.5% does not have this facility. So this finding is again of great importance for marketers who want to position their products on number of channels because majority of children are exposed to infinite channels.

Responses regarding children having TV in their own bedroom; 77.5% parents replied NO that they have not given this facility to their child while on the other hand 22.5% said YES. This result shows that majority of children view TV along with their parents which can again be an indication to advertisers that they should frame the ads not only to influence kids but also keeping

Table II

Questions	Yes	No	Sometimes
Child enjoys TV Ads	152 (76%)	10 (5%)	38 (19%)
Cable Availability	191 (95.5%)	9 (4.5%)	-
TV in his/her bedroom	45 (22.5%)	155 (77.5%)	-
Watch TV with your children	33 (16.5%)	15 (7.5%)	152 (76%)
Ads widen the children's choice	126 (63%)	74 (37%)	-
Ads targeting kids is right	104 (52%)	96 (48%)	-
Child try to copy TV ads	56 (28%)	40 (20%)	104 (52%)
Care for children choice while shopping	131 (65.5)	20 (10%)	49 (24.5%)
Attractive ads influences child to buy advertised products	162 (81%)	8 (4%)	30 (15%)
Children are rational to understand the TV ads	119 (59.5%)	81 (40.5%)	-
Child is influenced from his/her peers	168 (84%)	32 (16%)	-
TV ads affect child health & obesity	104 (52%)	73 (36.5%)	23 (11.5%)
Child accompany you while going for shopping	65 (32.5%)	40 (20%)	95 (47.5%)
Denying child purchase, leads to parent-child conflict	129 (64.5%)	26 (13%)	45 (22.5%)
Children show strong response to gift offers in TV ads	172 (86%)	28 (14%)	-
Product with good advertisement but with poor quality disappoints you	161 (80.5%)	12 (6%)	27 (13.5)
Trial for products on seeing in TV ads	110 (55%)	59 (29.5%)	31 (15.5%)
TV ads negatively impact the behavior of children	36 (18%)	112 (56%)	52(26%)
TV make the kids a good buyer	126 (63%)	74 (37%)	-

in mind their parents who actually purchase products for their kids. When we asked parents do they watch TV with their children; 76% replied SOMETIMES, 16.5% YES and 7.5% NO. So these results present insight for advertisers and marketers to mould their messages as per family influencing rather than focusing on children only even when they are targeting for child related products. On asking parents regarding do TV ads widen children's range of choice in a particular market and enhances knowledge; 63% replied YES and 37% said NO. **H4** of our hypothesis was strongly supported as 63% parents responded in favor that ads enhance the knowledge of children. This again gives key insight to marketers that ads promoting ethical standards and good knowledge are liked by the parents. As we proposed earlier that targeting children alone for child related products is useless so marketer should also focus on parents along with their children. This insight can help marketers to target parents while positioning children related products. Ads with promotion of ethical standards and widely accepted norms could get marvelous attention of parents and could be the cause of ever high sales volumes.

Ads targeting kids is right; 52% parents replied YES and 48% NO. It shows that almost half of the majority of parents are in the favor while others are not. This result shows that parents are in the favor of TV ads targeting kids as they are aware of all the latest offers available in the market on different products as compared to their parents which make them aware about the environment. While 52% parents responded SOMETIMES, 28% YES and 20% NO, that children try to copy the ads. These findings agree with our **Hypothesis 1** that children try to copy the TV ads most of the time as they make use of the language/wordings used in the ads or try to copy the actions, etc. Do you consider children choice while shopping for them; 65.5% parents reported YES, 24.5% SOMETIMES and 10% NO. It can be analyzed from the above results that parents today consider children choices while shopping because they have specific choices regarding what they want for themselves and if in any case you are not able to make them buy the product it leads to 'pester power'. So marketers should not ignore parents while designing their ads as they are the one who understand their child wants and demands. Do attractive ads influence children to buy advertised products; 81% YES, 15% SOMETIMES and 4% NO.

Results indicate that majority of parents said YES regarding the ads that influence children to sometimes buy unnecessary products because they are designed and presented in such a way like, using animation, catchy jingles, having gift offers, etc. which attracts children the most but on the other hand these ads put pressure on the parents who are not able to make their kids buy the product due to no. of reasons such as low income, etc. **H2** of our hypothesis was strongly supported as 81% parents responded in favor that attractive TV ads influence children to buy the advertised and even unnecessary products.

Children show strong response to gift offers in TV ads; 86% YES and 14% NO. Marketers as well as advertisers are well verse with the fact that kids are attracted towards the products which offer gifts specially toys for e.g. 'Kinder Joy', so majority of parents observed that children show strong response to products having gift offers. **H3** of our hypothesis was strongly supported as 86% parents responded in favor that children get easily attracted towards the TV ads showing products with gift offers. Are Children rational enough to understand the TV ads; 59.5% parents responded YES and 40.5% NO. By looking these results it can be said that parents observed that children can very well understand the language of ads as these ads are designed in such a way to influence kids by inculcating catchy slogans and easy language or poems, etc. Parents believe that today's child is much informed and connected as compared to say child of ten years ago. Is your child influenced from his peers, parents reported 84% YES and 16% NO. As it is children's tendency to have those products which is in his friend's or neighbor's home. So it is clear that children are aware of all the products available in the market by one way or the other creating 'pester power'.

TV ads affect child health and lead to obesity, parents replied 52% YES, 36.5% NO and 11.5% SOMETIMES. The result indicates that majority of parents feel that attractive ads influences the kids particularly for food items and lead to obesity which is going to be an alarming issue in the coming years as majority of the TV ads targeting kids are for food items.

Child accompanies you while going for shopping; 47.5% parents said SOMETIMES, 32.5% YES and 20% NO. Findings show that as kids are too much exposed to media these days that they are very well aware of the products available in the market as well as the latest offers available on different products as compared to their parents due to which parents prefer to take along their child while shopping or it can be said that to avoid 'pester power' parents prefer to take their kids along while shopping so that children can buy products of their own choice. Denying child-purchase leads to parent-child conflict; 64.5%

parents reported YES, 22.5% SOMETIMES and 13% said NO. Responses indicate that in most cases on denying the child for purchasing any product give rise to 'pester power' due to which parents have to sometimes make them buy the product in any case which is leaving the parents in vulnerable condition. Products with good advertisement but having poor quality disappoint you; 80.5% parents said YES,

13.5% SOMETIMES and 6% said NO. Results prove that most of the parents replied YES which is an insight for marketers and advertisers to make the advertisements more reliable and try to tell the truth about the advertised products. So advertisers should make an effort to convince rather than to misguide consumers by presenting the attractive ads. On asking parents that do you try the products being influenced from TV ads; 55% parents said YES, 29.5% NO and 15.5% SOMETIMES. The results indicate that even parents are also influenced from TV ads. So it can again be an indication to marketers and advertisers that how influential are these advertisements which are able to influence even the parents so advertisers should not be mistaken to ignore parents while designing TV ads targeting kids. When asked that do TV ads negatively impact the behavior of children; 56% parents replied NO, 26% said SOMETIMES and 18% answered YES. Parents observed that kids try to sometimes copy the TV ads, so in this regard parents believe that TV ads have negative impact on children otherwise they believe that TV ads enhance the knowledge of children. While our hypothesis regarding bad impact of ads on the behavior of children was rejected because only 18% parents agreed on it while 56% were not agreed and 26% were in between. This finding was quite surprising for us because generally it is believed that there is a bad influence of media and advertisement on children memory and behavior which make them assertive and violent. But our sample rejected this hypothesis i.e. **H5** that ads impact negatively on behavior of children. TV ads make kids a good buyer; 63% replied YES and 37% said NO. Parents observed that TV ads enhance the knowledge of children regarding the latest offers as well as the price of the product which make them a good buyer.

CONCLUSION

This paper discusses the television advertisements targeting kids leading to "pester power" and its influence on the buying behavior of parents. The study has revealed that a positive co-relationship exists between time spent with television and its impact on the child leading to 'pester power' there by influencing the parents buying pattern. For better understanding the situation the further deeper and wide research has to be undertaken to come up with remedial measures to lessen the role of pester power in the family environment.

REFERENCES

1. Butter, Eliot J., Paula M. Popovich, Robert H. Stackhouse, and Roger K. Garner (1981), "Discrimination of Television Programs and Commercials by Preschool Children," *Journal of Advertising Research*, 21 (2), 53-56.
2. Donohue, Thomas R., Lucy L. Henke, and William A. Donohue (1980), "Do Kids What TV Commercials Intend?" *Journal of Advertising Research*, 20 (5), 51-57.
3. Macklin, Carole M. (1983), "Do Children Understand TV Ads?" *Journal of Advertising Research*, 23 (1), 63-70.
4. Macklin, Carole M. (1987), "Preschoolers Understanding of the Informational Function of Television Advertising," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14 (September), 229-239.
5. Robertson, Thomas and John R. Rossiter (1974), "Children and Commercial Persuasion: An Attribution Theory Analysis," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 1 (June), 13-20.
6. Stephens, Nancy and Mary Ann Stutts (1982), "Preschoolers' Ability to Distinguish Between Television Programming and Commercials," *Journal of Advertising*, 11 (2), 16-26.
7. Burr, Pat L. and Richard M. Burr (1977), "Parental Responses to Child Marketing," *Journal of Advertising Research*, 17 (6), 17-24.
8. Goldberg, Marvin E. (1990), "A Quasi-Experiment Assessing the Effectiveness of TV Advertising Directed to Children," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 27 (November), 445-454.
9. Goldberg, Marvin E. and Gerald J. Gom (1978), "Some Unintended Consequences of TV Advertising to Children," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 5 (June), 22-29.
10. Grossbart, Sanford L. and Lawrence A. Crosby (1984), "Understanding the Bases of Parental Concern and Reaction to Children's Food Advertising," *Journal of Marketing*, 48 (Summer), 79-92.
11. Brucks, Merrie, Gary M. Armstrong, and Marvin E. Goldberg (1988), "Children's Use of Cognitive Defenses Against Television Advertising: A Cognitive Response Approach," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14 (March), 471-482.
12. Heeter, Carrie and Bradley S. Greenberg (1985), "Profiling of Zappers," *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 25 (April/May), 15-19.
13. Zufryden, Fred S., James H. Pedrick, and Avu Sankaralingam (1993), "Zapping and its Impact on Brand Purchase Behavior," *Journal of Advertising Research*, 22 (January), 58-66.
14. Sheoliha (2007), "Kids: A Bull's Eye for Advertisers Today", *Advertising Express*, June, pp. 39-42.
15. Mukherjee (2007), "Advertisements- Shaping a Child's Future: An Indian Insight", *Advertising Express*, October, pp. 27-30.
16. Solomon, G. E. A., Johnson, S. C., Zaitchik, D. & Carey, S. (1996). Like father, like son: young children's understanding of how and why offspring resemble their parents. *Child Development*, 67, 151-171.
17. Keane, A., Willetts, A. (1994), "Factors that affect food choice", *Journal of Nutrition & Food Science*, Vol. 94 No.4, pp.15-17.
18. Jensen, J. M. 1995. "Children's Purchase Requests and Parental Responses: Results from an Exploratory Study in Denmark." *European Advances in Consumer Research*, 2, 54-60. Newai, RAJASTHAN- 304022/ e-mail: harsh_wisdom@yahoo.com

Priyal Singhvi/ Research Scholar/
Banasthali Vidyapith/ 10/135, 202,
Nandini Aptt., Chitrakoot, JAIPUR – 302021/
e-mail: priyalvsinghvi@gmail.com

Dr. Harsh Purohit/ Professor & Dean/
Faculty of Management Studies (WISDOM)/Banasthali Vidyapith,