

Agents of socialization on pester power



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Introduction

In this ever changing world there is an increasing trend in the recognition of pester power of children by the marketers. Pester power is basically the influencing power of the children which they exercise in their routine life to get what they want and indirectly affect the buying decision of their parents. The basic reason behind the acknowledgement of pester power is that exposure of the children is growing over time as they are getting more social so dictating buying decisions of their parents. Thus pester power will be the main focus of our study and we will attempt to determine various factors of socialization that are gradually playing their role in strengthening this kid-influence on parents purchase of products.

Background

The term “ Pester Power” first originated in US in late 1970’s, described as the power children have, by repeated nagging, of influencing their parents to buy advertised or fashionable items. Nicholls and Cullen (2004) studied this parent-child relationship which results in pester power and developed a matrix for it which shows that while a family in making a buying decision parents and child both have to make a tradeoff between desire of control over decision and self realization of resulting purchase. Figure below is the matrix developed by Nicholls and Cullen (2004) it depicts that when children has high self realization and parents have high desire for control their interaction results in pester power of children.

Problem discussion

Children has an increased access to pocket money and a bigger say in purchase decisions is a result of children getting more information from

various sources, being more social and demanding as well. According to population characteristics of Pakistan given by Government of Pakistan, if we give a look on the broad ranges of the population pyramid it shows that around 45% people lie below 19 years of age which is the maximum age limit that pester power is considered (Refer Appendix I). This percentage of population results in a large potential customer base for marketers.

Objectives and research question

Based upon above background of study and problem discussion, purpose or main objective of this study is to provide a better understanding of how the agents of socialization of children make them influence their parents' purchase decision. In order to conduct this research, research questions are

Primary Research question

RQ: Do the agents of socialization have an impact on pester power of children?

Subsidiary Research questions

RQ1: Does interaction with parents has an impact on pester power?

RQ2: Does peer pressure has an impact on pester power?

RQ3: Do advertisements and TV programs have an impact on pester power?

RQ4: Does visiting store has an impact on pester power?

RQ5: Does cartoon character and celebrity endorsement has an impact on pester power?

Literature review

Kids represent an important market segment to marketers because kids have their own buying behavior. Most of the time, kids monitor the buying decisions of their adult parents because they are the adults of future. Today most of the advertisers spend more on TV advertisements having children content to attract more children which are going to change the behavior of their parents. Now let us see what are variables involved in pester power effectiveness. That is what McNeal and Yeh, (1997) has also stated that due to increase in awareness of children market potential has increased in three ways that children are spending money they have, that is essentially their pocket money, to satisfy their own need. Secondly, they influence their parents spending and finally they eventually will become a loyal customer base for the companies in long run.

Interaction with parents is the first thing that influences children buying behaviors. The parents teach their children the buying behavior. Same proposition was given by Ward et al (1977) that primary socialization agents for children are parents and children behavior in adulthood is dominated by their parental influence. If there is a direct and clear communication between the children and their parents then children could be easily influenced by their parents. Mostly the pester power works if there is more emotional engagement between the parents and their children. Children learn from their parents the way in which they live, buy and eat. Moore and Moschis, (1981) and Mascarenhas and Higby, (1993) stated that the most instrumental among social entities are parents from which children learns consumer behavior. Another researcher Moschis (1985, 1987) has concluded

that interaction of children with all other entities is majorly influenced by their parents, when they are in direct or indirect contact with each other. Along with this he also postulated that because of the nature of parent-child relationship effects of other agents of socialization like peer groups and mass media are modified to a large extent

Peer Pressure is the second component of the research question, which influences children buying behaviors. Children spent a lot of their time in certain peer groups such as at school, play places or street friends belonging to different families. A child learns a lot from other children. The extent to which these gatherings influence varies from situation to situation. For example a child can even make a decision to buy his school bag by looking at other children. Same element of influence was studied by many researchers including Parsons et al., (1953), David and Roseboroug (1955), Moschis and Moore (1982) have described the impact of peer pressure in two ways, expressive consumption and effective consumption. By expressive consumption they mean the social motivations and the materialistic values that are associated with the purchases while on the other hand purchase styles and modes of consumptions were categorized as effective consumption influence. This study comes in line with our study that social motivation and the purchase patterns of both the parents and peers influence children. This influence may or may not be productive as Bachmann, et al (1993) stated that consumption learning of consumption are from peers effect child consumer socialization directly or indirectly. Another research, stated earlier, by Ward (1974) has explained the relationship of

parental influence and peer pressure with age that as age increases parental influence is over shadowed by peer pressure

Impact of advertisements content and TV programs on children has gained significant importance by researchers and marketers. Berns (2004) has given a reason for the fact that children are now being used as a marketing tool is their cognitive immaturity, he constructed on this point by saying that children are more likely to believe that the images or characters they see on TV are real. Some of ways in which this agent of socialization influences the pester power of children are:

§ Making children desire things which their parents do not want to purchase by showing attractive contents in advertisements.

§ Encouraging children to influence or advocate the buying behavior of their parents

§ Presenting children as heroes in a particular situation such as showing a scene in which other children are in danger and one child adopts the role of savior etc.

§ Making Children feel inferior by showing them that if they will not buy a particular product they are not good but bad.

According to Woodward, et al (1997) and O'Guinn and Shrum (1997) advertising and programming content are the two channels of communication which inform children and young people about products and encourage them to purchase. Another point that O' Guinn and Shrum (1997) has stated in his findings is that consumer behavior is learned by children

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more easily if they are targeted with persuasion shown in commercials and various TV programs. Expansion in media messages and continuous changes in media environment are two key contributors, explored by Kunkel, Wilcox and Cantor (2004), of increasing the level of advertisement subjected towards children.

Store Visits and Retailing environments also influence children buying behavior as Shim, et al (1995) proposed that children become more conscious about the information regarding products such as price and brands the more often parent take their children for the shopping. Keeping this in view marketer induce sales by adding some incentives for children to influence their parents to buy a product. For example, a fast food restaurant usually adds play place along with the dining hall or some retailer give away toys, snacks, sweets as gift with the products purchased. Although products are for adults but retailers make children pester their parents to buy that product. The attractive display of product also works in inducing this power more efficiently; these kinds of purchases made by parents under the influence of children are usually impulse purchases. According to research conducted by Schulman and Clancy (1992) on the most admired after school activities among the children depicts that watching TV got the highest attractive scores while second on the list was shopping which shows that in either of the two cases our research questions are being supported that these agents of socializations are impacting children behavior to a large extent.

Cartoon character and Celebrities endorsement also has some bearing on children buying behavior. A recent study conducted by Dotson and Hyatt

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(2005) states that association of brands with certain popular sports, music and stars has increase the level of influence on children. Almost all children watch cartoon programs and other children oriented TV programs such as Quiz shows, Sports Shows etc. By introducing heroic characters like super-man, spider-man and various celebrities in advertisement make children buy that product because of emotional attachment of children with these things.

Product category and stage of decision making process are being varied by children as the amount of influence they exert and product they prefer. For some product categories they influence purchase made by the parents and for some other products they are active initiators, information seekers, and buyers. Children influence is different for different products, product sub division, nature of socialization of children and they prefer product what they are attracted towards. (Belch et al., 1985). Beside of the goods which are for direct consumption, children shows their influence in buying of goods for their family as their parents are less involved in the goods are preferred by them and preference increases in case of less expensive and the products for their own use. Geuens et al. (2002) and Foxman et al. (1989).

Today, most of the marketers are targeting kids because of the change in demographics and psychographics of children population. The first learning point for the children about “ Where to buy” is from family. The family characteristics such as family environment and parental lifestyle enhances the impact of the role of children in the different stages of taking buying decisions, as stated by Strong (1925) as well. Most of the children, when they go out with their parents on shopping, learn where a particular product or service is available and how they can reach them. The second source of

children learning about where to buy comes from peer or social group they usually spend their time. As Wang (1999) stated that cultural values influence consumption related behaviors of children. The third source of children learning about where to buy comes from different advertisements and TV programs. According to George (2003) and Kunkel et al (2004) there is big problem for children and their parents as viewers because young children are easily attracted towards the content of advertisements and promotions

Theoretical framework

The independent variable in our study is agents of socialization and the dependent variable is pester power of children.

Operationalization

In order to quantify our independent variable, agents of socialization we have identified five indicators based upon our finding of literature review which are operationalized as under:

Interaction with parents: How the parents buying behavior and patterns are learned by the children because they are in constant contact with them?

Peer pressure: To what extent the interaction of children with their peer transform their preferences for products?

Advertisements / TV programs: How much attention children pay to what they see on television?

Store visit: the retail environment impact children in nagging for a particular product?

Cartoon Characters/ Celebrity endorsement: To what extent children get inclined towards a cartoon character or even children in a commercial?

In order to quantify the dependent variable, pester power we have identified three indicators which are operationalized as follows:

Product preferences: How much differences in preference of children make them influence their parents purchase decision?

Where to buy: How do children know from where they can get their desired product?

How to buy: Do they know the tactic of buying the product, by nagging?

Hypothesis

The hypotheses we have developed for conducting our research are:

H1: There is a relationship between agents of socialization and pester power

Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between agents of socialization and pester power

Alternative hypothesis: There is a positive relationship between agents of socialization and pester power.

Survey questions

We have developed a questionnaire for collecting data based on indicators we have identified. Questionnaire is attached at the end (Refer Appendix II)

Analysis of survey questions

In our questionnaire there is a filter question at the start in order to get accurate data then each and every indicator is quantified separately like we have MCQs for brand endorsement then questions about store visit are asked which are followed by a number of statements that each relates to indicators of dependent and independent variable.

Data and analysis**Research design**

To test above mentioned hypothesis, we will need to find data about agents of socialization and level of pester power. This data will be collected from parents having kids entering a shopping mall.

Population:

Parents all over Pakistan comprise population for our study. But our target population will be parents living in Lahore.

Sampling Procedure:

We will be using non-probability sampling method. A sample size of 50 parents entering shopping malls will be taken. Shopping malls that we will target are Pace Gulberg and HKB Liberty. We will be using Convenience sampling method.

Data Collection instrument:

We will use Questionnaire for data collection.

Data Collection method:

An interviewer completed questionnaire of close-ended statements will be used. Each questionnaire is expected to be completed within 10 mins. 25 questionnaires will be collected from each shopping centre.

Data analysis Procedure:

Our questionnaire includes some multiple choice questions for convenience, along with question of ranking and Likert scale.

Ethical requirements:

We will brief our respondents about the purpose of study by explaining the true nature of our study in order to have their informed consent. The respondents will be given a free choice to opt for giving information and responding to the questionnaire. The element of confidentiality and privacy will be of major concern during our study. We will ensure confidentiality by using dummy data.

- 8 Analysis technique

We will use multiple quantitative data analysis techniques for analyzing our data gathered by running the questionnaire developed.

Project management**Timeline and Milestones****Costs**

- Printing questionnaire
- Transportation expenses

Conclusion

The prime user of the study conducted will be the marketers who have to develop their advertising campaign. As approximately 46% of the total population of Pakistan is in the age range of 0-18 years it is a huge figure to target, if only 30% out of it buy one specific product it makes up to 2083200 sales approximately, and if one is getting just 50 paisa profit from it, the total will be Rs. 10 million in one day, one week, one month, or one year depending upon the nature of the product and the strategy deployed. By focusing this age group marketers can bring about their brand loyalty in target audience for future purpose.

This point is also very important for parents as well, they try to reduce this pester power in their children, because it bring about negative changes in them, this is the reason that many countries like Canada have banned such advertisements that enhances pester power in children.

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Appendix-I

Filter question:

Do you have children?

Yes

No

If the answer is “ No”, kindly do not proceed.

Instructions:

Our survey mostly comprises of Multiple Type Questions for your convenience. Please select the best option according to your opinion. Do NOT give multiple answers for one question. For questions that require ranking, kindly read the specific instructions before answering.

Classification:

We are conducting our research from general public, focusing on people who have experienced the influence of children while making purchase decisions.

Questions

Q # 1 Your children get knowledge about the product/service that they want from which of these sources?

(Please rank the following; 4 being the most)

- a) Parents guidance
- b) Advertisements/ TV channel programs.
- c) Peers

d) While in store

Brand endorsement:

Q # 2 Do you think your children are influenced by cartoon character/
endorser they watch on TV?

a) Yes

b) No

c) May be

Store visit:

Q # 3 How many times do your children go for shopping in a month?

a) Never

b) Once

c) Four times or less

d) More than four times

Q # 4 With whom do your children go shopping with, in a month?

(Select one option for each of the following)

Per month frequency

Shopping alone

Shopping with parents

Shopping with friends

Never

Once

Four times or less

More than four times

Ads/ TV

Q # 5 How many hours a day your children spend on watching TV?

a) None

b) Two hours

c) Four hours

d) More than four hours

Q # 6 Kindly rate the following statements according to the below scale:

Strongly Agree 5

Agree 4

Neutral 3

Disagree 2

Strongly Disagree 1

- 1 My children keep on repeating the jingle of the advertisement.
- 2 My children only watch the TV channels that are specially broadcasted for them i. e. cartoon network and pogo etc.
- 3 My children keenly watch ads/programs in which some children are acting.
- 4 My children buy mostly those products in which, we as parents do not take much time to buy that for them.
- 5 My children do nag while in the store when they see a product/service they are familiar with.
- 6 My children wants to buy the item which their peers tell them about
- 7 My children wants to buy a certain product because their friends have it
- 8 My children know from where they will buy the product/service that was broadcasted over TV.
- 9 My children can name almost all the brands that they use frequently

Thank you for your time & cooperation.

We honor your opinion