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**BABIES ARE OUR BUSINESS: PESTER POWER-THE CHOICE OF TODAY'S MARKETER**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The world belongs to kids. Kids today mean business. Children are becoming a formidable segment in the marketing world. Marketing to kids may be marketers passport to growth. Companies are using this segment to rake in profits. The marketers are relying on the kids to pester the parents to buy the product, rather than going straight to them. Pester power is the recent technique adopted by the advertisers now a days. There is a reason behind this type of advertising. The advertisers are focusing on the children in the ads. They knew that if children like the products then they will compel the parents to buy the products. They nag their parents to buy the product. If children like the product then the parents will never consider the features, quality or any other element but just buy the product. So the marketers are focusing on such advertising and earning huge amount of profits. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the reasons that lead marketers to give greater importance to children, how to explain this increased potential that children have on the existing market and strategies that marketers and companies use in order to reach this market. To this end we analyzed a series of articles, studies and research conducted on the subject, with implications in psychology, sociology, but especially in marketing. The results obtained show very interesting issues regarding children as consumers, prescribers and future consumers, which motivate marketers to give children greater importance and to build various targeting strategies.*

**KEYWORDS**

children, target market, pester power, purchase decision

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The child is born innocent, but quickly becomes prescriber and consumer. This is what the masters of marketing and communication understood and that is why, our kids, as angelic as they are, quickly become full participants, often at the expenses of their parents. Consumption is seen as a "link between generations" (Minot, F, 2002).

To effectively market to children, advertisers need to know what makes kids tick. With the help of well-paid researchers and psychologists, advertisers now have access to in-depth knowledge about children's developmental, emotional and social needs at different ages. Using research that analyzes children's behaviour, fantasy lives, artwork, even their dreams, companies are able to craft sophisticated marketing strategies to reach young people. For example, in the late 1990s the advertising firm Saatchi and Saatchi hired cultural anthropologists to study children engaging with digital technology at home in order to figure out how best to engage them with brands and products.

Children of different age groups - be it infants, toddlers, young children or adolescents, form an attractive segment for the marketers considering the age based segmentation Children are becoming a formidable segment in the marketing world for twofold reasons.

First, children in India and across the world constitute a huge market size as the population of children is increasing tremendously.

Secondly, the vast spending power they accumulate based on their discretionary income and the influence on the family purchases (Kennedy 1995; Kim and Lee 1997). Proponents of child-targeted marketing and advertising argue that due to their financial power, children comprise a separate target market from adults (McNeal 1987). The same author argues that marketers have to consider children not only as existing clients, as well as future clients, because prior to extend its family, the child is already customer. The higher he is, the more he uses. To expect him to be adult in order to address him, it is an error, because he is guided more by ideas that have marked him over youth, than by those that expected him to be mature to conquer him.

Indeed, a large number of brands consumed during childhood are still used when the child becomes an adult (Guest, 1964; Moore et al., 2002 cited in Hémar-Nicolas, V, 2012). Thus, they are often the target of campaigns aimed at forging brand loyalties at an early age (Moore et al., 2002 cited in Moore, E, 2004). This dominant position that has been given to the child is not born without artifice, as marketers have developed the necessary elements and focus on the most promising in order to create this new generation of children KINGS (Provenzano, C, 2004) who harvest sometimes what it sowed, since this dynamic pushed to the extreme, sometimes leads to inconveniences difficult to control

**2. CHILDREN AS THE TARGET MARKET**

Children are more gullible targets as they fall easy prey to the alluring marketing tactics. Most children love promotions, contests, free gifts, discounts, and prize draws. Various research studies have been conducted in the past to understand how marketers target children using different marketing strategies. According to Adkins (1999), author of the bestseller book *Cause-Related Marketing*, considering fairness in marketing to kids is extensively subjective and debatable. Business is particularly interested in the juvenile market due to various factors like increased spending power, increased independence in decision making at a young age, influence on own and family decisions, high amount of awareness in children and large influence by the mediated environment (Horgan, 2005). Marketers tend to en cash the kids' power of influence for their selfish motives. It is suggested that marketers demonstrate responsibility marketing to ensure the well-being of kids i.e. balancing commercial sell with the promotion of positive behaviour (Kurnit, 2005).

With the explosion of advertisements to children, responsible marketing is warranted in the society. Some advertisers believe that if it is legal to sell, it is legal to advertise. This raises many issues in the juvenile market particularly. Since children are easily vulnerable to pufferies in advertising, there should be some regulation balancing the commercial and the responsible intent behind advertising (Kurnit, 2005). It must be taken care that under any case, the well being of a child must not be restricted or endangered.

While a commercial may create desire for the product being advertised, the acquisition usually requires a child to make a request to a parent. Since a young child normally does not have the financial resources to purchase a product, she/ he is dependent on the parents to fulfil their wishes. The behavioural measure most widely used is the frequencies of requests made to parents for advertised items (Hite and Eck, 1987) which the child uses for producing pester power.

**3. MARKETING STRATEGIES TARGETING CHILDREN**

From the choice of a fast food restaurant to what is stocked in the refrigerator, from the colour and the maker of a family auto to the destination of the family vacation, and from major appliances to the choice of a new home, children have been found to exercise an important and decisive impact on these decisions (Cook, 2000; McNeal 1992; Seiter, 1993). Children are targeted not only for products relevant to them but also for big ticket items like automobiles, computers,



home appliances etc. In a rush to attain 'share of heart' and 'share of mind' and eventually 'share of wallet', marketers are leaving no stone unturned to reach children. They introduce product innovations or reposition their current offerings to tap children and thereby en cash their influential capacities on family purchase decisions. Some companies also conduct elaborate research in collaboration with psychologists to better understand children's psyche and consumer behaviour. It is observed that kids accompany their parents almost everywhere- be it shopping for groceries or durables. The result of the survey "Parental Attitudes towards Family- friendly Establishments" (Leigh, 2007, p. 132) revealed that 75% of the respondents deliberately seek out establishments that have child accommodation facilities. Hence, it was suggested that retail outlets try to create family-friendly environments by widening the aisles or adding carts/prams or having other rides /play area so that parents can do more shopping and stay loyal to them.

Many retailers are now trying to target advertising messages to children in the shopping carts instead of mothers. The logic is that the child taking a ride is a captive and sometimes, stimulation-hungry and restless, thereby ensuring good amount of attention to the marketing cues like the brochures, catalogs, logos, brand names, offer displays, promotional material etc (Rust, 1993).

Advertising messages supported by jingles, emotional appeals or promotional campaigns are used to allure children. Marketing industry, at national and international level, holds illustrations of campaigns targeting children:

- Many top-notch apparel players have entered branded kidswear market in the spree to "Catch them young". Some international players like Benetton, Pantalone and Reebok have also roped in characters like Pucca, Ben10 and Power Rangers to tempt the young customers. Weekender has made an agreement with Walt Disney and Warner Bros., whereby they can make use of some of their famous cartoon characters in their apparel. Their collection 'Toon World' uses characters like Mickey and Minnie Mouse as well as Tom and Jerry to attract children (<http://www.article-emporium.com>). Raymonds has also introduced Zapp kids wear for the children in the age of 4-14 years. Merchandise licensing is a new trend among retailers with Reebok striking a deal with Cartoon Network for animated properties such as Ben 10, PowerPuff Girls, Johnny Bravo and Dexter for its kids-wear brand 'Reebok Junior' (Saini, 2009, <http://retailer.franchiseindia.com>).
- McDonald's has a 'Happy Meal' on its menu which is a meal consisting of a burger, fries, soft drink and a toy. The range of toys frequently changes to keep the excitement alive among kids and often become more sought after than the original food stuff. McDonald's TV advertising in Australia that offered *My Little Pony* toys with children's Happy Meals has won the unenviable "Pester Power" award from The Parents Jury network. The advertisement offered My Little Pony and Action Man giveaways with the Happy Meals, with the pony or action man changing from week to week encouraging return visits ('Pester power' award for McDonald's My Little Pony ads, 2006).
- Pester power has played a major role in attracting non-traditional advertisers such as car and technology companies (Hyundia) to Cartoon Network as they find more kids influencing decisions these days in the purchase of products which are not directly used by them. (Varghese, 2002)
- The Hoodibabaa campaign for Bajaj's Caliber 115 cc forward is an animation commercial created by Lowe Mumbai. This is the first time that an animation film has been made for the rather 'serious' motorcycle category with an objective to leverage pester power of the children (Gupta, 19 August, 2003).
- Multi action Surf is currently running a 'Colour Your Future' contest, offering scholarships to kids for studies abroad. Its heritage brand of Surf, which was relaunched on the Kids stain platform last year, has stretched its equity to the kids' market by aptly launching a scholarship which will be in the form of Rs 1 lakh and Rs 5 lakh fixed deposits. It has been trying to woo the average middle- class Indian family to become loyal to its brands. Since brands like Hamam, Surf and Clinic address the family, getting a scholarship is an achievement for them and once they get it they are bound to be loyal to the brand for the rest of their lives (BusinessLine, Aug 28, 2003, <http://thehindubusinessline.in>).
- ICICI has launched a special account for kids in association with Cartoon network. This is to cater to demanding kids by catching them young by issuing them personalized debit cards (Soni and Upadhyaya, 2007).

#### 4. WHY MARKETERS TARGET CHILDREN?

Retailers and manufacturers have two sources of new customers, those whom they can persuade to change from their competitors and those who have not yet entered the market. Those who switch are less likely to be loyal than those who are nurtured from childhood. Marketers pay special attention to children, and the latter are considered by the formed as the most vulnerable audiences of the society because they enjoy advertisements to the maximum. Industry spending on advertising to children has explored in the past decade, increasing from a mere \$100 million in 1990 to more than \$ 2.5 billion in 2005. The repetition of TV ads leaves a mark on the young minds. Previous researches showed that children are more likely to make requests for products which are frequently consumed by them, such as breakfast cereals, snacks or sweets, or for products that are of particular interest to them, such as toys or those with special offers. Marketers are targeted them as future consumers, by making them conformable with brand name. A child makes his first brand and category choice in school canteen, when he is hardly four or five makes it clear the impact TV advertisement on brand recognition of children (Mizerski, 200544). Children initially take advertisement as entertainment and being innocent and gullible; force their parents for product purchase. This called a 'Nag Factor'.

Parents today are willing to buy much more for their kids due to certain factors, such as smaller family size, dual incomes and postponing children until later in life. All this mean that families have more disposable income. Also, a sign of guilt plays a role in spending decisions as time-stressed parents try to substitute material goods for less time spent with their kids. Moreover, due to the fact that children personal spending is also on rise marketers are showing great interest in this segment. The research facts that children under 12 years of age spend an estimated \$25 billion and, through their parents, may influence another \$200 billion of spending per year (Strasburger, 200145); Adolescents spend an estimated \$140 billion a year on food and beverages and one of the latest estimates on spending by children in the US suggesting that children of 12 years and under spend \$27.9 billion of their own income, while they influence approximately \$249 billion of their parents' finances

(Lawlor and Prothero, 200346) provides a solid ground for the marketers to target the children. They are discovering that there's lots of money to be made by treating children like teenagers. The marketing industry is forcing children to grow up quickly.

TABLE 1: LIST OF SOME PRODUCTS ADVERTIZED BY MARKETERS TARGETING CHILDREN AND YOUTHS

Beverages	Cold drinks	Mobile phones	Snacks
Bicycles	Cookies	Mosquito killer	Soaps
Bike	Cosmetics	Nail paints	Soda
Biscuits	Dolls	Noodles	Sports item
Body creams	Detergents	Note books (stationery)	Telecom services
Body spray	Fast food	Pen	Face Wash
Born vita/Horlicks	Garments	Pencils	Tours
Cadbury	Googles	Perfumes	Toys
Candy	Hair colour	Rain coats	Umbrella
Cartoon network	Huggies	Sanitary Napkins	Video games
Chocolates	Ice-cream	School bags	Watches
Pens	Jeans	Shampoo	Water parks/fun parks
Coaching classes	Medicines	Shoes	Website

The present study has been conducted with the understanding of the above- mentioned facts and of all the audience, children deserve special attention because they are most likely to accept the ideas television advertising promotes.

It is not just the children in the US that are targets of the advertisers, but children in virtually every country of the world (Chan, 200047; Cheng, 20022; Kline, 199548). Rose (1999)49 estimates that there are over 200 million children from five to 14 years of age in the countries of Japan, South Korea, and the peoples'

Republic of China. The Population Reference Bureau estimates the population of children worldwide to be 32% of the total world population. McNeal and James (1999) notes, „there are nearly 2 billion children below the age of 15 worldwide, making the children of the world a handsome market for advertisers“. Of course, children may not give full attention to the screen during advertisement breaks, but unlike most of the adults they do not mentally switch off when ads appear on television. Taking into consideration these numbers, there is little wonder why children have become a target market, and why advertisers spend large amounts of funds on advertising to children.

## 5. WHAT EXPLAINS THIS INCREASING POTENTIAL OF CHILDREN?

Fertility control is the first factor that determines this. After 1960 in the West Europe, and after 1990 in Romania, with the development of contraceptives, births began to decline. Women could decide if they want one or more children. In addition, parents postponed the arrival of children, being interested first in their career and financial situation (Bhattacharyya R, 2007). Thus, children, less numerous, are more expected. As with any resource, the more rare, more precious. Thus, there is a marginal increase in the importance of each child. We have great care of them and spend more.

The structure of households changed over time (Provenzano, C, 2006). If families, for centuries, lived several generations in the same place, now we are witnessing a development of family structures, which change considerably the consumption. Overall, consumption has multiplied in proportion to the multiplication of households. Family being divided, the distance drives the increase in spending for children. Thus, grandparents tend to be more lenient and generous with their grandchildren that they rarely see. In addition, consideration should be given to another phenomenon, the increasing number of divorces. This leads to the multiplication of new households. The child will have two houses and more often 2 or more toys, games, phones etc. In short, to not upset him most, each parent will want to be equipped the same. When we say divorce, we say remarriage and therefore say recomposed family. Thus, it is common for children to receive gifts from parents, stepparents and from each pair of grandparents. Reconstituted families also involve an increase in consumption. The child will be entitled to gifts from all sides. Another win for those who target children.

Purchasing power has changed over time and family incomes have increased (Piachaud, D, 2008). It began to grow after World War II and especially after 1990 in Romania. This has led to the emergence of the middle class, and more resources allocated to children and their pleasures. It seems that not the wealthier classes spend more for their children, but middle class. Where an increase in spending on children. Children lead more solitary lives. In the past they had an important domestic role, they used to help their family at the table, in the garden, also earning money and supplementing low family incomes. But legislation and education have changed all this and “childhood is now an experience of consuming food, clothes and entertainments manufactured outside the home and bought with parents’ hard earned cash, rather than a matter of learning about and contributing to a busy centre of production. The average dual-career family’s home is often distinctly dull and lonely for children. Our response has been to supply them with ever more fantastical and hygienic plastic toys, and create special child-orientated environments” (Piachaud, D, 2008).

Accordingly, the place of the child within the family has changed over time. So find a redefinition of the role of children in the family. They are now full members in the household. They have a desire; they are heard and take part in dialogue. Children consume and determine consumption, being also the drivers of innovation within the family. Pocket money and all gifts received, grow with them. Furthermore, many studies have shown that half of the brands used in childhood, are also used during the adulthood (Moreau M, 2008).

All these made today to have a whole segment in marketing industry to think about how to sell things to children, because they are an undeniable target.

**Kids represent an important demographic to marketers because in addition to their own purchasing power (which is considerable) they influence their parents’ buying decisions and are the adult consumers of the future.**

**According to the 2008 YTV Kids and Tweens Report, kids influence:**

- Breakfast choices (97% of the time) and lunch choices (95% of the time).
- Where to go for casual family meals (98% of the time) (with 34% of kids always having a say on the choice of casual restaurant).
- Clothing purchases (95% of the time).
- Software purchases (76% of the time) and computer purchases (60% of the time).
- Family entertainment choices (98% of the time) and family trips and excursions (94% of the time).<sup>[1]</sup>

As a result, industry spending on advertising to children has exploded over the past two decades. In the United States alone, companies spent over \$17 billion doing this in 2009 – more than double what was spent in 1992.

Parents today are willing to buy more for their kids because trends such as smaller family size, dual incomes and postponing having 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.

## 6. HERE ARE SOME OF THE STRATEGIES MARKETERS EMPLOY TO TARGET CHILDREN AND TEENS:

- **Pester power**
- **The marriage of psychology and marketing**
- **Building brand name loyalty**
- **Buzz or street marketing**
- **Commercialization in education**
- **Marketing adult entertainment to kids**
- **The Internet**

## 7. RETAILERS RIDING ON KIDS PESTER POWER

Children have always had the power to influence the buying decisions of their parents. Retailers are now employing children as the ultimate medium to market their merchandise. Let us find out how they are capturing this important demographic.

### ➤ **PESTER POWER**

Kids today are smarter and sharper than the previous generations. Advertisements on the television and internet are keeping them up-to-date and well informed of the latest products across the world. They are the conscious consumers of the future and therefore have already started exercising their power to make purchasing decisions. On the other side today’s, advertisers have realised this power among children and are now targeting children to create a mass appeal.

### ➤ **REASON FOR AUGMENTATION**

With a dual income capability but hectic lifestyles have restricted parents from being able to spend enough time with their kids. Such factors fuel the pester power tool. Parents feel guilty of the fact that they do not have enough time to spend with their kids and try to substitute that with materialistic goods. The advertisements also try to showcase stylish kids to create the needed buzz. The label that something is tagged as ‘cool’ helps a company to successfully connect with their target audience.

### ➤ **TARGETED ADVERTISING**

A thorough research is being undertaken by advertisers in collaboration with psychologists to better understand a child’s psychology to hit the right chord. An in-depth knowledge of a child’s emotional and social need help the advertiser to devise the right strategy for retailers to succeed. Mc Donald’s has a ‘Happy Meal’ on its menu which is a meal consisting of a burger, fries, soft drink and a toy. The range of toys frequently changes to keep the excitement alive among kids.

Advertisements that are targeted at kids are not just in reference to products that are directly related to them but also to others. In this relation, the kids pester their parents to buy the specific product for them. For example advertisements for soaps for bathing or washing their clothes use the marketing technique of making children influence their parents and it is quite evident on television today. The target of these ads is to reach out to the masses but the medium is the children.

### ➤ MARKETING AVENUES

Marketing for children is not just restricted to television and the internet. Retailers have realised the power of the school environment for promoting their names and products. Sponsored educational material is one of the most common practices witnessed today. Retailers are eagerly exploiting this medium as well. Children are being targeted by the retailers to promote their products. This phenomenon is soon catching up as an important marketing tool and will soon witness a huge success in years to come.

### 8. CONCLUSION

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.

*Kids are big business.* Much evidence, research shows that parents, peers, mass-media, stores, schools, brands and product themselves and their packages are all sources of information namely socialization agents. but no other socializing agent attracts more attention than mass media in developing kids consumer socialization. Children learn basic issues related to consumption from messages addressed to them by marketing experts through mass media. Among mass media the most frequent used means is television advertising for enterprises whose target group is children. According to a World Federation of Advertisers report, most academic reviews recognize that by the age of 12 children develop their behaviour as consumers, effectively recognize advertising and are able to adopt critical attitudes towards it (World Federation of Advertisers, 2007). But what happens to children under 12? What regulations protect children from the potentially harmful effects of all campaigns that target them? Advertisements are an enterprise's most efficient and effective promotion tools, especially when their target group is children.

Marketing for children is not just restricted to television and the internet. Marketers/ Retailers have realised the power of the school environment for promoting their names and products. Sponsored educational material is one of the most common practices witnessed today. Retailers are eagerly exploiting this medium as well.

Children are being targeted by the retailers to promote their products. This phenomenon is soon catching up as an important marketing tool and will soon witness a huge success in years to come.

The issue of using child psychologists to help marketers target kids gained widespread public attention in 1999, when a group of U.S. mental health professionals issued a public letter to the American Psychological Association (APA) urging them to declare the practice unethical. Although the APA did not outright ban psychologists from engaging in this practice, as a result, the recommendations of their final report in 2004 included that the APA "undertake efforts to help psychologists weigh the potential ethical challenges involved in professional efforts to more effectively advertise to children, particularly those children who are too young to comprehend the persuasive intent of television commercials

It's no surprise that using children has got obvious appeal as a campaign tactic. After all, they make natural campaigners - no shades of grey, no nuanced arguments, just loads of passion and clarity, and a general lack of embarrassment about putting themselves forward. So no wonder that museum, councils, schools and campaign groups are all busily setting up green schemes for children, hoping that they might act as catalysts for change.

"We're relying on the kid to pester the mom to buy the product, rather than going straight to the mom." (Barbara A. Martino, Advertising Executive. ) Kids are a main target for marketers in terms of the three roles they play: consumers, prescribers and future consumers. Moreover, children are a huge market today for the reasons we have discussed previously. There is also an even greater potential if marketers will be able to keep them faithful actors. The goal for companies is for children (future adolescents, adults and parents) to have sympathy for brands and to retain them for future purchases.

### 9. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are some findings that which could be of interest to marketers, parents and schools. The most important thing is that they cannot treat children from both the domicile as one mass for targeting messages at them. They are different in respect to their culture and family environment. The study has certain implications which are mentioned hereby;

- Marketers should design their food marketing communication material in such a way that children become interesting in health and to demand health food products. For example, the packaging could provide health messages including nutrition information, cooking ideas and fun in a way attracting children by using shapes, colours, spokes characters and themes. They can make packaging to show some influence techniques such as Mom, this product is healthy and easy to cook'. This might make children provide ideas for healthier food choices
- Marketers should understand the corporate social responsibility and their communication targeted children should always involve ethical and moral aspects with the purpose of protecting children. They should resort to self-regulation. Since young children have a limited capability for evaluating the credibility of what they watch, a special responsibility lies upon marketers to protect them from susceptibilities.
- Advertisers should play due consideration to enjoyment aspects of TV ads, as reported by children in the study. They should use all possible means to make tv ads more attractive, interesting and enjoyable. This can be done by developing more than one ads design, pre-testing them before broadcasting and selecting the more enjoyable. The same as should not be repeated to excess, to avoid boredom. Advertisers should also change ads more often, to reduce consumer boredom and should produce more creative advertising which breaks free from the advertising clutter.
- Marketers and advertisers have a dual responsibility in this new world of children marketing. They should place the product in appropriate contexts for use as meal components, encouraging play and developmental skills and entertainment that is age and theme appropriate. Children marketers and advertisers should raise their hands and contribute their talent in promote social programmes and advertising. The future for children and children marketers will be about products, pitches and promotion that balance fun with focus on positive, healthy lifestyle choices for kids as they grow to be citizens of tomorrow.
- Parents have to play an important role in guiding the children in adoption of traditional and western values as displayed by media and advertisement. Parents should counsel their children to make differentiation between reality and imagination.
- The amount of parental pestering that occur can be reduced if children are more usually involved in family purchase decisions and if parents discuss television and advertising with them.
- School authorities should conduct some kind of educational programs to improve children's advertising literacy, so that they can understand the temporal course of the persuasive process and the relative effectiveness and appropriateness of particular advertising tactics. This persuasive knowledge becomes increasingly valuable to a growing number of everyday tasks and goals,
- Schools can adopt policies to refuse to accept sponsorships from companies and to disallow food beverage marketing on campuses. They can mandate and implement adequate physical education and nutrition education programs .

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