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**A STUDY OF CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION AND IMPACT OF ADVERTISEMENTS ON CHILDREN & YOUTH**

**DR. N. SUMAN KUMAR**  
**ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR**  
**SR ENGINEERING COLLEGE**  
**WARANGAL**

**ABSTRACT**

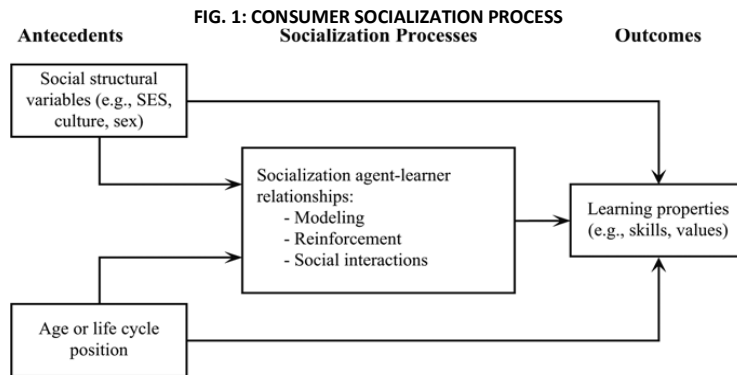
Children begin to make requests for desired products in first two years of their age. By around the age of five, most kids are making purchases with the help of parents and grandparents, and by eight most are making independent purchases and have grown to a matured consumer. These changes occur as children move through three stages of consumer socialization—which we have named the perceptual stage, the analytical stage, and the reflective stage. Child and youth get knowledge (or learn) about products or services through different agents, which socialize them as consumers. Youth are more socialized than children through advertisements. Family and peer play a vital role in consumer socialization of children. Youth and parent talk about products or services, and they exchange information. Analysis of various aspects related to advertisement role in decision making, concludes that advertisements are playing a vital role in socializing the child & youth and in turn they involve in family buying decision and role of advertisement cannot be neglected.

**KEYWORDS**

consumer, socialization, cognition, advertising.

**INTRODUCTION**

Consumer socialization is a developmental process that proceeds through a series of stages as children mature into adult consumers. The period from birth to adolescence contains dramatic developments in cognitive functioning and social maturation. Children develop abilities to go beyond perceptual appearances to think more abstractly about their environment, acquire information processing skills to more readily organize and use what they learn about their environment, and develop a deeper understanding of interpersonal situations, which allows them to see their world through multiple perspectives. Figure – 1 illustrates Consumer Socialization Process.



Source: Adopted from Moschis and Churchill (1978)

Cognitive and social development provides a backdrop for the growing sophistication children exhibit in understanding and performing in the consumer role. Age-related improvements in cognitive abilities contribute to the development of consumer knowledge and decision-making skills. For example, well-developed cognitive abilities facilitate the process of evaluating products, comparing them against other alternatives, and purchasing the chosen item from a store. Age-related improvements in social development are similarly helpful. Many consumer situations involve interpersonal understanding, from impressions children form about people who use certain products or brands to negotiation sessions with parents in an attempt to influence the purchase of desired items. These changes occur as children move through three stages of consumer socialization—which we have named the perceptual stage, the analytical stage, and the reflective stage (see Table -1).

**TABLE 1: CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION STAGES**

Characteristics	Perceptual stage, 3–7 years	Analytical stage, 7–11 years	Reflective stage, 11–18 years
Knowledge structures: Orientation	Concrete	Abstract	Abstract
Focus	Perceptual features	Functional/underlying features	Functional/underlying features
Complexity	Uni-dimensional Simple	Two or more dimensions Contingent (“if-then”)	Multidimensional Contingent (“if-then”)
Perspective	Egocentric (own perspective)	Dual perspectives (own 1 others)	Dual perspectives in social context
Decision-making and influence strategies: Orientation	Expedient	Thoughtful	Strategic
Focus	Perceptual features Salient features	Functional/underlying features Relevant features	Functional/underlying features Relevant features
Complexity	Single attributes Limited repertoire of strategies	Two or more attributes Expanded repertoire of strategies	Multiple attributes Complete repertoire of strategies
Adaptively	Emerging	Moderate	Fully developed
Perspective	Egocentric	Dual perspectives	Dual perspectives in social context

Source: Journal of Consumer Research, 26 (December 1999), 183-213.

**NEED & IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY**

It was observed that the main influences on children’s consumer learning are parents, peers, the media and culture as a whole.

Children & Youth are viewed as:

- (i). Primary market of consumers that they spend money on their own wants and needs,
- (ii). Influences the spending of their parents’ money for their family benefit and (iii). A future market for all goods and services

Thus when considering these three markets together, marketers have come to understand the potential of this huge segment and thus have started targeting this segment. There is an immense need in understanding children's influence in family buying process has been acknowledged as an area in immense need of research.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

1. To examine the process of consumer socialization of child and youth
2. To understand the impact of advertising on child and youth buying behavior

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**Sources of Data**

Primary data collected through a well-designed structured questionnaire. The data collected from children and parents spread over five selected cities in the country. Admittedly, the sample does not represent the country's entire population but only "the universe of parents & children". Secondary data is also used to supplement the findings drawn from the primary data.

**Sample Design**

Parent and Children from five cities were selected on the basis of convenient sample method. The respondents shall include both males and females and in the age group of 6 – 17years. For an in depth study 300 children and 200 parents are selected.

**Data Analysis**

The data shall be analyzed by using SPSS package. This study makes a demographic comparative analysis of parents & children consumers in urban areas by demographic variables. Simple statistical tools like averages, mean, standard deviation is used. The sample data have been presented in a cross-sectional form, invariably resulting into  $r \times r$  contingency tables.

**CONSUMER SOCIALIZING AGENTS OF CHILDREN**

Preschool and kindergarten years, the egocentric stage (ages 3–6), children are unaware of any perspective other than their own. As they enter the next phase, the social informational role taking stage (ages 6–8), children become aware that others may have different opinions or motives, but believe that this is due to having different information rather than a different perspective on the situation. In the self-reflective role taking stage (ages 8–10) as children not only understand that others may have different opinions or motives, even if they have the same information, but can actually consider another person's viewpoint. However, the ability to simultaneously consider another person's viewpoint at the same time as one's own does not emerge until the fourth stage of mutual role taking (ages 10–12). The final stage, social and conventional system role taking (ages 12–15 and older), features an additional development, the ability to understand another person's perspective as it relates to the social group to which he (other person) belongs or the social system in which he (other person) operates. These changes occur as children move through three stages of consumer socialization—which we have named the perceptual stage, the analytical stage, and the reflective stage

**DATA ANALYSIS**

These stages are characterized along a number of dimensions that capture important shifts in knowledge development, decision-making skills, and purchase influence strategies. An attempt is made to find the socializing agents of children and the results were presented in below table 2

**TABLE 2: CONSUMER SOCIALIZING AGENTS OF CHILDREN**

Source of Information	Frequency	Percent
Parents	111	37.0
Friends	54	18.0
Mass Media	123	41.0
Others	12	4.0
Total	300	100.0

Source: Primary Data

The table above elicits that 41% of children get knowledge about a product or service through 'Mass media', 37% of them through 'Parents', friends are source of information for 18% of children and 4% of them get aware of product or service through other sources, which include teachers, relatives etc.

**Null-Hypotheses (Ho):** There is no significant difference in children media consumption and its impact on consumer socialization of children.

**CHI-SQUARE TEST**

Chi-Square	106.800 <sup>a</sup>
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.000
a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 75.0.	

Since the calculated value (106.800) is greater than the table value (5.991) at 5% significance level, hence the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, it may be concluded that there is significant difference among children media consumption and its impact on consumer socialization of children.

Respondents were asked whether advertisements play a vital role in socializing them as consumers or not. Their responses are given the Table 3

**TABLE 3: ROLE OF ADVERTISEMENTS IN SOCIALIZING CHILDREN**

Advertisements socialize Child	Frequency	Percent
Yes	188	62.7
No	80	26.7
Can't say	32	10.7
Total	300	100.0

Source: Primary Data

It is evident from the above Table 3 that almost one-third (63%) of children socialized by Advertisements, almost one-fourth of them (27%) expressed that there is no role of Advertisement's in socialization of their behaviour and 11% of the children can't say whether Advertisements socialize them as consumers or not.

Table 4 below tries to understand the role of family and peers on consumer socialization of children. The mean values of respondents' opinion indicate that they neither agree nor disagree with the statements i.e., When my family member discuss about a new product, I try to gather information about that product through various media. However, these values can be interpreted that they are towards agreeing. This information indicate that a large number of respondents gather information about that product through various media.

Mean values of respondents' opinion on the remaining statements except the above indicates that a large number of respondents are agreeing concerned statements i.e., 'My parents and I talk about things we see or hear advertised', 'After viewing Advertising on a product, I suggest my parents to buy same product for the family', 'My friends and I talk about the things we see or hear advertised', and 'When my friend share information about a new product, I try to gather information from various media sources'

TABLE 4: CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION OF CHILDREN THROUGH FAMILY & PEER

Descriptive Statistics			
Child – Family – Peer information sharing	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
My parents and I talk about things we see or hear advertised	300	3.51	1.206
After viewing Advertising on a product, I suggest my parents to buy same product for the family	300	3.50	1.155
When my family member discuss about a new product, I try to gather information about that product through various media	300	3.16	1.364
My friends and I talk about the things we see or hear advertised	300	3.55	1.238
When my friend share information about a new product, I try to gather information from various media sources	300	3.51	1.206
Valid N (list wise)			

Source: Primary Data

Further, respondents opinions are analyzed taking 5 point likert scale starting from 'strongly disagree to strongly agree' on ten statements related to advertisement role in decision making

TABLE 5: IMPACT OF ADVERTISEMENTS ON CHILDREN

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Advertisement increases the frequency of purchase	300	3.80	1.267
Exposure to Advertisements has enhanced my involvement in purchasing	300	3.67	1.321
I mostly purchase products shown in Advertisements	300	3.04	1.261
Information gained through Advertisements make the purchase of the products easier	300	3.11	1.381
Due to Advertisement exposure I have started experimenting new products	300	2.58	1.129
I feel my demand for products purchase is influenced by Advertisements	300	3.05	1.442
I feel good when I watch the Advertisements of products I am already using	300	3.61	1.407
Advertisements help me to find best products	300	3.25	1.408
Advertisements induce me to buy products for enjoyment even though I do not require them.	300	2.39	1.272
Quality of Products is as good as expected from Advertisements	300	3.13	1.170

Source: Primary Data

Their responses were analyzed using mean values. The mean values and the standard deviation of responses are given in the below Table 5. The table 5 reveals that the respondents agreed to the statements 'Advertisement increases the frequency of purchase', 'Exposure to Advertisements has enhanced my involvement in purchasing, 'I feel good when I watch the Advertisements of products I am already using' and 'Advertisements help me to find best products'. However, they neither agreed nor disagreed to the statements that 'I mostly purchase products shown in Advertisements, 'Information gained through Advertisements make the purchase of the products easier', and 'I feel my demand for products purchase is influenced by Advertisements'. They move more towards disagreeing when it comes to the statement that 'Due to Advertisement exposure, I have started experimenting new products', and 'Advertisements induce me to buy products for enjoyment even though I do not require them'. After the above analysis of various aspects related to advertising impact on decision making it can be concluded that advertisements are playing a vital role in buying decision. It is also studied the parent's opinion with regard to role of advertisement in influencing child s' buying decision. The results are presented in Table 6.

TABLE 6: PARENTS OPINION ON ROLE OF ADVERTISING ON CHILDREN BUYING DECISION

Advertisements influences my child buying decisions	Frequency	Percent
Yes	149	74.5
No	39	19.5
Can't say	12	6.0
Total	200	100.0

Source: Primary data

Table 6 above elicits that three-fourth (75%) of parents opine their children buying decisions are influenced by Advertisements. One-fifth of them (20%) do not believe that there would be any role of Advertisement in buying decisions of their children, and remaining 6% of parents are unable to decide on the role of Advertisements on child buying decisions.

Chi-Square Test	
Chi-Square	127.680 <sup>a</sup>
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000
a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 100.0	

Since the calculated value (127.680) is much greater than the table value (5.991) at 5% significance level, hence the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, it may be concluded that there is a significant difference on impact of advertisements on children buying behaviour.

**CONCLUSION**

Children begin to make requests for desired products in first two years of their age. By around the age of five, most kids are making purchases with the help of parents and grandparents, and by eight most are making independent purchases and have grown to a matured consumer. Child gets knowledge (or learns) about products or services through different agents, which socialize them as consumers. Majority of children are socialized by mass media (which include TV, Hoardings, Newspapers etc.), followed by parents and some children through friends. Three-fourth of parents spends quite some time with their children while watching TV. Almost two-third of children expressed that they were socialized (or knowledge on product is gained) through advertisement. Majority (80%) of parents disagree on 'advertising always misleads the consumers'. Family and peer play a vital role in consumer socialization of children. Children-parent talks about products or services, and they exchange information. When new products are purchased, children are able to educate their parents, when they have learnt from new age media like internet. Present generation Indian children are more extroverts to share the knowledge in general and about new happenings (including products and services) in particular.

Exposure to advertisements enhance the children involvement in purchasing, they start experimenting new products. Advertisements increase the frequency of purchases and as well helps in finding best products, make the purchase of the products easier, they influence demand for products purchases.

Analysis of various aspects related to advertisement role in decision making concludes that advertisements are playing a vital role in family buying decision and role of advertisement cannot be neglected.

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