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The Influence of Socialising Agents in Cultivating Consumerism among Children

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Abstract

Cultivating wise consumerism is a need for society, especially among children. Children are highly susceptible to being influenced by the compelling marketing strategies employed by businesses. The socialising agents such as family, peers and media play a major role in equipping children to become consumers. The act of consumerism has developed from the socialising agents to children since their childhood. In this study we have analysed the important aspects that define the socialising agents and the children's preference towards them. A sample size of 217 children were surveyed from India to understand the consumerism and the influence of socialising agents in their purchases. The results show that socialising agents are predominant in cultivating consumerism among children. Especially, family leads the socialisation of child consumerism than peers and media. Therefore, socialising agents holds the responsibility of developing wise consumerism habits in children so that the child can become sensible consumers of the future.

Keywords: Socialising agents, children, consumerism, consumer literacy, family, peer, media

1. Introduction

Socialising agents are those that play a major role in shaping the child's understanding since their early childhood. The predominant socialising agents including family, peers, and media contribute much to the socialisation of a child. According to the consumer socialisation hypothesis by Hota and Bartsch ^[1], a child's processing of social and cognitive cues as an adult relies on their age and family structure. Children grow to become consumers in a social context that is shaped by their parents, friends, and the media, all of which serve as socialisation agents. The consumer socialisation processes differ depending on children's ages and family arrangements, according to research done on Indian children. From the studies of Sramova ^[2], children's consumer behaviour has received recent interest from the fields of education, marketing, psychology, and sociology. There is a worry over the misuse of a child's inherent trustworthiness and innocence. For this reason, the specialists shifted their attention to the understanding of how children's cognitive development and various forms of consumer and economic socialisation work. Only until we have a clear understanding of the consumer's developmental trajectory can we begin to consider preventative measures to guarantee the child's safety. Ward ^[3] defined consumer socialisation as the process by which adolescents gain the abilities, information, and mindsets necessary for them to act as customers in the marketplace. While overall socialisation discusses how a

person becomes a member of society as a consequence of the process, consumer socialisation involves integrating a person into the purchase and consumer processes, which is how marketing operates. Understanding how consumers perceive culturally imposed social norms and how they adapt and translate them into consumer behaviour is a key component of consumer socialisation ^[4]. Based on regression analysis of Chaudhary and Gupta ^[5], revealed that the three consumer socialisation agents-parents, the internet, and television-were highly predictive of a child's participation in the decision-making process when it came to the purchases of the three product categories. Their study also found that, young urban children in India have a big say in what a family decides to buy. The study's particular goal is to determine how different socialisation agents affect kids' degree of influence during the family purchasing process. The three consumer socialisation agents-the internet, television, and parents-have been found to be highly predictive of the co-decision-making role that children will play in the three product categories' purchases. For all three product categories, parents have been shown to be the primary socialisation agents for young children, which is consistent with the majority of studies conducted in this field ^[5]. Based on the studies of Rashid & Hameed, Parents serve as role models for their children because these young children greatly value the opinions and consumption patterns of their parents. For children of this age, the development of pestering strategies is not greatly influenced by peers or

schools. While, television and packaging have a crucial role in the development of purchase-related behaviour. The fact that parents keep an eye on how much time their young children spend online may be the cause of the finding that there is little to no correlation between internet uses and pester strength. Marketers cannot be held solely responsible for children's increasing pester capacity. Furthermore, it is found that appealing packaging targeted towards kids increases kids pester strength. In comparison to indirect tactics like emotional manipulation, child socialisation leads to a rise in direct nagging strategies like negotiation, bargaining, and persuasion. The study comes to the conclusion that children learn to nag because of their parents, the media, and kid-friendly packaging. Parents should spend quality time with their kids and play a significant role in establishing their socialisation environment [6]. The study of Sramova [2] also emphasises the need of teaching kids' media literacy because today's marketers increasingly target young consumers. The purpose of these marketing campaigns is to increase parental pressure to sway their children's decision-making and shopping habits in favour of purchasing the promoted goods.

This article focuses on marketing to kids, whose cognitive capacity to understand the persuasive aim of advertising is not developed enough to face the market place. The foundation of our opinions is Piaget's theory of cognitive development to understand how children's consumer behaviour patterns evolve over the course of four developmental phases (from birth to the age of 12 and above). We draw attention to the fact that an individual's ability to comprehend commercial information is based on the maturity of their cognitive processes. The growth of consumer behaviour and the capacity to discern between commercialism and realism in commercials both depend on the same factor. Increasing children's media literacy might be the key to helping them comprehend marketing communications and, consequently, enhance their capacity to identify commercial messages. Gunar Mau [7] put forth that, children start actively making purchases when they are eight years old. They still need to grow their skills and competencies, which creates a conflict because they have to meet market needs. In the last few years, this field has sparked both consumer protection and research. Children require the necessary information and abilities to grasp the entire shopping process to make wise consumption decisions. Along with being able to meet their own wants and goals, children should also be able to recognise difficulties in their own conduct as well as in other people's. Children's purchasing conduct and decision-making processes reveals that children eventually acquire knowledge of key ideas related to purchase behaviour. This study focuses on the role of socializing agents in fostering and developing consumerism in children.

2. Literature Review

Socialisation Agent-Family

Family influence is acting as a predominant one among children of age 7-11 years. The goal of the current study done by Gilal *et al.* [8] is to determine if a person's brand passion may be shared with others. According to their research, girls who live with their parents may emotionally catch up with their parents' brand enthusiasm, but not daughters who live alone. Similar to this, boys can inherit their parents' brand enthusiasm from anywhere in the world. Richins and Chaplin [9] also put forth that, the idea of "material parenting," in which parents utilise material possessions to show their

children how much they care or to influence their behaviour. Although material products are frequently used for these goals, research has not been done on the potential long-term implications of material parenting techniques. This study suggests and evaluates a material parenting approach in which loving, nurturing parents give their kids material possessions that eventually encourage materialism as adults. The findings point to the possibility that material parenting may have an impact on kids' material values by unwittingly pushing them to use their belongings to define and alter who they are. Therefore, parents do influence their children in the process of consumerism.

Socialisation Agent-Peers

The study conducted by Sheffler & Cheung [10] adds to our knowledge of how peers' ideas affect adolescents' learning-related outcomes, such as how they respond to social comparison, how they see themselves, and how they behave. Given the negative impacts of social comparison on children's academic self-perceptions, the overall effects of peer growth mindset on their identification with higher-performing peers and learning-related outcomes emphasise peers as a helpful resource in boosting students' motivation. However, no interactions between peer development mindset and social comparison were discovered. When students' desire for education begins to decline in the middle school years, peer participation in growth mindset methods may become especially crucial. Additionally, it might improve children' learning environments by fostering a sense of inspiration rather than intimidation from their classmates.

Socialisation Agent-Media

Chellasamy & Nair [11] proposed that, children now have a more significant position in society than did their parents. In addition to being consumers, they also have a significant role in decision-making due to peer pressure, social media, and cultural changes in India, such as the rise in nuclear families, dual-income households, hyper parenting, and media exposure. Fraga *et al.* [12] study support the discussion around food advertising regulations and help with the creation of successful nutritional interventions for schools, such as food and nutrition education, which would primarily include the parents because they are mostly in charge of a child's access to food. Regardless of the time period, food advertising needs to be controlled since most of them promote highly processed meals, which when consumed in excess can have negative health impacts. Findings from the studies of Brinson & Holiday [13] show that parents' purchase intentions are positively influenced by beliefs that a TV ad speaks directly to their children. Perceptions of children's willingness to advertisements and the probability of purchase requests play a role in this impact. When perceptions about children's sensitivity to an ad's addressability are not sequentially mediated by beliefs about their probability of making purchase requests, parents' purchase intentions are negatively mediated.

3. Methods

One of the theories most commonly used in marketing research is Jean Piaget's cognitive development hypothesis [14]. According to this theory, Piaget distinguished four stages of cognitive development, each of which is required for an individual to comprehend messages meant for children in advertisements. These are the following: the sensorimotor stage (ages 0 to 2), the pre-operational stage (ages 2 to 7), the

concrete operational stage (ages 7 to 12), and the formal operational stage (ages 12 and above). One of the four phases is chosen and thoroughly examined in order to understand the children's literacy with regard to making purchasing decisions. The third stage of cognitive development, which spans the ages of 7 to 12, is known as the concrete operational stage [14]. It is the time when children begin to develop their cognitive abilities and think more coherently. These structures are observable because they are connected to certain objects. The individual may now distinguish between their own and other people's viewpoints. This research focuses on children aged 7 to 11 based on the phases of Piaget's theory of cognitive development. Children inside the city limits of the municipal corporation region were chosen as the study's target respondents. A sample size of 217 children was used in the study. Compared to children from rural regions, city children are said to be exposed to more market settings. By providing a brief report on the study and its significance for kids, the administrators of the schools granted initial approval for the performed study. Children from third to sixth grade participate in the research for 30 minutes after receiving permission from the school administrators. After 20 replies were deemed incomplete, a sample size of 217 responses was obtained from the data collection. The children can get help from their particular class teacher or topic instructor at any point during the session to get their questions answered. After the data collecting was finished, kids had enough information to make informed purchasing decisions.

4. Data Analysis and Results

From the demographic (Table 1), it is understood that male children (55.5 percent) participated more on the survey than female children (44.7 percent). Among ages, children of age 9 participated more (38.2 percent), followed by children with age 10 and other age groups (see Table 1). Children who are taken care by their parents are majority among the respondents (87.6 percent). While those children who are taken care by their father were 6 percent and those taken care by their mother were also 6 percent. For the demographics, and type of the child's family, children belonging to nuclear family type contribute 67.3 percent. And those living in joint families were 21.7 percent and those living as extended families with the parent's father and mother staying along with them were 11 percent.

From the mean and standard deviation values (Table 2), the predominant socialising agents' influence are enquired among children. In family, most of the children replied that asking parents opinion before buying is habitual for them prior to choosing a product from shop which comes with a mean value of 4.32 and standard deviation of 1.095. Followed by that, preferring to pick the same brand their mother or father would have chosen before, mean =4.15 and S.D = 1.147. While, some children were instructed and directed to choose some specific brand of products by their parents, and this comes with a mean value of 4.12, S.D = 1.122. Children also shared that they follow their parent's advice whenever they select a product during purchase. And it comes with a mean value of 3.91 and S.D = 1.202. Among peers, discussion with their counterparts ranked higher mean M=3.00, S.D = 1.543. And considering a friend's suggestion ranks second with M=2.64, S.D=1.405. The third comes with visiting the same store as their friend visited before, M=2.49, S.D=1.388. The fourth item involves buying the same product their friend had told, M=2.29, S.D=1.383.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Children

n=217		
Demographics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	120	55.3
Female	97	44.7
Children's Age		
8	44	20.3
9	83	38.2
10	50	23.0
11	40	18.4
Taken care by		
Father and Mother	190	87.6
With Father	13	6.0
With Mother	13	6.0
With Guardians	1	.5
Type of Family		
Nuclear family type	146	67.3
Joint family type	47	21.7
Extended family type	24	11.1

Among media, purchasing things advertised on television influences children the most with M=2.81, S.D=1.330. Referring online for products information results second with M=2.62, S.D=1.352. While, children directly see a television ad and buy a product, which is also preferred by children M = 2.46, S.D =1.323. Trusting television advertisements as true is also considered as influencing their purchases M=2.15, S.D=1.232. However, among the three socialising agents' family (M = 4.13, S.D =1.142) ranks higher in mean score, followed by peers (M = 2.61, S.D =1.430) and media (M = 2.51, S.D =1.309).

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Family		
Children following parent's advice	4.13	1.142
Buying the same brand	3.91	1.202
Asking parent's opinion before buying	4.15	1.147
Parents' instruction towards brand selection	4.32	1.095
Peers		
Peer discussion	4.12	1.122
Visiting the same stores as peer visits	2.61	1.430
Buying the same product their friend told	3.00	1.543
Considering friends suggestion	2.49	1.388
Media		
Purchasing things advertised on television	2.29	1.383
Seeing products on television	2.64	1.405
Notice online product information	2.51	1.309
Trusting TV advertisements	2.81	1.330
	2.46	1.323
	2.62	1.352
	2.15	1.232

Table 3 represents the age of the respondents in comparison with the socialising agents. Among the agents, family shows significance with the age of the respondents when compared with peers and media. All other combinations of demographic variable's comparison with family, peers and media do not show any significance.

Table 3: ANOVA results of socialising agents with the age of the children

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Family	Between Groups	9.246	3	3.082	7.855	.000
	Within Groups	83.569	213	.392		
	Total	92.815	216			
Peers	Between Groups	2.297	3	.766	1.076	.360
	Within Groups	151.571	213	.712		
	Total	153.867	216			
Media	Between Groups	2.589	3	.863	1.387	.248
	Within Groups	132.531	213	.622		
	Total	135.120	216			

5. Discussion

According to the findings, children of both genders participated in the study, with male children contributing more than female children. Since the children were surveyed at their school premises, they were encouraged to participate based on those classes randomly selected for the survey. The study covered children of ages 7-11 years. The contribution of children from age 9 is greater, which is purely based on the number of children studying in a particular division. However, the following demographic variables can be interpreted for the study more relevantly: Most of the child's parents were taking care of them. And considerably fewer children were taken care of by either their father or mother. As there is only one child taken care of by a guardian, this can be considered negligible. The type of family includes the way the family's shopping and purchase decisions are made. The children from nuclear families are contributing more, as Indian society is moving faster toward nuclear family setups, paving the way for purchasing more goods. While the joint family type, where the family lives in groups, eventually spends less. This is also proven in studies, where joint family monthly expenses can be lower in comparison with those of nuclear family consumers. Extended families are those where the grandparents stay along with children, which is considerably common in countries like India. Children who are born and brought up by these grandparents tend to show wiser shopping behaviour than other family types. From the mean and standard deviation tables, it is understood that socialising agents contribute to the purchase of products by children. Among the family influences, children opt to ask their parents opinions before buying a product. However, post-opinion seeking comes the peer power, which varies from children. And leads to hatred activities within the shop by children. Children think they can be correct if they can depend on their parents. Depending on parents differs by age, and this has been proven in many studies. However, children do not forget to continue such brands or products that they got from their parents to a longer extent. Some parents have the habit of teaching children the brand they need to choose. And at this age, children accept their parents' suggestions easier than their peers. But it won't last long, as the children are growing fast and their circle of contact is widening. They get influenced next by their peers. Peers bend the choices and teachings made by the child's mother into their own. The child sees peers as more interesting and engaging than their

parents. It starts with discussing products, followed by considering their suggestions while purchasing. This always overacted the guidance mothers had built up on their children. It also continues with visits to the same store his friend visited. And exploring all that was discussed among them. Finally, these efforts result in them buying the same product their friend told them to purchase.

The third socialising agent, media, influences children's consumerism similar to family and peers. Among the media, television is the most easily available source of entertainment for children. Since the technology has improved and driven the way people watch YouTube and other social media on television, the second tool is mobile phones. Since the pandemic, children have been allowed to use mobile phones more than any other generation. Purchasing things advertised on television is closely watched by children. Even though they are not the target customers, companies influence children and make it convincing for their parents to accept the purchase. Seeing products on television is also considered very influential on a child's purchase preferences. Nowadays, children also check the price of a particular product online to compare it with actual deals. And still, children completely believe in trusting television advertisements. Among the three socialising agents, family influence is higher among children than peers and media. Family still leads the child's purchase preference and is more responsible for developing wise consumerism among children. Eventually, family influence changes as the children grow and develop a bond with their counterparts. Based on the results of ANOVA, as the age changes, the child's influence towards family also changes subsequently. However, for the same change in age, there is no variation in the child's peer and media influences. This shows children's age does not change the peer and media influence. Therefore, irrespective of age, peers and media do influences the purchase preference of children.

6. Conclusion

Marketers and advertisers understood that influencing a child is more valuable and also has sustained long-term growth in comparison with doing marketing tactics convincing an adult. Therefore, they try hard to persuade children and get their brands registered in the minds of children. It is the socialising agents who need to be replenished with effective overcoming strategies for tackling the behind-the-scenes activities and persuasions marketers use for captivating children into their world. Parents should make the necessary efforts to teach their children about the nuances of marketing so that they can develop a shield to protect themselves. Children in schools should be encouraged to do critical shopping by being educated about wise consumption habits. The media should also take initiatives by telecasting consumer awareness advertisements on television and social media to make children aware of the current market scenario. Doing these initiatives will help our children become wise future consumers.

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