
IMPACT OF TELEVISION COMMERCIALS UPON THE PURCHASE BEHAVIOR OF URBAN INDIAN CHILDREN

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Abstract:

Introduction - The kid market is a burgeoning market worldwide. A similar situation exists in India where the kid market is estimated at Rs.5000 crores/ \$110 million. The sheer size of the market reveals how strategically important this market is for the advertisers and the marketers. Having realized the long term implications of addressing this market, the marketers have devised marketing and advertising strategies specifically aimed at this target audience.

The kid market in India, more commonly referred to as the “tweenager” (8 to 14 Year olds) possesses enormous purchasing power which could probably be attributed to the increasing discretionary income of households. Children today are assuming the role of decision makers from a relatively young age.

Marketers use different media vehicles to communicate with this target audience. A media vehicle which the kid market is very conversant with is television. Television viewing by children has been increasing at an exponential rate over the last few years in India and abroad. Consequently, television commercials appear to have a large impact upon the brand preference and purchase behavior of children.

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Purpose of Study - This study is aimed at measuring the impact of television commercials on the brand preference and the final purchase decision of the kid market. It also aims to measure the impact of peer group pressure on their purchase behavior. The study also measures to what extent pester power is used by children to coerce parents to meet their demands for preferred brands.

Design/Methodology /Approach – The study was conducted in the National Capital Region of Delhi in India consisting of the following regions: Delhi, Noida, Gurgaon, Faridabad and Ghaziabad. The population in this region is fairly cosmopolitan. Also efforts were made to give fair representation to both genders.

Questionnaires were administered to the children following in the “tweenager group”, i.e, between the ages of 8 years and 14 years, both extremes included.

The study was undertaken taking few product categories into consideration. These product categories include shoes, health drinks and fast food. These categories were identified as children in that age group demonstrate visible discretionary choice in their purchase behavior for the same.

Findings - Advertisements on television have significant impact upon the brand preference of the target audience. This brand preference thereafter positively impacts upon the purchase behavior of children. This has been validated in product categories like health drinks, fast food and sport shoes- categories which the target audience is very familiar with.

Peer pressure from reference groups have less significance on the brand preference of children. This implies that reference groups do not significantly influence the brands that children prefer.

It is also evident from the results that parental influence is on the lower side. The obvious implication that follows is that parents are unable to significantly influence the brands that children would like to buy. Also, children do not exert sufficiently strong pester power to influence their parents’ minds.

Research/Limitations – The study was limited to the National Capital Region of Delhi which represents a small percentage of the population of India. For further research, it is recommended that the study covers all the four regions (East, West, North, and South) of India.

1. Students in the age group of 8 – 14 years were only examined.
2. A convenient sampling method was adopted. The region selected for the study is highly advanced in terms of economics and advertisements compared with other Indian cities.

Key words: Decision making skills, Purchasing power, Brand preference, Consumer socialization, Television advertisements, Pester power.

1. **Introduction:**

Advertising aims to influence audiences by informing or reminding them of the existence of the brand or at a higher level, persuading or helping the target audience differentiate a brand from other competing brands in the marketplace. A strong theory of advertising propounds that advertising can persuade/influence someone to buy a product that they have never previously purchased. Also, it helps in sustaining a long-term purchase behavior. Advertising is also designed to be capable of improving people's knowledge.

By and large, it is generally assumed that advertising works at a rational, logical and cognitive level. But that is possibly not true. Feelings and emotions do play an important role in advertising especially when advertising is used to build awareness levels and brand strength. It is also imperative that this should ultimately lead a consumer to purchase the said product. Advertising, for most part of it, is designed ultimately to lead a person towards purchase.

For many scholars (McLuhan, 1964), one of the more socially significant events of the 20th century has been the introduction and diffusion of television. Television has forever changed our families and the way we elect our leaders, set social policy, judge the accused and view ourselves in relation to others. This is probably because television has supplemented reading and interpersonal narrative as our primary means of story-telling and myth-delivery (Silverstone

1991) and has thus fundamentally changed our culture (McLuhan,1964). Across diverse theoretical formulations, television is widely acknowledged as a powerful agent of socialization.

Television is generally acknowledged as the most powerful advertising medium and reached a very broad spectrum of consumers. In India, television is the medium with the highest reach where it reaches an audience that constitutes 54% of the population. Television, as a medium, can be an extremely effective medium, vividly demonstrating product attributes and persuasively explaining their corresponding consumer benefits. Also, it can dramatically portray user and usage imagery, brand personality and other intangibles.

1.1 Advertising to children

Advertising to children presents challenges. Kids are not sophisticated consumers. Their conceptions of self, time and money are immature. As a result, they know very little about their desires, needs and preferences – or how to use economic resources rationally to satisfy them. And the nature of children's conceptual ability makes it likely that child-oriented advertising can lead to false beliefs or highly improbable product expectations.

While most children and parents are still joint consumers, more and more children are becoming sole decision makers. To protect them and their parents, both critics and defenders agree that advertisers should not intentionally deceive children. From the advertiser's point of view, there are good reasons for being interested in how children think and what they do, and what role does advertising play in their lives vis-a-vis product preference and purchase.

1.2 Decision-making skills and abilities in children

Children assume the role of consumer decision makers at a young age. As they grow older, they develop more sophisticated decision-making skills and abilities and also develop a greater awareness of different information sources which they deploy in a more flexible manner depending on need. (Moore and Stephens, 1975; Moschis and Moore, 1979a). Children utilize attribute information in evaluating products and adapt their decision strategies to the nature of the choice environment they face.

1.3 The “tweenager “market

Marketing terminology has chanced upon a new term “tweenagers”. This term effectively managed to capture the interest of marketers and many commercial stakeholders in different fields of business who are becoming aware of the huge potential of this segment. “Tweens” are those young people whose ages range from “pre-adolescent to 14 years” and have been described as “the richest generation” in history and the spending of this age group “has roughly doubled every ten years over the last three decades” (Lindstorm, 2003). According to Mintel International Group (2001), “tweenagers are aged between 10 and 14 years of age while Clarke (2003) classifies them as 8-12 year olds. “ They are a generation with economic power unlike anyone before them” (Solomon and Roboly, 2004). This is why retailers and marketers consider them a most attractive growth market. Tweens are leaving the kids line a little younger at about the time when mom stops buying the items for them and they start buying on their own (Levinson et al, 2001, p49).

1.4 The “tween” market in India

According to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2002), population data sheet, the population of India as of mid-2002 was approximately 1.05 billion. At an estimated growth rate of 1.5 % per annum, the population is expected to increase to 1.35 billion by 2025. The urban population in 2002 was approximately 29% with the rate of growth of urbanization at 2.8%. Thus the sheer size of the urban population (283 million) makes it an attraction market. Further, this population is young. United Nations statistics show that 33% of the population is between 0 and 14 years and 62% is between 15 and 64 years. In fact, only 5% of the population is over 65 years.

This is a population which represents considerable high purchasing power. More specifically, in the urban areas, children from the upper middle class segment have substantial amount of their own money to spend and also exert a great influence on their household spending. Consequently these children have considerable market potential. Children constitute a major consumer market with direct purchasing power for snacks and sweets and indirect purchase influence while shopping for big ticket items (Haler, 2002; Singh, 1990). Marketing minds have started taking children seriously and are fast realizing that the road to a customer’s heart and mind is the child at home. Children relate to brands in much the same way as adults do and they influence

purchase decisions even in categories that do not directly cater to them. With increasing kid power, there is tremendous opportunity in the emerging market meant for kids. Children can be really specific in their tastes and preferences and have stray likes and dislikes. Most brands today are targeting kids to build brand preference. Indian children have recently attracted considerable attention from marketers because the market for children's products offers tremendous potential (this market is pegged at Rs. 5000 crore/\$ 110 million) and is rapidly growing. According to available industry data, the chocolate and confectionary market is estimated at Rs. 1300 crore / \$290 million, the apparel market at Rs. 480 crore / \$110 million and kids footwear at Rs. 1000 crore / \$220 million.

It naturally follows then children constitute a very strategic market segment today. Consequently, marketing to this segment has become increasingly desirable because the kid markets is huge, has more disposable income/ pester power than in the past, and is said to be more brand-conscious. Considerable marketing expenditure toward the kid market bears this out.

2. Literature Review:

A study conducted in 2002 in the United States revealed that 98% of all homes in the US have television sets. American children between the ages of 2-17 spend an average of 25 hours per week watching TV, more time than in any other activity outside of school. This study also revealed that a significant trend since 1990 has been the penetration of media into children's bedrooms and influencing their consumption patterns. A number of studies worldwide have noted a correspondence between the products children like and request and those advertised on television (Galst & White 1976; Caron & Ward 1975). TV advertising does appear to be effective in creating positive attitudes and behavior toward advertised products. Television advertising does go a long way in changing perceptions of the product in the course of shifting the relative salience of attitudes, especially when the purchaser is not particularly involved in the message.

At the same time, a key concern underlying child advertising is the extent to which children have the ability to discuss, interpret and cope with advertising. It is generally perceived that younger

children lack the guile and sophistication to adequately address the overtures of advertisers (Moses & Baldwin, 2005; Chan & McNeal, 2004; Bartholomew & O'Donahue, 2003). Yet, another research conducted by Young broadly concluded that children of approximately 8 to 9 years understand advertising's raison d'etre. In a study of Honk Kong children, Chan (2000) found that children preferred advertisements of food, drinks, toys and mobile phones.

Research using an experimental paradigm has tended to support the view that the influence of commercials targeted at children is considerable. Galst & White (1976) report a high degree of influence between children's purchase influence attempts and the foods that are heavily advertised on television. They, thereafter, conclude that "further research is needed to determine if a casual relationship exists between television advertisements and children's food requests and preferences". A study conducted examined children's recall of advertisements from a variety of perspectives. When experiments measure recall of advertisements immediately following viewing, more than half of the children studied, tend to remember advertisements for products such as toys, cereals, and ice-cream even when it is shown just once during a program (Gorn & Gooldberg, 1977, 1980; Zuckerman, Ziegler & Stevenson, 1978). When children are asked where they learned about toys they would like to have, they most often identify television commercials as the source (Caron & Ward, 1975).

Television has become an important economic socializing agent because of its massive presence in children's lives. Children are exposed to numerous advertisements from an early age and are most likely the ideas advertising promotes. A study by Mittal (2009) shows that television advertisements were found to be more effective in creating a desire among children to own the advertised product. Also, celebrity endorsements are found to be more effective among children.

From the advertiser's perspective, the ultimate intended effect of airing a commercial is for their product to be subsequently purchased by viewers. Both Atkin (1978) and Galst & White (1976) found that the amount of prior television viewing was a significant predictor of children's product purchase requests at the supermarket. Even cross-cultural research comparing families from Japan, UK and the United States has demonstrated a positive relationship between children's amount of television viewing and their product purchase requests (Robertson, Ward, Gatignon & Klees, 1989).

Research on family decision making has been largely confined to spouses, who have been considered as the relevant decision making unit in a family. However, the role of third party influences such as decision making strategies is essential to taking a broader view of the relevant unit of analysis. Children enjoy greater discretion, not only in making routine consumption decisions for the family but also in pestering their parents to buy other products desired by them (Singh, 2006). Contemporary research also suggests that children constitute a major consumer market with direct purchasing power for snacks and sweets and indirect purchase influence while shopping for big ticket items (Halan, 2000; Singh, 1988).

Research makes it clear that children's purchase influence attempts have a relatively high degree of success and that parents create direct opportunities by interacting with their children about purchase requests, giving them pocket money and taking them to shopping excursions (Ward et al 1977), leading to consumer socialization from a relatively young age. Peers are an additional source of influence affecting consumer beliefs starting early in life and continuing through adolescence (Moschis & Churchill 1978). Finally, mass media and advertising provide information about consumption and the value of material goods. Prior research also confirms that children find advertisements to be entertaining. However, they understand that the basic objective of advertisements is to inform about the products and also to persuade them to buy these products. Interestingly, children are also aware that media vehicles carrying advertisements gain financially from the same.

Research studies in India, more or less, firmly conclude that television in this country is getting transformed rapidly into a primary source of information and entertainment for millions of Indian families. In a paper published in 2003, Panwar also states that for a whole generation of new age children in India, television is as influential as a parent or a teacher. This is a fact very well understood by the marketers today. It is evident that with the growing influence of media on children, an increasingly large number of advertisements are today directed at this potential target audience. The process may be indirect but television commercials targeted at children are highly effective at accomplishing their intended goal of promoting product sales.

3. **Methodology of study:**

This study covers children between eight and fourteen years (both the extremes included). The qualifying conditions include:

- (i) They should belong to a household which belongs to the upper-middle income segment.
- (ii) The children should be studying in a school.

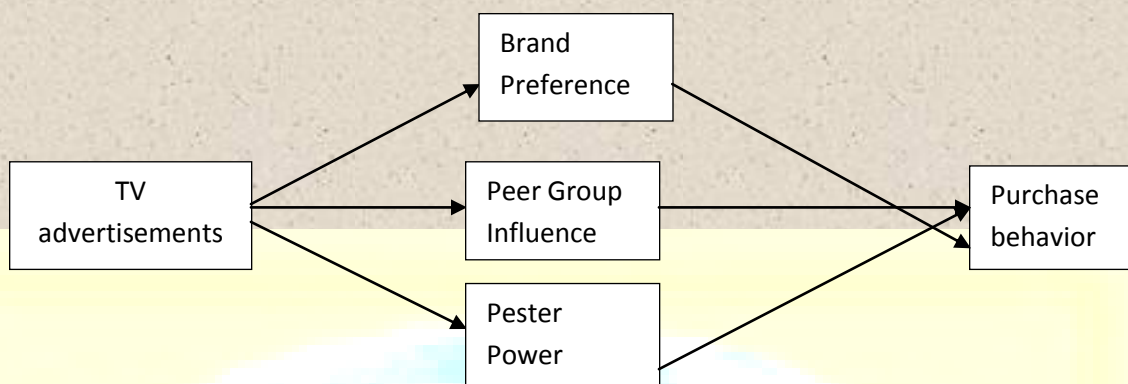
The reason why the age interval was defined is because children below the age of eight have limited processing skills and children above fourteen years of age use a variety of strategies for storing and retrieving of information almost similar to the grown-up people (Selman, 1980) and also because this age group constitutes the “tweenager market”.

The study was conducted in the National Capital Region of Delhi in India consisting of the following regions: Delhi, Noida, Gurgaon, Faridabad and Ghaziabad. The population in this region is fairly cosmopolitan. Also efforts were made to give fair representation to both genders.

The study was undertaken taking few product categories into consideration. These product categories include shoes, health drinks and fast food. These categories were identified as children in that age group demonstrate visible discretionary choice in their purchase behavior for the same.

4. **Framework, hypotheses and model to evaluate the influence of advertisement commercials on the purchase behavior of children in the age group 7 to 14 years:**

4.1 Framework for Analysis



The above framework demonstrates that television advertisements do have an impact upon the purchase behavior of children in the age group 8 – 14 years. Purchase behavior is impacted in the following manner:

- (i) Brand preference – It is expected that the child develops a preference for the brand by watching the commercials on television for a certain period of time. A preference for the brand will lead the child to purchase the said brand.
- (ii) Peer group influence – Children in the age groups 8-14 years are subject to a fair amount of peer pressure. When children watch advertisements, they discuss amongst themselves. This discussion does lead to purchasing those brands favored by their brands. Children do fall prey to peer pressure and tend to buy those brands favored by their friends.
- (iii) Pester power – Children have learnt to wield power over their parents and get what they want. Pester power is a weapon children use on their parents to get them to buy things they want. They watch commercials on television, like the brand featured in them and ultimately want to buy them. Since, in India, children do not have the independence to make all their purchase decisions on their own, they need to seek the permission of their parents. Permission is not always easily granted by the parent. The child takes recourse to pestering the parent to buy the same. Consequently, the child demonstrates pester power that he is able to wield over his parents. Ultimately it boils down to the child watching commercials on television and developing a liking

for the brand featured in the advertisements. He may use pester power to purchase the preferred brand.

4.2 Hypotheses pertaining to the impact of advertisements on television on the purchase behavior of children in the age group 8 to 14 years

The prior discussion leads us to the following four hypotheses:

H₁: Respondent's purchase pattern will be positively impacted by watching advertisements on television.

H₂: Advertisements on television have an impact upon the brand preference of children.

H₃: Advertisements on television indirectly impact the child's purchase pattern through peer group influence.

H₄: Advertisements on television have led to the emergence of pester power having an impact on purchase decisions on children.

4.3 Analyzing purchase behavior consequent to exposure to television advertisements

We attempt to analyze the purchase behavior of children arising out of watching commercials on television using linear regression model in which impact on purchase because of advertisement is dependent variable while TV viewing, advertisement effect, brand preference, advertisement influence on brand preference, impact of pester power on purchase behavior and impact of peer group are independent variables. The linear regression method is considered to find out the relationship between the above mentioned variables which are in terms of dependent and independent. The authors considered all the influenced variables as independent variables.

The basic software SPSS has been used to analyze the regression model. After the input of data collected from the respondents, analysis was done using Linear Regression Model in which the dependent and independent variables were chosen as mentioned above.

5. Model:

The regression model for the above mentioned hypotheses is as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
 Y_{\text{uptoprihadasefadateat}} &= \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{\text{TVviewing}} + \\
 &\beta_2 X_{\text{dateatidlet}} + \beta_3 X_{\text{hadpbefore}} + \\
 &\beta_4 X_{\text{dateatidletocobadpbefore}} + \\
 &\beta_5 X_{\text{uptofetepoverocourpoldaxior}} + \\
 &\beta_6 X_{\text{uptofergopid/pactsoinfriopressig}} + \varepsilon
 \end{aligned}$$

Where ε belongs to $N(0, \sigma^2)$ and known as residual error. Here Y is a dependent variable and all X 's are independent variables; β 's are the regression coefficients to be estimated.

5.1 Validation of data:

Relevant data was collected from children in the age group of 8 to 14 years. These children belong to different schools in the National Capital Region of Delhi. Based on various variables, a model (4) was created. The fitness of the model depends on the R^2 -value. From the table below, it is evident that the value of R^2 is 0.304 which is significant. R^2 is coefficient of determination; basically the ratio between known variability and total variability. This implies that the causes of variability are known and if one wants to reduce it, can easily do so by changing the known variability value. Also standard error value is quite low i.e. 0.25245 which shows the validity of data.

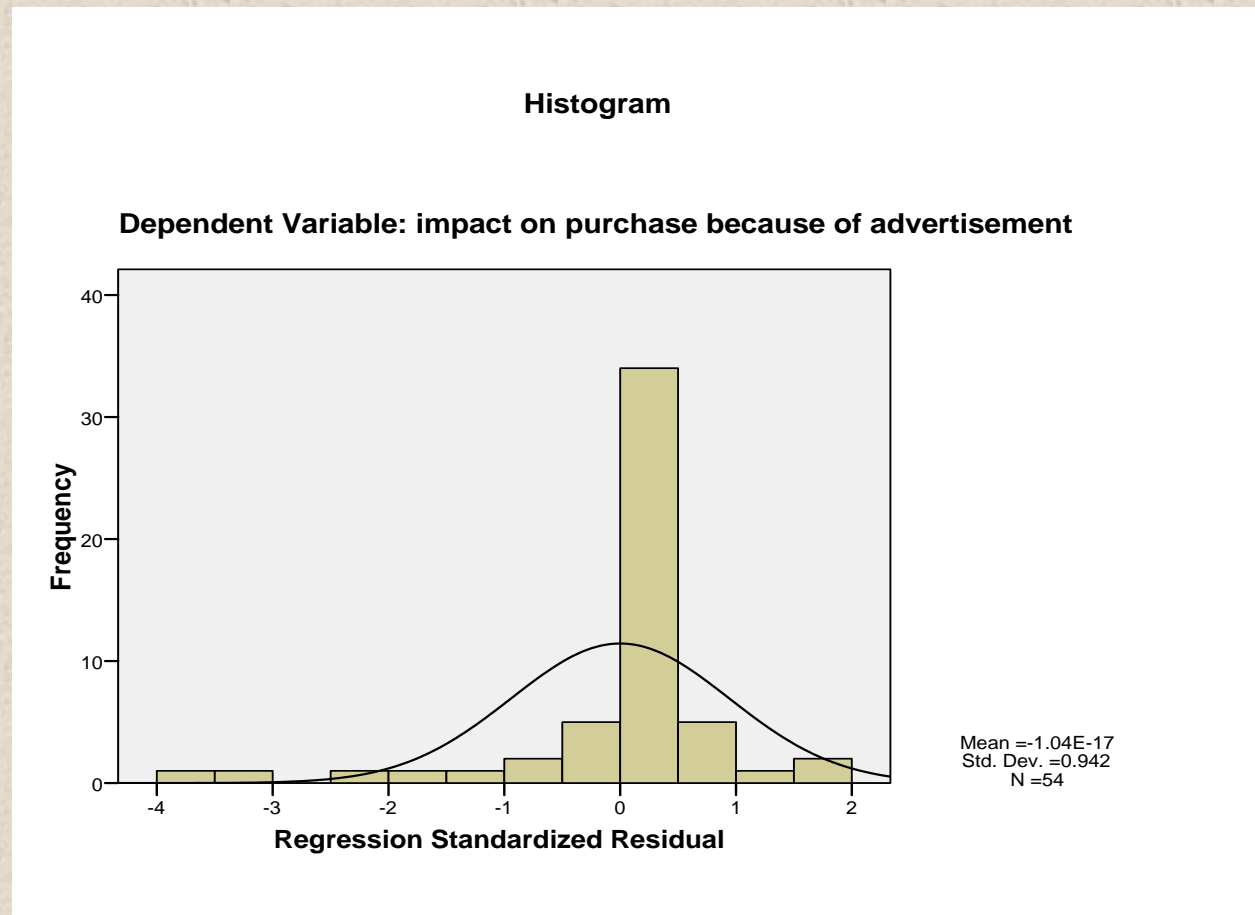
The normal curve as depicted in 5.1.2 is slightly skewed. This skewness is tolerable, also as per central limit theorem, the sample size is enough to consider it as large sample and data is considered normally distributed. With the values of B 's from the coefficient table 5.1.3, the model takes the following form:

5.1.1 Model Summary (b)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					
	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. Change	F Change	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2
1	.583(a)	.340	.256	.25245	.340	4.032	6	47	.002	

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Impact of peer group/advt./parents on information processing, Brand preference, Advertisement effect, Impact of pester power on consumption behaviour, advertisement influence on brand preference, TV viewing
- b. Dependent Variable: impact on purchase because of advertisement

5.1.2



5.1.3 Coefficients (a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.545	.129		4.215	.000
	TV viewing	-.149	.081	-.255	-1.837	.073
	Advertisement effect	.534	.116	.579	4.593	.000

Brand preference	.148	.080	.253	1.842	.072
Advertisement influence on brand preference	-.024	.073	-.040	-.322	.749
Impact of pester power on consumption behavior	-.106	.082	-.160	-1.296	.201
Impact of peer group/advt./parents on information processing	.000	.084	-.001	-.006	.995

a. Dependent Variable: impact on purchase because of advertisement

6. Interpretation:

From the survey conducted and data collected, it is evident that advertisements on television have significant impact upon the brand preference of the target audience (children in the age group 8 to 14 years) because P-value of the variables is as follows:

Advertisement influence on brand preference – 0.749

Impact of pester power on consumption behavior – 0.201

Impact of peer group./parents on information processing - 0.995

Impact of advertisement on purchase behavior – 0.000

These values are more than the level of significance i.e. 0.05 and as per the p-value rule, all these variables are insignificant. Only one variable, i.e. advertisement effect p-value is 0.000. This is less than the alpha-value i. e. 0.05, which is considered significant. The value of R-square indicates that 34% of the times the independent variables, i. e advertisements on television leading to brand preference, peer pressure, pester power, parents influence impact the dependant

variable, i.e. the purchase behavior of children and from p-values, it is evident that only one variable which is significant is advertisement effect. As no other variable is significant, we can say that advertisements do affect the purchase behavior of children, but does not necessarily always lead to the formation of a preference toward a particular brand.

This has been validated in product categories like health drinks, fast food and sport shoes-categories which the target audience is very familiar with.

Peer pressure from reference groups have less significance on the brand preference of children. This implies that reference groups do not significantly influence the brands that children prefer.

It is also evident from the results that parental influence is on the lower side (if we compare with other levels of significance). The obvious implication that follows is that parents are unable to significantly influence the brands that children would like to buy. Also, children do not exert sufficiently strong pester power to influence their parents minds.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations:

7.1 Conclusions:

From the study conducted, it is evident that the “tweenager” market is a very potential target audience for marketers and advertisers alike. In India, this market represents enormous purchasing power. The brand preference as developed by the children would continue to be their preferred brand as they move into adulthood. This signifies the enormous clout this market has over the marketer presenting a lifetime of value. Also the power wielded by this market is enormous taking into consideration the fact that the child today appears individualistic who is not very influenced by his peers neither by parents.

Another significant finding which probably may have long term implications is the fact that parental influence over children appears to be eroding slowly and steadily. This also implies that children are seeking freedom in their purchase and other decisions.

It is also significant that pester power which was considered to have an overwhelming presence in most households hardly has a role to play. This could probably be attributed to the fact that children are becoming more assertive and individualistic in nature and do not have to resort to throwing tantrums to get what they want.

7.2 Limitations and Recommendations:

3. The study suffers from a basic deficiency that the survey was conducted in National Capital Region of Delhi which represents a small percentage of the population of India. For further research, it is recommended that the study covers all the four regions (East, West, North, and South) of India. Subsequent to this, it is also recommended to use cluster sampling design for collection of data since the population is large and consist of four regions which have sub-cultural variations.
4. Students in the age group of 8 – 14 years were only examined.
5. A convenient sampling method was adopted. The region selected for the study is highly advanced in terms of economics and advertisements compared with other Indian cities.

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