

MARKETING TO KIDS

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Abstract

Marketing is the process of communicating the value of a product or service to customers, for the purpose of selling. It is a critical business function for attracting customers. Market segmentation also occupies a dominant role in the process of popularizing the product. In the present day scenario as the consumer buying pattern is changing marketers are taking initiative to explore new segments. As India is a developing nation, where huge chunk of population falls below the age group of 14 years, marketers have identified this particular segment as a lucrative segment from which large profits margins can be reaped up. But there are a lot of complexities involved in marketing the products to the kids. In this paper the role of kids in influencing the behavior of marketers has been highlighted. The present paper also illustrates the various aspects to be considered by the marketers while popularizing the product amongst this segment. A case study of Mc Donald's has also been quoted which depicts the ethical issues involved in the process of marketing the products to the kids.

Keywords: marketing, market segmentation, marketers,

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Introduction

Kids occupy an important segment in the field of marketing today. Kids are the sort of consumers who doesn't care about the cost of product; don't have money to buy the product but are still playing a dominant role in influencing the parents to buy the goods. Keeping this ideology in mind now the focus of the companies has shifted to them that how goods are to be marketed to this particular segment. Marketing the products to the kids is a sensitive issue, as a lot many intricate issues involved in this process. They are actually a tough nut to crack; moreover brand loyalty cannot be expected out of them. However, kids represent an important demographic segment to the marketers because they have the ability to influence the purchase decisions not only for the products they are consuming but also the products there family is going to consume. Kids enjoy a tight grip over both the shopping list as well as the purse strings. Due to greater disposable income, smaller family sizes evolving buying behavior; kids have become a vital part of the market. According to a World Bank report 2011 roughly 30 % of the population in India falls below the age group of 14 years. Added to this rising education standard and exposure has given immense potential to the marketers to trap this particular segment. Big business houses like Titan, Parle G, AMUL, etc. have also realized the immense influential power present in this particular segment that have a greater impact on the buying behavior. These companies are either directly or indirectly targeting this particular segment. AMUL a dairy co-operative through the caricature of a six year old girl has tried to make an appeal to all the age groups. Titan has launched Zoop(watches brand) which focuses on kids who are fond of colors as well as different cartoon characters. Marketer tries to draw children's attention through various means like TV, Magazines, Stickers, etc. Young children, in particular, have difficulty in distinguishing between advertising and reality in ads, and ads can distort their view of the world. Additionally children are unable to evaluate advertising claims. Obviously children attracted by the marketing practices; get adversely affected most of the time. Childhood overweight and physical inactivity have reached epidemic levels taking a terrible toll on health. Skyrocketing obesity rates are a symptom of current community norms shaped by a market driven economy

that promotes overeating and sedentary behavior. Both children and adults are targets of intensive marketing campaigns promoting soda, fast foods, and high-calories snacks, along with passive leisure-time activities, including TV, movies, and video games. Highcalories foods are more readily available in schools and communities than are healthy eating options, and physical education and walking, and other exercise opportunities are lacking in many neighborhoods. This paper focuses on growing children market & marketing to children. It talks about, adverse effect of marketing on children. It also focuses on the points which are to be considered by the marketers while marketing the products and services to kids.

Objectives

- To illustrate the role of kids in influencing the marketers behavior.
- To describe the various challenges faced and ethics involved by marketers in marketing the products and services to the kids.

The influence that kids have on purchases made in a household are extremely high, shockingly, even on high-end items such as what vehicle the family decides to purchase. They are not actually the present consumers of the products but they are the future users. With the rising trend of nuclear families kids have also occupied the role decision makers in the family. This scenario is clear from the following table.

INVOLVEMENT OF KIDS IN PRODUCT PURCHASE

Product	Definitely Consider (in %)	May Consider(in %)	Would Not Consider(in %)
<i>Computer</i>	20	49	31
<i>Internet Service Provider</i>	21	45	35
<i>Car</i>	17	46	37
<i>Mobile Phone</i>	11	37	48

<i>Hair Oil</i>	17	43	41
<i>Savings Plan for Child</i>	12	46	42
<i>Motorbike</i>	14	47	39
<i>Shampoo</i>	16	44	40

* Source: cartoon network New Generation India 2011

The above table highlights the growing role of kids in the decision making process while purchasing different articles required at home. It is visible from the table the while making major purchase decision i.e. when parents are going to purchase costlier commodities like computers, cars, motorbikes and mobile phones ,children's decision is given a great deal of importance. Due to their growing importance in the families marketers have found immense potential in this particular segment and they are taking all the initiative to trap this particular market.

CHALLENGES FACED BY MARKETERS

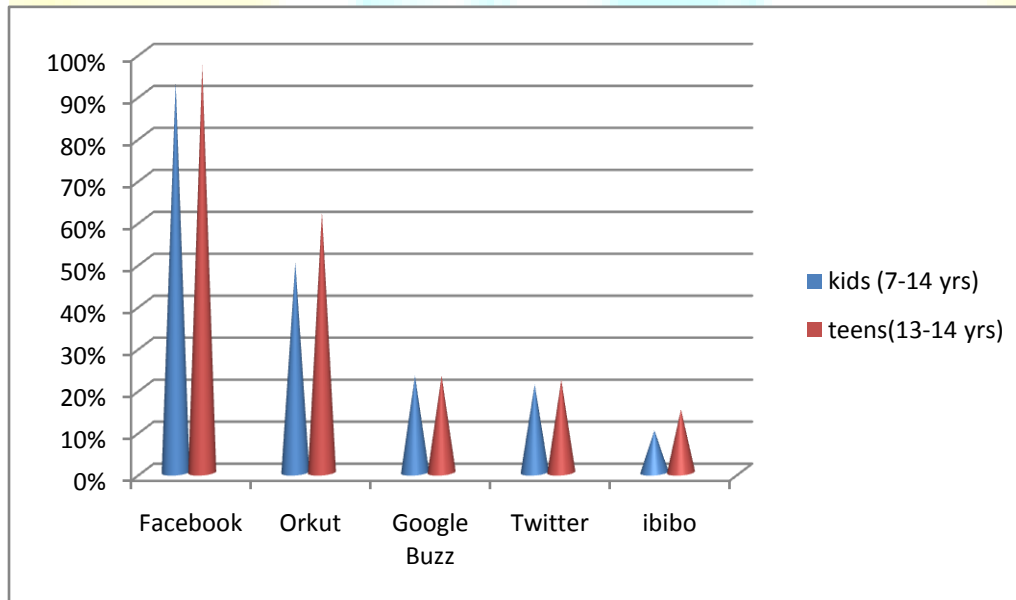
- **Reduced brand loyalty:** it is difficult for the companies to encourage a feeling of brand loyalty amongst the kids, because their mind is flooded with information regarding the brands. Kids can only be loyal till the time brand is able to retain their interest.
- **Not actual buyers:** Kids are not the actual buyers of the product, rather purchase decision is and initiative is taken by their parents on their behalf. So marketers have to ensure that parents should also understand the product differentiation and brand qualities associated with the particular product.
- **Limited reach:** Marketers have to target the kids segment only through the limited means, where they are available. It is mostly focused at internet and television advertising.

Kids on Social media

Social networking sites like facebook, twitter,Orkut etc. are now a day's quite popular not only

amongst adults but also amongst the kids. Although they are not allowed to make their profiles on these websites and publish any information, but still by making fake profiles kids love to socialize with their friends online. 20% parents claim their kids visit social networking sites, whereas 19% kids claim to visit social networking sites. Marketers also try to optimally utilize this particular space but publicizing their products on these networking sites. Even kids remain updated regarding the latest products and brands prevailing in the market.

Kids on top 5 social networking sites



*source: Cartoon Network New Generations India 2011

From the above figure it becomes clear that presence of kids on the social networking sites is quite high. Facebook and Orkut are the two most popular sites amongst this segment. Though law defines a age limit for people using these sites, still kids by misrepresenting there age group participate in the socializing process eagerly.

POINTS TO BE CONSIDERED WHILE MARKETING TO KIDS

Besides certain limitations, kid's role is crucial in influencing the buying behavior for the products which might be for their direct or indirect consumption. According to Monika Tata (G.M. Entertainment Networks (South Asia), Turner International) , Nearly 60% of advertising comes from brands that market to kids like chocolates, candies, etc. For this reason the taste and preferences needs to be crucially evaluated before marketing the product to them.

- Brightly colored, uniquely packed and lot of freebies by its sides, usually attract the attention of kids.
- Direct contact programs and outdoor engagement activities also serve as a good platform to attract the kids.
- Rapid changes and new innovation in the product also enables to keep this customer group intact.
- Association with their superstars like Barbie, Spiderman, Mickeymouse etc. also generates positive results for the marketers.
- Kids even enjoy the pester power i.e. they even exert pressure in purchasing products like an air conditioner, washing machines, clothes etc., due to which companies have started involving kids in there advertisements.
- Products targeted towards kids are often purchased by there parents and it is important to make them understand the usage of products and its benefits.

ETHICS INVOLVED IN MARKETING TO KIDS

(A CASE STUDY OF MC DONALDS)

The issue of marketing to children really brings that into focus; with food marketing a timely lens, the issue of obesity a hot health care crisis, and McDonald's handling of responsibility, as one of the world's largest fast food chains, a case in point. As background, McDonald's Happy Meals for children with toys has come under attack. San Francisco is one of the cities that have voted to ban selling toys with fast food for children that exceed certain levels of salt, fat, calories and

sugar. McDonald's was accused of deceptive marketing practices to children over the lure of toys as an inducement to buy Happy Meals. Healthy alternatives are available, apple slices in place of fries and milk instead of soda – if kids are willing to eat them. But, there is still the issue of high sodium content in burgers. At McDonald's May 17, 2011 shareholder meeting, activists focused attention on McDonald's marketing to children. In February 2011, in anticipation of McDonald's shareholder meeting, Corporate Accountability International launched a campaign to fire Ronald McDonald, the clown mascot for the last nearly 50 years, and encourage headquarters to stop marketing to children by delivering petitions to individual restaurants. They also asked the chain to address directly the relationship of fast food to obesity. Beginning the campaign in a Portland, Oregon suburb, by May they had gathered 20,000 parents' and community residents' signatures on petitions which they delivered to the shareholder meeting. In Oregon, McDonald's threw down the gauntlet, and affirmed Ronald's job security, saying he is "the heart and soul of Ronald McDonald House Charities, which lends a helping hand to families in their time of need." The response demonstrated how McDonald's infuses the emotional and the marketing: Ronald, the symbol to families dealing with sick and dying children, is also the brand, signifying the food and fun atmosphere to eat it in. A letter signed by 600 health professionals and organizations, critical of the link between fast food and obesity, was read at the shareholder meeting. It had run as full page ads in newspapers across the country. In addition, shareholder Proposal 11, by the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, requested McDonald's undertake a report on its "policy responses to public concerns about the linkage of fast food to childhood obesity, diet related diseases and other impacts on children's health." The proposal was soundly defeated. In his remarks at the meeting, CEO Jim Skinner asserted the company's right to advertise freely, to offer its menu and lifestyle selections, and leave to parent's the right to chose what their children eat, saying it is up to personal responsibility. McDonald's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) information indicates the company serves "a balanced array of quality food products and provides the information to make individual choices."

CONCLUSION

In India it has always been a belief that a healthy society raises children to be responsible citizens rather than just consumers. Creating healthy, happy families means spending time together rather than spending money. It's probably impossible to completely shield children from marketing messages. Still, parents can give their children tools to help them cope with the barrage. The Government can also help by coming out with few regulations that will ensure that unethical targeting is stopped. Special care needs to be taken in case of the food and beverage industry, entertainment industry and advertisement in education. It is a war between marketers and the family where the marketer is using his money and resources to entice children and the family its strength and values to protect the children. Marketing activities should not directly nor indirectly incite nor condone violent behavior, other dangerous or reckless behavior or make improper use of violent effects, fear or superstition. Marketing should not encourage to acts of violence, victimizing or the like; nor should it contain representations of murder, violence, abuse or other criminal actions. To conclude, it is not only in the hands of food companies or Government or the interested groups at large to create a healthy society but a more patronage and sustaining is required from the consumers themselves to make the world a better place to lead a quality life.

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