



A Conceptual Framework Of Decision-Making By Children As Consumers With Insertion Of Influencing Factors

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Abstract: Comprehending consumer buying behaviour and the reasons behind it continues to be important in marketing as it enables companies to improve their marketing strategies and increase company performance. Additionally, during recent years, emphasis has been drawn to children as consumers as well as the variables that affect their purchasing decisions. However, there aren't many studies on the subject. The present paper focuses on providing a conceptual framework based on the previous works of literature published by scholars in regard to children consumer behaviour with the inclusion of factors that shape children's consumer behaviour and therefore, the purchase decision. For this purpose, established studies provided by Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, Blandina Šramová's children socialization process, and McNeal's growth sequence of children consumers have been majorly referred to along with other contributions of different scholars on the same. The framework also tries to explain the cognizance of children towards such influencing factors.

Keywords: Advertisements, children's consumer behaviour, parents, peers, media, stores.

Introduction

Although the idea of marketing to children is not nascent, the strategies for integrating them into the marketing world are (Cook, 2004). Children's purchasing behaviour is influenced by these marketing strategies with regard to the product, its price, the place of sale, and promotion, as well as other variables like family, peer group and so on. Since young consumers make up a substantial portion of the target audience demography, the marketing industry in Western nations started focusing on children, particularly in the 1960s (Marshall, 2010). But this gentry of consumers was taken into account in developing nations, comparatively later to the West.

Academicians, marketers, psychologists and researchers in various other fields have been paying attention to the study of children's consumer behaviour in recent years (Šramová, 2017). Children were not formerly thought of as an important market segment. But because of shifting socio-economic and demographic forces, the scenario has changed. These days, they are regarded as three markets together. First and foremost, they are seen as the market that is currently spending money on their wants; secondly, they are also seen as the market that will be purchasing the majority of products and services in the future; finally, they are seen as the market that drives the choices and buying habits of their guardians (Neal, 1987). Children are socialised into this specific position as influential buyers from their earliest years (Sharma & Sonwaney, 2013). In Western research, it has been claimed that children have a significant influence on the decisions made regarding buying children's goods. Since children exhibit distinct needs, wants, convictions, and views, they cannot be understood via the prism of the consumer behaviour of adults (Šramová, 2017). As they get older, their purchasing habits are moulded and established. From the beginning, this generation has been completely surrounded by technology. Young consumers' purchasing habits and preferences have changed as a result of the accessibility of additional information sources and a proliferation of knowledge. This generation places a lot of importance on using new technology for personal development and education (Šramová & Hamranová, 2015).

Additionally, brands have been seen to be a significant component of modern childhood, and this inclusion has grown over the generations. Therefore, it is not surprising that enormous funds have been made aside for eye-catching commercials, an inviting physical store environment for young customers, a variety of offers, etc.

Kulkarni & Prasad (2009) described that the current generation is smart and intelligent, internet knowledgeable, watchful, cognizant of their options, and conscious of their parents' financial situation. They are not susceptible to deception. This generation's alertness and lack of ignorance is its best quality. This sets them apart from earlier generations. They continue by stating that children nowadays, even though innocent but still are well aware; they respect a decent price-quality balance, know of their options, and most importantly, understand that everything carries a price tag. They occasionally attempt to exploit the situation.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the paper is to develop a conceptual framework that demonstrates the decision-making of children as consumers with the inclusion of influencing factors.

Research Gap

There have been various studies on consumer behaviour and on purchase decisions of individuals, as well as, on children with reference to the psychology domain and their socialization process but there are limited studies on children's consumer behaviour. Further, there is not any prominent framework or model for decision-making by children as consumers.

Research Methodology

The work is based on secondary sources of information. Various literature, journal and other published works related to children's consumer behaviour have been referred to for the purpose of supporting the conceptual framework.

Review of literature on children's consumer behaviour

Children's cognitive stages and their observations of the environment are linked by a transactional procedure that occurs during their development (Piaget, 1947). This process results in a balance between the child's observation of their surroundings and cognitive level at a certain point in the child development phase.

One of the primary forces in children's socialisation has proven to be their parents and family (Webley & Nyhus, 2006). Parents' involvement at every stage of childhood is tacit, however, it is more prominent and more often than not, is the only factor influencing a child's development during the age of 0-2 years (Piaget, 1947). During this initial phase, children get information from their family members, specifically, their parents. The fundamental concepts of consumerism are explained to the children, including the meaning of money, how it can be made use of, what advertisements are for, and so forth. In addition to learning symbols, which are still at a superficial level, children begin to comprehend the money's worth (Piaget, 1947). They find it difficult to accept the truth that they can't always get what they desire (Šramová, 2017). The money given to children to carry out their own expenses by their parents, which plays an educational role, is one of the key aspects influencing the economic learning of the children (Furnham & Kirkcaldy, 2000). This practice starts gaining pace during adolescence but the concept of money commences to become clear from an early age (Lassarre, 1996). Further, siblings also play a vital role in shaping and influencing the same. In contrast to single children or those with younger siblings, older siblings attract the children to commercialisation more (Šramová, 2017).

Another critical component of the consumer development process is the media. Through media, children learn models, standards, and concepts and functioning that are acceptable socially (Šramová, 2014). The media messages reach young consumers not only through television but also through banners, and online means. Children are drawn to media from the beginning of their life (Neal, 1987; Juliet, 2004), especially, from the age of 2 years and forward, children learn how to articulate objects with text and visuals and to interpret symbolically (Piaget, 1947). This is because electronic media emits sounds and have vibrant, moving displays. It has been witnessed that TV is commonly tended to by children before leaving for and after arriving from school as well as during weekends (Šramová, 2017). While magazines and children's books are read whilst the assistance of family members, especially parents or older siblings. Parents frequently limit their children's exposure to ads, but they also acknowledge that they utilise the TV, tablets, and mobile phone games to occupy their kids while they are occupied with work or want to take a break, but this is an issue since children who spend more time watching television or using a computer are more likely to suffer from low self-esteem as well as generally, tend to become materialistic (Nairn et al., 2007). Studies have implored that children in the age group of 2- 7 years view TV ads as amusing, interesting, and reliable, and they seek out the promoted goods (McNeal, 2007 ;Šramová, 2014) creating more one-minded opinions and stubborn nature to buy such advertised products. However, this situation changes as the child grows as children begin to understand that all content portrayed via advertisements is not true (McNeal, 1987; Šramová, 2014) as children from age 7 start gaining logical understanding (Piaget, 1947) and the focus is drifted to other forms of promotion that include product placement, recommendations offered by influencers, etc., and as age increases (from age 11 and above) the child becomes even more sceptical of the persuasive content showcased through various forms of promotion (Piaget, 1947; McNeal, 1987).

In consumerism, the product is the most common and eye catchy element that stirs to make the purchase decision. In the case of young consumers, the role of the product is quite eminent. Even from the early ages of life, i.e., from 2 years a child begins to cognize different products and even brand names but product evaluation is based on a single feature; and apprehension about products, brand names, their features as well as evaluation increases as the child grows, specifically from 7 years of age; further, from age 11, the child's brand awareness considerably increases along with better evaluation skills and therefore, sophistication in consumption habits (Neal, 1987). However, in the early stages, the understanding of the value of the product and its price is merely based on certain features while gradually as age ascends, the child understands the price via conjectured reasoning (Kulkarni & Prasad, 2009).

Stores have also been perceived differently by children falling into different age brackets. Although the place of the store remains consistently important for children of all age groups, the point of view however changes. The stores are quite attractive for children in the age group of 2-7 years mainly because of the ambience as a whole and it is a junction of ads and products for children (Šramová, 2017), comprehension of retail stores upgrade for children consumers during 7-11 years of their age and from 11 years of age, children consumers become enthusiastic about the retail stores (McNeal, 2007). This may be due to the fact that their understanding of the product has increased by this age and they want to have

the experience of same in the stores. The media messages from the apparel, books, packaging, presentation or the store come into contact with the child there; and parents acknowledge that malls are the places that create temptations where it is harder to negotiate with their children due to the abundance and promotion of various products and services (Šramová, 2017). Children and their parents frequently get into arguments while shopping because the child asks for a particular product that he/she saw in the commercials previously or is promoted by the store attendants but the parents are not in the interest to buy the same however, parents frequently choose a shopping establishment with a supervised indoor playground for kids that consists of all kinds of fun activities, ranging from swings and sports to video games. This inculcation moulds the consumer behaviour of children as they are availing of the services under guidance (Šramová, 2017). Children trust TV advertising, and they frequently yearn for the products that are advertised to them (McNeal, 2007; Šramová, 2017). The peer group is another entity of socialisation that shapes a child's will, inclinations, perspectives, and beliefs (Šramová, 2014). Parents have acknowledged feeling pressurised by their children to purchase a certain product due to peer pressure. The child puts pester the parents to acquire what they believe to be trendy in order to fit in with their social circle (Šramová, 2017). Children falling under the age group 0-2 years lack symbolic conceptions; instead, they have mental frameworks that are based on their actions. Howbeit, they begin to develop a general symbolic function towards reaching the completion of this period, so they begin to understand (Roland-Lévy, 2010). Thanks to holding and glancing, children learn about their surroundings and develop egocentric personalities (Young, 2010). Although children's cognition has not reached the symbolic level at the preschool stage of development and commences to be perceived at later stages (Marshall & Aitken, 2006), but it has been noticed that certain products that are popular among peers have been given special attention by young consumers, including the symbolic understanding (Šramová, 2017). This becomes more notable as the children reach the age of 11 and above (Neal, 1987). The first indications of economic socialisation among young consumers are negotiating, exchanging products (Webley et al., 1988).

Conceptual Framework of Factors Influencing Cognitive Development of and Decision-Making By Children as Consumers

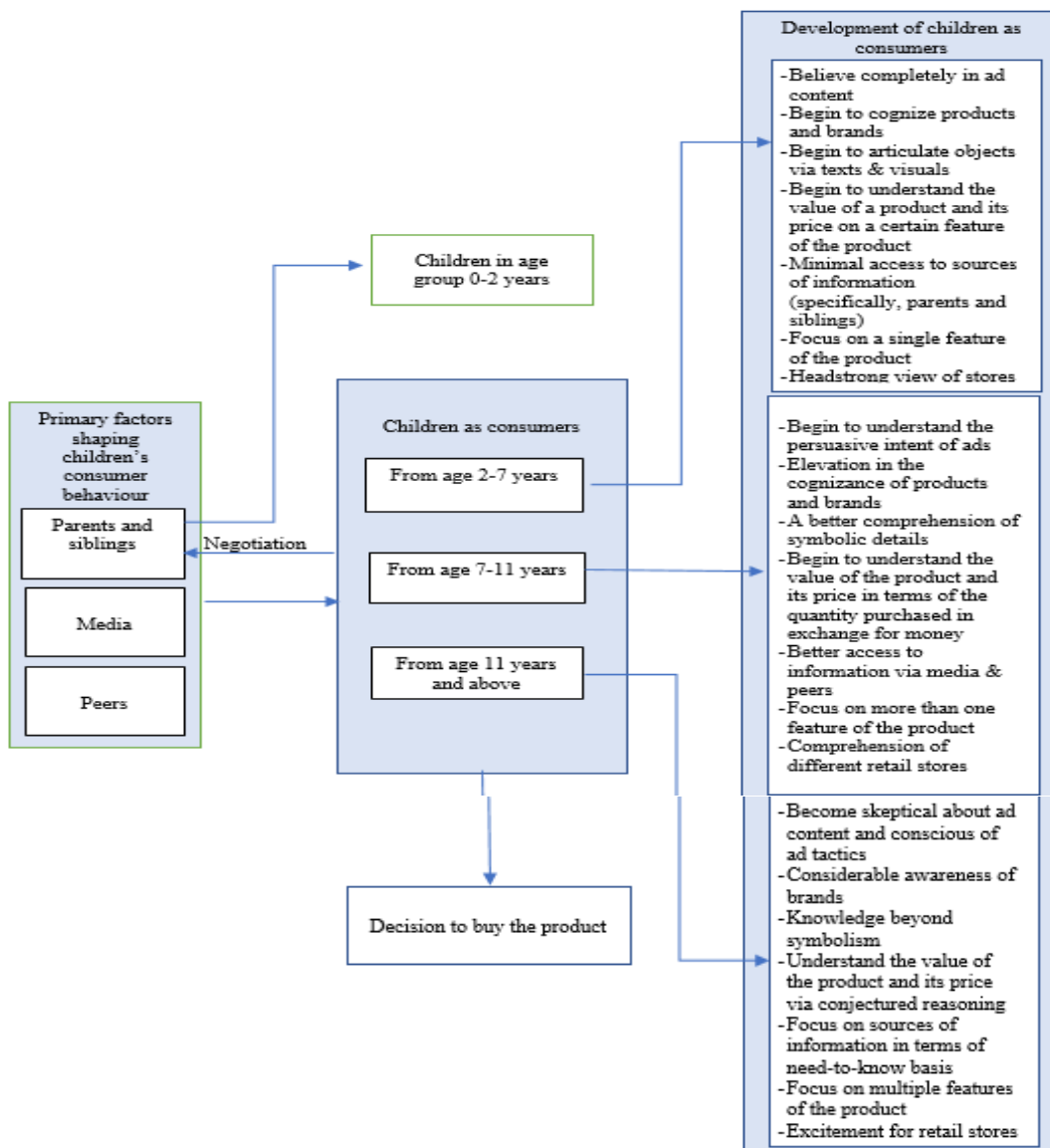


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Factors Influencing Cognitive Development of and Decision-Making By Children as Consumers

The above framework, Figure 1, portrays the factors that have a bearing on the decision-making to buy the product by children as consumers. The primary factors that influence the consumer behaviour of children are parents and siblings, media and peer groups, however, for the age bracket of 0-2 years, parents and siblings play the major role. These influencing factors, with age, are perceived and understood in an improved manner by children and therefore, influence the children's consumer behaviour differently. The factors that were less prominent in the early stage become important for the child at progressive stages. For e.g., parents and siblings are considered fundamental factors in shaping the child's consumer traits but in the growing stages, the product or brand, its features and price, detailed information collected via other sources, reasoning and evaluation increasingly shape their purchase decision. The retail stores play a luring part, however, their attractiveness and significance change as the child grows. Further, with age, the child also starts to interpret the advertisements differently and begins to understand the persuasiveness of the contents within and gradually the purchase and utilization of the product is conducted with more sophistication. Apart from the influencing factors, negotiation acts as a major element that is focused towards parents and siblings and that exerts its impression on final decision-making.

Conclusion

Children's knowledge of products varies as their age ascends. It is evident that the child accepts information and places it in specific situations according to the child's stage of intellectual growth. We might assert that consumer behaviour starts at birth and that its patterns emerge through time. As they get older, certain variables that weren't important at younger ages become more important. For instance, a child could be captivated by a product only by catching a glimpse of it or by its colours; at this age, price and promotion are irrelevant. In contrast, as a child's mind develops with age, cognition operates in ascension and contributes to knowledge and understanding, changing their perceptions. A grown child would take into account the price and promotion in addition to the product and its point of sale. This could alter how children think about and persuade others to make decisions about what to buy in the end.

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