

Children's Influence on a Mother's Purchase Decision: Shaped by TV Advertisements and Preferred Product Categories

Rabia Rafiq Boghani^{1*} Bushra Mahmood² Zainab Asad³

1.Independent researcher, Karachi, Pakistan

2.Faculty of Management Sciences, DHA Suffa University, Karachi, Pakistan

3.Independent researcher, Karachi, Pakistan

Abstract

As a potential market worldwide, children have a great influence on household purchase decisions, and therefore, are targeted by advertisers every day with numerous selling messages. A fair amount of research has been conducted internationally on the relationship between television advertisement aimed at children and its influence on their purchase behavior. Pakistan, however, vastly differs in terms of family dynamics, which shapes a child's role in family buying decisions. It is also important to notice that a child's inclination towards a certain product is often contingent on his/her interest towards the product category itself. The aim of this study is two-fold: to identify the elements of child-focused TV advertisements that are retained by children and their interest in selected product categories, both of which consequently shape their influence on a mother's purchase decision. Eight mothers, with children aged from 3 to 7 years, belonging to SEC A were interviewed. Additionally, an observation was conducted at two superstores in Karachi to record the mother-child purchase behavior. Overall, it was found that children build a strong recall through television advertisements and actively influence the buying process for the product categories of interest, particularly eatables and toiletries category. Also, mothers are not always affirmative and exhibit a reluctant and skeptical behavior towards products requested by children.

Keywords: Children's influence, TV advertisement, product category, purchase decision

1. Introduction

Television advertisement is considered the most effective way of reaching individuals of every class and age group. Its primary motive has always been to introduce audience to different products and induce them into making a certain purchase. It also has a tendency to alter behaviors and evoke actions at every age, with children having a propensity to be the most vulnerable of them all. Although elements of TV advertisements serve as a strong recall during the purchase, another factor that alters the final purchase decision is a child's natural inclination towards certain product categories. This research intends to study child's influential behavior towards a mother's purchase decision; shaped by child's retention of television advertisements and his/her natural inclination towards certain product categories. This study taps into mother's insights as they are deemed principle decision makers of the family and are often influenced by their children.

TV advertisement tones down the direct influence and instead portrays an innocent aspect of daily life which not only attracts the customer but also makes them relate the product to their life (Adler et al., 2004). An advertisement that bears the idea that is less complex and says something new has a likelihood of attracting children's attention (Rice et al., 1988). A direct relationship was found between the repetition of a commercial and its ability to attract children's attention (Wellman, 1990). The extent to which commercials maneuver a child's behavior towards a product is alarming for many parents. Another fundamental factor is a child's interest towards selective product categories. A category of product often decides the impact a child would have on the final purchase decision. As substantiated in one of the studies by Chaudhary and Gupta (2012), TV advertisements as well as peer-communication play a vital role in skewing children towards a particular brand in toiletries category; hence, the highest influence is shown for this category in the final decision stage. Hence, a comprehensive study of categories of interest among the target group is also paramount.

1.1 Research problem and purpose

This study intends to explore the role of elements of TV advertisements (aimed at children) on mother's purchase decisions. It also investigates a child's preference for certain product categories and the degree of influence it has on a mother's purchase decision through child's persuasion.

1.2 Objectives

1. To examine a child's exposure to TV advertisements and its elements retained.
2. To explore the product categories preferred the most by children.
3. To extract mother's insights on child's purchase behavior.
4. To analyze the degree of influence a child has on mothers' purchase decisions.

1.3 Justification

Significant number of studies have been conducted worldwide on the power children exert on mother's purchase decision; however, the ones related to Pakistan mostly cover food purchasing and consumption behavior only. Children are a heterogeneous market and therefore, this paper aims to facilitate local marketers in understanding this diverse segment by exploring product categories of interest among children and the elements of TV advertisements retained by them.

1.4 Limitations and Scope

The sample of this research is limited to children aged 3 to 7 years, considering the traits this segment exhibits and its dependency on the mothers. In addition to this, responses during interviews maybe limited to mothers' sincerity and candidness while disclosing children's behavior. Interviews are conducted from mothers residing in Karachi due to time and cost constraints. A direct observation is carried out which is limited to two leading superstores of Karachi only.

2. Literature review

2.1 Children's media preference

An increase in child's TV exposure has resulted in parallel exposure to advertisements as well, skewing the purchase preference towards products being advertised. Children watch television for approximately one to two hours during weekends and holidays, with younger children watching for longer duration as compared to older children (Panwar and Agnihotri, 2006). In many families, TV watching is considered a family activity where co-viewing occurs and parents' supervision and influence is likely (Soni and Singh, 2012). This supervision also leads to mothers mediating advertisements according to the child's age. A more specific form of restrictive mediation entails limiting the time for watching TV as well as controlling the content that children can watch (Soni and Singh, 2012). Children, around the world, are naturally more inclined towards cartoon channels and the same was depicted in a study conducted by Panwar and Agnihotri (2006) where children of age seven to eight years voted for Cartoon Network programs as their most favorite. Similarly, a report by Gallup Pakistan (2012) depicted Cartoon Network's TV ad spend (revenue) of 0.435 billion, which contributed to 2% share of spend.

2.2 Influential nature of advertisements

Children from developing countries are the most vulnerable segment of the market; a strong correlation is found between children and television advertisements (Priya et al, 2010). Children often take a role of decision-maker in the family and therefore, are enticed by marketers to encourage increased consumption through targeted campaigns (Ironico, 2012; Sondhi and Basu, 2014). The intent of advertising is to inform, persuade and incite purchases through in-store visits, but the actions followed depend on children's perception of advertisement and personal interest as many children see it as a source of entertainment rather than a mere assisting tool (Lawlor and Prothero, 2007; Oates et al, 2002). A child's understanding of the advertising intent is also contingent on other demographics like age, socioeconomic strata and education level (Panwar and Agnihotri, 2006). A child at a very young age starts differentiating a program from an advertisement; however, he often fails to understand the complete message, extracting only the positive information out of it (Pine and Nash, 2002).

Children also seem to be greatly attracted to elements such as humor, special effects, cartoon characters, catch phrases and rhymes. Also, dramatized situations with good lively visuals have proved to be more receptive to children (Panwar and Agnihotri, 2006; Priya et al., 2009). Another frequently used tool to evoke emotions and ensure child's retention of brand message is the brand associations between young consumers and brand characters (Lawrence 2003, cited in Nicolas and Gollety 2012). According to a research, more than 90% respondents stated advertisements featuring free goodies and celebrities as appealing enough to induce their children into purchasing the product (Nassar and Zien, 2012). A few other important elements used to create likeability towards adverts are endorser, music, jingle and slogan (in the same order) (Panwar and Agnihotri, 2006).

2.3 Children's purchase preference

As witnessed all over the world, Martensen and Gronholdt (2008) acknowledged that children indeed do take a part in parents' buying process. Their purchase preferences range from products of direct consumption such as snacks to household items like toiletries; however, the level of influence on each category tends to be different.

Given children's natural inclination towards toys, according to Sondhi and Basu (2014), McDonald's is one example which uses collectible toys as promotion to lure children and influence parents' purchase decision. Products on which children exert least influence on are those which carry high purchasing risk and are used by the whole family (car, furniture, refrigerator, newspaper), whereas the products most influenced are the ones with low risk and are used by the whole family (bread, dairy products, bottled water) (Isin and Alkibay, 2011). Food advertising plays a vital role in influencing children's food choices, preferences and behavior (Hastings et al., 2003). Children's purchase preferences and the power exerted depend highly on their socio economic background

as well. Education background, peer intercommunication and family income are a few important socio-economic factors that help children understand and interpret advertisements. Children in high-income families actively interact with parents about purchase decisions because they have greater exposure to the economic world than children from low-income families (Soni and Vohra, 2016).

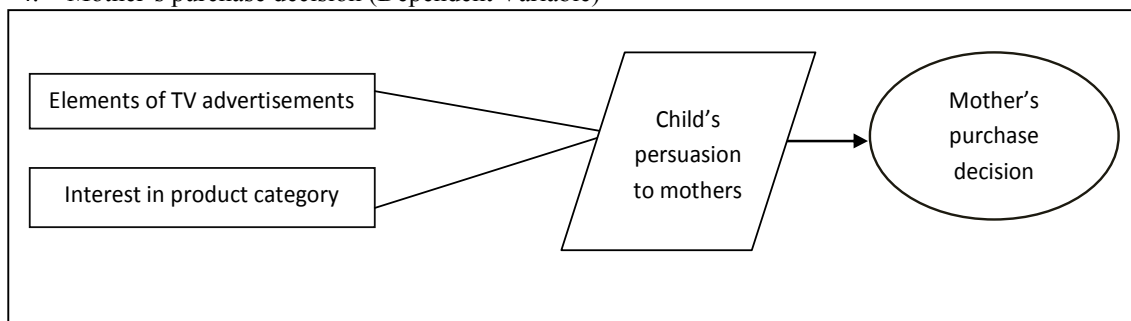
2.4 Children's influence on parental purchase

Children understand the commercial aspect of advertising hence, they increasingly participate in the decision making process during household purchases (Youngs, 2000). It can be rightly said that the purchasing power of children is actually their purchase influence (Haselhoff et al., 2014). Children not only demand products passively during shopping trips, but also are a part of the whole process actively by carrying, locating and fetching products, as well pushing trolley, placing products on the shelves and carrying shopping bags (Haselhoff et al., 2014). Being the influencers, children act as a buying team with mothers, influencing her purchase decisions through pester-power (Nash and Basini, 2012). The reason of such influence is the shifting focus of marketers from adults (direct users) to children, subconsciously manipulating children to intervene the buying process. The extent of children's influence, however, is affected by socio-economic and demographic factors. Children who lie in the bracket of 2.5 years to 8 years tend to be familiar with products and brands alike. A child's first request of a product comes around at the age of 2, typically in a mall or supermarket (Powell et al., 2011). Parents find it difficult to refuse their child and feel that they are losing control over them (Baharlsin and Alkibay, 2009). Maintaining a control over children gets even more challenging as they employ various tactics of persuasion such as bargaining, emotionally convincing and persistently requesting (Palan and Wilkes, 1997). During their research, Wimalasiri (2004) and Shoham and Dalakas (2005) found persuasion strategies to be very popular amongst children and adolescents. According to an Indian study by Chaudhary and Gupta (2012), tactics that are more likely to convince parents are logical and practical arguments rather than emotional tantrums and aggressive behavior.

2.5 Variables

The variables and their relationship identified form theoretical framework to understand the research problem.

1. Elements of TV advertisements (Independent Variable)
2. Interest in product category (Independent Variable)
3. Child's persuasion to mothers (Intervening Variable)
4. Mother's purchase decision (Dependent Variable)



The independent variables, elements of TV advertisements and interest in product category, directly influence the dependent variable, Mother's purchase decision, through an intervening variable, Child's persuasion to mother. The elements of TV advertisements build a child's recall at the time of purchase, whereas, the level of interest in a product category trigger the persuasion to mother.

3. Methodology

A multi-method qualitative research was undertaken, consisting of 8 in-depth interviews (IDIs) from mothers and two unobtrusive observations of children and mothers during shopping trips in the city of Karachi. A thorough analysis of the transcriptions through constant comparison, iterative and progressive, resulted in a categorical distribution of responses. An inductive research approach helped in identifying the relationships between the variables as the research progressed. Purposive sampling technique was used as the sample consists of educated and working mothers who are aware of health issue and belong to SEC A with one to two children in the age bracket of 3 to 7 years. Also, theoretical sampling was practiced as recruiting interviewees came to a halt when no new information was added. Questionnaire for interview was semi-adopted from a past research which has already been validated by an expert. For reliability, interviews had been recorded, transcribed and shown to respondents to seek affirmative response before continuing.

4. Analysis and finding

4.1 Interview Analysis

4.1.1 Child's TV watching routine and TV advertisements aimed at children

A part of this study set out to search children's TV interests and elements of TV advertisements retained to trigger the purchasing act later. As per the interviews, 7 out of 8 mothers revealed that their children watched TV advertisements with interest, whereas 2 mothers highlighted that the attention was contingent on child's level of interest in the product being advertised. When asked about the number of hours spent watching television, 6 out of 8 mothers said their children spent 1 to 4 hours on the average each day which may increase or decrease according to child's other activities, day of the week (weekdays versus weekends), season (holidays) or airing of a program of interest. It should also be noted that 3 out of 8 mothers maintained a strict control over children's TV watching time. All mothers highlighted Cartoon Network as the most favorite TV channel among children. For the given age bracket, the study also identified the inclination of girls towards television dramas particularly.

Table 1: How much time does your child spend watching TV and how much attention does he/she pay to TV advertisements?

Responses	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	Total	%
1 - 4 hours	1	-	1	1	1	-	1	1	6	35%
5 - 8 hours	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	2	12%
Watches advertisements	1	1	1	1	-	1	1	1	7	41%
Product of Interest	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	12%
Total	2	3	2	2	1	2	2	3	17	100%

Source: Author constructed

When asked which elements of advertisements their children tend to notice and retain the most, 6 out of 8 mothers selected cartoon characters and jingles as the two most retained aspects of advertisements. The second most unanimously voted influential element was Free goodie, as 5 out of 8 mothers believed that a free toy was the most enticing incentive for their children. The last two elements to build product benefit and recall were catchy Punch Lines and Special Effects, as depicted through brand examples such as "Horlicks – Taller, Stronger, Sharper" and "Dettol kills germs".

Table 2: Which elements of TV advertisements do they retain the most?

Responses	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	Total	%
Jingle	1	1	1	1	-	-	1	1	6	26%
Cartoon Characters	1	1	-	1	1	1	-	1	6	26%
Special Effects	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	3	13%
Free Goodies	1	1	-	1	-	1	1	-	5	22%
Catchy punch lines	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	3	13%
Total	5	4	1	3	1	2	4	3	23	100%

Source: Author constructed

4.1.2 Product categories that have more influence on children's purchase decisions

Numerous brand advertisements from different product categories have targeted children; however, very few have successfully been able to do so. According to the interviews, category of eatables was unanimously voted favorite among children as 7 out of 8 mothers (50% of the responses) reported junk food and energy beverages to be of primary interest to their children. The same is highlighted by a mother's response, "My kids do not interfere in household purchases, and they like to buy things such as candies only". Product type and category plays a vital role on a type of influence a child has on the final decision as the influence would be active in child-related product decisions (Mangleburg, 1990). The second most preferred category was Toiletries, which accounted for 29% of the responses as 4 mothers highlighted their children's interest for soaps, shampoos and toothpastes. One such response is, "My daughters do like to buy shampoos and soaps of their choice". School accessories (stationeries, bags and shoes) was the third most responded category of interest as 3 mothers (21% of the responses) highlighted children's natural inclination towards this category. Apart from this, toys were one of the requested products; however, they have not been highlighted in the report considering every child's natural inclination towards this category.

Table 3: Which product categories are they inclined to buy the most?

Responses	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	Total	%
Eatables	1	1	1	1	1	-	1	1	7	50%
Toiletries	-	1	1	-	-	-	1	1	4	29%
School Accessories	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	3	21%
Total	1	2	2	1	1	1	3	3	14	100%

Source: Author constructed

4.1.3 Extent of child's persuasion to mothers

As per the interviews, 25% of the mothers showed reluctance in letting their children accompany during shopping trips. In order to gauge a child's influence on parents' purchase decision, the tactics employed to acquire the desired product were identified. After gathering, filtering and grouping responses on the child's way of persuasion, pleading and requesting were identified as the most used tactics by 66% of the mothers. Shaun Powell et al. (2011) in their study indicated that pleading is the tactic most frequently used to persuade mothers into buying a desired product. A mother reflected her experience as, "My son keeps on urging and screaming in public and I get so embarrassed that I normally end up buying the thing". Children's impatience to get a particular product and their inability to properly communicate it to their parents leads them to resort to behaviors like urging and pestering (Pilgrim and Lawrence, 2001). Requesting, on the other hand, is considered the most simple and refined way of asking for a product. BaharIsin and Alkibay (2010) highlight the substantial influence children have as future consumers and the influence exerted by them through simply requesting the desired product. As children get older, they start to rationalize with parents, look for valid reasons to explain and justify the purchase (Shaun Powell et al., 2011). Another tactic identified was emotional tactics to influence with statements such as, "I want it now" and "Please get this for me if you love me" and asking for a reward of good behavior in past. According to a few responses, however, mothers also controlled such situations by having a stern demeanor.

Table 4: How do children make the request for their desired product?

Responses	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	Total	%
Plead	1	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	3	33%
Request	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	3	33%
Emotional Tactics	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	11%
Mother's Control	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	2	22%
Total	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	9	100%

Source: Author constructed

Table 5: Are children only interested in buying the product that they see on TV or do they consume that product too?

Responses	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	Total	%
Consumption	1	1	1	1	-	1	1	1	7	87.5%
No consumption	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	12.5%
Total	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	8	100%

Source: Author constructed

4.1.4 Effect of persuasion on mother's purchase decision

When asked how often does she yield to a child's request, 50% of the mothers reported that they yielded sometimes, with the decision highly depending on factors such as ensuring that the product is worth buying and that it is consumed consistently post purchase. This was followed by 25% of the mothers who yield requests every time and the remaining 25% who rarely yield such requests. Child-centered and traditional mothers are more concerned with the child's health and eating habits than are other mothers (Berey and Pollay, 1968). During the interviews, 44% of the mothers highlighted that they allow a purchase only if it's healthy (eatable category), with responses such as, "I always check the ingredients of a product to see if it is healthy for my child" and "I don't yield requests too much and try to discourage my child from buying a product if it isn't good for her. If we think it's healthy for her, then only we buy it". 33% of the mothers yielded to merely appease and calm the child down as one of them responded, "I yield to calm the children down and so that they stop nagging me". Children generally try to persuade their parents by using different types of influences such as bargaining, persuasiveness, emotional and requesting frequently (Palan and Wilkes, 1997). It must be noted that almost every mother emphasized her reluctance on a child's request in eatables category; as per the responses, it can be induced that children mostly persuaded their mothers for this category.

Table 6: How often do you yield to children's request?

Responses	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	Total	%
Every time	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	25%
Sometimes	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	1	4	50%
Rarely	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	2	25%
Total	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	8	100%

Source: Author constructed

Table 7: Do you yield to your child's request? If yes, why?

Responses	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	Total	%
Pacify	1	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	3	33%
Worth buying	-	1	-	-	1	-	1	1	4	44%
Soft spot	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	11%
Don't yield	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	11%
Total	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	9	100%

Source: Author constructed

4.2 Observations

Locations: Imtiaz super market and Hyperstar, Dolmen City Mall, Karachi

Table 1: Observations in the supermarkets			
		Individuals	Years (approx.)
Hyperstar, Karachi	Family 1	Mother	35
		Daughter	5
		Son	3
	Family 2	Father	45
		Mother	42
		Daughter	7
Daughter		5	
Daughter		4	
Family 3	Mother	35	
Imtiaz, Karachi	Family 4	Daughter	5
		Father	32
		Mother	28
		Son	6
	Family 5	Son	4
		Daughter	28
Family 6	Mother	7	
	Daughter	4	
		Mother	30
		Daughter	3

To particularly understand children's tendency to influence some category of products more than others and the influence on final purchase, two unstructured and unobtrusive observations were conducted at major superstores, Hyperstar and Imtiaz supermarket, located in the Karachi metropolitan region. Target shoppers (children aged 3 to 7 years, accompanying mothers) were identified to accumulate first hand, unbiased data at the point of purchase. During each observation, 3 families were selected, observed, documented and analyzed to record the mother-child purchase behavior, child's category of interest and child's degree of influence on mother's purchase decision. Researchers also subjectively assessed child's approximate age as silent background observers. During observation at Hyperstar supermarket, children of Family 1 and Family 2 were identified as active subjects in snacks aisle as they picked up snacks from the shelves first and sought the approval later. While children of Family 1 mostly requested the desired products which were yielded later, children of Family 2 pleaded incessantly, in the same aisle, until controlled by the mother. Similarly, children of Family 3 were observed at school stationary aisle, purchasing products of their choice which parents generally agreed to without much insistence. During the length of this observation, different aisles belonging to different product categories were observed; however, children were mostly seen to be actively involved at the snacks, beverage and frozen food aisles, with activity in the latter being limited mainly to assisting mothers. Similarly, during an observation conducted at Imtiaz supermarket, grocery items were of the least interest to a child of Family 4. Children of Family 5, however, were seen to be quite involved in toiletries aisle, as one of the children not only mentioned the brand name of soap,

‘Safeguard’, but also showed interest towards body lotions while highlighting its benefit, “mama see lotion, we apply it on hands”. For energy beverages such as Horlicks, Family 5 was action oriented as children directly dropped the products in the basket. In both these categories, children didn’t insist the mother to get product and the mother herself was very affirmative throughout. Conclusively, in both observations, children actively influenced products of direct consumption (eatables and stationary), but passively influenced grocery items.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to examine children’s influence on mother’s purchase decision when shaped by retention of TV advertisements and a child’s natural proclivity towards choice of product categories. It further examined this relationship through an intervening variable, child’s persuasion to mothers. Through responses generated during interviews, the most retained elements of TV advertisement identified by mothers were jingle, free goodies and cartoon characters. Mothers believed that these affected their children’s purchase behavior as they built a strong recall. Regarding TV watching preferences, though girls primarily watched cartoon content, they were also inclined towards drama serials. Boys, however, limited their content preference to cartoon only. Children are a heterogeneous market with varied habits and demographics and hence, demonstrated a need to be treated like one.

Furthermore, according to the interviews and observations, the product category that children influenced the most during final purchase was eatables (snacks and beverages). While eatables were of primary interest to them and were followed by consumption as well, grocery items, on the other hand, did not provoke the same reaction and interest. As witnessed during observations, children were only passively involved in the grocery aisles and didn’t drop the items directly in the trolley. Toiletries (soaps and shampoos) in the grocery category, however, were the only exception in this category as children influenced and took great interest in selecting the soap brand of their choice.

Lastly, mother was identified as the final purchaser who consented to every purchase made by the child. During the research, nearly all mothers exhibited a child-centric behavior and were generally reluctant to buy the products demanded by children, often agreeing only to pacify them. Furthermore, pleading and requesting were the two most employed tactics by children which mothers gave into only if they deemed the product worth buying i.e. healthy and useful. Taking this into account, there’s a need for marketers to direct the communication towards mothers to address their concerns.

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