

Television viewing and consumer behaviour

Noor Hasmini Abd Ghani, University Utara, Malaysia, looks at the influence of television on children's development as consumers. She explains the results of a study of Malaysian schoolchildren which considers gender, family income and personality traits in relation to television viewing habits and consumer behaviour

THE IMPORTANCE OF children as consumers is now acknowledged. According to McNeal (1992), and Schiffman and Kanuk (1997), in the US child consumers are not simply a market of 37 million potential young buyers. Globally, this market is exceptional because they are considered to influence three marketplaces. Firstly, young consumers are a primary market, they have their own money to spend on whatever they desire and they may also be asked to do shopping for the family. Secondly, they are a market influencer, they can directly and indirectly influence the shopping habits of others, including their parents. Thirdly, they are a future market who will themselves become consumers of all products and services in years to come.

The unique market position of the young consumer has meant that increasingly large budgets are being committed by marketing departments to reach and influence children. However, marketers need to continually rethink their strategies and assumptions, and make cost efficiency their priority. This means that marketers need strategies that target this young sector that are similar to those used for adults. Stipp (1993) comments on how different consumer groups have dissimilar attitudes, interests and behaviour, and taking these factors into account is likely to improve marketing success. Needless to say, this premise applies equally to children as to any other group.

Stipp (1993) further stated that, of the many ways to target young people, television provides

the broadest and most frequent reach. Although there has been a lot of discrepancy about the accuracy of television ratings for children, it still provides the useful data for studying this audience. Television attracts large audiences of young consumers and they clearly do not only watch the programmes specifically produced for them. It is expensive to advertise on prime-time shows, yet more advertisers are looking beyond children's programmes to reach target audiences of children and parents.

McNeil and Ji (1999) determined that television is the most important source of new product information for children and this importance increases significantly as they get older (in comparison with other mass media – radio, magazines, newspapers and outdoor ads). They posited that through television advertising children learn about new brands and products, how to use the products and who uses them. Children develop knowledge and opinions about the products and show preferences. The children may then buy advertised products themselves or ask their parents to purchase for them.

This study evaluates the importance of television in influencing children's consumer behaviour. We considered the influence of children's gender, parental income and personality traits on their television viewing habits, and the relationship between television viewing and children's consumer socialisation.

Literature review

According to Nik Rahimah *et al* (1994), children become consumers through a socialisation process. Socialisation, as defined by Zigler and Child (1969, cited in Gunter & Furnham, 1998), is a process by which individuals learn to participate effectively in the social environment. According to Ward (1974, cited in Gunter and Furnham, 1998), the adaptation of this definition to socialisation as a consumer was proposed in the mid 1970s, as a vehicle for the study of consumer behaviour. Ward defined consumer socialisation as the process by which young people acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in a marketplace.

The importance of mass media as a socialisation agent has received much attention in consumer socialisation research (Moore *et al* 2002, Nik Rahimah *et al* 1994, Ward 1972 and Caron & Ward 1975). Moore *et al* (2002) asserted that market researchers have shown television viewing can play a significant role in the formation of consumer behaviour in young people. Nik Rahimah *et al* (1994) also highlighted the fact the role of television in forming children's consumer behaviour is widely documented. Ward (1972) explained the influence of television in children's consumer socialisation by looking at children's perceptions, judgment, and understanding of television advertising. Ward concluded that the older the child, the better the child's awareness of what advertising is and the the greater understanding of the purpose of advertising. Older children also tended to question the credibility of the advertisements. In Ward's study with Caron (1975), he determined the influence of television on children's socialisation by looking at their gift ideas. They concluded that older children (ages 10 and above) were more likely to cite television as the source of gift ideas than friends. When considering gender as a factor, no differences were found.

Consumer socialisation has been defined as the process by which young people acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in a marketplace

In the study made by Nik Rahimah *et al* (1994), they concluded that of three demographics variables, age, gender and family income, the most influential in explaining differences in socialisation is the family income. The result supported the findings made by Caron and Ward (1975). They considered child's age, gender and social class as factors in consumer socialisation. Social class was found to be the most important variable in explaining a child's requested gift. In the survey, they concluded that middle-class children (average family income US\$9,000) requested more gifts than upper-class children (average family income US\$14,500). In addition, Goldberg (1990, cited in Nik Rahimah *et al* 1994) found low-income children tended to purchase a greater number of children's cereals as compared to upper-middle income children.

The important of income variable also can be found in explaining the amount of time children spend watching television. Comstock *et al* (1978, cited in Nik Rahimah *et al* 1994) found that children with lower income watched more television than middle or upper-middle income children. The study by Nik Rahimah *et al* (1994) concluded family income is a strong predictor of the time children spend watching television. These findings also determined a link between family income and children's favourite television programmes. Children from families with higher monthly household income tended

Television is an influential model for children's expression of nonverbal behaviour and emotion, such as happiness, sadness, anger, fear and disgust

to like watching cartoons, but they were also interested in other types of programmes such as dramas and thrillers. They also found that both boys and girls like to watch cartoons, but the girls preferred to watch dramas and movies as well, while the boys liked thrillers.

In addition to demographic factors, the importance of a child's personality in connection with television viewing has been widely documented. For example, Schramm *et al* (1961) explained that compared to a group of children with medium and low IQ, children with high IQ tended to watch less television. Also children who found it difficult to make friends watched more television than children with many friends. Hess and Goldman (1962) explained that children who watched a lot of television tended to be lonely, shy, unmotivated and spoilt. Whereas children who watched little television were found to be happier, more flexible in their personalities and more physically active. Coats and Feldman (1995) stated that television is an influential model for children's expression of nonverbal behaviour and emotion, such as happiness, sadness, anger, fear and disgust. Even though television has long been recognised as affecting children's understanding of their world, a growing body of research suggests it also affects understanding of their emotions (Coats & Feldman 1995).

In summary, it may be seen that television plays an important role in children's consumer socialisation. To further research in this area

this study considers family income, gender, personality and television viewing habits as variables in the development of children's consumer socialisation.

Methodology

Procedure

The respondents of this study were 138 primary school children aged 10 to 12 years from three schools in Bandar Baru Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia. Simple random sampling was used in the survey and the structured questionnaire was translated into Malay. Out of 138 questionnaires distributed, 110 were returned complete and usable.

Measurement

Consumer socialisation

The aspects of children's consumer socialisation included in this study are how much television children watch, what they watch and their purchasing behaviour.

Demographics

The children's gender and family income are considered as influences on their television viewing and consumer socialisation. These demographic factors have been documented as a significant influence on the consumer socialisation of Malaysian children (Ward & Caron 1975; Nik Rahimah *et al* 1994).

Personality

According to Mowen (1995), personality is 'the distinctive patterns of behaviour, including thoughts and emotions that characterise each individual's adaptation to the situations of his or her life'. In previous literature ten children's personal characteristics have been identified and may be measured using semantic scales (Schramm *et al* 1961; Hess & Goldman 1962; Coats & Feldman; Mowen 1995). Following are details of the characteristics measured:

Table 1 Sample characteristics (%)

Child's age		Child's position in family	
10 years	18.2	Eldest	24.5
11 years	36.4	Second	20.9
12 years	44.5	Third	26.4
		Fourth	17.3
		Fifth	4.5
		Sixth	2.7
		Seventh or more	2.7
Gender		Parents' education level	
Male	40.9	Primary school	7.3
Female	58.2	Secondary school	36.4
		Higher education	54.5
Number of children in family		Parents' profession	
1	0.9	Executives	25.5
2	3.6	Professionals	18.2
3	14.5	Housewives	13.6
4	30.0	Clerks	10.0
5	20.0	Self-employed	8.2
6	12.7	Manual workers	9.1
7	9.1	Students	1.8
8 or more	8.1		
Adult assisting with questionnaire		Monthly household income (gross)	
Mother	59.1	RM2000 and above	70.0
Father	40.0	Less than RM2000	26.4
Sample: 138 children			

- C1 Aggressive ⇔ ⇔ ⇔ ⇔ passive
- C2 Studious ⇔ ⇔ ⇔ ⇔ playful
- C3 Rough ⇔ ⇔ ⇔ ⇔ gentle
- C4 Silent ⇔ ⇔ ⇔ ⇔ chatty
- C5 Alone ⇔ ⇔ ⇔ ⇔ friendly
- C6 Brave ⇔ ⇔ ⇔ ⇔ cowardly
- C7 Angry ⇔ ⇔ ⇔ ⇔ sensitive
- C8 Happy ⇔ ⇔ ⇔ ⇔ pensive
- C9 Self-reliant ⇔ ⇔ ⇔ dependent
- C10 Competitive ⇔ ⇔ ⇔ tolerant

Limitations of the study

The study focuses exclusively on primary school children in Bandar Baru Bangi in the

Selangor region, located in the western peninsula of Malaysia. Hence the study represents only part of the Selangor population.

Results

Sample characteristics

Table 1 show the demographic and socioeconomic traits of the sample of children and their parents. In the sample 18.2% were 10-year-olds, 36.4% were 11-year-olds and 44.5% were 12-year-olds. Most of the children came from families of four children (30%) and a gross household monthly income of RM2000

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Table 2 Chi square results – influence of demographic variables on consumer socialisation

Socialisation factors	Gender			Family income		
	Chi-sq	df	p	Chi-sq	df	p
Television viewing						
from time/day	4.7	5	0.45	219.2	170	0.01
hours per day	1.8	3	0.62	95.0	102	0.67
hours per week	0.5	5	0.99	158.7	170	0.72
time of day viewing ends	0.3	3	0.95	113.4	102	0.21
Television programmes viewed						
Programme category	8.5	4	0.07	95.3	136	1.00
Preferred type of programme	22.5	6	0.00	237.8	204	0.05
Purchasing behaviour						
desire to own product seen on television	3.4	4	0.49	154.3	136	0.13
frequency of request for product seen on television programme	5.0	4	0.29	140.8	136	0.37
frequency of request for product seen on television advertising	2.7	3	0.45	131.3	102	0.03
Level of significance p=0.05						

(US\$527) and above. Most children in the sample were the third child in their family (26.4%).

There were more girls than boys in the sample. Most of the children were assisted in completing the questionnaires by their mothers. According to Warren (2002), female-dominant samples are basically ordinary and it is appropriate for mediation research because women are more often primary caregivers. The level of education of parents in the sample may be divided into those with primary education only (7.3%), those with secondary school education (36.4%) and those with higher education (54.5%). Most of the parents were executives (25.5%), professionals (18.2%) and housewives (13.6%).

Demographic influences on socialisation factors

As shown in Table 2, the family income is an important factor in relation to the amount of

spent watching television each day. Analysis showed that children from low income families like to watch television between 8.30pm and 10.59pm. Children from high income families tended to watch television between 5.00pm and 6.59pm and 8.30pm to 9.29pm. The amount of time children spent watching television was not influenced by gender. Boys and girls tended to spend an equal amount of time each day watching television.

In terms of the programmes the children watched, gender and family income showed significant effects. Of the two demographics variables, gender constitutes a strong predictor with $p=0.00$. The results showed boys were interested in documentaries and girls preferred programmes in a series.

Family income is the only demographic variable to have a significant effect on children's purchase behaviour, as shown in Table 2. Family income appeared to have a strong significant

Table 3 Chi square results – influence of personality traits on consumer socialisation

Socialisation factors	Aggressive–passive (C1)			Studious–playful			Rough–gentle(C3)			Brave–cowardly (C6)		
	Chi-sq	df	p	Chi-sq	df	p	Chi-sq	df	p	Chi-sq	df	p
Television viewing												
from time/day	11.2	5	0.05	11.3	5	0.04	5.0	5	0.41	3.1	5	0.70
hours per day	2.0	3	0.58	0.86	3	0.84	1.7	3	0.64	1.2	3	0.76
hours per week	4.3	5	0.51	8.3	5	0.14	12.1	5	0.03	11.9	5	0.04
time of day viewing ends	2.1	3	0.55	0.05	3	1.00	4.1	3	0.24	2.7	3	0.44
Socialisation factors												
Socialisation factors	Aggressive–passive (C1)			Rough–gentle(C3)			Competitive–tolerant (C10)					
	Chi-sq	df	p	Chi-sq	df	p	Chi-sq	df	p			
Television programmes viewed												
Programme category	1.9	4	0.75	3.1	4	0.54	4.0	4	0.40			
Preferred type of programme	2.0	3	0.58	0.86	3	0.84	1.7	3	0.64			
Socialisation factors												
Socialisation factors	Aggressive–passive (C1)			Studious–playful			Silent–chatty(C3)			Competitive–tolerant (C6)		
	Chi-sq	df	p	Chi-sq	df	p	Chi-sq	df	p	Chi-sq	df	p
Purchasing behaviour												
desire to own product seen on television	3.4	4	0.50	7.6	4	0.04	1.5	4	0.82	10.3	4	0.04
frequency of request for product seen on television programme	5.9	4	0.20	0.74	4	0.84	8.0	4	0.10	2.3	4	0.67
frequency of request for product seen on television advertising	6.7	3	0.08	4.3	3	0.20	12.1	3	1.00	1.1	3	0.78
Level of significance p=0.1												

effect in association with frequency of request to purchase product seen on television advertising, $p=0.03$. Gender did not exert a significance influence on purchase behaviour.

The influence of personality on consumer socialisation

Table 3 shows the relationship between the children's television viewing habits and their personalities. The aggressive–passive ($p=0.05$) and studious–playful ($p=0.04$) variables were significant in relation to the amount of time children spent watching television each day. Children with more aggressive personalities

were more likely to watch television between 5pm and 6.59pm, and 8.30pm and 9.29pm, as compared to children with passive tendencies who mostly watched between 5pm and 6.59pm. Children who were keen on reading preferred to watch between 5pm to 6.59pm and 8.30pm to 9.29pm, whereas children with playful characteristics preferred to watch between 5.00pm and 6.59pm. Other personality variables were not found to produce significant effects in relation to time spent watching television.

There was a relationship between number of hours of television watched per week and

There was a significant relationship between those with silent-chatty personality traits and frequency of requests to purchase a product seen on television

children with personality characteristics of rough-gentle ($p=0.03$) and brave-cowardly ($p=0.04$). Children with a 'rough' personality watched between 16 to 25 hours of television each week, compared to children with 'gentle' personalities who watched between 16 and 20 hours per week. Children with brave characteristics watched 10 hours of television or less, while children with cowardly characteristics watched 16 to 20 hours per week.

The findings also showed that children with studious-playful personality influences neared a significant ($p=0.14$) relationship with the number of hours of television watched per week. The personality variables did not have a significant association to the number of hours watched per day and the time children stopped watching television each day.

In terms of the programmes watched, children with aggressive-passive and rough-gentle personality traits were found to have significant association with preferred programme types and neared a significant effect for children with competitive-tolerant personality traits ($p=0.15$). The result showed that aggressive and tolerant children preferred documentaries, whereas for passive and competitive children liked programmes running a series. There were no other significant effects found for preferred types of programme and personality.

The influence of personality on children's purchase behaviour is significant for four types

of personality as shown in Table 3. The studious-playful and competitive-tolerant personality traits were found to have significant relationship with intention to own a product seen on television, $p=0.10$ and $p=0.04$ respectively. There was a significant relationship between those with silent-chatty personality traits and frequency of requests to purchase a product seen on television ($p=0.10$). Children with aggressive-passive traits were also found to have a significant association ($p=0.08$) with frequency of requests for a product seen on television. Other personality variables were not found to have significant effects on purchasing behaviour.

Discussion and conclusion

The influence of television on children's consumer socialisation was examined in this study by looking at the influence of demographic variables and personality traits on television viewing and purchase behaviour. Of the two demographic variables, the most influential in explaining differences in socialisation was the child's family income.

The statistical results with family income functioning as a predictor indicates significant findings in association with the amount of time spent per day watching television, the preferred type of programme and the frequency of requests to purchase a product seen on television. This finding partially supports the survey made by Nik Rahimah (1994) in the association between family income and frequency of request to buy products seen on television.

Gender is less influential in explaining the socialisation pattern. But gender should not be discounted in future research into children's consumer socialisation. Gender is an important variable in explaining the children's consumer socialisation as it has a particular influence on the type of programmes preferred by children.

Not all of the personality variables had significant effects on children's consumer

socialisation. Overall, of the six variables that did show a relationship with consumer socialisation, the most influential was the aggressive–passive personality trait. The statistical results with aggressive–passive personality functioning as a predictor indicate significant findings in association with the amount of time children spent watching television per day, the preferred type of programme and the frequency of requests to purchase a product seen on television. The studious–playful personality trait showed significant findings in association with the amount of time children spent per day watching television, the intention to own a product seen on television and neared significant with the number of hours spent watching television each week. As mentioned by McNeal & Ji (1999) television is the most important type of media in identifying a product a child would like to buy.

Other significant personality traits were rough–gentle, brave–cowardly, silent–chatty, and competitive–tolerant. These traits were found to have significant effects with some of the socialisation variables. Although the personality variables alone–friendly, happy–pensive and self-reliant-dependent were less influential they should still be considered by marketers.

Children's personality traits are an important consideration when devising a marketing strategy. Marketers should take these characteristics into account when developing their advertising and research how children with different personalities will perceive their ads. Future research into children's consumer socialisation should consider a larger sample and perhaps include different countries. Further demographic variables could include nationality and parental marital status to identify other influences on children's consumer socialisation. Another way to increase the value of the survey would be to include details of parents' restrictions on television viewing, the level and effectiveness of such restrictions are now a significant consideration for television advertisers.

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