Chapter 10

Suggestions and Recommendations

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10.1 Introduction

To survive in a competitive environment, an organisation must provide target customers more value than is provided by its competitors. This requires anticipating and reacting to customer needs than competition does. Since marketing starts and ends with consumers, the key is to ensure customer satisfaction which lies in understanding the consumer, his likes, dislikes expectations and motivations. Marketers benefit by understanding how consumers take consumption decisions which enable them to formulate suitable marketing strategies. The market today, promises to be economically more multi-layered, culturally distinctive, complex and geographically heterogeneous than it was earlier. Marketing has always been very dynamic and changes with times.

Due to the change in the market place, economic structures, standard of living, family structures, there has been a lot of changes that have taken place over the years. Change in the consumer behaviour of children also started few years back; it is today that parents, the government and the marketers are taking notice of the same. Increase in DPI has resulted in parental spending; NUF has given considerable freedom to the husband and wife to take their own decisions. But dual earning families are falling short of time, due to which the decision making in a family has shifted to children. Media Tsunami has gripped the nation and children are the first to fall prey to it. Media invasion and technology has give rise to new concepts of peer pressure and pester power, on the basis of which the child in the family makes the entire family dance on his little finger. This has resulted in the children growing up early. Children are smart, knowledgeable have access to lot of information and they know how to use it to their advantage.

Many parents take pride in their child’s knowledge, smartness, awareness and decision making skills. Parents are not realising that these children are growing in an increasing world of materialism. In spite of being born with a silver spoon in the mouth, they are still not happy. The thin line between need and desire has vanished long back. Gone are the days of carefree childhood and abundant
happiness that previous generation (now parents) experienced. Gay abundance, laughter, friends, fun and frolic and small joys shaped the personality of young kids. They were far away from consumerism. If they needed anything they asked for it, needs were frugal and money was valued. Today you see a 360 degree turn to this scenario whereby childhood is laced by expensive toys, PSP, PS II/III, personal computer, international vacations, branded goods, and media invasion. Children are unhappy with whatever they have, aspirations are high and they seem to have got into a vicious cycle, where getting out seems to be next to impossible. Malls, multiplexes and international food chains like McDonalds and Pizza Hut have added to this very materialism.

Well-to-do parents in metros are splurging as they have high DPI and usually a single child or maybe two, whom they want to give the best, i.e. whatever best money can buy. Parents today are trying to give their children the kind of things that they never had access to when they were kids. What parents need to do tomorrow, they have already done it yesterday. Early consumer socialization - directly or indirectly further helps in changing the perception of children towards a particular brand.

If the consumerism is within limits, there would be no problem. But it is increasing at a rapid rate which is frightening. Today’s children are growing up in comfortable and luxurious environment whereby their parents have switched gears to luxury goods rather than necessary consumption items. The same children will grow up into adults with a certain lifestyle and standard of living which is definitely going to be high. If these adults are unable to sustain this lifestyle, they will fall into depression and other similar disorders. If they are able to sustain themselves, they would have lost novelty of all the things in life as they would have either used or acquired them very early in life.

Today’s children are tomorrow’s adults who will help build and shape the nation. If this generation grows up to be materialistic, bored, depressed, with no interest left in either going out, or on vacations, where small joys do not matter at all, who
will be responsible for a vacant and robotic generation? And what kind of legacy will they pass on to the future generation?

Instead of playing the blame game, parents should take the marketers into confidence and along with the government pass some stringent rules on media and marketing to children. Parents too must impose self-regulation as every move of theirs is watched and then aped. The researcher has given a few suggestions and recommendations. Suggestions related to media and marketing, specifically to children is given below in the respective chapters. Hence this chapter will only speak about the general recommendations and suggestions.

10.2 Specific Suggestions given to Parents

Specific suggestions for parents from the researcher are as follows:

For parents:

1. Parents are the role model of a child. If parents exercise restraint on splurging on unnecessary luxurious items, the message will pass on to the children. It is easier said than done but the very thought that parents themselves are spoiling the future of their children may help put this suggestion into practice.

2. Parents flaunt their wealth and use their children to show off. This parental tendencies rise from inferiority complex or low self-esteem. Parents should realise that flaunting the wealth is momentary but its impact is permanent on the minds of the young children.

3. Parents want to give their children all that they can afford. Buying unnecessary things also stems from peer pressure or comparison with other parents. It is important to know where to draw the line.

4. It is important to keep a keen watch on the child’s TV viewing and internet habits, without feeling guilty about it. Have a element of surprise whenever you are calling your child. Kids should not be able to predict your conversation before they hear you.
5. Do not treat TV as an electronic baby-sitter. Exposing a child to TV at a young age should be avoided. In fact, as parents TV should be kept out of the child’s life as much as one can. TV is addictive and hence it begins with a few advertisements followed by few hours of cartoon network and finally whole day of Pogo, and so on.

6. It is important to be extremely respectful and honest with children. If this is lost, it is difficult to build up the same image again in the eyes of the children, leading to dangerous consequences to both-the parents as well as the child.

7. Sometimes children will want to talk about issues like peer pressure or things you feel are silly and stupid. Be patient and hear them out. Don’t interrupt in between, in fact converse with the child, be honest and explain why other parents can probably afford a few things whereas the respective family cannot. Do not hide money matters from kids; they are too smart not to notice it. Hence it is important to be honest and blunt.

8. When you explain the importance of nutritious food, fruits and vegetables, one has to be careful to practice what you preach. If parents insist on eating out on every weekend and gorge on junk food, you are giving wrong signals to the child.

9. Today’s children are brought up in an era of pleasure and not hard work. Make the child run a few errands or thrust the responsibility of looking after the pet or plants in the house and pay a certain amount which also doubles up as pocket money. Let the child earn his pocket money rather than getting it easily. This will keep the child grounded as he will realise the efforts that go into earning the money that he is ever ready to spend.

10. By giving too much too soon, we are robbing the children of the opportunity to realise their dreams and actually work towards it.

11. The power of advertising cannot be undermined—even parents and adults are influenced by it. Therefore one has to be practical and interactive with the child.
12. Excessive gaming is already seen as a public health issue, sparking addictive behaviour that can lead to a range of psychological problems. Apart from this, excessive gaming can lead to strained eyes and inability to concentrate.

13. Parent’s perception of what a child needs and should spend has changed. Sometimes it is the guilt of not being able to spend enough time, with both parents working, leading to extra generosity. Guilt on parent’s part is the biggest culprit; even the child knows how to manipulate this factor. Hence it is important to spend quality time with the child.

10.3 Recommendations

Recommendations given by researcher are as follows:

1. Use pool parenting technique. In this parent of one child talks to another child as part of a group and learns how different children react to them. Sometimes the child may not open up to his/her own mother and thus this method can be implemented successfully.

2. If the child gets pocket money per month, make the child responsible for the same. Gift a small diary to the child and ask him/her to write the daily expenses, which the parent should go through every month. This will help keep a check on the child’s expenses.

3. Open a savings bank account in a nearby bank. Encourage the child to save from his/her pocket money and give a bonus if the child is able to save a certain amount. This will inculcate the value of money in children.

4. Don’t let the child intimidate you—you are the parent and you have the right to say ‘no’. If you give in to one unreasonable demand, it will lead to another; hence learn to say ‘no’.

5. Do not give in to emotional blackmail—you know you love him and denying him/her a designer watch doesn’t make you a bad parent. Do not feel guilty; you are doing the best you can.
6. Don’t shout, scream or yell at the child—reason out or say a firm ‘no’ which will have more impact than making the child stand in the corner.

7. Restrict TV viewing to one hour a day maximum. Instead encourage the child to join some sport like table tennis or badminton. Schedule the child’s activities in such a manner that the child is not left with more than an hour to watch TV.

8. Tight and continuous grasping of hand-grips together with repeated pushing of buttons produce continuous trauma to palm surface. This is also termed as play station palmer hidradenitis causing painful lesions on the palms of children. Play station, PSP playing should be restricted to weekends for one hour.

9. Traditional games involve interacting face to face with people, an environment of healthy competition, unlike video games which usually isolate a child and also foster ferocious kind of competition. Hence thrust should be on outdoor playing rather than gaming.

10. Education needs to go beyond the curriculum to teach life skills and relationships. There needs to be an effective system of school counselling involving parents, children and psychologists.

11. An outcome of wide choice has seen that kids are increasingly dismissing products that don’t cater to their immediate needs. They seem to be moving on to the next best thing a lot quicker and a lot many times; this is called as a ‘passed syndrome’. Parents can help children by involving them in systematic purchasing. A list is made before going to a departmental store and only those things written on the list are purchased.

12. Continuous TV watching is affecting the mental health of the children. Watching so many brands being advertised, gives them the feeling of helplessness and frustration of not owning enough things. This problem requires open and healthy communication skills among the parents and child or the teacher and the child.

13. Those who cannot afford the various symbols of luxury grow up nursing wounded aspirations leading to tremendous inferiority complex. Inferiority
complex and peer pressure is leading to ‘kleptomania’. It means conducting small thefts which could further lead to bigger problems. Every school has a counsellor, if the parent finds any such symptom; the school or private psychologist should be contacted immediately. Hiding the problem will make it worse and hence one should not be ashamed of visiting a psychologist.

14. The incidence of childhood depression in India is on a rise. Children have to face the pressures of changing lifestyle and peer pressure. It is important not to enrol the child in a hi-fi school where the rich and the famous study. Keeping up with the rich and famous is a difficult task; hence school where children from similar economic background study should be preferred.

15. Government should work towards forming stringent laws to curb the menace of excessive advertising or advertising of unnecessary products on kid’s channels. Government in collaboration with consumer forum should set up a strict vigil by its members. Marketers breaking the rules should be severely punished so as to set an example for others.

10.4 Conclusion

In India, the literature on family decision-making is scant and researchers have only partially investigated the role of children along with other members in family decision-making. The extent of influence of a child on parent’s purchase decisions are based on child’s assertiveness and parent’s child centeredness. Parents seek opinion in purchasing products not directly related to them, such as cars, because of their higher knowledge of brands, models and latest trends. The dual earning families too have relatively greater discretionary income to splurge. The average Indian is spending money more liberally than ever before, in fact, yesterday’s luxury are fast becoming today’s necessities.

The importance of children as consumers has suddenly come to the forefront with the marketers not losing any time in grabbing up the opportunity and directing all concentrated efforts in trying to sell to the children. Children are three markets
bundled into one- the primary market, the influencer and the future buyer, which makes them so important. They are the ones who are driving the sales home. The marketers have realised that the best way to reach a consumer is through his/her child. This excessive attention has its own repercussions. Right from a health drink to toilet cleaner, mobile phone to insurance policies, everything is sold to these young consumers. A simple Cartoon Network program is no longer innocent; it is laden with a number of advertisements.

This excessive attention by the marketers is influencing the children negatively. Children today are driven by materialism. They are unsatisfied little consumers whose aspirations are very high, and once they are achieved, they still rise further. Friendships, social relationships are all counted with material things. The same children will grow up into consumers whose appetite for goods will be insatiable, they will constantly want new and innovative products and keeping brand loyalty will be a difficult task. Right now the marketers are busy milking the cows without realising the serious repercussions it could have on the future. Researcher has made an in-depth study on the consumer behaviour of children and suggested suitable recommendations. Similarly important suggestions are also given at the end of the relevant chapters that is chapter 6, impact of media and technology on buying behaviour of children and chapter 8, marketing of goods, especially to children.