Preface

A visit to a local grocer as well as a mall brings forth an important consumer to the forefront—a child, who every marketer is set to woo. Every channel and every advertisement has a cute kid in it trying to influence this young consumer. They seem to be knowledgeable, motivated, and also seem to drive the sales home. Prime time is no longer 8 pm to 11 pm. It is all about the early evenings when children come back from their tuitions and plonk in front of the TV sets, more often at the cost of sacrificing the outdoor play time. Every month a new TV channel is added to the already vast number of TV channels especially dedicated to children, and marketers are clamouring to run their advertisements on these channels. Being a mother of a 10 year old herself, the researcher felt the need to study the reasons behind young kid’s turning into mature consumers at a very young age. Hence this topic is a outcome of a lot of discussions with young mothers. Similarly having a teaching background has always encouraged having an ‘open mind’ and constantly learning from all the interactions. Further while watching one of the kid’s channels brought forth an extremely significant fact to the forefront. Marketers were busy advertising not only cola’s and candies but also shampoos, soaps, cars and insurance policies on the kid’s segment. Therefore the combination of both—being a mother and an academician as well as the marketers attitude of trying to get mileage out of the advertisements, prompted the researcher to delve deep into the minds of the ‘tweenagers’ i.e. 8-14 year olds. It was interesting to study this fickle-minded segment that is also extremely knowledgeable as compared to their age.

Trying to find the reasons for children turning into consumers quite early in life opened a Pandora’s Box. The reasons were many as well as complicated. The
responsibility of the same lied with the parents as well as the marketers. Fuelling this was the great middle class explosion, which has made everything affordable and also a new trend of having children late in life, after gaining financial security and fulfilling the career dreams. This in turn gave rise to a new phenomenon called as the ‘single child syndrome’, where the children are treated as ‘especial’. The entire household seems to be centred around this ‘little brat’, who is smart, intelligent and knows about his importance in the household. Dual incomes, peer pressure, pester power all seems to be adding fuel to this fire. These factors have converted the little ones into expert buyers who are pint-sized consultants to their parents. They not only decide which brand of shampoo or toothpaste will come into the house but also provide information to their parents on varied products. Media explosion, discussion with their peers, and easy internet access has made these children savvy consumers. They rule the household purchases and in many cases even rule the purse strings in the household.

This makes the children’s market extremely lucrative and profitable so much so the marketers are falling over each other to grab the attention and mind-share of these little consumers. Detergent and insurance policy advertisements are not restricted to the news channels but are now telecasted blatantly on kid’s channels. Earlier kid’s programmes were miniscule but today a number of channels are solely dedicated to children 24 by 7. Every second advertisement has a cute kid or a celebrity sharing the screen space with a kid trying to sell something either through humour or emotional blackmail. Children love all the attention bestowed upon them and parents are busy treating the TV as an electronic baby-sitter without knowing the consequences of the same.

Retailing has emerged as a greatest distraction to the young consumer who is hooked on to shopping at malls. Malls too are marketed as a family entertainment centre with
something for everybody in the house. There are stores selling exclusive children’s apparel or shoes or even toys which are branded and cost a lot. Every weekend is complete only after a short or long visit to the mall. Video games entice the young children, food courts further attract the young and the old and multiplexes makes the day complete. When children see a display in a window shop, they are likely to pester their parent’s into buying them what they want. In this manner retailing too is fuelling the change in buying behaviour of children.

Internet, gaming, increased use of hand held games like PS II/III or Xbox 360 is how children prefer to spend their time rather than playing outdoor games. These games are quite addictive and children can play them for a long time thereby even sacrificing their study time for the same. Any game played in moderation does not cause any harm, but excessive gaming is leading to children’s behavioural disorders leading to mental disorder, aggressiveness and low concentration. Sitting in front of the TV or internet can have its own repercussions. All the above said things are leading to increasing materialism and selfishness among children. There is no value for things that they possess, so much so that when questioned, they all replied in negative and provided the researcher with a separate list of their own.

Children are going through the phase of ‘too many things too early in life’ or ‘been there, done that’ syndrome. These privileged set of children have got everything on a platter without having to work hard for it. Their aspirational levels have gone high and they have the next level of aspirations ready even before the first set is fulfilled.

In this manner the new generation is reckless in their behaviour and spending. Spending on luxury products come easily to them. They feel it is their birth right to interfere in every decision-making for households. Be it a soft drink, a shampoo or a mobile phone, children have knowledge about its features, price etc. This generation will soon reach a saturation point where nothing will excite them anymore. They too
will grow up and pass the same ideologies to the next generation. All this has to be stopped before it is beyond repairs. We as a nation cannot afford to have a selfish and demotivated young generation who cannot think beyond themselves. Words like childhood depression, Boredom, nothing to do, no games to play have very recently come into existence. School counsellors seem to be having their hands full trying to get these children counselled. Parents and marketers are not realising the major threat which is lurking around the corner as they are busy watching what lies in the forefront. This tsunami of consumerism will fast gulp down the young consumers if stringent measures are not taken. It should be a joint effort by the parents, marketers, schools and media houses to curb down the menace of materialism.

Hence the thesis starts with an overview of consumer behaviour, followed by conceptual framework and review of literature. The fourth chapter is the researcher’s contribution to the study which studies the earlier factors affecting children’s buying behaviour and the emerging factors influencing today’s children’s buying behaviour. Both these factors are compared and the conclusions are derived from the primary data collected. Since consumer socialization and media invasion are two very important concepts which influence the buying behaviour of children, an in-depth study of the same is undertaken. Mall culture has slowly but steadily become an integral part of our life and so has the international fast food chains. Hence their importance could not be ignored and the impact of mall culture and international food chains on buying decisions of children was studied. As an afterthought marketing of goods, especially for children as a chapter was conceptualised, given the importance of marketer’s view point. This is followed by findings and conclusions based on which suggestions and recommendations are given.