MARKETING MANAGEMENT

"ARE CHILDREN DIFFERENT FROM ADULTS :
A RESEARCH METHODOLOGY PERSPECTIVE"

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INTRODUCTION

Children, in India, constitute three different markets, viz. Primary market, Influencer's market and Future Market. Extant literature suggests that these new generations kids are significantly different from the kids of earlier generations. They are different in cognitive processes such as thinking, information processing, analyzing the inputs and responding to stimuli. Today's parents, in most Indian families focus on children and their aspirations and the outcome of the entire phenomenon is that children get more attention and participate actively in the decision-making process.

It is, therefore, natural that these children are focus areas of today's marketers, especially, how children learn to be consumers and what are the major sources of influences on children. This research on consumption skills of the children is not only important for marketers but also for public policy formation and development of quality education programmes. Hence research methods used for researching children is one of the important issues of discussion and debate in various fields of research such as psychology, sociology, and consumer research. Sociologists and researchers not only perceive children as being different from adults but also they perceive childhood differently from adulthood. This understanding often influences the research methods that researchers apply while researching children. Various researchers explore the ways in which research with children as subjects is similar to or different from research with adults as subjects.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Sociology of children reveals that children are innovative and competent

social actors and also underlines the need for distinct research approaches and methods when studying children. Research with children in marketing has also applied this approach and has been using different experiments and study methods to study children. The present conceptual paper discusses some important issues about the debate highlighted above and the dilemmas for researchers while researching children.

THE RESEARCHERS INTEND

1. To review the methodological issues while researching children.

2. To review the research tools in children's research in consumer socialization.

SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

Twenty research papers, selected from International journals such as Journal of consumer research, Journal of Advertising research, International Journal of Marketing research and Journal of Children's right were reviewed. These journals are from Marketing, Psychology and Sociology domains. The literature selected for review is related to children's knowledge and skills related to the consumption.

The researchers are interested to study children as consumers. However there are some common concerns of researchers studying children in every domain. Therefore articles from domains of psychology and sociology were also reviewed. Articles pertaining to the period year 1977 to year 2005 were included in the review. Hardly any Indian literature is available in this context.

In this review there are some methodological issues and concerns discussed by various articles. The major concern about the methods used for researching children is expressed by various researchers is whether children are really different than adults. Samantha Punch writes that research with children is potentially different because there is substantial difference between adults' perception about children's perception of the world and children's perception about the world. He gives three reasons for this statement

1) Childhood is constrained by adult society. Children are often marginalized in adult society.

2) Children are different from adults. Children have limited vocabulary, less understanding of the words, relatively less experience of the world, and shorter attention span. Child development models are not same for all regions and countries. They are society and culture specific.

3) Adult perceive children to be different. Adults' fear, assumptions and attitudes affect their behaviour towards children.

He also gives seven explanations to the above mentioned differences and the question that whether research methods for children should be different

1. The first argument is that adults normally impose their views on children. Researchers being adults do the same; hence there should be different research methods for children. They shall be different in a way that researchers will not impose their views on children.

2. Reliability and validity issues: Children are vulnerable and may be afraid of adults and hence sometimes give fake answers or lie.

3. Clarity of language: Children have limited vocabulary and use different language. Researchers need to understand their language.

4. Different research context and research setting: Children may not have control on the environment created by adults.

5. Building rapport: All adult researchers may not have the skills to build a rapport with children.

6. Care shall be taken to not to impose inappropriate interpretation: Children may not have understood the adult world hence their experiences and words have to be interpreted very carefully.

7. Using familiar techniques while researching with children: Children shall have fun while working in research settings so that researchers can observe their natural responses.

The second important argument found in these research papers is that not only there should be different methodologies for children but these methods should be Child-centric. In a research work, Exploring innovative

methodologies for child-centric consumer research, Emma N. Banister, discusses the use of creative qualitative techniques for research studies focusing on young participants and encourages the development of what we term a "child-centric" approach. Researcher has given a good review of several qualitative techniques for researching children so that they can relate their experiences through an active role in the data collection. Young children can express themselves in a better and creative manner as opposed to vocal means. They are equally active as adults, hence their expressions cannot be considered less rich than that which adults can generate. Suggested methods are interviews, group interviews, observation, photography, projective techniques, games, and letters.

The research also documents an experiment that explores how children learn to attach negative meanings to products and brands through the socialisation process. The children were involved in various task-centered creative activities connected to the topic under study (projective techniques and self-directed photography). The final phase consisted of interviews with the children who had participated in the activities and served as a means to further explore the meanings that had emerged from the previous two stages.

The intention of above experiment was to give every child an opportunity to express in his own way. Researcher wanted that children should see themselves as partners in research process. In this way the researcher presented and emphasised the idea of co-ownership.

METHOD USED FOR THE STUDY

The exercises involved were helpful for children to become familiar to drawing, colouring and sometimes writing. Initially observations of the children and their collages during the exercises were recorded, as well as answers to general informal questioning. The templates were then collected in for content analysis across the group and at a later stage the children were given the chance to talk in-depth about their individual collages.

Twelve children were asked to take approximately 12 photographs of things they considered distasteful, disgusting or disliked and 12 pictures of things they liked or enjoyed (i.e. 24 exposures in total). Then they were asked to talk about their photographs. Prompts were used whenever necessary. The process was therefore, one of self-analysis

(by the child), supplemented by interpretation and discussion between the researchers. Interviews were also conducted of those children who participated either in Projective techniques or photography exercise.

One can see that in this research investigators embraced child centric approach. They found this research design effective in providing children with a voice with which to share their experiences. The most successful method was the photography exercise. The photographs allowed a huge insight into the lives of the children.

Joanne Burke in his article (Children's Research and Methods: What Media Researchers Are Doing) has given a brief overview of methods media professionals use to measure children's media usage. Neilson uses People meter to study about children's viewing levels. However there are problems regarding regularity of children of signing in and signing out. Hence the only alternative he thinks about is asking parents to maintain weekly diaries of children on their behalf.

The article discusses another study i.e. the Simmons Kids Study - a syndicated multimedia survey of children. Simmons used, with some modifications, all adult research techniques on the 6 to 14 year old children: a personal interview with the "through-the-book" magazine method, with a flexible format wherein they took a lot of chances, they broke a lot of rules, and the most surprising part is that it seems to have worked.

Some research scholars stress upon research methods which enable children to express their own way. In this context an article 'consulting with Children and Young People' by Steven Walker is another landmark review work which reviews 50 articles on studies about mental health of children and young adolescents.

All practitioners and researchers in this area have adopted a wide variety of methods, models, techniques, and approaches to study children and young people. They believe that children are not a homogenous group. The range from childhood to adolescence incorporates several developmental stages which would suggest attention being paid to the design of developmentally appropriate methods. A variety of participatory research methods are being developed including the use of mapping and modeling, diagrams, drawing and collage, drama and puppetry. These methods are designed to empower children and young

people by enabling them to represent their own situations, to reflect on their experiences and to influence change.

Gender differences are also considered important in terms of children and young people's perceptions in other areas of life experience, therefore attention needs to be paid to considering the gender dimension in research studies. This means considering the advantages and potential disadvantages of using male or female researchers. The researchers also suggest refinement of methodologies, to improve reliability and to increase participation of the recipients of child and adolescent mental health services in order to enhance service quality and development.

Lastly, role of children in social research is also discussed in one of the articles written by Emma Uprichard. She states that children are active agents, who participate in knowledge construction and daily experience of childhood. Children are never homogeneous group of Individuals; hence children's involvement in any social research is a methodological challenge. Therefore, the approach presented in her research assumes that children are capable of social action. They can have a dialogue with other people hence areas in which children are socially active shall be carefully identified.

Researchers mean by the term active agent that children are active in constructing the structures and processes within which they are embedded and within which they actively participate.

KEY OBSERVATIONS IN ABOVE MENTIONED RESEARCH PAPERS

1. Research with children is potentially different. There is substantial difference between adults' perception about children's perception of the world and children's perception about the world.

2. Qualitative techniques and creative methods can be considered as child centric.

3. Television is most widely used medium by Media to study children

4. Different methods used for children empower children to express their views and representing their situations.

5. Observational methods are used to study children's

involvement in some situations.

6. Children are active agents who participate in knowledge construction.

REVIEW OF RESEARCH METHODS USED FOR DIFFERENT STUDIES WITH RESEARCH METHODS FOR CHILDREN

Various researchers tried different methods to study children. Here is a summary of such fifteen experiments and research studies. These studies are from the period 1977 to 1996. Ward and his associates studied children as consumers for the first time in 1977 and then many research scholars studied children and their consumption skills in different context. A series of research studies is found from 1977 to 1996, which creates an evidence of child centric research methodologies.

Ward et al. (1977) in his **Study on Product and Brand Knowledge** among the children used Brand recall method to measure brand awareness and knowledge among the children. He asked children from kindergarten to sixth grade to name as many brands as possible in four different product categories (soft drinks, gum, gasoline, and cameras). For soft drinks, for example, the average number of brands names increased from 1.2 to 2.4 to 3.3 brands for kindergartners, third graders, and sixth graders, respectively.

Turner and Brandt (1978) conducted a study **on shopping skill.** The children age groups, selected for the study were children of Preschool, (age 4) and children of elementary school (ages 10-11). Children were given several shopping tasks, For the first, children were shown two packages containing the same product, with one containing many individually wrapped pieces of candy and the other containing the same candy in one large size. The child was asked to compare the two packages and determine which contained more of the product. The correct answer was identified by looking at net weight on the packages. For the second task, children were shown three different sizes and shapes of packages containing the same product and asked to determine which one would give the most products for the money. The correct answer was determined by comparing unit prices per package.

Responses to both tasks revealed that older children were more accurate in their comparisons as were children who were given more opportunities at home to manage money

and participate in consumer decision making with other members of the family.

Moschis and Moore (1979a) used Method personal interview to study **use of information search.** He asked middle and high school students to identify the sources they would rely on most before buying eight different products. Friends were relied on most for products where peer acceptance is an important consideration (e.g., sunglasses), whereas parents were a favored source for products with a higher perceived risk in terms of price and performance (e.g., hair dryer).

Moore and Moschis (1978, cited in Moschis 1985) provide an example of how family communication patterns affect adolescent preferences for several sources of information, including parents, peers, and mass media. He uses questionnaire method to measure **peer influence across family structure.**

Four types of family communication patterns were studied: laissez-faire, protective, pluralistic, and consensual families. Laissez-faire families are characterized by little parent-child communication; protective families stress obedience and social harmony, with little consideration given to developing the child's own opinions; pluralistic families encourage the child to develop new ideas and promote open communication without requiring obedience to authority; consensual families combine the idea of children developing their own views with the need for social harmony and family cohesiveness.

Moore and Moschis (1978) found that adolescents from pluralistic families prefer information from a variety of sources, with a higher preference for parental advice than adolescents from other family types. In contrast, adolescents from protective families are highly receptive to peers, and to a lesser extent, television advertising. Laissez-faire children, too, rely less on parental advice, but are also less likely to rely on peers, implicating the use of fewer information sources overall Ward et al. (1977) used groups study method in his study related to children and consumption The study**was on type of information sought.** Ward concluded thatas children mature, they learn to rely on different types of information. Perhaps the most important development is a change from reliance on perceptual product attributes to a more detailed consideration of functional and product performance

attributes. To prove this he conducted study with kindergartners, third graders, and sixth graders. Children were asked the following question: "Suppose you wanted to buy a new television set. What would you want to know about it?" Children of all ages inquired about perceptual attributes (e.g., colour vs. black-and-white), though mentions of this sort were lower among sixth graders. With increasing age, however, mentions of performance attributes (e.g., easy to operate), functional attributes (e.g. quality), and price became more common.

Another study by Moschis and Moore (1979a) was conducted with middle and high school students. They were asked to indicate which of the following types of information could tell them the best product to buy: "one that is on sale," "one that is advertised a lot," "one with a well-known brand name," "one that my parents like," or "one sold by a well-known store." Certain types of information were more valued than others, with adolescents favoring products on sale and with a well-known brand name. The focus on price and brand name (as a surrogate for functional attributes) is consistent across product categories, as is the limited value placed on signals such as high levels of advertising or placement in a well-known store.

John and Whitney (1986) in a study with children from 4 to 10 years of age illustrated the role of experience and age related abilities in script formation. The Study was on **development of consumer knowledge.** The shopping script studied here was returning or exchanging an item at a store. The study was conducted in a rural area, where local stores were limited to gas stations and a small grocery store, with a larger retail area located about an hour away. Such a setting was chosen to minimize the amount of experience that children would have with returning items to the store, since the rural location made returns to the larger retail area quite inconvenient and infrequent.

In order to study how scripts develop with experience, children in each of three age groups (4-5 years, 6-7 years, 9-10 years) were read different stories about a boy or girl exchanging or returning a faulty product to a store. The amount of experience was varied by the number of stories read, resulting in low (one story), medium (three stories), or high (five stories) levels of experience about product exchanges and returns. After hearing the assigned number of stories, children were asked to describe, in their own words, how one would go about returning or exchanging a product.

In a study by John and Sujan (1990), on **Structural knowledge among the children,**children from 4 to 10 years of age were shown triads of products from the cereal or beverage category. One of the items was identified as a target, with the other two items in the triad sharing perceptual and/or underlying features with the target. For example, one beverage triad featured a can of 7-Up (target product), a can of Orange Crush that was similar to the target on the basis of a perceptual cue (both in cans), and a large litre bottle of Sprite soda that was similar to the target on the basis of an underlying cue (both lemon-lime taste). For all triads, children were asked to identify which of the two items was "most like" the target and why.

John found out in response that, older children (ages 9-10) used underlying cues in a ratio of about 2:1, whereas the very youngest children (ages 4-5) used perceptual cues in a ratio of about 2:1 relative to underlying cues.

McNeal (1992), in his one of the studies, used drawings of the children,to analyze **retail / store knowledge among the children.**Heasked children in second, third, and fourth grade to draw pictures of "what comes to mind when you think about going shopping." Findings from a content analysis of the pictures supports the fact that older children understand the process and purpose of shopping and include a variety of retailers (supermarkets, specialty stores, discount and department stores) in their depictions. Children's drawings reveal that their shopping experiences have resulted in a good deal of knowledge about aspects of store layouts, product offerings, brands.

Karsten (1996) in a study conducted with children in kindergarten through fourth grade who were asked to participate in a shopping game. He used the technique called **shopping script.** Each child was shown a small toy with a price tag on it (e.g., a toy dinosaur for 17 cents) and told that they had been given money (e.g., a quarter) by their mother to buy the item at the store. A store area was set up nearby with a small cash register, containing visible amounts of coins and bills. Children were asked to show the interviewer/cashier how they would buy the toy in the store. Although the results reveal age differences in terms of understanding the need for change and calculating change amounts, the basic shopping script was enacted by even the youngest children in the study.

As Karsten concludes (p. 109): "Even the youngest subjects

in the study understood that one selected their item, checked their money, decided what to purchase and placed it on the cashier's counter, waited for the cashier to check and record the price and perhaps offer change they even reminded the interviewer to hand them a pretend receipt.

McNeal's (1992) conducted a studyto find out whether children can recall **price information** about particular products. **He used drawings of children in this s**tudy to see whether children can draw brands of the products with price tags. Children from the second, third, and fourth grades participated in this study. They were asked to draw pictures about shopping, about 40 percent of the drawings pictured products with brand names, whereas only 10 percent of the drawings showed actual price information (e.g., $3.99).

Fox and Kehret-Ward (1990) illustrates how notions of price and value develop from the preschool years to adolescence to adulthood. Subjects were told a story about a group of friends who decided to open a bicycle shop and needed to set a price for each bicycle; each of the friends had a different idea about how to price the bicycles, such as price based on physical size (larger bikes should cost more), amount of labor required for manufacturing, or preference (bikes people like best should cost more). After presenting these suggestions, children and adults were asked whether the pricing scheme was a good idea and why.

The responses were informative in identifying what criterion the child sees as a basis for retail prices and the source of value connected to that criterion. Preschoolers pointed to a product's perceptual features, especially size, as the basis for pricing, but articulated no theory for why these features provide more value. Ten-year-olds also linked price to perceptual features (size or fancy features), but reasoned that a higher price would be forthcoming due to the amount of production inputs required. Thirteen-year-olds exhibited a more abstract level of reasoning, viewing prices as a function of the quality of the product's inputs and the preferences of potential buyers. Adults voiced similar opinions, also adding notions about supply and demand to the mixture of factors contributing to value.

A study by Gregan-Paxton and John (1995) was proved to be very interesting. It was to understand whether children can relate **search cost and search benefits.** In the studya simulation technique was used with the children of 4 to 7 years of age. They were asked to play a game called "house

of prizes." The game involved making a choice between two cardboard boxes decorated to look like houses, with a prize hidden behind each of four windows of the house. Children were allowed to search windows to uncover the prizes prior to making a choice, with differing costs and benefits of doing so.

In the low benefit condition, all four windows within a house contained the same prize; in the high benefit condition, every window in each house had a different prize. In the low cost condition, children could uncover as many prizes as they wished prior to making a choice, with the only cost of doing so being minimal effort and additional time in making a choice; in the high cost condition, children were given several pieces of candy prior to the start of the game and had to give up one piece of candy for each prize they wanted to uncover. In all cases, the number of prizes uncovered was used as a measure of the amount of information search.

Capon and Kuhn (1980) studied how children evaluate products with the use of various attributes. It is a good example of a study with various age groups, i.e. kindergartners, fourth graders, eighth graders, and college students. Subjects were shown notebooks that varied on four dimensions: color (red or green), surface (dull or shiny), shape (long/thin or short/ wide), and fastening (side or top).

Participants viewed each notebook individually and were asked to indicate how much they liked it on a nine-point scale. After rating all notebooks, subjects were asked to evaluate each notebook dimension, indicating how much more they liked one level than another (e.g., how much they preferred red over green notebooks or vice versa) on a similar nine-point scale. Comparing the dimension ratings with overall notebook preferences, the authors found that kindergartners had a difficult time incorporating preferences for even one dimension into their overall ratings and older children tended to use one single dimension, with integration of two or more dimensions becoming more common in late adolescence.

An interesting study by Wartella and her colleagues (1979), conducted with kindergartners and third gradersto study use of relevant attributes to evaluate the products. Children were shown a series of cards, with each card containing a drawing of two or more hypothetical candies. These candies varied by the type of ingredient (chocolate, caramel, raisins, peanuts, and liquorices) and the amount of each ingredient (five pieces or two pieces). For example, one card showed "Candy E" with lots of chocolate (five pieces) and "Candy F" with a little chocolate (two pieces), lots of raisins (five pieces), and lots of peanuts (five pieces). Children were told to imagine that they were choosing a present for a friend who likes some ingredients more than others (e.g., a friend who likes chocolate very much and raisins and peanuts less). The cards and attribute importance information were designed in such a way that the child's strategy for comparing and choosing items was revealed by the set of choices made.

Attribute importance information was supplied by describing the ingredient preferences of a friend who would receive the chosen candy as a gift. Given the particular set of choice alternatives and attribute (ingredient) preferences, the researchers were able to discern whether or not children were using a number of different strategies: best single attribute (choice based only on the amount of the single most important ingredient contained in the candy), variety of attributes (choice based on the number of different ingredients contained in the candy), lexicographic strategy (choice based on the amount of the most important ingredient and, in the case of a tie, on the amount of the second most important ingredient), and a weighted adding strategy (choice based on the sum of the products of the important weights and amount of all ingredients contained in each candy).

CONCLUSIONS FROM THE REVIEW

This review says that more we are creative and innovative while researching with children richer the data can be gathered. This review mentions different methods which are experiments on comparatively small number of children. These studies are based on children's knowledge about price, products, brands, information search, and the market at large. However the question remains unanswered that if the numbers of children are large in numbers then which method will be practically feasible.

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