Creating an Impact towards Brand Inclination between Children with the Help of Cartoon Characters

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ABSTRACT

In the eyes of marketer children are always seen as a source of business. In India it has been found out that almost 40 corer children are less than 15 years of age who are more conspicuous customers in terms of toys, gadgets, phones, cloths but also in counseling parents to make big purchases. In order to attract this age group many big players relay on high spend advertisements, cross selling, high spends advertisements, cross-selling, licensed merchandising, program length commercials, product placement and promotions involving free gifts. The association between children and cartoon characters is analyzed by the researchers in this research.

Keywords: Branding, Cartoon characters, Children, Endorsements, Consumer buying behavior, Advertising Effectiveness.

1. INTRODUCTION

In a family child hold the power to convince their parents to buy certain products. To take advantage of this marketers are trying to lure the children in terms of selling their own product. Often nagging and pestering is used by children to convince their parents to go forward with certain purchases. "The nagging ability of children to purchase the product they desire due to some reason" is the true meaning of pester power as defined by Seth Gaurav et. al. (2008). When the parents purchase the products after getting convinced by their parents in termed as pestering. This has the capability to mould the customers buying behavior to a great extent. The power of pester has grown stronger in today's world with the emergence of nuclear families and family planning efforts made by the government. A child is usually pampered by their father, mother, grandparents, uncles, aunty etc. A Childs demands and necessity is always fulfilled by

giving gifts and meeting all their demands as parents in today's world are so busy in their work schedule that the process of spending time has been replaced by gifts. With the evolution of internet and television children nowadays stay updated with recent releases and products which are available in the market. Thus a lot of marketing activity of the marketers is aimed towards children.

Due to commercialization a lot of children are being attracted towards it which always goes against their parents will. The amount of earning of a parent 75% of the expenses go in meeting the needs and wants of the children as mentioned by Horgan Sheena (2005). The knowledge about the products reaches the children primarily through the advertisements which are aimed towards them. The ability of the advertisers is practically making the children to love and buy their product. (McNeal 1987). The things which the children adore the most, the brands use those things to make the children recall their brands. The children are being hocked up by these advertisements through their favorite TV channels namely pogo, Carton Network. In general celebrity endorsements also leave a never ending effect on the children. (McNeal 1987) in the reviews said that advertisements have a lot of impact on the children in terms of their purchase, purchase behavior and anti social behavior. Cross-selling, licensed merchandising, program length commercials, product placement and the production of advertisements as entertainment are the norm of the day.

It has been observed that cartoon characters play a vital role in convincing the children. They act as celebrity for the children and keep them hocked up towards a particular brand. The true meaning of a celebrity is someone who used their own recognition being associated by appearing in the advertisements of consumer goods in order to make it a successful product by giving it a credibility, attention, coverage, recall and mass appeal.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is:

- Cartoon characters associating themselves with the brand to make the children recognize the product.

- Associating cartoon characters with brand names to help in recalling.

- The level of attachment that children have with the brands due to association of cartoon characters.

- The relationship between attitude of the brand and cartoon endorsements.

- Creating brand preference with the help of cartoon characters.

To effectively target the children this research would be useful for the marketers while making their endorsement strategy. To target the children this study will help the marketers in choosing the right endorsement strategy for creating brand recall. It helps to know whether brand recall leads to brand preference during purchase decisions. Being associated with cartoon characters are the children happy and it would also help them to find an alternatives to the high spending celebrity endorsements.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

To demonstrate how pester power is the major decision maker a lot of studies have been conducted. The child's influences over the parents on buying certain products are termed as pester power (Turner et. al., 2006).

Sales promotion as defined by Blattberg and Neslin (1990) is an "action oriented marketing event with a purpose of having a firm impact on firm's customers. It can be concluded as when the marketers employ strategies in promotion to create excitement to purchase their brands.

Children as young as 3 are able to recognize the brand logos as found out in the study. (Fischer et. al.1991).

According to Horgan Sheena (2005)

- Brand logos can be recognized by children at 18 month.

- Consumer choices can be made by children ranging from as young as 2 years. They are able to draw brands by 2 or 3 years.

- By the fourth year they develop consumer preferences and by the fifth year actually purchase brands.

It is evident from the studies of Fischer et. al. (1991) and Horgan Sheena (2005) that children not only prefer the look alike brand but they want the exact and particular choice.

A child thinking pattern is far more different from an adult thinking pattern as found out in the child psychology study. They are found to be great observers, highly creative, very insightful, spontaneous, sensitive and volatile. At different stages they have different emotional, social and development needs. Consumer socialization is a term which is used when children acquire skills, knowledge and attitude pertaining their functioning as a consumer in the marketplace. Children belonging to the age group of 3- 7 years are an appropriate age for them to distinguish ads from programs based on perceptual features, believe the ad is truthful, funny and holds a positive attitude towards the ads. As against this children belonging to the age group of 7-11 years is called as analytical stage in which the child distinguishes the ads from programs based on persuasive intent, understands that the ad may have contain a bias and deception and can also hold negative attitudes towards ads. A child ageing from 11 to 16 is the reflective age in which the child understands the persuasive intent of the ads along with specific tactics and appeals. He starts believing that the ad is a lie and knows how to spot the difference of bias and deception. Due to this they become spectacle towards the claims made in the advertisement. Children have a tendency to feel favorable about a particular product (Danielle Bargh et. al. 2012). The product preferences differ on the brand awareness created in the childhood. It was found out that frequent exposure towards trade characters leads to high brand recall and product. Due to this a favorable attitude towards the product is developed and the child may use that product further in life (Fischer et. al. 1991). (Belk, Mayer, and Driscoll 1984) Advertising has the ability to influence the children to view appropriate model from the adult world and also about which product to use now and which product to use further in life.

It has been found out that when the child reaches between 2-11 years of age they are most vulnerable to advertisements as their cognitive structures starts to form and they are more sensitive to external influences. Due to this reason the marketers target this age group the most because of their young and tender age. Children are not only considered the customers of future but they also have the power to influence their parents.

Brand reorganization and brand recall performance together combine to form brand awareness. To retrieve a particular memory about a particular brand by using a particular hint is called brand recall. By

linking brand name, logo, symbol etc to memory is called brand awareness. (Keller 2007). A high brand awareness and brand recall is created in children because of frequent bombardment of advertisements on children and high attention seeking strategies used by the marketers. Just by a single exposure to the advertisement on the television children are able to recognize the information correctly.

Children learn out of fun, they are even keen observers, experimenting every time and do not take anything for granted. When it comes to the latest trends and products there is no brand loyalty, stickiness, materialism and consumerism. Children are seen as an important customer and are naïve, wanton, inexperienced and easily gullible. (Soni Swati and Upadhyaya Makarand 2007).

Advertisement repetition, advertisement recognition, and positive attitude toward the product advertised have an inevitable association with each other. (Schindler, Holbrook, and Greenleaf 1989). Cartoon characters like Mickey Mouse, Donald duck, Spiderman, and phantom attract the children more. They try and make their life as of their favorite frictional characters. There are a lot of products like cereals, vitamins, and other edible products where comic characters are used. They are used to make the children think that if they eat that product they would turn powerful and strong as their favorite cartoon characters. The power of mythology is the main reason to influence their explanations. When it comes to food and non food involved products a human celebrity is more useful to endorse the product then an animated cartoon character as found by Varsha Jain et. al. (2011) in her study. A human celebrity was not considered useful when it came to high involvement products.

As the child grows up with age the reorganization of fictional cartoon characters tend to increase. The positive association with the product and the level of reorganization of the product is based on the age (Richard Mizersk 1995). It often becomes difficult for the parents to convince their children not to have a particular food which is endorsed by their favorite cartoon character or celebrity on television (Solomon 1996).

When we compare cartoon character endorsements and celebrity endorsements, the cartoon character endorsements prove to be more budget friendly for the marketers. Cartoon characters prove a huge advantage for the marketers as they are fictional characters and do not have a fixed personality of their own as compared to human celebrity, and so they can be molded according to the advertisement of a particular product. Celebrity endorsements can also cause risk to the brand as if the image of the celebrity endorsing a particular brand is affected by some negative actions (Francois A. Carrillat et. al. 2013). 'Should it pursue its association with the celebrity? Or should it cancel the association? This happened in case of

Table 0
Stranger than Fiction Re-ranking the World's Billionaires with their Fictional Friends

Rank	Name	Source	Residence	Networth (US$) billion
1	Scrooge Mcduck	Mining, Treasure Hunting	Duckville, Calisota	65.0
2	Smaug	Marauding	The Lonely Mountain	54.1
3	Carlisle Cullen	Compound Interest, Investments	Forks, Wash.	46.0
4	Tony Stark	Defense, Energy	Malibu, Calif	12.4
5	Charles Foster Kane	Media	Xanadu, Calif.	11.2
07	Richie Rich	Inheritance, Conglomerates	Richville, U.S.A.	5.8

Source: Forbes, "Fictional 15 the Richest Characters" 2015

tiger wood, lance Armstrong, Sanjay Dutt etc is the biggest question that arises as cores of rupees were wasted and went down the drain hurting the brand image as well. The main advantage of taking a fictional cartoon character over celebrity endorsement is that the cartoon characters image does not get effected by some negative publicity.

3. PRESENT STUDY

The cartoon characters have shown that they have a considerable effect on the brand awareness and marketers pursue their endorsement as a vital promotional tool as shown in review of literature Table 0. However several studies have been conducted to detect the effect of these cartoon characters and the results have always been minimal.

Chota Bheem is rated as the most rated India's top animated TV Series with the viewership of 40 million people. Chota bheem's character is portrayed as an omnipotent guy who is gifted with unusual potency. It is a broadcast serial and is telecasted by Pogo TV six hours every day. 130 episodes have already been shot and on an average of one episode every week is released. The Chota Bheem character was given life by Rajiv Chilaka's Green Gold Animation. A children's drink Notty sold by Pepsi used Chota Bheem character for its promotion. Apart from Chota Bheen different other characters like Doremon, G-One and Spiderman have been used by MacDonald's for their promotional activities.

On children channel the second most popular show is Disney's Doremon. Different section of products like apparel, school products, comics have the faces of these cartoon characters on them for the purpose of promotion.

Different cartoon clothing, school kits, stationary are present in different stores across the country.

In order to understand the way of creating brand preference between children with the use of these cartoon characters in product promotion the researcher has focused his study completely on this.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Five factors influencing the dependent variable Brand Preference due to cartoon character endorsement are as below.

- Recognition of the products associated with a cartoon character.

- Recall of the product endorsed by the cartoon character

- Believability of the facts claimed in the advertisement by the cartoon character

- Persuasion ability of the cartoon character associated with the product to create purchase intention in the children

- Creation of Brand awareness

The gender of the child, age, family income, employment status of parents and exposure towards advertisements combine together to give a moderating variable. Different product affinities are developed since male and female children perceive celebrities differently. Other crucial dependents can be the age of the child and affluence of the family.
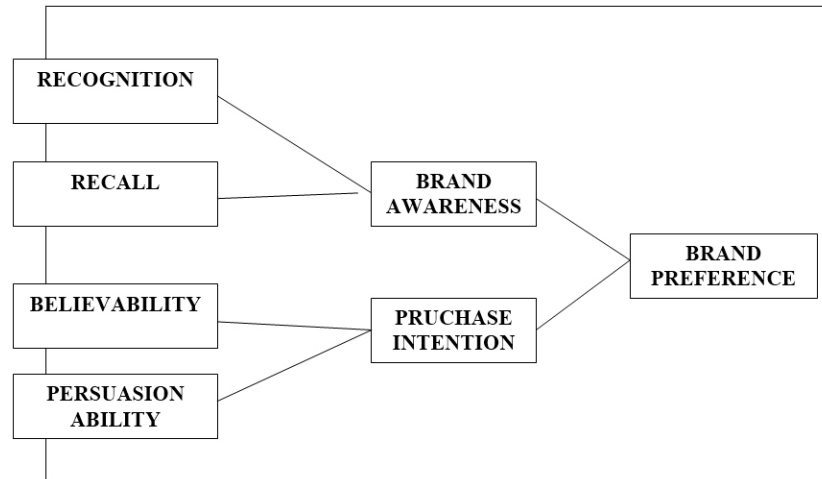
Figure 1: Children, Carton Characters, Branding, Recognition and Persuasion

Figure 1 - It shows that the better the children are able to recognize the cartoon character the better it is for them to recall the product associated with that cartoon character. By using the cartoon characters in the advertisements leads to a creation of intention in the children to own the product which finally leads to product purchase and brand preferences.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample Size: 150 school children were used as sample for the research.

Sampling Technique: Multistage sampling method was used by considering the age, gender and education as variables for the sample. The division of children was made according to the stream of education i.e. 50 from state syllabus, 50 from CBSE and 50 from ICSE. Age of 7 to 9 years was taken as judgement sample of age, as well as students from 2nd, 3rd and 4th standard were being administered round the clock as a part of the schedule. As the age group which was decided was 7 to 9 years it was appropriate for the researchers to monitor the schedule themselves. Total number of 75 male and 75 female children were taken from 6 different schools from Alappuzha and kottayam districts for sampling. Thus the sample of 150 correspondents had reached.

Type of research design: Descriptive Research

Research Instruments: The instruments used in research included closed ended questions and visual tools depicting characters and advertisements for better recognition and catching the child's attention and in-depth interview technique was employed. The questions were divided into a 5 point on likert scale which intended that 1 point is strongly disagree and 5 points means strong agree.

Hypotheses

HA1: Brands which are not associated with cartoon characters have a less brand recognition value as compared to brands having cartoon characters as their brand ambassadors.

HA2: Brands which are associated with cartoon characters have a significantly higher brand recall value in children.

HA3: When the facts or advertisements done by cartoon characters, the children tend to find it real and believe everything shown in the ad.

HA4: As brands which are associated with cartoon characters have a significantly higher persuasion power. This leads to purchase intentions of the brand.

HA5: Brands connected with cartoon characters are the most preferred by the children.

Table 4 shows the Pearson's **r** 0.761 helps us conclude that cartoon character association with brands leads to strong preference for the brand.

Reliability Analysis

Table 1 shows Cronbach's alpha is **0.823**, which indicates a high level of internal consistency for the scale.

Table 1
Cornbach's Alpha Test

Cornbach's Alpha	Cornbach's Alpha Based on standardized Items	N of items
.823	.743	9

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics

	Factors	Mean	Standard Deviation
1.	Brand Recognition	4.121111	1.127101
2.	Brand Recall	4.167778	1.267686
3.	Believability	1.323323	1.897775
4.	Purchase Intention	3.823222	0.319123
5.	Brand Awareness	4.722111	1.543242
6.	Brand Preference	4.234333	0.437691

It is evident from the Table 2 that cartoon characters associated with brands lead to strong brand awareness, brand recall and brand recognition. Kids have a considerably high brand recall. It is however found that the believability of facts stated by the cartoon character in the advertisement is not found true by kids. The kids neither believed that strengths and powers of the cartoon characters were due to the endorsed brand usage. However kids had a strong preference for brands of their favourite characters.

Hypothesis Testing

Ha1: Compared with brands not associated with cartoon characters there will be a significantly higher recognition of brands associated with cartoon characters.

Table 3
Karl Pearson Correlation- Ha1

		Brand Recognition	Implications
	Pearson Correlation	0.823*	
Cartoon Character Association	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	Ha1 accepted
	N	150	

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3 shows the correlation coefficient between cartoon character association and brand recognition *r* is. 823. This indicates a relatively large positive relationship between the two variables. A perfect positive relationship would yield a correlation of 1 and no relationship at all between the variables would give a correlation coefficient of 0. The relationship here is then a relatively large one, above 0.5, but considerably less than a perfect association between the two variables. For this reason, we can conclude that there is a strong relationship between association of the cartoon character with the brand and brand recognition. Hence we accept Ha1.

Table 4
Karl Pearson Correlation- Ha2

		Brand Recall	Implications
	Pearson Correlation	0.789*	
Cartoon Character Association	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	Ha2 accepted
	N	150	

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 4 shows Pearson's *r* is 0.789. This number is very close to 1. There is a strong relationship between the two variables. This means that changes in one variable is strongly correlated with changes in the second variable. For this reason, we can conclude that there is a strong relationship between association of the cartoon character with the brand and brand recall in kids. Hence we accept Ha2.

Ha3: Children tend to believe the facts associated/stated by their favourite cartoon characters

Table 5
Karl Pearson Correlation- Ha3

		Believability	Implications
	Pearson Correlation	0.332*	
Cartoon Character	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	Ha3 accepted
	N	150	

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 5 shows Pearson's r is 0.332. This shows there is only a small positive association of the facts stated by the cartoon character and Childs belief of the same. Hence we cannot accept Ha3 which states children tend to believe the facts associated/stated by their favourite cartoon characters. The hypothesis Ha3 is rejected. The believability is not strongly correlated with the cartoon character.

Ha4: Cartoon characters associated with brands have a significantly higher persuasion ability to create intention to purchase the particular brand

Table 6
Karl Pearson Correlation- Ha4

		Purchase Intention	Implications
	Pearson Correlation	0.832*	
Cartoon Characters Persuasion Ability	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	Ha4 accepted
	N	150	

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 6 shows Pearson's r is 0.832. This shows that the cartoon characters associated with brands have strong persuasion powers to create an intention in the mind of the kid to own the product. Hence our hypothesis Ha4 stands proved.

Ha5: Cartoon characters association with brands lead to brand preference in kids.

Table 7
Karl Pearson Correlation- Ha5

		Brand Preference	Implications
	Pearson Correlation	0.693*	
Cartoon Character Association	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	Ha5 accepted
	N	90	

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 7 shows the Pearson's **r** 0.693 helps us conclude that cartoon character association with brands leads to strong preference for the brand.

6. CONCLUSIONS

When brands get associated with cartoon characters they have a huge impact in making the brand attractive to the children. Involving cartoon characters in their brand promotion strategy can do wonders for the brand. The attention of the children can be grabbed with the help of an advertisement showing a well-drawn influential cartoon character. Brand preferences during purchase are the result of brand recall. In terms of high involvement of cartoon characters in making the children believe the advertisement proved to low, but they seemed to effect the impulsive purchase decision. Children prefer and get associated with a brand according to the involvement of their favourite cartoon character with the brand. Sometimes children are not able to associate a brand with their favourite cartoon characters, thus it's advisable for the marketers to keep the same cartoon character as their brand ambassador for a long time as this can create an impress in children minds which leads to brand recall. Children loyalty towards the brand changes as the brand change their cartoon characters. Thus long time association is advisable. Placing product promotions, product advertisements in between cartoon programmes would be the best strategy to create brand awareness in children as it would increase believability. Not all the products made for children are endorsed by cartoon

characters, only at promotions cartoon characters are involved. It is highly advisable for the marketers to use the cartoon characters since they are highly reliable and can be stage managed to choose the brand.

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