Effectiveness of Cartoon Character’s in Creating Brand Preferences Among kids

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Abstract
Kids mean business to marketers. Around 40 crore kids below the age of 15 are India’s most conspicuous consumers, lapping up not just toys, eatables, gadgets, phones and clothes but also counseling their parents on big-ticket purchases. Intense competition to tap this young aspiring segment has seen big players relying on high spends advertising, cross-selling, licensed merchandising, program length commercials, product placement and promotions involving free gifts. The researcher has tried to analyse the association of cartoon characters with brands in inducing Brand Preference among kids.

Key Words: Branding, Cartoon characters, Kids, Endorsements, Consumer buying behavior, Advertising Effectiveness

Introduction
Children have a big say in family decision to purchase many products. Marketers are trying to cash on the children’s ability to nag their parents to induce purchase. Pester power is a child’s ability to affect their parents purchase decision, often through the use of nagging or pestering. Seth Gaurav et al. (2008) defines pester power as “the nagging ability of children to purchase the
product they desire due to some reason”. This nagging or pestering finally results in the adult purchasing products for kids. It can mold the consumer buying behaviour of adults to a great extent. With the advent of nuclear families and family planning efforts of the government the power of pester is all the more relevant today. A child is pampered usually by father, mother, grandparents (4), uncles, aunts etc. With both parents working the lack of quality time to spend with children is usually replaced by showering gifts and also giving in to their demands. Internet and television have loaded the children with information from marketers on what they want Because of the nag factor lot of marketing and advertising activity is aimed at children.

Kids are increasingly influenced by commercialisation that often goes against what parents are trying to do. Horgan Sheena (2005) has found that up to 75% of the family’s total disposable income goes on the children. Young children acquire the knowledge about products primarily through advertisements specifically targeted at them. Advertisers have the ability to convince children to like and desire practically any product (McNeal 1987). The brand is reinforced in the minds of the kids if it is associated with a thing or event that they adore the most. Exclusive kid’s only channels like Pogo, Cartoon network etc. have prompted the kids to be hooked to advertisements targeted specifically on them. Celebrity endorsers seem to exert a considerable effect on the behaviour of kids in general. McNeal’s (1987) review also states that advertising is capable of producing three types of behaviour among children: purchases, purchase requests, and antisocial behaviour. Cross-selling, licensed merchandising, program length commercials, product placement and the production of advertisements as entertainment are the norm of the day.

Cartoon characters seem to exert a considerable effect on the behaviour of kids in general. They have kids hooked to them and are celebrities in their own right. Celebrities are considered as “any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement” (McCracken 1989). They give the products they endorse credibility, attention, coverage, recall and mass appeal.

**Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to find
1) Children’s recognition of brands associated/endorsed by Cartoon characters
2) Recall of brand names associated/endorsed by Cartoon characters
3) The degree to which children correctly associate brands with associated Cartoon characters
4) The relationship between product Cartoon association/endorsement and attitude towards the brand

5) The effect of cartoon characters in creating Brand preferences

The study would help marketers in designing their endorsement strategy to effectively target kids. It would enable them to decide on choosing the right product endorsement strategy in creating brand recall for products targeted at kids. Help analyse whether brand recall leads to brand preference during purchase decisions. Are kids proud to be associated with cartoon characters? Also it would help them to find alternatives to the high spend on celebrity endorsements.

**Literature Review**

Numerous studies have been done across the world to demonstrate how pester power is a major decision maker. Pester Power is a term used to define a child’s influence over the parent in the buying process (Turner et al, 2006). Blattberg and Neslin (1990) define sales promotions as an “action-oriented marketing event whose purpose is to have a direct impact on the behaviour of the firm’s customers”. From the definition, it would be reasonable to conclude that marketers employ strategies in promotion to create excitement to purchase their brand. It has been found that children as young as three recognised brand logos (Fischer et al.1991).

According to Horgan Sheena (2005)
- Children at 18 months can recognise corporate labels
- Children as young as two years make consumer choices
- By two to three years can draw brands
- By four years have developed consumer preferences and use information from advertisements to develop these
- Five years actually purchased brands

From Fischer et al. (1991) and Horgan Sheena (2005) it is evident that kids’ preferences for brands are not any look-alike one but particular and specific choice. Child psychology studies show that children think and behave differently from adults. They are great observers, highly creative, very insightful, spontaneous, sensitive and volatile. They have different emotional, social and developmental needs at different stages. Kids acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes pertaining to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace through
a process called Consumer socialization. Three to seven years of age is approximately the Perceptual stage wherein the child can distinguish ads from programs based on perceptual features, believes the ads as truthful, funny and interesting and holds positive attitudes towards the ad. As against this, seven to eleven years of age is the Analytical Stage wherein the child distinguishes 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. Eleven to Sixteen years of age is the Reflective Stage and here the child understands the persuasive intent of ads along with the specific ad tactics and appeals. He believes that the ads lie and knows how to spot the specific instances of bias and deception. In a nutshell, he is skeptical towards the claims made in the advertisement. Children have a predisposition to feel favorably about an advertised product (Danielle Bargh et al. 2012). Brand awareness created in childhood can be the basis for product preference later in life. It is proposed that frequent exposure of a trade character would cause high recognition of the trade character and the product. It will also lead to favorable attitudes toward the product, and influence the child to use the product later in life (Fischer et al. 1991). Advertising can influence how children view and obtain appropriate models for the adult world, including concepts of appropriate products to use now and in the future (Belk, Mayer, and Driscoll 1984).

It has been suggested that children between two and eleven years of age are the most vulnerable to advertising, because their cognitive structures are beginning to form and they are most sensitive to external influences (Raju and Lonial 1990). It is because of this reason marketers try to catch them young. Kids not only exert considerable influence on their parents purchase decisions, they have their own spending power and are the customers of the future.

Brand awareness consists of brand recognition and brand recall performance. Brand recall relates to consumers’ ability to retrieve the brand from memory when given a relevant cue. Brand Awareness also involves linking the brand-brand name, logo, symbol and so forth- to certain association in memory (Keller 2007). Kids with the bombardment of advertisement and being at the mercy of the marketers’ attention seeking strategy seem to have a high brand recall and brand awareness. Children can recall a reasonable amount of information from a single exposure to a television advertisement and are capable of sharing that information accurately. Kids are keen observers, ever experimenting, do not take anything for granted and want to learn while having fun. There is no stickiness, no brand loyalty, ultimate materialism and consumerism
in sync with the latest trends and fads. Kids are wanton, inexperienced, naïve and easily gullible, but, a very important set of consumer (Soni Swati and Upadhyaya Makarand 2007).

An inevitable association exists between advertisement repetition, advertisement recognition, and positive attitude toward the product advertised (Schindler, Holbrook, and Greenleaf 1989).

Children are by instinct attracted to cartoon characters. Fictional characters like Donald Duck, Mickey Mouse, Spiderman, and Phantom have ruled the imagination of kids since time immemorial. Children type to ape and model their lives on these fictional characters. In fact, comic book heroes have been applied to breakfast cereals, vitamins, and other edible products, not to mention scores of nonedible offerings. With edible products the use of cartoon characters may create a perception among children that a character's strength is derived from consumption of the cartoon-adorned or cartoon-sponsored brand. The explanations for their influence tend to focus on the power of mythology (Randazzo 1992). The study of Varsha Jain et al. (2011) suggests that, for food and non-food low-involvement product categories, the impact of a human celebrity is more than that of a fictional celebrity. In the case of the high-involvement product, the human celebrity was not found to create favorable consumer attitudes.

Recognition of select cartoon trade characters tended to increase with the age of the child. The level of recognition and favorable attitude toward the product were positively associated with age (Richard Mizersk 1995). Parents often find it difficult to deny their children food that is endorsed by their favorite cartoon characters or celebrities on television (Solomon 1996).

Cartoon character endorsements compared to human celebrity endorsements are budget friendly for the marketers. Since cartoon characters do not have personal life’s they have a big advantage to human celebrities since their personality and character can be made to suit the brand endorsed. When the reputation of the celebrity endorser is hurt because of some misconduct, the brand may come to risk as well (Francois A. Carrillat et al. 2013). Then the big questions that arise are ‘Should it pursue its association with the celebrity? Should it cancel the association? In the recent instance of Tigerwoods, Lance Armstrong, Sanjay Dutt, Sreshanth etc. crores of money spent on the celebrity went down the drains hurting the brands as well. Adopting a cartoon trade character over a celebrity to promote a brand has this advantage that the personality of the cartoon character remains intact and is not affected by scandals and bad reputation.
Table 0: Stranger than Fiction Re-ranking the World’s Billionaires with their Fictional Friends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Networth (US$) billion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Carlos Slim Helu</td>
<td>Telecom</td>
<td>69.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>*Smaug</td>
<td>Marauding</td>
<td>62.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bill Gates</td>
<td>Microsoft</td>
<td>61.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>*Flintheart Glomgold</td>
<td>Mining, Theft</td>
<td>51.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Warren Buffett</td>
<td>Berkshire Hathaway</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>109</td>
<td>*Richie Rich</td>
<td>Inheritance, Conglomerates</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Cartoon Characters

Source: FORBES, “FICTIONAL 15 THE RICHEST CHARACTERS” MAY 7 2012

Present Study

From the review of literature, the Table 0 shows that cartoon characters have a considerable effect on brand awareness and that marketers pursue their endorsement as a vital promotional tool. However studies related to creation of brand preference in kids due to the presence of cartoon characters as promotions are minimal.

With a viewership of 40 million people, Chhota Bheem is rated India’s top animated TV series. Chota Bheem is the omnipotent boy who is gifted with unusual potency. Actually, it is a broadcasting serial telecasted by Pogo TV four to six hours every day. Created by Rajiv Chilaka’s Green Gold Animation, 130 episodes have already been shot and on an average one new episode is released every week. Pepsi uses Bheem to sell Notty, its energy drink for kids. McDonalds has been using Bheem, Doreamon, G-one and Spiderman extra for their promos with much success. Disney’s Doraemon is the second popular show on kids’ channel. Spiderman, Superman, Ben10 all are cartoon characters whose face pops up on apparel, school products, comics, shoes, fans, umbrellas and biscuits as well.

Stores across the country sell cartoon clothing, school kits, stationery, apparel and accessories. The researcher has focused his study on product promotions and free gifts involving cartoon characters and their effect in creating brand preference in kids.
Theoretical Framework

The Dependent variable Brand Preference due to cartoon character endorsement is influenced by five Independent variables

1) Recognition of product associated with the cartoon character
2) Recall of the product endorsed by the cartoon character
3) Believability of the facts claimed in the advertisement by the cartoon character
4) Persuasion ability of the cartoon character associated with the product to create purchase intention in the kid
5) Creation of Brand awareness

The Moderating variable would be the gender of the child, age, family income, employment status of parents, exposure to advertisement. Since male and female kids perceive celebrities differently they might have different product affinities. The age of the child and the level of affluence of the family might also be crucial dependents.

Figure 1: Kids, Carton Characters, Branding, Recognition and Persuasion

Figure 1 shows that the better the recognition of the cartoon character, the greater are the chances of drawing the attention of the kid to the product. The character would lead to the recall of the advertisement and the product. The persuasional ability of the cartoon character through the advertisement may lead to an intention in the kid to associate with the character by owning the product, which can lead to purchase requests and brand preferences.
Research Methodology

Sample size: The sample consists of 150 school going kids

Sampling technique: A Multistage sampling technique using stream of education, age and gender as variables was taken. Stratification is made on the stream of education 50 from state syllabus, 50 from CBSE and 50 from ICSE. Judgment sampling for age has been decided as 7 to 9 years, with students from 2nd, 3rd and 4th standard being administered the schedule. Since the age group of was chosen as 7 to 9 years it was appropriate to use a schedule with the researchers themself enumerating. A simple random sample of 75 male and 75 female children were taken from six schools in Alappuzha and Kottayam districts. Thus a sample of 150 respondents was reached.

Type of Research Design: Descriptive research is employed

Research Instruments: Research Instruments included schedule containing closed ended questions and also visual tools depicting characters and advertisements for better recognition and catching the kids’ attention. In-depth interview technique was employed. The questions had a 5 point likert scale with the first point on the scale as strongly disagree and the fifth point strongly agree.

Hypotheses

H_{a1} Compared with brands not associated with cartoon characters there will be a significantly higher recognition of brands associated with cartoon characters

H_{a2} A significantly higher recall would exist in children of brands associated with cartoon characters

H_{a3} Children tend to believe the facts associated/stated by their favourite cartoon characters

H_{a4} Cartoon characters associated with brands have a significantly higher persuasion ability to create intention to purchase the particular brand

H_{a5} Cartoon characters association with brands lead to brand preference in kids
Data Analysis & Findings

Reliability Analysis

Table 1: Cronbach’s Alpha Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cornbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>Cornbach’s Alpha based on standardized Items</th>
<th>N of items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.805</td>
<td>.789</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows Cronbach’s alpha is **0.805**, which indicates a high level of internal consistency for the scale.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand Recognition</td>
<td>4.311111</td>
<td>1.218101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Recall</td>
<td>4.277778</td>
<td>1.356586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believability</td>
<td>1.433333</td>
<td>1.997875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase Intention</td>
<td>3.922222</td>
<td>0.229123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Awareness</td>
<td>4.821111</td>
<td>1.438242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Preference</td>
<td>4.133333</td>
<td>0.357691</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

$H_{a1}$ 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- $H_{a1}$**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cartoon Character Association</th>
<th>Brand Recognition</th>
<th>Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>0.801*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$H_{a1}$ accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>150</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*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 .801. 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 $H_{a1}$. 
**Hₐ₂** A significantly higher recall would exist in children of brands associated with cartoon characters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cartoon Character Association</th>
<th><strong>Brand Recall</strong></th>
<th>Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pearson Correlation</strong></td>
<td>0.778*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sig. (2-tailed)</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td><strong>Hₐ₂ accepted</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>150</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Table 4 shows Pearson’s r is 0.801. 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>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cartoon Character</th>
<th><strong>Believability</strong></th>
<th>Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pearson Correlation</strong></td>
<td>0.278*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sig. (2-tailed)</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td><strong>Hₐ₃ accepted</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>150</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*
Table 5 shows Pearson’s r is 0.278. 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 $H_{a3}$ which states children tend to believe the facts associated/stated by their favourite cartoon characters. The hypothesis $H_{a3}$ is rejected. The believability is not strongly correlated with the cartoon character.

$H_{a4}$ Cartoon characters associated with brands have a significantly higher persuasion ability to create intention to purchase the particular brand

**Table 6: Karl Pearson Correlation- $H_{a4}$**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cartoon Characters Persuasion Ability</th>
<th>Purchase Intention</th>
<th>Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>0.735*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$H_{a4}$ accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>150</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Table 6 shows Pearson’s r is 0.735. 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 $H_{a4}$ stands proved.
Ha5 Cartoon characters association with brands lead to brand preference in kids

Table 7: Karl Pearson Correlation- Ha5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cartoon Character Association</th>
<th>Brand Preference</th>
<th>Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>0.761*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Ha5 accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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.

Conclusions
From the analysis of data the following results and suggestions can be summed up

- Cartoon characters associated with brands have a great influence in making the brand attractive to kids. Brand promotion strategies involving prominent cartoon characters can create wonders for brands.
- A well thought out advertisement campaign involving cartoon characters can draw the attention of the kids.
- Brand recall often leads to brand preference during purchase.
- Though the believability of the facts in the advertisements involving cartoon characters figured relatively low in high involvement product category, they seemed to be effective in impulse purchase decisions.
- The kids’ preferences for brands were in sync with, ‘which’ of their favourite cartoon characters was associated with the brand.
- Television was the major source of advertisement information for kids. Cartoon channels like Kochu TV, Pogo and Cartoon Network being the favourite choice.
• Kids have a considerably high brand recall and were found to be brand specific.

• It was observed that kids where sometime unable to associate the cartoon character with the brand or the product category. So it would be advisable for marketers to have long term association with the same character. This would imprint the association of the brand with the character in the little minds and reinforce the brand recall.

• It is observed that kids’ loyalty to brands shifted with change of association of the cartoon characters to other products or brands. Hence long term associations would be useful.

• Program length commercials, product placements and introduction of brands in to the sets of cartoon programs would be the best marketing strategy to create strong brand awareness in kids, since it would increase believability.

• It is seen that not much products targeted on kids are endorsed by cartoon characters. It’s usually only promotions that involve cartoon characters. It would be wise for marketers to have endorsements with the characters since they are highly reliable and can be stage managed. To choose the brand.

References


