

## Social Implications Of Invasive Marketing: A Crosscultural Empirical Investigation In The Indian And American Contexts

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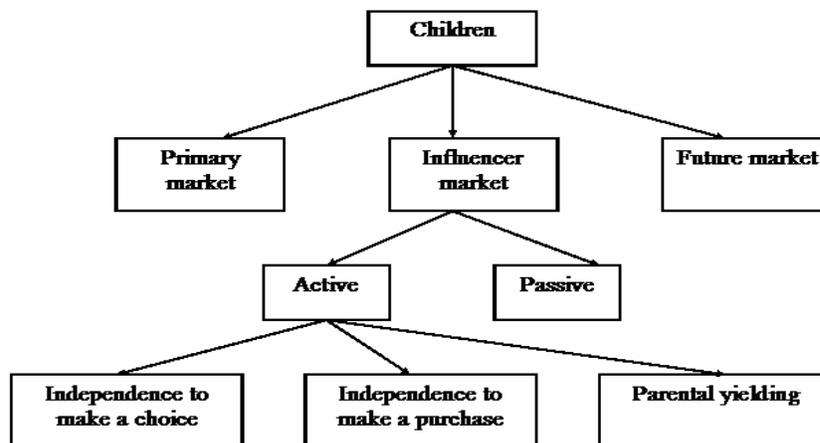
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### Abstract

This scientific investigation adopts a cross cultural perspective in studying the perception of parents regarding the contribution of children in bringing in awareness, creating interest, desire and influencing final purchase decision of packaged food products. Parenting styles in the two cultures were studied in relation to the contribution of children to the four levels of AIDA. The sample size was 117 (40 American parents and 77 Indian parents). The results indicate that there exists no significant difference in the two cultures regarding the contribution of children in bringing in initial information, creating interest and desire about packaged food products in the family but the two cultures differed significantly in terms of the contribution kids have in influencing the actual buying decisions regarding packaged food products. The influence of American children was lower in final purchase than Indian children. Indian parents showed higher level of indulgence ( $M=3.33$ ,  $S.D. 1.7$ ) than American parents ( $M=2.02$ ,  $S.D.=1.86$ ). The level of indulgence was found to regress on actual buying behaviour of parents. The study points at the shift of Indian parents towards indulgence as a result of invasive marketing practices targeted at the children. The study has implications for marketers, social agencies, and parents and attempts to highlight the growing intrusion of marketing influence in the sociocultural fabric.

Families are inundated by overwhelming level of social stimulation. Marketers over the globe are targeting children as influential vehicles of marketing and prospective adult consumers. These children have their own purchase power and influence over the buying decisions of parents.

Today children have more autonomy and decision-making power within the family than in previous generations, so it follows that kids are vocal about what they want their parents to buy. This influence is termed as "Pester power" which refers to children's ability to nag their parents into purchasing items they may not otherwise buy (Mintel, 2002). Marketing to children is all about creating pester power as it is a powerful marketing tool. Children exert this power on their parents as to what food will be purchased for the household (Darian, 1998). It was revealed in a study by Isler et al. (1987) that younger children tend to make more "pestering" requests than the older siblings for junk food in the supermarket. Potentially, children constitute the most lucrative market there is for many businesses.



Source: Kaur & Singh (2006)

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McNeal & Ji (1999) point out that children learn their consumer-related skills, knowledge, and attitudes through interaction with various social agents in specific social settings, a process that is usually termed consumer socialization (Ward, 1974) or consumer development (McNeal, 1964). McNeal (1998) notes that parents today worry that their children should have it as good as other children, and therefore are giving them more money, more things, and more opportunities to better compete. There is considerable evidence to suggest that family communication processes modify the effects of other socialization agents, in particular television (McLeod et al., 1982), and this parental mediation is often the result of a child's requests for advertised products (Atkin, 1982)

### Invasive marketing

According to Turner et al (2006), children are influenced by a number of socialization agents, which impacts upon their purchase decisions. The cognitive-psychological model and the social learning model, explain and predict how consumers make consumption-related decisions (Moschis and Churchill, 1978). In communication and advertising research, the social learning model has often been a popular choice for explaining consumer behavior (Moschis and Smith, 1985). Children try to emulate and develop general behaviors and attitudes by modeling the behavior of others (Bandura, 1977). These models often become "role" models for the individual, influencing the career aspirations, educational objectives, and self-views of young people (Mitchell et al., 1979). Children are very susceptible to advertising, for example, McDonald's Happy Meals came with a free "Smurf" character in July 2002, one of nine characters which children were encouraged to collect (Parents' Jury, 2002). Solomon (1996) argues that children are targeted directly with messages of what food products to buy, which will influence them to pester their parents when shopping. Parents often find it difficult to deny their children food that features their favorite cartoon characters or celebrities that they have seen on television (Keane and Willetts, 1994). The Indian context is replete with practical examples of success of advertisements targeting children for example in the Asian paints kid's creative advertisement, Esteem's "my daddy's big car", Mc Donald's happy meal, surf excel 'Daag Achchey hain' advertisement, and my Daddy strongest Dhara'. Though critics have strongly condemned merchandising of teletoy's via food chains like McDonald and Burger king, but this has not prevented the cross promotion. Cultures today are losing their ethnicity and identity and becoming more 'popular' cultures wherein the style of living is perpetrated by the advertisements (Schlosser, 2001). Aggressive marketing of food products via children has led to a nation of obese younger generation both in U.S.A (Schlosser, 2001) and India (India Today, March 2004). Hastings et al. (2003) points is that children receive advertising messages which have more to do with fantasy and fun than health and nutrition. According to the Canadian Paediatric Society, most food advertising on children's TV shows is for fast foods, soft drinks, candy and pre-sweetened cereals—while commercials for healthy food make up only 4 per cent of those shown.

### Pester Power versus parental Influence

Children today are becoming an influential power in marketing. The impressionistic minds of children try to force their parents to buy the promoted products (Moschis and Churchill, 1978; Moschis and Moore, 1982; O'Guinn and

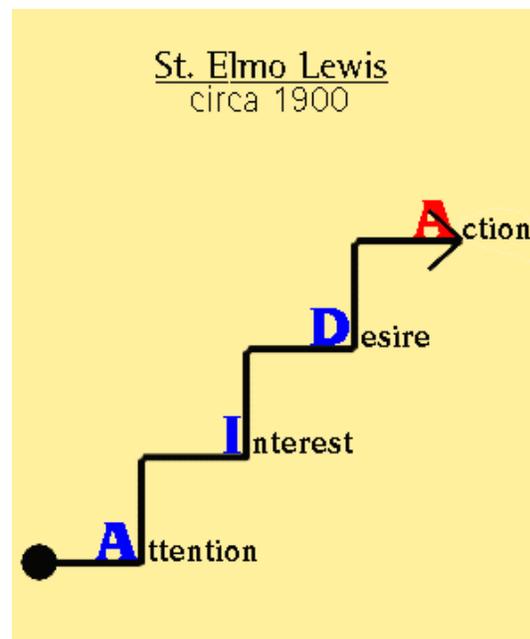


Fig 3.2 AIDA Model

Shrum, 1997). McNeal and Yeh (1997) demonstrate that children have great influence on their parents' spending. McNeal and Ji (1996) point out that children have substantial input into their parents' decision making related to weekend activities inside and outside home. Lewis (1898) presented a model of this decision making process in relation to product purchase. The model attempted to explain how marketers must lead potential customer through in order to achieve a sale. The stages, Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action, form a linear hierarchy. Simply put, in order to be motivated to actually make a purchase, Lewis believed that the fourth stage, Action, would come as a natural result of movement through the first three stages; i.e., desire leads to action.

Children passively generate awareness, interest and the desire towards products. The buying intentions may be mediated by parents. Thus parental authority holds significance in the purchase decisions. Parents of young children have an important role to play in protecting their kids from invasive marketing, and in educating them about advertising from an early age. The question under consideration is if the children are able to lure parents to the extent of buying products or whether the parenting styles intervene and protect the child consumer from invasive marketing. The parental atmosphere helps buffer the impact of these marketing campaigns, which might be detrimental to their development. Research has pointed out that there are primarily four types of parenting styles that differ in the amount of responsiveness and control exercised by the parents. This typology categorizes them into indulgent, authoritarian, authoritative, and uninvolved parenting styles (Baumrind, 1971, 1983, 1991a, 1991b, 1996). Each of these parenting styles reflects different naturally occurring patterns of parental values, practices, and behaviors (Baumrind, 1991) and a distinct balance of responsiveness and demanding ness.

The socialization models of child development point at the impact of these socialization agencies. Belsky's (1984) process model points out that optimal need gratification is necessary for child development, and at the same time exonerates the child's role in his poor outcomes and places thrust on the parental role. Thus these models of child socialization and development lay emphasis on the role of parental influence. Not only are the children impacted upon by the socialization agents, the families are also impacted upon by these agencies. According to sociologist Bronfenbrenner (1977) individuals are like a "set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls". In studying human development, one has to see within, beyond, and "across" how the several systems interact (family, workplace, and economy). Bronfenbrenner's framework points out the four systems of influence on the child and his family-which are- the micro-system which is related to the interpersonal interactions with the child, the meso-system which consists of the interrelationships among settings (i.e. the home, a day-care centre, and the schools), the exo-system-which includes agencies outside the home like parental workplace, school boards, social service agencies, and planning commissions. The impact of invasive marketing on the children, parents, families and the nation become a prerogative of the exosystem, wherein the social agencies attempt to intervene and initiate the required moves to prevent this potentially negative impact. This study attempts to present child's contribution in the information, interest, desire and actual buy (AIDA) of the food product in the Indian and American sample. The study also attempts to investigate the parental authority styles in the two countries and study the (AIDA) in relation to parenting in the two contexts as parenting is emerging as a potential buffering variable, in the face of strong invasive marketing towards children.

### **Research Design**

The study is a cross cultural causal study. The sample was parents of children in the 8-11 age groups. Two cultural samples were taken. In case of American sample the sampling was purposive. In the first stage, parents of 8-11 year olds were selected out of a group of 130 employees of a MNC in oil sector in Houston, America. Out of these 40 were selected randomly. Similarly 77 Indian parents were randomly selected from amongst 160 employees in three MNCs in oil sector. This age group was selected as 'tweens' (age group-8-11 years)

is an important target segment of marketers today. To assess the level of AIDA, a 12 items questionnaire was constructed and parental authoritative, authoritarianism and overindulgence levels were tapped using an adapted version of Buri's (1991) parental authority style questionnaire which had a reported reliability of 0.84. The data was subjected to bivariate and multivariate analysis using correlation tests, regression analysis and t-test.

### **Hypotheses**

- Ho<sub>1</sub> There is no difference between the levels of awareness, interest, desire and intentions of actual buy related to packaged food products generated by the children of Indian and American parents.
- Ho<sub>1a</sub> There is no difference between the levels of awareness related to packaged products generated by the children of Indian and American parents.
- Ho<sub>1b</sub> There is no difference between the levels of interest related to packaged food products generated by the children of Indian and American parents.
- Ho<sub>1c</sub> There is no difference between the levels of desire related to packaged food products generated by the children of Indian and American parents.
- Ho<sub>1d</sub> There is no difference between the levels of intentions of actual buy related to packaged food products generated by the children of Indian and American parents
- H<sub>2</sub> There is a positive relationship between level of overindulgence in parenting style and level of influence of children in actual buying decision of parents
- Ho<sub>3</sub> There is no difference in the level of overindulgence in the parenting style of the Indian and American sample.

### **Discussion**

The null Hypothesis 1 was partially supported and partially rejected. There was no significant difference in the level of interest, awareness and desire generated by the children in both the cultures but there was a significant difference in the level of actual buy in the two cultures (refer to table 1, figure 1). The American parents tend to be more cautious and adopt a balanced approach. They entertain requests, by finding out about the products but if it is detrimental to the interest of the child they practice restraint. Whereas the Indian parents go ahead and buy the products for the children. According to Bredehoft et al (2002) indulgent parents may try to compensate for their own deprivation. With the Indian economy surging high, the purchase power of Indians have gone up and they are pampering their children with it. In contrast to previous studies on Indian parents (Thakur, 2005) Indian parents are more indulgent today and the trend is alarming, as it is slowly eroding the cultural ethos. (refer to Figure 2) Bredehoft et al (1998) points out that overindulgent parents inundate their children with family resources such as material wealth, time, experiences, and lack of responsibility. They give children too much of what looks good, too soon, too long and at developmentally inappropriate times. Overindulgent parents may overindulge to meet their own needs, not the needs of their children. For example, they may have grown up in poverty and do not want their child to experience the same.

When children are overindulged, they develop in an environment which is not realistic since they do not learn skills such as perseverance, coping with failure in effective ways, and compromising. Because overindulgence hinders children from completing their developmental tasks and prevents them from learning necessary life lessons, it can be conceptualized as a form of child neglect.

Belsky (1991) points out that an optimal level of gratification is best for child development. Indian parents are crossing the border and heading towards overindulgence for which marketers targeting child segment are to be held responsible. The social agencies in the exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) of the families need to take notice of this potential threat posed by invasive marketing towards society.

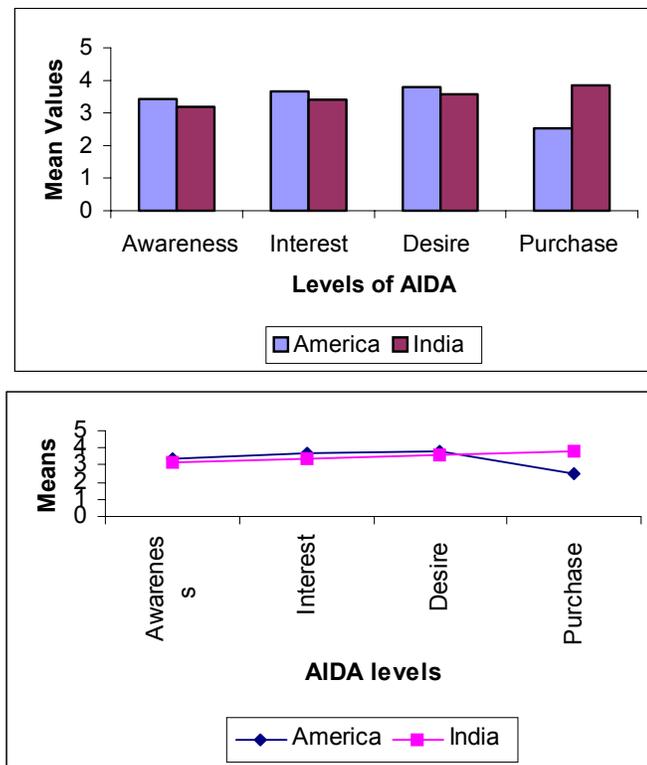
Null hypothesis 3 was rejected as there was a significant difference ( $t = 8.7$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) (refer to table 2) in the level of overindulgence in the parenting style of parents in India. The level of overindulgence was higher in Indian sample ( $M = 3.33$ ,  $S.D. = 1.7$ ) than the overindulgence level of American parents ( $M = 2.02$ ,  $S.D. = 1.86$ ) (figure 2, table 3). This can be attributed to the

post modern era which is shaped by pluralism, democracy, religious freedom, consumerism, mobility, and increasing access to news and entertainment. Indians are inundated by stimuli from around the world and slowly the cultural legacy of nurturant parenting is being mitigated by western influence and import of western culture via advertisements and media. The eastern parenting style used to be primarily authoritarian and nurturant (Kakkar, 1978) but today parents are giving in to western influences. The level of overindulgence practiced by parents was found to be responsible for 30.3% of variance in actual buying behaviour of parents in packaged food products (refer to table4). Thus the hypothesis2 is accepted as it was found that overindulgence of parents is a predictor of actual buy. With the booming economy, Indian parents are raring forward in the race of acquiring material possessions for their children which was not found to be in the American parent sample.

**Implications**

This study has implications not only for the social agencies, which need to check the level of kids related contents in the advertisements but also for the parents themselves. While championing the cause of democracy Alfred Adler suggested that if a nation is to prosper, then each citizen needs to develop a democratic character within, and the inculcation of democratic values are first imbibed from democratic (authoritative) parenting. He suggested that the parents need to be educated about the benefits of democratic parenting where in values get institutionalized within the child and the child requires no policing. Thus democratic families lead to democratic nations (Stein, 2001).He warned against the detrimental impact of overindulgent parenting. The results of this study point out at the alarming increase in overindulgence in the parenting style of Indian parents- for which marketers are responsible to a certain extent. Thus the result of the study has social and cultural implications.

**RESULTS**



**Fig. 1. Showing levels of awareness, interest, desire and action (AIDA) brought by children in two cultures regarding packaged food products**

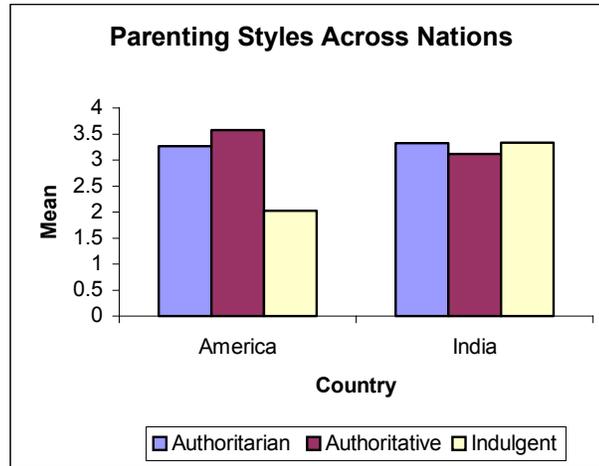


Fig. 2. Showing levels of authoritarianism, authoritativeness, overindulgence practiced by parents

Table 1. Showing the difference of means (t test) of levels of AIDA between American and Indian Parents

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Initialinfo3	Equal variances assumed	10.926	0.001	1.351	115	0.179	0.23	0.170	-0.107	0.568
	Equal variances not assumed			1.606	114.593	0.111	0.23	0.143	-0.054	0.514
desire1	Equal variances assumed	1.523	0.220	1.133	115	0.260	0.23	0.202	-0.171	0.628
	Equal variances not assumed			1.216	95.782	0.227	0.23	0.188	-0.145	0.602
interest2	Equal variances assumed	9.696	0.002	1.552	115	0.123	0.27	0.176	-0.075	0.620
	Equal variances not assumed			1.765	108.891	0.080	0.27	0.154	-0.034	0.578
actual buy1	Equal variances assumed	1.903	0.170	-7.931	115	0.000	-1.33	0.168	-1.665	-0.999
	Equal variances not assumed			-8.775	103.095	.000	-1.33	.152	-1.633	-1.031

**Table 2. showing the difference in means of level of overindulgence in the American and Indian Parents**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
ind1	Equal variances assumed	23.894	.000	-7.364	115	0.000	-1.31	0.178	-1.666	-.960
	Equal variances not assumed			-8.744	114.543	0.000	-1.31	0.150	-1.610	-1.015

**Table 3. Showing relationship between level of overindulgence practiced by parents and the level of actual purchase decision of packaged food products**

**Correlations**

		actual buy1	ind1
Actual buy1	Pearson Correlation	1	0.550(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.000
	N	117	117
ind1	Pearson Correlation	0.550(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	.
	N	117	117

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

**Table 4. Showing the stepwise regression of level of overindulgence of parents on actual purchase decisions**

Model Summary (b)									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	0.550(a)	.303	.296	.895	.303	49.887	1	115	.000

a Predictors: (Constant), ind1

b Dependent Variable: actual buy1

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