Factors and Issues to Consider when making a better Promotion Strategy

Introduction

This report is highly relevant to my company which trades in children’s toys keeping in mind the rule of advertising to children and those who see a need to protect kids from aggressive marketing. Little children are a susceptible group, it is proposed, because they lack the cognitive skills essential to defend themselves against the persuasive power of advertising. This paper will discuss factors and issues to consider taking to account of theories about children’s development in assessing this vulnerability and uses a methodology that examines children’s behavioral responses to television promotion campaigns and relate to low key campaign based on safety and educational value of products, which the company has been implementing in the past.

Advertisers are not entirely free to bombard children with television advertising as regulations control the amount and type of television publicizing targeted at children in many parts of Europe and the USA. Nonetheless, controls vary considerably from country to country ranging from few precincts to timing restrictions to total bans on any TV advertising which is aimed directly at children. For instance, in the UK the content and amount of advertising are delimited. Nevertheless, while strict regulations are in place, there is left plenty of opportunity for advertisers to target youngsters, leading to claims of cumulative commercial pressure on children (Pine et. al, 2008).

Research suggests that young children lack an explicit understanding of the advocatory nature of marketing and that this renders them more susceptible to its effects. Oates, Blades & Gunte (2007), put forward that young children may not understand the link between advertising and commercial profit. Children only appear to begin to understand the convincing intent of an advertisement at around 7-8 years old. Before this age, kids see the tenacity of adverts as helping, entertaining or informing audiences. Such understanding is significant because, even if adults recognize that an advertisement may present a biased message designed to sell products, young children are uninformed of this. Children are also less likely to have proficient disappointment with advertised products such as toys that they have bought and are less able to delay gratification ( Buijzen & Valkenburg,2011). Besides, children may be more susceptible to peripheral routes of persuasion, for instance, celebrity endorsement or cartoon presentation. Even though opposition argue that young children’s partial memory capacity means they will not recall advertisements.

Critical to the issue of evaluating the true impact of advertisements on children is employment of an age apt methodology. To this culmination, our research studies children’s letters to Father Christmas to examine the impact of toy advertising at Christmas on 3 to 7 year olds. Research show poor brand recall was perceptible and, excepting demands for Barbie and Action Man, there was petite association between the products promoted and the children’s brand-named requests. Over again the findings suggest that advertising was employing an influence, even though brand recall was poor. A later study with 4 to 6 year olds suggests that this failure to request brand named marketed products is attributable more to differences between recall and recognition memory in kids of this age, than with promotion campaign. The young children in this study were shown to have high recognition for advertised brands and this effect was particularly notable for girls, which may be due to early socialization processes or the fact that better oral skills at this age aids their processing of the messages in advertisements (Pine et. al, 2008).

This incongruity between high brand recognition and poor recall is explained by the way children’s abstract knowledge develops. Consistent with Karmiloff-Smith’s Representational Re-description (RR) model, knowledge is primarily implicit and non-verbal and can only be retrieved via recognition tasks. This familiarity, over time, be- comes explicit and verbally accessible until, at a later stage, children can recall adverts and explicitly recall brand names. This same model can also explain other glitches found in advertising research with children. For instance, in contrast with the studies mentioned earlier which demonstrate overt knowledge not emerging until around the age of eight, Pine and Vesey found that children as young as four years old have an implicit understanding of the positive bias in promotional messages.

The research conveyed here replicates the original letters to Father Christmas paradigm, but with children aged 6 to 7 years old. This methodology has high ecological cogency, as it measures a natural activity that children engage in, i.e., writing letters to Father Christmas, and uses a natural time frame between exposure to our toy advertising and writing the letters. Poor brand reminiscence in the earlier study was attributed to the children being too young to explicitly recall the names of the toys they had seen, even though exposure to television had increased their desire. The children in this study are of age (6-7 years) and, if they have more explicit knowledge, will be more likely to request items by brand name thus enabling steadier conclusions to be drawn about the influence of television advertising ( Buijzen & Valkenburg,2011).

The research studied the relationship between television advertising and the advertised products requested by children aged 6 to 8 years old in their letters to Father Christmas. Based on self-report data, with no parental validation. The findings confirmed that greater exposure to television led to an increase in the proportion of advertised products requested. Furthermore, children who favored watching commercial television were likely to request more advertised products than those children who said they preferred watching non-commercial television. The gender effects found in previous research were replicated, with girls requesting more advertised products than boys (Achenreiner, 2009). There was also a strong relationship between the most heavily advertised products and the most requested products, despite a few of the most heavily advertised products not being requested at all.

Developmental psychologists have been concerned with elucidating children’s understanding of advertising, particularly in relation to theories about explicit knowledge and cognitive defenses. More children in this study (52%) showed explicit understanding of what an advertisement is than the younger children in the Pine and Nash study (32%), suggesting age related increases in knowledge. However, their explanations still indicated that they saw advertising as informative rather than persuasive, with only one child demonstrating understanding of the motive of the advertiser (Achenreiner, 2009). Furthermore, viewers who showed a preference for commercial television were not better informed. Thus, favoring commercial television channels does not alone appear to facilitate the development of the cognitive skills necessary to aid critical understanding. This suggests that while age may confer benefits in terms of knowledge development, the findings relate particularly well to the idea of this gradually developing from an implicit understanding through more explicit phases. This would suggest that some of these children are able to abstract a certain amount of knowledge from their implicit understanding of advertising, but that this knowledge is not complete(Macklin,2010).

The six to eight-year-old children in this study asked for more products by brand name than the younger children in the earlier study which may be attributable to their increased memory capacity and explicit knowledge. Therefore, rather than consider the development of cognitive defenses against advertising at this age, as suggested by some, this study demonstrates that it is perhaps more pertinent to consider whether knowledge about advertising in its early phases of development combined with better recall for brand names actually leaves children more vulnerable around this particular age. Moreover, it raises the question of whether advertising directed at children is fair, especially in view of the number of advertisements being shown as many as 51 in one hour in this study; and whether, as a result, vulnerability is paramount at this age (Chan,2010).

Aside from the non-branded requests, two other categories of request merit some consideration insofar as they shed light on children’s consumer behavior. One is where branded goods have been requested, but not advertised and the other is where goods have been advertised, but not requested. However, these requests may have arisen indirectly from advertising as games for the games consoles were advertised and the latest Harry Potter film was heavily promoted at the time. It seems that even in the absence of specific advertisements, advertising may still account for a number of requests (Macklin,2010).

While word-of-mouth and peer pressure have been indicated as influences on purchases it is so evident that only TV campaign can show positive results. Our key prediction is that children who watch more television would request more advertised toys, by brand name, in their letters to Father Christmas. Besides, it is expected this to be greater for children who favor watching commercial television channels over non-commercial channels (Macklin,2010). We were also interested in whether there would be gender differences, as findings from earlier studies have suggested that girls may be more influenced by advertising than boys. It was also predicted that there would be a relationship between the frequency with which products are advertised and the number of requests for these products

Lack of product familiarity and implicit memory offer some explanation s as to why many of the toys advertised are not requested by any of the children in this study. Certainly the Ad map (2010 ) suggestion that “the visuals are key, words secondary’’ when advertising to children does not seem to have resulted in production techniques that enhance the memorability of the product name. However , recognition memory at this age is far better than recall (Gunter & M c Aleer, 2007 ), and a child would need to recall a product’s name explicitly in order to ask for it in a letter. Future studies will include recognition measures in order to tap in to the child’s implicit memory. An alternative explanation is that the products themselves may not be appealing an d fail to create a desire and that children are more shrewd an d sophisticated than the advertisers would believe. However, given the lack of cognitive skills of children in the age group studied here, this is unlikely. Finally, the restrictions on advertisements imposed by the IT C , and the self- regulation c odes, may be seen here to be working very effectively in preventing g pester power. It is unlikely that children would be pestering their parents for advertised toys and yet fail to mention the desired toy in their letter to Santa. Although these findings are from a correlation study using cross- sectional data, one interpretation could be that increased exposure to commercials has the effect of making children want more toys in general , rather than specific named products, so pester power cannot be totally ruled out. The heavy viewing children in this study may possibly be pestering their parent s for the latest type of toys, although not necessarily by name. A similar positive relationship between high viewing and more request s was also found in a cross- cultural study carried out by Bovill et al. (2007). Their study also investigated parent- child convict and found this was higher in families where children watched more television. Therefore, parents who allow their c children to watch a lot of TV in order to give themselves an ‘‘easier’’ life may, in fact, be creating more problem s for themselves in the long run. Future studies could explore this relationship more systematically by use of longitudinal observations. These could employ diary methods, interviews, and children’s letters to Santa over a 2 or 3 -year period.

In summary, this report has shown that increasing number of commercial TVs watched are matched by the increase in the overall amount requested by children, and a rise in the number of branded products requested. The general effect of advertising on children desires the lone viewing data may be taken as evidence of young children susceptibility to the persuasive intention of commercials. However with the exception of two well established products, the paucity of a relationship between the branded products requested and the frequency of televised advertisements for them suggest that advertisement of toys may not have individual impact on the under 7s but simply contribute to the general increase of desire. If this strategy is implemented it will be much costly but it will surely yield profits especially since it bring forth the low key campaign strategy of about safety making a more promising sell. One implication that the society which exposes young children to advertisement every year has a duty to educate those children in consumer literacy and critical viewing.

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