



## Consumerism Engulfing Childhood and Youth

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### Abstract

Children around the globe are experiencing and behaving according to the consumerist culture at the consummate level of involvement. Consumerism is one of the greatest 'Social evil', eroding all boundaries of continents and humanities. It is therefore becoming crucial to investigate the blow of consumerism in order to review identity formation and development of self- image in youth. As children are trodden by a flow of media messages, along with a flood of accessories including toys, storybooks, videos and garments shown in movies and commercials, only tiny time and space remain vacant for their own ideas and images Winn (1983). Children are being targeted by marketers to imprint luxury brand images which represent 'cool'. This article investigates the ubiquitous effect of consumerism over children's socialization and attitude formation to overall physiological and psychological well-being examined with a sample of Indian urban adolescents.

**Keywords:** Consumerism, Consumerist culture, Self-image, Identity formation, psychological well-being

### 1. Introduction

Modernity touches every aspect of our lives and children are also not out of this enchantment. As a part of contemporary society, modern children are engrossed in a culture of overconsumption because ultimately this buy and consume modality represents identity. Children around the globe are experiencing and behaving according to the consumerist culture at the consummate level of involvement. It is therefore becoming crucial to investigate the blow of consumerism in order to review identity formation and development of self-image in youth. Consumerism or materialism, as well as conspicuous consumption or beliefs that too much consumption of material goods makes us happy and the concept, is one of the today's 'social evils' Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2009) and is considered as unfavorable to physical and emotional well-being Eckersley (2006, 2011). Consumerism is the prolonged, habitual buying pattern of individuals, slowly grasping society in epidemic proportions irrespective of class boundaries. This study highlights how different levels of consumerism are associated with the measures of physical and psychological well-being of individuals examined with a sample of Indian urban adolescents. Most of the studies on consumerism has dedicated to adults Bottomley et al. (2010), and not relating to young people. In spite of the fact that the impression of modern consumerist culture is possibly the most influential among young people Eckersley (2011). This fascination for quantifiable possession of physical goods evidently noticed among children and youth, in case they belong to ambitious, wealthy, educated families with a high amount of spendable income. Modern youngsters spend their maximum time with various electronic media and access the internet mostly for leisure activities. They are highly exposed to plentiful commercials focused on consumers with high spending abilities streaming in various media platforms. Multinational corporations are cleverly structuring several marketing and advertising tactics, such as attractive packaging, celebrity as well as children role models and anthropomorphism to allure children and the culture of consumerism is being intoxicated over minds of tender age. Children are being targeted as the prospective current and future customers of consumer durables, holiday packages to tiny offerings like stationaries, toys, confectionaries etc. Ultimately these children are becoming victims of consumerism and getting lost in search of happiness and end up accumulating stress and dissatisfaction.

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## 2. Literature Review:

**2.1. Recent research on the influence of consumerism on children and adolescents:** Juliet Schor (2004), a researcher in the field of consumerism, addressed the question regarding the negative effect of consumerism on a child's physical as well as mental wellbeing. Four measures used as indicators of mental health; those are feeling of anxiety and depression, declining self-esteem and psychosomatic behavior. It is fair to accept from the finding that cultures of consumerism make a mentally healthy child emotionally unstable even end up making them miserable Schor (2004). The study also found that several media encouraging consumer culture-making children more exposed and vulnerable to the harmful impact of omnipresent seductive attraction to consume more. The finding may be critical due to the fact that the ubiquitous power of media induces dissatisfaction with what one has, with more importance in materialism; it causes children to surrender themselves blindly to the endless attraction to possess luxury brands and products with greater consumer value. Also this study reveals, a higher degree of consumer involvement results in conflict with parents and poor interpersonal relationships. Children with poor interpersonal skills, conflicting relationships with parents and close reference group ultimately experiencing disturbed mental health. Children and adolescents are equally exposed to the endless bombardment of consumer-oriented messages encouraging irrational mindless purchasing and consuming that affects self-identity and self- image. Girls especially are being targeted by enormous no of marketers with their vast array of consumer products to satisfy all girly fetish and fantasies to emulate their feminine icon. Post globalization corporate giants and worldwide distributed marketers find youth as a potentially prospective avenue to generate current and future profit. So corporations, media and marketers infiltrate beyond the boundaries of class, gender, ethnicity and all other demographic parameters to a great extent and childhood is not outside anyway from the realm of transformation in consumption pattern. Certainly, it is the pervasive power of media and its associated consumerism that has blowout across regions and humanities alike, penetrating childhood too with each instance.

## 3. Methodology:

We can define the research as descriptive research because this research describes the characteristics of individuals. This research also estimates the percentage of responses of a specified sample population exhibiting a certain behavior. One structured questionnaire is used to conduct surveys and respondents are asked to express an opinion regarding their purchasing intention, engagement with media and their way of self- presentation. A total sample size of 90 is considered within the specified sample, 30 respondents are young adults (13-19 years) and 30 are youngsters (8-12 years) and 30 respondents are children (5-7 years) old respondent is interviewed to record their responses. This article examines different aspects of consumerism (ownership of material possessions and measures of consumer involvement) and well-being (self-esteem, psychological distress). For this research statistical software, SPSS is used for analyzing the collected data deliberately for accurate results and methodological findings.

## 4. Study Implications:

### 4.1. *Selling brands which reflect 'Cool':*

Marketers are striving to build brand images with intruding and cleverly advertising strategies and children are unknowingly being the soft target of them. The most intimate and binding relationship of identity and brand is captivating children's minds over the last two decades. The multinational giants like Disney, Mattel, McDonald, Lego, and Hasbro have imprinted their lasting image into the everyday life of urban children around the globe Langer (2004). Marketers are putting considerable effort to build brand identity and for the sheer benefit of attention-grabbing in no time, they include sex and violence in commercials through toys, video games and broadcasting media (Kilbourne (1999); Linn (2004); Schor (2004)). Marketers are practicing ruthless tactics to exploit children as loyal current and future potential consumers. Marketers are simply exploiting children's aspirations, to get a certain body type or attitude by acquiring certain high valued brands that reflect and represent 'cool' as product quality and feature. Children are the most defenseless segment in adopting aggressive attitudes, values and victims of a high level of consumerist aspirations as a result of media exposure and entertainment violence Linn (2004). TV shows and movies using rampant implicit and explicit sexual reference and content evidently influencing a child's self -image and invoke potentially harmful behavior for self and others (Kilbourne (1999); Linn (2004); Schor (2004)).

## **42. Impact of advertising on children and adolescents:**

Television and the internet are the highest-flying media communicate marketer's message to children. Certain researchers argue that children are the critical future consumers and they can defend themselves against the negative impact posed by advertising. Children receive valuable product information and they interpret that info on their own. way (Miller JH, Busch P. Host (1979); Sheikh AA, Prasad VK, Rao TR (1974); Buijzen M, Valkenburg PM (in Press); Ward S. (1975)). On the other hand, no researchers highlight the strong negative effect of advertising on children's physical, mental and psychological wellbeing as well as their values, beliefs and moral judgments Gardner & Sheppard (1989). They discuss that children are more susceptible to the persuasive effects of advertising, in comparison to adults because they are unable to defend themselves from the negative effect of cleverly produced commercials Adler et al. (1980). They also argued that child-focused advertising enhance family conflict, encourage bad eating habits, creates materialistic attitude towards life and ultimately leads to frustration (Miller JH, Busch P. (1979); Peterson L, Lewis KE. (1988))

## **43. Gauging Children's health:**

Many researchers argued that children and youth who are engaged in addictions like the use of drugs, alcohol and smoking must attach and confirm this type of lifestyle with their identity Kilbourne (1999). Children are always willing rather crave to adopt these identity factors marketers are keenly selling along with their offerings Kilbourne (1999). Consumerism nourishes a philosophy that adjusts with the denial of a positive self-image by attaching forged values to the basis of an individual's identity Barber (2007). The tricky agenda of corporations and the individualistic desire to convert self to the wanted identity of aspiration that emulates consumeristic culture have propelled towards lowered self-esteem as well as detrimental health consequences in children (Kilbourne (1999); Linn (2004); Quart (2003); Schor (2004)). Younger children are lured by marketing strategies unintended to them and ultimately building identities that are older than their developmental age.

Figures on children's well-being pinpointing to a worrying trend, children who are deprived of their most beautiful days of childhood not only at an emotional and psychological level but at the physical level as well. Obviously western countries are in more vulnerable and exposed situations. Children in western countries are commonly obese and the trend is more usual in teenagers. By the time children are in 8<sup>th</sup> standard to 12<sup>th</sup> standard in school to show off 'cool' attitude, more than 20 percent become smokers Wallman (2008). As well, children are getting addicted to alcohol and consuming illegal drugs at alarming rates; 10 percent of 12th graders consume alcohol and 7 percent report that they have used illegal drugs and some of them are habitual users Schor (2004). Rates of emotional as well as psychosomatic problems among children from ages 4 to 15 are quite common nowadays and if we consider statistics it is increasing exceptionally Kelleher et al. (2000). Childhood and adolescent depression are evident in primary to middle school goes i.e. approximately 10 percent of adolescents are suffering Olfson et al. (2003). Finally, suicide rates for teenagers almost tripled between 1968 and 1985 Goleman (1995). In recent days children getting 'older' at younger ages because for the sake of the marketer's intention children are engulfing commercials not directly intended towards them Quart (2003).

## **44. Grasp on child's play:**

Children's play is pretty much related to how they learn. Play denotes as a means of self-manifestation Weininger (1979). While children are swamped with inducements from various media they have lesser chances to learn to initiate an action or to influence the world they inhabit, and fewer opportunities to exercise creativity. Indeed, play is costly because through play only children develop a sense of self Polakow (1992). As children are beaten by a flow of media messages, along with a flood of accessories including toys, storybooks, videos and garments shown in movies and commercials, only tiny time and space remain vacant for their own ideas and images Winn (1983). Consequently, children learn at their tender age about group conformity and approval, defining self-worth and identity by what they own and seeking happiness through possession of material goods. A sense of self and identity is formed in abundant ways by creativity, reflects in play, and while manipulated cleverly, identity suffers Leach (1994).

## 5. Future scope of research:

Corporation's interest in the conviction of children segment has grown exponentially Kline (1993). As children become socialized in consumer cultures their childhood days are getting shortened. The research focused on children's consumer behavior is based on mainly two types of theoretic models of learning: socialization and cognitive-developmental. Socialization focused studies typically attempted to describe socialization as a function of environmental influences like media, advertisements, branding efforts of marketers. Future studies should try to incorporate different environmental agents (ex. peer influence and pester pressure, family communication patterns, media exposure and other personality factors (ex. Attitude and taste, interests that motivate media exposure) function as interacting determinants of children's consumer behavior. Research also should incorporate a comparative perspective of cross-cultural influences for generating further developing theories.

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