INDIAN INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT KOZHIKODE

04ᵗʰ International Conference on Marketing, Technology & Society 2020

Examining the influence of In-App Advertising (IAA) on Tweens: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

The paper seeks to explore the influence of in app advertisement on tweens using in depth interviews in qualitative approach. The current study was based on 20 in depth interviews of the mother child dyads. The study demonstrated that tweens had a neutral opinion about the advertisement they were exposed to during watching the videos/games. However, they exhibited a greater recall and recognition for the brands seen on the internet. The study has addressed the research objectives, despite the limitations in the size of the sample in conducting in depth interviews. The study claims to be a pioneer in exploring in app advertising and its impact on tweens market.

Keywords: In App Advertising, Tweens, behavior, qualitative

1. Introduction

Families have always played a central role in agrarian economies across the globe. Larger families always meant more helping hands and a stronger financial yield. Today economies have changed and so have families. Today, families are becoming smaller and independent of the traditional joint family concept. Due to this shift, children in families have a larger say in the purchase decisions. Several studies advocate the growing influence of children on the final decision-making process. This transforms the demographic into a vivid market force. Traditionally families used to be larger with many decision-making adults in the family, the joint family concept, but this situation is changing with the conversion to nuclear families. The importance of children in the family purchase decision has been increasingly appreciated in recent times. All this conspire to children being a major decision making force in the family. Catering to the changes marketing was compelled to evolve to where it is today. With rapidly advancing technology, marketers and content creators have found new and more wide-reaching ways to put the information to customers and prospective customers through various marketing communication platforms such as social media marketing, online marketing, In-App marketing, In-game marketing and much more. These methods are cost effective, more flexible and easier to customize as compared to what existed before their advent into Marketing. Advertisements have started becoming more focused and relevant to individual consumers. Social media aside, most demographics of internet users are turning to mobile phones to satisfy their internet needs. While social media and nearly every online platform have their own mobile applications, these mobile applications seem to be the new trend, as everyone who owns mobile phones find it more convenient using mobile applications than using websites through the in-built browsers. This has opened a new domain for marketers through in-app marketing. Marketers are leveraging these new methods to share brand information and invoke loyalty in all consumers in the market. These constantly push marketers to innovate in their domain.

Marketers turning over to social media created newer and more efficient methods of targeting consumers who may fit to the marketers' specific profile. Advertisements have started becoming more focused and relevant to consumers. Social media aside, most demographics of internet users are turning to

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mobile phones to satisfy their internet needs. While social media and nearly every online platform have their own mobile applications. These mobile applications seems to be the new trend, as everyone who owns mobile phones find it more convenient using mobile applications than using websites through their in-build browsers. This has opened a new domain for marketers through in-app marketing. Marketers are now exploring this as a new opportunity. 36.7% of the Indian population come under the age group of 0 - 19, the teens and tween coming under this umbrella spend an average of 5 hours on their smartphones (McAfee Intel Survey Report, 2013).

The current study aims to focus on the age group between 8-12, specifically referred to as Tweens or Generation-I (the first generation to take the internet for granted). Tweens are pre-adolescent children who are on the verge of being teens. Due to their excessive usage of internet and technology, tweens have created opportunities for marketing and content that are available on the online platforms.

2. Literature Review

2.1 In-app advertising

One of the latest methods of reaching young consumers is In-App Advertisements. In-app advertising is a method in which developers of apps allow advertising networks to run advertisements through the mobile application. Chen et al. (2013) found that every mobile application on android operating systems embedded 6.97 advertising networks and that on iOS embedded 4.13 advertising networks on average. These advertising networks centrally controlled the integration of advertisements into the app, they also allowed other networks to run ads through their networks. This is evidence to show that marketers are already tapping into in-app advertising. Larger amount of time being spent on mobile applications presents marketers with more opportunities to market to the right consumer. As more marketers tap into this mode, it poses a risk in terms of the exposure to mature content to fraud through in-app purchases, despite its' benefits to marketers. This leaves younger children more vulnerable to risks posed. In traditional marketing methods, parents intervene when advertising start creating problems where children pester their parents for unnecessary products, thus for effective advertising through this channel, advertisers have to take a more responsible approach so that the advertising is filtered through the parents to their children. (Dens et al, 2016). In-app marketing helps in removing this barrier as well. According to Martinez (2019), children described advertisements in mobile games as "particularly annoying, tiresome and hard to cope with." The study found how children in Sweden reacted to ads that were displayed during games. Meyer et al. (2018) observed that unlike television advertisements, mobile advertisements use persuasive tactics directed towards children. Actions such as buying toys, food or purchases/must watch advertisements to continue playing were used directed towards children. Brunick et al, (2016) observed that children show an emotional connection with the characters of games and tend to learn faster from these characters. When children learn from these characters both their emotional and cognitive brain creates a combined effect that is long-lasting (Nairn and Fine, 2008). They also observed that on a relative scale to adults' pre-adolescents do not possess the ability to differentiate implicit persuasion in advertising. According to Bidmon and Rottl (2018), interactive ads created better recall and brand awareness among participants. This is an incentive for marketers to push further into the segment of In-App advertising. This implies that the persuasive character of advertisements combined with the ability to make advertisements interactive can help in higher recall and an emotional connection in children who are exposed to the products that are advocated by these advertisements. Chaudhary (2015) studied on family decision making in emerging economies found that Yang et al. (2013), found that the students who were exposed to In-Game Advertisements had a higher implicit recall of brands than those who were not exposed. The study gives evidence that those involved with the game has a better association with brands and how brands can use this to their advantage. Brunick et al. (2016) opine that the characters in the games might be used by marketers to take advantage of the cognitive and emotional appeal of the children they may also be as educative to help give the children a hands-on interactive training as well. However, there is a paucity of literature that focuses on in-app advertising and its impact on children.

2.2 Influences on Tweens

Sramova and Pavelka (2017) revealed that, advertisements and media influence children from preschool age. The children, even though, are aware that advertisements are used for persuading individuals, are still attracted to products but, they are more attracted to package elements rather than the product itself. Marketers directly target tweens through direct messages through child-oriented characters that they associate with (Dotson & Hyatt, 2005), some adult oriented messages are also directed to these tweens in

relation to alcoholic products and cars (Duff, 2004). Tweens at a young age can relate with brands and form an impression about the brands at an early age thus improving brand recall in the further stages of their life's. They also relate these brands to certain personality types and use this influence to project their self-concept to their peers (Parks et. Al 2012). Research has indicated that (Jones and Glynn, 2019) children, once they decide to interact with the brand have reflected a greater commitment to the brand and proceed with longer interactions with the brand in the future, such interactions are usually filtered through social contacts, hence it is not just a child's personal identity but his friends also influence his judgment in brand interaction and critically shaping the brand perception for him. These children with their cognitive abilities still in development, not only has lower ability to decipher these messages coming from brands but also lacks the motivation to do so (Valkenburg and Peter, 2013). According to Lundby (2011), tweens have more economic resources at their disposal compared to the past and they are to be considered as a strong market segment in themselves. This is ideal for a marketer, as the tweens get older and although they already have great influence over even the biggest decisions in the family, their influence in family decision making will only increase over time creating long term prospects for the brand.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Method

The study was conducted using the qualitative approach with the help of in depth interviews. It has been noted that qualitative researchers are mostly interested in reaching a thorough orientation of the building to be built while outlining the underlying reasons for the phenomenon (Malhotra, 2010). This gives an opportunity to the participants, in this case, children and their parents to present their views, with ease of response.

3.2 Study participants and procedure

As part of the study, children aged between 8 - 12 years of age were taken into consideration and oral consent of the parents and children was taken before participation. To be identified with the study the children chosen should be the users of mobile applications and should be exposed to the use of mobile applications. Responses from parents were recorded on views of how their children react to these in-app advertisements. All interviews were recorded and word transcripts were made for analysis. Each interview began with an informal discussion about the children's hobbies and favorite pastime. Children were asked about how they spend time, their habits and interests. They were asked about what kind of TV or internet programs they watch regularly and what makes them like or dislike them. The parents were also interviewed using a separate interview protocol. They were asked about their ward's time spent on content viewing on the internet and also playing games. The parents were also asked to respond if the content was monitored and about how their children reacted to exposure to various advertisements. The study has addressed the research objectives, despite the limitations in the size of the sample in conducting in depth interviews.

4. Study results and conclusion

The research was carried out to explore and examine the impact of in app advertising on Tweens market. The content analysis of the interview transcripts from parents and children generated the outcomes that could be classified into various themes. Most of the children who played games agreed that they preferred playing on mobile phones than computers or console games. Most of the tweens who admitted watching advertisements in between the games or videos, tend to remember the content of the ads. Children also had a greater recall of other game related advertisement. Some popular names of other games (which can be attributed for brands) were candy crush, traffic rider tycoon etc.

Some children mentioned that they had only limited time allowed for watching videos or playing games. Most of the children did not like ads in between the videos/games and skip them. It can thus be concluded that their attention is still focused on the screen and they await the video/game to resume as soon as possible. The parents who admitted that they monitor their ward's activity on mobile phone also kept a track of pop ups. They said these pop ups were not harmful to the children. In most of the cases, the child insisted on downloading a new game whose ad he/she was subjected to. Most of the children had a recall of the advertisements shown in between the videos/games (cars and coaching institutes). There is also an instant recall that the children have exhibited of automobiles on the road. Parents admitted that the children did not pester them for getting the products shown in the advertisements but had a good recall and recognition of brands shown.

5. Study implications

The purpose of this article is to examine how children perceive and participate in ads in mobile applications, and what is the impact of in-app advertising on children. Mobile games are an integral part of current media consumption habits and children's play takes place, to a large extent, in a commercial setting. Teo et al (2013) observed that the tween consumers in this group show growing brand loyalty as they grow older, they also seem to influence their parents and family members regarding spending patterns in the family. Their higher allowance and better conviction about the brand makes them a source of information to their older family members and peers. Peer pressure and "fitting into" their respective peer groups are important part of a tween's social development and thus staying up to date is considered important. The sources of information to these tweens are important for marketers to forge a long-term brand loyalty with them. From a marketer's perspective, the study will help in understanding the effectiveness of In-App Advertisements. The result gives directions on how the advertisements shown through mobile applications affect the physical world through purchase decisions and application downloads.

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