



BRAND INFLUENCE IN CHILDREN'S ECONOMIC CHOICES

Callea Antonino

Work and organizational psychologist, Phd in "Educational, psychological and social services for the International Adoptions", and teacher of Psychometric at Lumsa University, a.callea@lumsa.it.

Urbini Flavio

Lumsa, Work and organizational psychologist and Phd student in "Psychology of working and human resource" at Lumsa University.

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ABSTRACT

The research aims to verify if the choice of young consumers depends on the brand of products. In particular, we studied the children's preferences referred to four kinds of products (brand and non-brand names): toys, school items, snacks and clothing. Our hypothesis is that children choose brand-name products and, they especially prefer games and clothes while they show less interest in school items and snacks. We carried out a study on a sample of 106 children between 6 and 11 years of age; the questionnaire was designed to understand the children's economic choices and preferences. We analysed the data through Thurstone's method of paired comparison (Pedon, 2005) that allowed the creation of an interval scale on a continuum which represents the degree of preference of the given stimuli. The results confirm that young consumers prefer brand-name products and, in particular, they chose games. The research demonstrates the usefulness of the method that has allowed us to describe accurately the level of preference of the various stimuli.

Although many studies had already shown that young consumers prefer branded products, the results of this study showed that some products, like games and clothes, are chosen over other regardless of brand.

Key words: Parents, Children's preferences, Marketing, Economic psychology

INTRODUCTION

From the National Report on the Condition of Childhood and Adolescence (Movimento di Difesa del Cittadino, 2005) significant aspects appear in relation to children's advertising and consumption; according to the data of the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB, 2008), in Italy during the period



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from 2003 to 2004 on-line food marketing registered a rise of 30%. Other data (Altroconsumo, 2005) indicate the quantity of advertising messages by product typology promoted through TV. The research points out that most Italian children (88%) get their information from television, against a relatively low (64%) European percentage.

The data calls for thought on the influence that mass media have on the buying choices during childhood, especially if we consider that in 2004 a child watched on average 27.000 television commercials, for a mean of 2 hours a day (64%) (Doxa, 2004).

Nowadays, children are more aware of and competent in seeking value for their money and are also used to managing it. A minor is no longer a mere recipient of the product itself, but he has an active relation, as a buyer, with the goods which capture his interest, thanks to his access to small and big sums (Elliott & Leonard, 2004). Marketing influences the child's attitude toward products and brands, though, until a certain age, the child don't directly buy the products, but his parents (Pine & Nash, 2002). In this case, the role of the purchaser, that is the one who actually spends money in order to buy something, is fundamental.

The socialization process of children is very important because they influence each other in their choice of products. The socialization of consumption is the process through which young people acquire abilities, knowledge and aptitude that are significant in their functioning as consumers (Ward, 1974). The socialization of consumption begins in the family setting, but develops early (under 12 years of age) through an independent and personal prospective towards buying.

Companies that deal with the production, sales and advertising of consumer products "have cast an eye on children" (Schor, 2005). Marketing addresses them not only as consumers to "educate", but also as a network between the consumer market and the family: according to some U.S.A. research, in 2004 children, from four to twelve years old, determined adult spending for 330 billion dollars and influenced other 340 (Dotson & Hyatt, 2005).

This result arises from a capillary advertising action, because the commercials addressed to children are full of emotions and of cognitive stimulus. Seduction is often enforced using testimonials, real or imaginary, and images of "ideal consumers" in whom they identify: often children or older youth than those being targeted (Nolte & Harris, 2006). Also the appeal to values, challenge or group pressure are a further stimulus to persuasion (Puggelli, 2005).

In general, advertising communication acts on the characteristic needs of children and teenagers and it often promises that, by buying products that others cannot have, they will attain a high level of success and social acceptance (Faber & O'Guinn, 1988). Italian scientific literature confirms that children, from 5 to 13 years old, can influence the buying parents decisions in terms of product and brand, especially for games, knapsacks or clothing. The children's advertising objective is threefold (Oliverio Ferraris, 2006); it aims to make children insistent in their request for certain products designed for them (nag factor); make sure that their requests influence their parents' buying; make them loyal to a brand, package, slogan that has, for the young consumer, an emotional resonance that should accompany him even in later years in order to make him dependent (Henrie & Taylor, 2009).

As well as adults, children want to have got a branded products to gain prestige. Therefore, brand loyalty and consumer behaviour may affect consumers' evaluation about the social status of the others young (Phau & Cheong, 2009).

A well-designed advertising campaign can, in some ways, jeopardize the parent-child relationship: the child, who is told that a series of products are "for him", considers the adult who does not satisfy his requests as "bad". The product image in itself should evoke pleasant sensations, protection, affection, safety or adventure, curiosity, autonomy (Oliverio Ferraris, 2006).

In 2006 the Business School of Prato (Freni, 2006) carried out a study on the relationship



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among children, brands and educational models. From the interviews carried out during the research, it was found that most parents ask their children about what to buy not only for everyday products (food and clothes) but also about more important purchases like a home or a car.

Regarding the educational model, children have been classified into three categories: children “inside the home” essentially live at home, socialize very little, are dedicated to reading, playing with friends/brothers and watching a lot of television; “the little under branded grow up” are children who are consulted from their parents for the purchase of goods, have a weekly allowance and are conscious of what and where to buy; “I am, I want” brand ideology of the is more affirmed that request and use brand products, especially related to clothing.

The research points out that children recognize brand food products, above all snacks, at a very young age (4 children out of 5 at less than 8 years of age); for other products (video games, mobile phone, shoes, clothing) brand recognition takes place at around 10 years of age. In particular, children included in the cluster “I am, I want” are the most brand conscious; they even suggest brand products to their relatives and friends and, at the same time, are influenced in their product choice.

The research aims to investigate young consumers’ buying behaviour.

We hypothesize that children prefer and choose brand products rather than non-brand products; in particular, the favourite products are toys and clothes.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample is composed of 106 children (69 boys and 37 girls), from 6 to 11 years old (mean age 8,50). Interviews took place in a safe environment for children, usually schools, through a monitor; the interviewer recorded the answers on a special grid. The mean period of the interview was about 15 minutes.

Instrument

The tool is “3C Test: Children’s Consumer Choices”, composed of 8 visual stimuli, related to four products (brand and non-brand) regarding the children’s consumption: knapsacks, snacks, clothing and toys. In order to facilitate the administration and make the tool as non-invasive for children as possible, we presented the stimuli showing the images of each pair through a computer monitor and with background music.

Data analysis

The data related to the 3C tool has been analysed through the method of paired comparisons for social values as stimulus ordination (Thurstone, 1927). This method is founded on Thurstone’s rule of comparison judgement, that affirms the normality of the evaluations each time by the subjects, who are asked to compare pairs of stimuli and to choose the one he/she prefers; the fact that the stimuli are compared in pairs in all possible combinations, allows the complete vision of the choices.

The series of judgements expressed by each subject is checked for any possible contradictions that may arise: in this way, we can obtain a validation of each single administration (De Carlo, Brunoro & Pedon, 1981). The complete set of answers is recorded in a frequency table from which it is possible to obtain an attitude scale. The scale however can be considered definitive if the validity of the assumptions related to the method can be proved and this proof of validity is obtained by the “correctness of the adaptation”. Moreover, the collective trend of judging according to a general agreement by means of a concordance test is evaluated (Brunoro, 1980).

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As to the administration we can quantify the frequencies pertaining to each pair of stimuli. They are shown in Tab. 1; the frequency with which the column stimulus is preferred to the line stimulus is recorded in each box.

Tab. 1. Formal representation of the frequencies.

| | Brand knapsack | Non-brand knapsack | Brand toy | Non-brand toy | Brand snack | Non-brand snack | Brand t-shirt | Non-brand t-shirt |
|--------------------|----------------|--------------------|-----------|---------------|-------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Brand knapsack | | 56 | 72 | 52 | 52 | 42 | 65 | 67 |
| Non-brand knapsack | 50 | | 71 | 45 | 47 | 34 | 61 | 52 |
| Brand toy | 34 | 35 | | 16 | 25 | 28 | 36 | 35 |
| Non-brand toy | 54 | 61 | 90 | | 45 | 39 | 53 | 62 |
| Brand snack | 54 | 59 | 81 | 61 | | 25 | 66 | 73 |
| Non-brand snack | 64 | 72 | 78 | 67 | 81 | | 87 | 69 |
| Brand t-shirt | 41 | 45 | 70 | 53 | 40 | 19 | | 23 |
| Non-brand t-shirt | 39 | 54 | 71 | 44 | 33 | 37 | 83 | |

Once the recording frequencies were calculated the corresponding proportions were worked out by dividing each frequency by the number of subjects. The proportions are illustrated in Tab. 2; in the box along the diagonal line the value 0.50 is recorded according to the hypothesis that if a group should compare a stimulus with itself, in 50% of the cases this would indicate a term higher than the other and in 50% of the cases it would give the opposite indication. It can be noticed that each box has a value that is correlated to the value of the complementary box.

Tab. 2. Representation of the proportions.

| | Brand knapsack | Non-brand knapsack | Brand toy | Non-brand toy | Brand snack | Non-brand snack | Brand t-shirt | Non-brand t-shirt |
|--------------------|----------------|--------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Brand knapsack | 0,50 | 0,53 | 0,68 | 0,49 | 0,49 | 0,40 | 0,61 | 0,63 |
| Non-brand knapsack | 0,47 | 0,50 | 0,67 | 0,42 | 0,44 | 0,32 | 0,58 | 0,49 |
| Brand toy | 0,32 | 0,33 | 0,50 | 0,15 | 0,24 | 0,26 | 0,34 | 0,33 |
| Non-brand toy | 0,51 | 0,59 | 0,85 | 0,50 | 0,42 | 0,37 | 0,5 | 0,58 |
| Brand snack | 0,51 | 0,56 | 0,77 | 0,58 | 0,50 | 0,24 | 0,63 | 0,69 |
| Non-brand snack | 0,60 | 0,68 | 0,74 | 0,63 | 0,76 | 0,50 | 0,82 | 0,65 |
| Brand t-shirt | 0,39 | 0,42 | 0,66 | 0,5 | 0,38 | 0,18 | 0,50 | 0,22 |
| Non-brand t-shirt | 0,37 | 0,51 | 0,67 | 0,41 | 0,31 | 0,35 | 0,78 | 0,50 |



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In correspondence to each proportion indicated in Tab. 2, it is possible to obtain the corresponding x-axis using the normal distribution tables. In Tab. 3 the x-axis proportion values are listed and on the bases of these values, the scaling related to the stimuli presented was obtained.

We have chosen an value equal sign to 0, since in this way the difference between the two proportions clearly appears (for example with a proportion of 0.50 the point on the x-axis is equal sign to 0 and, thus, there is no difference in the choice between the two stimulus). The sum is worked out column by column; the sum is divided by the number of the stimuli, obtaining the mean. In order to eliminate the negative values due to by the gap of the stimulus mean, a constant figure equal to the lowest value (-0.53) is added to each value.

Tab 3. Scalar distances corresponding to the proportions.

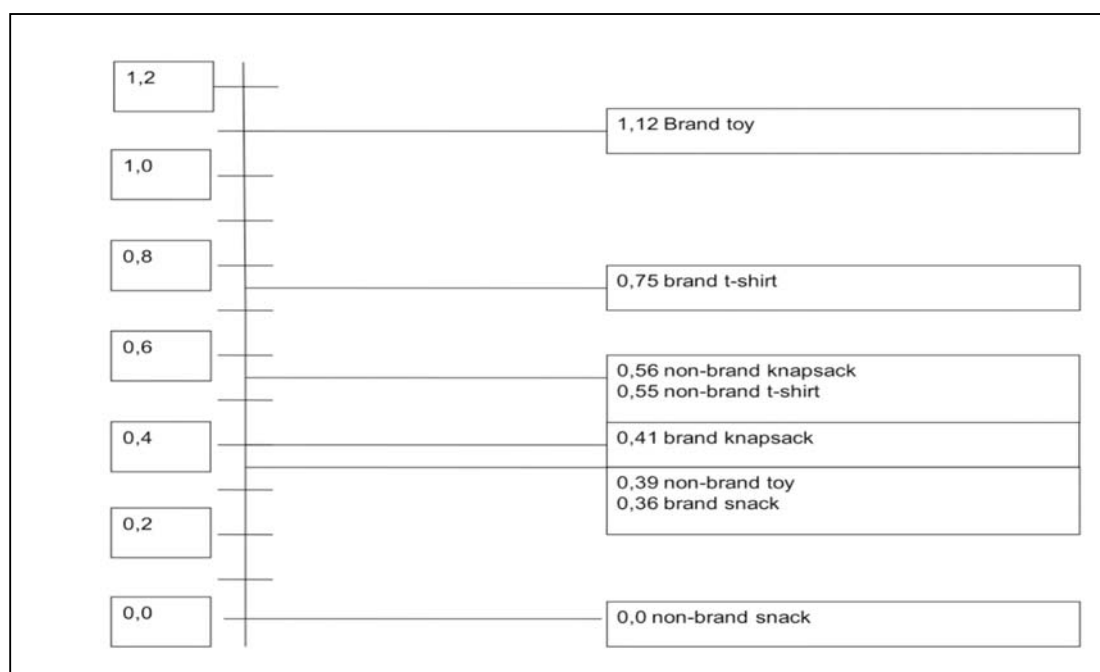
| | Brand knapsack | Non-brand knapsack | Brand toy | Non-brand toy | Brand snack | Non-brand snack | Brand t-shirt | Non-brand t-shirt |
|--------------------|----------------|--------------------|-------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Brand knapsack | | 0,075 | 0,467 | -0,025 | -0,025 | -0,253 | 0,61 | 0,331 |
| Non-brand knapsack | -0,075 | | 0,439 | -0,202 | -0,151 | -0,467 | 0,279 | -0,025 |
| Brand toy | -0,467 | -0,439 | | -1,036 | -0,739 | -0,643 | -0,412 | -0,439 |
| Non-brand toy | 0,025 | 0,176 | 1,036 | | -0,202 | -0,331 | 0 | 0,202 |
| Brand snack | 0,025 | 0,151 | 0,706 | 0,176 | | -0,706 | 0,305 | 0,495 |
| Non-brand snack | 0,253 | 0,467 | 0,612 | 0,331 | 0,706 | | 0,015 | 0,385 |
| Brand t-shirt | -0,279 | -0,202 | 0,412 | 0 | -0,305 | -0,915 | | -0,772 |
| Non-brand t-shirt | -0,331 | 0,025 | 0,439 | -0,227 | -0,495 | -0,385 | 0,772 | |
| Mean | -0,12 | 0,04 | 0,59 | -0,14 | -0,17 | -0,53 | 0,22 | 0,03 |
| Mean+ costant | 0,41 | 0,56 | 1,12 | 0,39 | 0,36 | 0 | 0,75 | 0,56 |

From the values obtained by adding the constant figure to the mean, it is possible to illustrate the scale that indicates the differences among the preference of the different stimuli.



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Graf. 1 Representation of the scalar distances among the products



CONCLUSIONS

The results confirm the hypotheses about the children's preference for brand products over non-brand ones (Hogan, 2007). It is possible to come to a consideration related to the preferences: the everyday but not primary products, like toys and clothing, are chosen with greater autonomy than snacks or school accessories. It is hypothesized that food represents an intrinsic value that motivates parents to buy it personally, unlike products that do not clearly jeopardize the health of their children, which in this case they are free to choose more autonomously (Linn, 2004).

The methodology allows us to understand the various consumer choices but it represents an added value because it allows us to establish the scalar distance among the preferences related to the products (Oliverio Ferraris, 2004).

In order to better describe the obtained results, the scale has been split into 3 areas: from 0 to 0.50, from 0.51 to 1.00 and greater than 1.00. In the first area we find "non-brand snack" which has a 0 equal sign value and which represents the least frequently chosen product; next on the continuum representing the preference scale are "brand snack" (0.36), "non-brand toy" (0.39) and "brand knapsack" (0.41) that are quite distant on the scale from the first. The products which belong to the second area are "non-brand T-shirt" (0.55), "non-brand knapsack" (0.56), that are on an intermediate/medium level of preference and "brand T-shirt" (0.75) that ranks on a medium-high level of the scale; in relation to clothing some research has indicated that children around 8 years old, know and distinguish the various clothing brands, but also look for and choose brand clothes and recommend them to friends and relatives too (Siri, 2001). The most frequently selected product is "brand toy" (1.12) that has a scalar distance much higher than the closest-ranking product, equal sign a 0.37; we can hypothesize that children more easily express a preference to toys because in this area they are very qualified and knowledgeable; in particular, as it appears from the results of other research, children mostly prefer electronic toys, videogames and consoles (Linn, 2005).

The most important aspect is that this study has allowed us to understand how, beyond the



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brand, children are not interested in certain product, such as snacks. It is possible hypothesized that parents personally choose some products that they consider important and therefore, these products do not affect children (Preston & Paterson, 2005).

In conclusion, we can affirm that the results of the present research confirm data of recent studies on children's consumptions; moreover, the methodology allows us to establish not only the most frequently chosen product but also the scalar distance among differences expressed by children with respect to the various products.

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