

---

# Pester Power : Role of Media and Parents

*Richa Sharma Vyas \**

## Abstract

Children are playing an active role in modern consumption. Their role is not limited to that of a consumer only rather their influence and pester power in determining what the family purchases is increasing significantly. This paper explores the incidence of pester power and role of media and parents in increasing the pester power. An attempt has been made to explore reasons behind pester power and relation between parents' profile and prevalence of pester power. Results of the survey show that children are more brand-aware today than their counterparts from past generations, this brand awareness can be mainly attributed to their exposure to TV. Parents' income and education level affect pester power significantly. Study provides implications for both parents and marketers.

"The next generation is open about its consumer strategy: beg your parent enough and you'll get what you want" - is the result a four-country poll commissioned by the Cartoon Network shows. The survey of 4,000 children aged 6 to 15 in Mexico, Argentina, Chile and Brazil found that both the kids and their parents agree that "pester power" is a factor in purchases (Latin Trade, 2000). In India also, over the years the buying behaviour of consumer has undergone a drastic transformation, so is the role of children, as an influencer in buying decisions. In the past children never enjoyed the immense importance given by the marketers as a 'segment' as they enjoy now. In earlier times buying decisions were considered the domain of parents or grown ups for that matter, today the parents' role of decision-maker is shared and children are now becoming key influencers in the buying process. This fact is attributed to the work done by marketers, whose effective use of advertising and other promotional tools hold children's attention, encouraging them to determine what they should buy or what their parents should buy for them or for the family. Unlike in 70's & 80's when even the products of kids could be marketed solely to parents, now kids are not only making active choices for themselves,

but also suggesting their parents about family products. In urban India they're getting more influential when it comes to purchasing decisions in a household. They have a say on matters relating to all categories ranging from chocolates and confectionery to computers and cars. Kids are not only taking part in the decision to buy or not to buy a commodity, but also they are airing their views about the brand within a category.

This paper looks in to the pester power prevailing in India, and tries to explore the role of media and parents in increasing the pester power. However, before further discussion it is felt that an understanding of Pester power will be useful. As per

**\* Richa Sharma Vyas**

*FPM Office, MDI Gurgaon*

*Mehrauli-Sukhrali Road, Gurgaon-122001*

*e-mail: fpm03\_richa\_s@mdi.ac.in*

*s\_richa@rediffmail.com*

*Richa is a scholar of fellow program  
Management, MDI Gurgaon.*

---

the dictionary Pester Power, as a noun means the ability that children have to nag their parents into purchasing items they would otherwise not buy.

In a simplistic demonstration of deconstruction, the phrase contains two words; the first, all dictionaries agree, has two set properties attached to it:

- unwanted requests
- repeatedly delivered (Procter and Richards, 2002)

Marketers widely assume that pester power works, it is also believed that children today are playing a more powerful role of influencer compared to their counterparts from past generations. They are an attractive market segment for marketers, whether they have direct offerings for children (McDonalds, Harry Potter, Cadbury) as consumers or they do not (Maruti, HLL, Asian Paints). In later case, marketers try to attract children to make them play a larger role in family buying decision through pester power. Almost 70% of parents are influenced by their children on everything from cars, to computers, to mobile phones, more marketers are cashing onto pester power. Some of the factors responsible for pester power are that these children are techno savvy, have brand consciousness and knowledge of what he or she wants and how to get it (e-Eighteen Newswire, 2006)

Besides pester power, kids are also getting good purchasing power in terms of pocket money. Kids on an average spend Rs 9,000 every year, with pocket money to children in the Sec A, B and C bracket going up nearly 30% and so besides the usual suspects - the chocolate and candy manufacturers, automobile and FMCG companies are designing contests and giving away freebies aimed at kids (Ac Nielson Report).

Some Success Stories in marketing to children are

- McDonald's Happy Meal Program is probably the best example of a successful campaign that takes advantage of the role kids play in the purchasing power process.
- Pizza Corner has 25 outlets all over the country. It has launched a scheme for kids in which they are given a credit card like identification, which entitles him to 15 per cent discount on family meals. Not

just that, they have created a special Tintin-like character, who is the mascot for the restaurant. 'ZZapi Necror', an acronym for 'Pizza Corner' also comes in comic book form that is given to the kids free. The members of the kids club get other freebies like special toys with kids' meals, free Tiffin boxes and water bottles.

- Barbie Doll: every little girl's prized possession and a must have. Barbie is a legend in the children's toy world.
- Harry Potter: Harry Potter has established new dimensions of success in children's category; it's been more successful because parents want to inculcate good reading habits among their children.

Other than this, many marketer who are not directly related to kids' related products, yet have entered into promotional licensing deals in India include ICICI: Tom & Jerry, Cartoon Network  
BPCL: Johnny Bravo, The Powerpuff Girls, Dexter's Laboratory  
Citibank: The Powerpuff Girls and Scooby-Doo  
Ford- Tom & Jerry  
GM Pens: The Powerpuff Girls and Dexter's Laboratory  
Red Label: Tom & Jerry  
Surf: Tom & Jerry  
All Out- Tom & Jerry  
Bombay Dyeing: The Powerpuff Girls  
(Source: e-eighteen,2006)

In the light of above facts, pester power becomes an interesting issue to look into, in this study an attempt has been made to determine whether this "Pester Power" exists in India? How much influence do kids exert on their parent's buying decisions, how the demographic characteristics of parents affect pester power and what external factors (media) influences kids? This paper will be helpful in providing meaningful inputs in exploring the transition in the role of today's Indian kids in the family buying decision, factors influencing children's knowledge and awareness regarding various products. This research will help parents, marketers, academicians and researchers in understanding incidence of pester power and factors behind it

The paper is organized in five sections, first section is introduction to the problem, second is the

---

literature review; third section presents objectives and research questions followed by the section on methodology. Fifth section is discussion of results and last section sums up with limitations, conclusion and implications of the paper.

## Literature Review

### Marketing Research on Pester Power

Ten years after the term 'pester power' was coined, promotions aimed at children continue to fill supermarket aisles. Tapping into playground crazes or linking with popular TV shows or blockbuster cinema releases is a proven way of boosting sales. However long term benefits of such promotions are not established as children are unpredictable, and if a product is purchased on the basis of an on-pack promotion, their interest is likely to be fleeting (Holly, 2004). Logistix Kids, a research company that conducts ongoing research with children and parents to ensure that any promotional activity appeals to both parties found in one of their tracking study that was carried out monthly among 480 seven- to 14-year-olds and covered a range promotion of revealed that although strong promotions influenced purchases, children must have an affinity with the product in the first place (Holly, 2004).

One of the research conducted by MindShare Asia-Pacific revealed that 53.6 per cent of Asia's tweens received a regular allowance, 81 per cent received monetary gifts from relations, and 66 per cent are influenced to buy by TV advertising, while advertising on the internet influenced 15.5 per cent. Similarly in a separate survey, Universal McCann found that children in Thailand, China and Taiwan had an ever-greater influence on what they watched on TV. In Taiwan, for example, only two per cent of households ever stop their children having a say on what is watched on TV (David and Olivia, 2003).

In one of his research conducted on food buying behavior Spungin (2004) found that parents by and large kept the final decision of food shopping in their hand. 'Nutritional value' was considered the most important factor by parents, followed by child's preference and value for money. In case of new products advertising does have an effect: 80 per cent of mothers had been asked by their children to buy an

advertised product. About the pester power study found that Some 81 per cent of parents said they would check out the product before deciding to buy; 48 per cent would look at the nutritional value and 33 per cent the cost. 14 per cent of those questioned said they agreed to let their children try a new product without vetting it.

On similar lines, Pilgrim & Lawrence in their study (2001) suggested that pester power is not the main driving influence in purchasing behaviour. Instead, they believe that purchasing is more a process of negotiation within the family unit among parent and child, although the age of the child can affect the negotiation process with the parent.

### Children and Advertising

A lot of research has been conducted in the area of advertising's impact on children. Results of one such study shows that by seven and eight years of age children become aware of advertising's persuasive intent, over and above its informational intent, and that advertising therefore advocates (Chan, 2000). Gaines and Esserman (1981) in their study found that by the age of eight almost all children understand that advertising exists to tell them about things that we may wish to possess, and that few believe advertising to truthful in doing so. This reflects that not only children are aware of persuasion, but they are also aware of the creative nature of the persuasion. Similarly, Martensen and Hansen (1999) found that most 8-year-old children do not find advertising to be believable, and that advertising's message is not to be considered to be merely information about brands, but fantasies about brands.

Commercial organizations tend to keep their knowledge of children's interaction with marketing messages to themselves for competitive and political reasons; almost all marketers whose commercial messages are aimed at children would like to portray themselves as benevolent as possible. No manufacturer or advertiser wishes to publicly portray that they study children's minds, and utilize that knowledge to sell them things, even when that is unequivocally what they do as a matter of course (Preston, 2004). Within the commercially driven environment, Stephen Kline (1993) argues that marketers manage their communication with children

---

to boost the product sales and television advertising is used as a dominant means to communicate with them and consequently marketers have the power to be influential.

### Children and Marketing in India

While formulating the concept various reports, news lines and articles related to children, were scanned for their relevance for this research. Thrust was on to knowing the reports available on children's attitude, their changing role in the family, etc. Media related to children has expanded fast in the country. Between 1995 and 2001, there was only one channel for kids in India — Cartoon Network. Where as, in the year 2004 alone, four new channels were launched — UTV's Hungama, Sony's Animax, Turner's Pogo, and the latest being Disney's Toon Disney (Times of India, 2005). This phenomenal growth reflects the importance Children's segment is getting. Some of the excerpts of various experts' opinion available from secondary sources are listed below:

"Today's generation of children is more computer-literate and advertising literate than ever. Equally they are more brand-literate. They maintain a wider mental portfolio than adults and find swapping brand messages fun". (Sandeep budhiraja, 2003).

"The best way to woo children through advertising and in turn make parents buy the brand, is to provide a 'rational or emotional benefit' that the parents can see"- Christian Roth-MD, Asia Pacific, Marketing Store.

If the product helps the parent to get the child to eat a healthy snack, brush their teeth more regularly or provide them with some quality family time together, then there is a clear benefit to the parent and they will more than likely, once pestered, buy the product. As per Roth the challenge is to highlight the parental benefits of a product, while focusing the main thrust of the communications on the benefits to kids.

"The fact remains that kids are becoming an integral part of the family and by extension, integral to purchase. They pester, not only for what they want, but also want to have a say in things they don't really have an expertise in"-Santosh Desai, President,

McCann Erickson India Ltd.

"Generation next kids are well aware of what is happening in the marketplace, for they are exposed to a lot of advertising both on television and outdoors."- Suhel Seth, CEO, Equus Advertising.

By the year 2030, it is estimated that across the world's cities, there will be 800 million people below the age of 15, and most of them will be in India. What this could translate into in terms of pester power is illustrated by the findings of a study conducted by Millward Brown (Exchange4media,2004).

- Kids influence 80 per cent of vehicles bought in India.
- A six month old child can identify the corporate logo
- A 10 year old understands brand value
- Kids can identify brands masquerading as 'their'

There are many reasons for this syndrome but three of them are vital.

- Purchasing power has considerably gone up in India
- Advertising of products has never been as good as it is today.
- Joint families have perished and society has more of nuclear families, at the same time number of children are limited to one/two children.

**Objectives:** Challenges of studying such influence of kids are evident considering the efforts marketers are putting into impressing children and the changing role of a child in the modern Indian families.

**In the light of scenario discussed above the objectives of this study are:**

1. To find out the level of influence children exert on their parent's buying decision
  - a) Of the products marketed to children
  - b) Family products FMCG & Consumer durable
2. To find out whether a relation exists between parent's education levels and pester power
3. To find out whether a relation exists between parent's income levels and pester power

Sub objectives are:

To study the information environment, this includes:

- Finding out the various sources of information available to children.
- To explore the role of media in pester power

### Research Methodology

A combination of both exploratory and conclusive research was adopted for the study. To understand the problem of 'Incidence of Pester power and role played by media and parents' an exploratory research was adopted by conducting unstructured interviews with some of the parents in the first phase, also data was collected from secondary sources. In the second phase, survey method was adopted for data collection. This data was further used for descriptive research and testing of hypothesis. Data was collected with the help of a structured questionnaire in Delhi and NCR region. Before designing the questionnaire, unstructured informal interviews were conducted (in the first phase) with people who had children in the target age group i.e. 4-12 year age group in order to have an idea about which are the important aspects that needs to be cover in the analysis. Sample, thus was comprised of parents who had children of target age group. Hence results are mainly based on perception of parents and not actual facts from market based databases.

Data from secondary sources was collected from websites like cartoonnetwork.com, exchange4media, books on marketing relating to child

Like Brand Child by Martin Lindstrom; James U. McNeal "Kids as customers" Lexington books. Articles from various online journals (listed in ABI/INFOM, Emerald insight and Proquest) etc. were referred.

The questionnaire consists of three components – child exposure to medium of information, pester power variation with product categories and opinion of respondents on certain factors indicating existence of Pester Power.

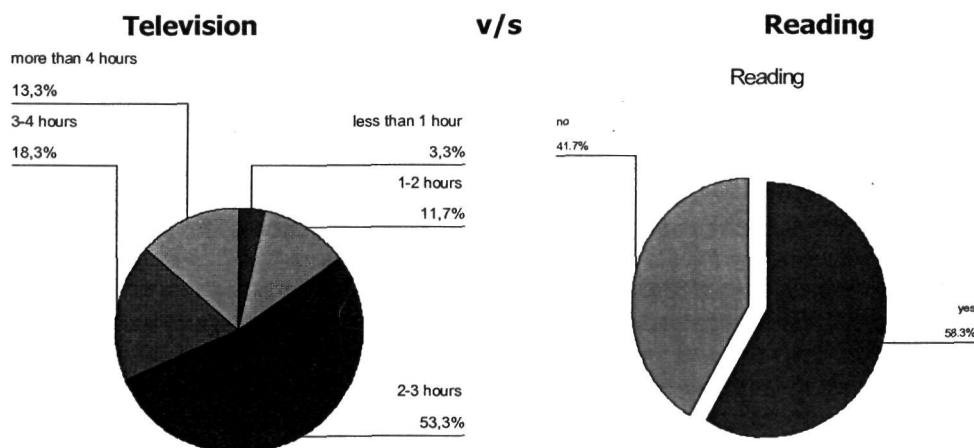
### Analysis and Results

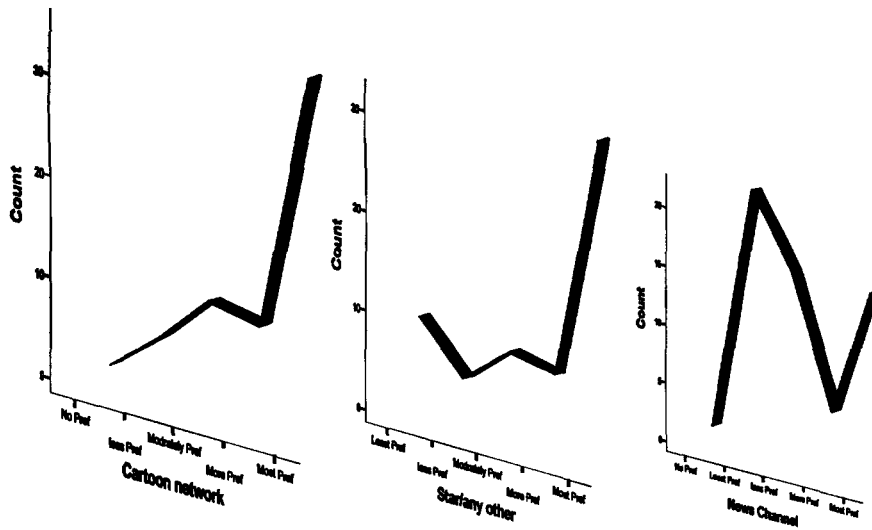
#### Media Exposure

Before venturing into the questions about "Pester Power", the respondents were asked about the level of exposure to advertisements that their children have. A simple frequency analysis was run to get an initial idea about children's' exposure to various media and media related habits.

As graphs shows, 85% of respondents had children viewing the TV for more than two hours per day on an average. Reading habits are not uniform as slightly more than half respondents feel that their children read.

In order to know which channels are most preferred among children, respondents were also asked to rank the channels in order of preference of children. The channels were Cartoon network, Sony, Zee, Discovery, News Channel and Star or any other channel. The results are shown in the graphs below. These results provide the information to marketers where can they attract this segment most.

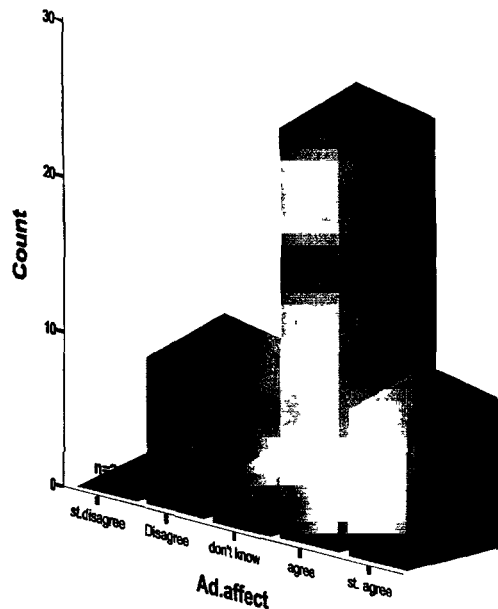




**Whether children are affected by advertisements?**

Frequency analysis shows that majority of respondents felt that children are affected by advertisement; especially TV advertisements which contribute signifi-

cantly towards pester power. Mostly children run after freebies like happy meals of McDoanlds (details from interviews of parents) advertised on TV. Following chart shows parents' agreement level to the question 'whether advertisements have a role in increasing pesters power'.



---

## Pester Power across product categories

Questionnaire contained questions related to the involvement of children in the purchase process of various good across categories like children goods, family household goods or consumer durables. The opinions were tested for variation with the demographic factors.

### Chi square test was applied to analyse data.

First hypothesis tested was; children of high income group parents' will have more influence of advertisements compared to children of middle income groups. The logic behind this hypothesis was more socially oriented than empirical one, usually the notion prevailing in society is that high income group parents can allow children to buy things showed in advertisements; as a result their children might be affected by advertisements more compared to children of middle income group parents.

H1: There is no association between influence of advertisement on children and parent's income level. However at 0.05 significance level  $\chi^2(13.25, df-8, p 0.10 > 0.05)$ , null hypothesis can not be rejected therefore apparently, income group does not affect influence of advertisement on children. Thus it can be safely concluded that influence of advertisement is not affected by parent's income level, rather there may be some other factors related to influence of advertisement on children.

Next hypothesis relates to influence of advertisement on children and parents education level. H2: There is no association between advertisements' effect on children and parent's education level.

Chi square test shows ( $\chi^2 32.005, df-8, p=0.00 < 0.05$ ) hence, null hypothesis can not be accepted. Advertisements' influence on children is associated with parents' education level, an explanation of the same can be that educated parents will sensitize their children about the commercial aspect of media, and also that everything advertised can not and should not be bought.

Third, hypothesis again relates to parents' opinion on media/TV exposure and their education level.

H3: Parent's opinion on children's exposure to TV must be controlled is not associated with their education level.

$\chi^2(21.125, df-8, p=0.002 < 0.05)$ , thus parents' education level and their opinion that children's exposure to TV needs to be controlled are associated. Educated parents understand the negative effects of media more and think rationally that children's exposure to TV in terms of both number or hours and content needs to be controlled.

H4: Parent's opinion that children's exposure to TV must be controlled doesn't depend upon their income level.

As per the  $\chi^2(3.448, df-8, p=0.51 > 0.05)$ , the null hypothesis can not be rejected. Parents strongly feel that their children's exposure to TV should be controlled irrespective of their income levels.

Hypothesis five is related to children's brand awareness.

H5: There is no association between children's brand awareness and their parent's income-level.

Results of  $\chi^2(70.6, df-8, p=0.000 < 0.05)$  shows that the association between the children's brand awareness and their parents' income level is significant hence null hypothesis can not be accepted here. An explanation to this can be attributed to high income group children as such as more exposure to branded products s in their day to day life, their brand consciousness can be explained by an ability to buy the branded products based on their parents' income level.

Next hypothesis relates to children's brand awareness and parents' education level.

H6: There is no association between children's brand awareness and parent's education level. As per the  $\chi^2(24.69, df-8, p=0.002 < 0.05)$ , null hypothesis can not be accepted, meaning there exist a significant relationship between parent's education level and their children's brand awareness.

Following table (Table-1) summarize the findings of importance of children opinion along with demographics

	<b>Children Products</b>	<b>FMCG (other than products for kids)</b>	<b>Consumer Durables</b>
Income	Yes	Yes	No
Education	No	Yes	Yes
No. of Children	Yes	Yes	Yes

### **Children's products - High Pester Power**

The analysis revealed that most of the respondents felt that the opinion of the child does matter a lot when it comes to buying a product for them. Most of the parents responded that they consider children's opinion important while buying products for them, e.g. a child may have preference for a particular health drink over other, as long as it can make him drink milk, parents do not mind taking children's preference into consideration.

- children such as chocolates, toys, chips etc. However, this power is reduced in the case of FMCG goods (other than product directly meant for children such as soaps, toothpastes) and consumer durables.
- Income Increase generally results in more Pester Power.
- Education level of parents has a significant relationship with Pester Power, as educated parents are able to control their children's demand better.

### **FMCG products - Moderate Pester Power**

The Chi square results indicate that increase in income of the respondent has a direct bearing on increase in pester power. The education background of the respondent shows variation from "high pester power" at lower level to a "diffused state" at higher level. The results showed that the others would not allow children to decide about the household goods, whereas the fathers won't mind.

### **Limitations**

Though, present study provides meaningful insight to the problem of Pester Power, it suffers from some caveats like sample size is small 78 respondents, a small sample size though gives an idea about the problem however, is not conclusive in itself. Secondly, study is limited to Delhi and Gurgaon and may not be generalized across the country.

### **Consumer Durables - Low Pester Power**

The pester power in this category of purchase shows an increase with increase in Income level and number of children. It decreases with education level, whereas it is lower for a female respondent compared to male respondent which means that fathers try to incorporate their children's opinion more than mothers.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Our research study indicates that children are quite powerful influencer in family buying decisions. Increasing trend towards nuclear families, rising income levels and lesser number of children are other factors which increases children's influence over parent's buying decision. Major reason behind increase in pester power is the media exposure children have specially exposure to TV. As a result they are largely affected by advertisements. Parent's education and income level also has a significant bearing on pester power.

### **Results of the study are summarized below**

- Children view television more than reading. Avg. viewing is more than 2 hours/day.
- Cartoon Network and Star are the two most preferred channels with children. News Channels are relatively less popular among children.
- Children exercise more power in influencing buying decision for the product categories related to

As far as implications of study are concerned, on the parents' part there is a need to make children understand the commercial aspect of advertisements. They also need to draw the line, as in where to consider children's opinion and to what extent.



Similarly marketers also need to modify their strategies. The best way to influence children through advertising and in turn make parents buy the brand, is to provide a 'rational or emotional benefit' that the parents can see. For example if a toothpaste advertisement induces the kids to brush their teeth by creating the fear of cavity, parents will be more than willing to buy the brand. Similarly in order to get the full benefits of the advertising expenditure marketers need to advertise on the channels which are more popular among children. A word of caution is worth including here that too much emphasis on children by hard selling advertising may raise ethical issues and marketers must bear some social responsibilities while adopting advertising targeted towards children.

#### Reference:

- Brucks, M., Armstrong, G. and Goldberg, M. (1988), "Children's use of cognitive defenses against television advertising: a cognitive response approach", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 14, pp.471-482.
- Chan, K. (2000), "Hong Kong children's understanding of television advertising" *Journal of Marketing Communications*, Vol.6, pp.37-42.
- Clay, R. A. (2000), "Advertising to children: Is it ethical?", *APA Monitor on Psychology*, September 2000, pp.52-53 American Psychological Association
- **David, E. and Olivia, T., (2003), 'Parents Buy but Kinds Rule', *Media Asia*, Nov.14.**
- Elizabeth S Moore, Richard J Lutz, Children (2000), 'Children, Advertising, and product experience: A multimethod enquiry', *Journal of consumer research*, 27 (June) pp.31-48.
- **Esserman, J.F. (ed.) (1981), "A Quantitative Study of Young Children's Comprehension of TV Programmes and Commercials", pp. 95-105.**
- Holly, A., (2004), Doing it for the kids, Marketing (UK).
- James U. McNeal "Kids as customers" Lexington books.
- Joanne, P. and Martyn, R.(2002), "Word-of-mouth marketing: beyond pester power", *International Journal of Advertising & Marketing to Children*, Vol. 3 Issue 3, p3-9.
- **Kline, S. (1993), "Out of the Garden: Toys, TV and Children's Culture in the Age of Marketing. London, Verso.**
- **Martensen, A. & Hansen, F. (1999), "Children's knowledge and understanding of commercial advertising intentions", truthfulness and viewing habits, Proceedings of Conference at Copenhagen Business School 2001. Forum for Advertising Research.**
- **Media watch (Indiantelevision.com) "Pester Power-Cartoon network sizes up kids"**
- **M. Carole Macklin , Les carlson "Advertising to children –concepts and controversies"**
- **Mike T. Bendixen (1993), "Advertising effects and effectiveness" *European journal of marketing*, vol.27, Issue 10. pp. 19-32.**
- **Pilgrim, L. and Lawrence, D. (2001), "Pester power is a destructive concept", *International Journal of Advertising and Marketing to Children*, March-April, pp.11-21.**
- **Preston, C. (2004), "Children's advertising: the ethics of economic socialization", *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, Vol. 28 No.4, pp. 364-80.**
- **Procter, J. and Richard, M. (2002), "'Word of Mouth Marketing: Beyond Pester power", *Advertising & Marketing to Children* April-June , pp.3-13.**
- **Spungin, P. (2004), 'Parent Power, not Pester power', *Advertising & Marketing to Children*, April-June, pp. 37-41.**
- **Thomas S. R. and Rossiter, J. R. (1974)," Children and commercial persuasion –An attribution theory analysis", *Journal of consumer research*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 13-20**
- **Outlook Feb17,2003.**
- **Pester power: Can children influence papa's decisions? Rediff articles**
- **PESTER POWER , Latin Trade (English), 10870857, Apr2000, Vol. 8, Issue 4**
- **Brands set to appeal to the powerpuff category, april 13,2006, e-Eighteen News wire**
- **The Child Branded, [www.exchange4media.com](http://www.exchange4media.com), March,1,2004.**
- **[www.cartoonnetworkindia.com](http://www.cartoonnetworkindia.com)**
- **"Pester Power is the Key", Times of India Article , June 20<sup>th</sup>,2005.**