The Effect of Movies and Television Commercials on Brand Preference in Children

Student Name

University of Victoria

Student number: xx-xxxxx
Abstract
To investigate the influence of media on children's brand preference, 60 third-grade children were assigned to three conditions: exposure to television advertisements, exposure to movies, and no exposure to any form of media. Participants' change in brand preference was assessed by comparing the results of pre-treatment wish lists which were completed by the participants before exposure, to the results of post-treatment wish lists which were completed by the participants after the exposure. Results indicated significant differences in the increase of preference for branded products across the conditions. Planned comparisons showed that exposure to television advertisement but not to movies caused significant increases in brand preference.
The Effect of Movies and Television Commercials on Brand Preference in Children

In today's Western world, watching television is a major part of children's lives. Therefore, children are being exposed to more television advertisements (Livingston & Bovill, 1999). Some researchers have argued that young children may not recall advertisements, due to their limited memory, and therefore they are relatively immune to advertisers' messages (Macklin, 1994). However, other research suggests that children as young as two years old have already established a strong sense of brand reliance, which is encouraged by parents and reinforced by television advertisements (Hite & Hite, 1995). Furthermore, studies show that although children remember television advertisements, ten-year old children do not fully understand the purpose of television advertisements (Oates, Blades & Gunter, 2002). Findings also indicate that adult television advertisements influence children's association of certain kinds of products with being an adult (Gorn & Florsheim, 1985). Motion pictures also play a part in children's brand preference and recognition (Vollmers, 1996). On 68% of occasions, children preferred branded, television-advertised products more than nonbranded products (Pine, Hertfordshire, & Nash, 2003).

The Pine et al. (2003) study supports the idea that children will choose a branded product over a nonbranded product, but it does not show whether children will request more branded products after being influenced by commercials and movies. Little brand preference research has been done on children under 12 years of age. Also, there are only a few research studies that examine movies' influence on brand preference in children.

In the present study, children were randomly assigned to one of three conditions. The first condition involves 30-min exposure to a popular, non-animated children's movie each day for a three-day period. The second condition involves 30-min exposure to television advertisements for a three-day period. The third condition involves no exposure to any type of media (television, magazines, movies, newspapers or advertisements) for a three-day period. Each participant was asked to complete a shopping wish list before and after the three day period. If movies and
television advertisements influences children's preference in branded products, then the wish list of the participants after the three-day period should contain more branded products than the wish list before the three-day period.

Method

Participants

Sixty third-grade children (ages 8-9) were recruited from six different primary schools in different areas of Vancouver Island. Each child was randomly assigned into one of three conditions \( n = 20 \): movie, television advertisement, and no exposure.

Materials

Each participant's parent in the movie group was provided with three different movies: "Toy Story I", "Monster Inc." and "Finding Nemo". Three videotapes of recorded television commercials were provided to the parents of the television advertisement group participants. Each videotape consisted of half an hour of various television commercials for different children's products. Each participant was provided with two pieces of paper for them to write down their shopping wish list before and after the study period.

Procedure

Before the three-day exposure period, parents of the participants were asked to sign a consent form to allow their children to participate in the study. In the first morning of the study period, participants' homeroom teachers were requested to ask the participants and their fellow classmates to write a wish list. Participants were not aware of that they were being studied. Participants were asked to include no more than six products in their wish lists. Parents of the participants of the movie group were asked to let their children watch "Finding Nemo" on the first day, "Monster Inc." on the second day and "Toy Story" on the third day. Parents were asked to ensure that their children watched the entire movie. The parents of the television advertisement group were given three videotapes of different television commercials. Participants in the television advertisement group were to watch one tape per day during the three-day study period. Each tape was 30 min in duration. As with the movie group, the parents
of the television advertisement group were asked to ensure that their children watched the entire 30 min. The parents of both the television advertisement group and the movie group were asked to keep their children from being exposed to any other sources of media for the three-day study period, other than the one which was assigned to them. In this study, media was defined as television, magazines, movies, newspaper, internet, or advertisements. Lastly, the parents of the no exposure group were asked to keep their children from being exposed to any type of media during the three-day period.

After the three-day study period, participants' homeroom teachers again asked the participants and their fellow classmates to write a wish list, again with a limit of six items. The two wish lists of each participant were collected and compared. A score was obtained by counting the number of branded products in both wish lists. Each participant's pre-treatment score was subtracted from the post-treatment score to obtain the difference in brand preference between the start of the study and the end of the study.

Results

The dependent variable in this study was the change in brand preference following the treatment. The mean difference score, as well as the standard deviation, for each group are presented in Table 1. Difference scores were analyzed in a one-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) with group as the independent variable. The type I error rate was set at .05. The ANOVA found a significant effect of condition, $F(2, 57) = 8.89, MSE = 2.75$. Two planned comparisons were carried to examine the pattern of differences between conditions. The first comparison was between the no exposure group and the movie group. This comparison resulted in a non-insignificant difference, which was contrary to expectation, $t < 1$. The power of this test to detect a large effect size ($d = .8$) was approximately .72. The second comparison was between the no exposure group and television advertisement group. As expected, a significant difference was found, $t(57) = 3.91, SEDM = 0.524$.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that preference for branded products in children increases
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significantly when they are exposed to television advertisements. The planned comparisons revealed that the change in brand preference was significantly higher for the television advertisement group compared to the movie group, but not for the movie group. These results mean that television advertising is a media that increases children's preference in branded products. On the other hand, movies are a form of media that does not increase children's preference in branded products.

The results of this experiment support the Pine, Department, and Nash (2002) study that showed that children prefer branded products after being exposed to television advertisements. Contrary to the study of Vollmers (1996), the results of the present study do not show a significant influence of movies on brand preference in children. Vollmers found that movies have an impact on children's brand preference and recognition. The discrepancy between these findings might be due to various reasons. A different selection of movies might be a key factor in influencing children's brand preference. Movies that portray a character as someone who needs the help of gadgets in order to complete a task, for example, the James Bond series and "Spy Kids" might have a greater influence in children's brand preference. Further research that compares different movie selections might provide more evidence on whether movies have an impact on brand preference in children.

Another reason for the difference between the present results and Vollmers' (1996) study could be that the number of different products in a 2-hr movie is usually less than the number of different products in 30 min of television commercials. If the children in the television advertisement group and the children in the movie group both want ten percent of what they saw during their treatment, then the children in the television advertisement group will be requesting more branded products than the children in the movie group. This difference would greatly affect the results of the present study. Therefore, further research might take this factor into account so that both the movie group and the television advertisement group have the same number of products shown to them during the session.

The plot of the movie instead of the products might capture the children's attention. Movies
are designed with intriguing plots to capture viewers' attention. On the other hand, television commercials are designed to direct viewer's attention to specific products. This difference between movies and television advertisements might also have affected the results.
References


Table 1

*Mean and Standard Deviation of Difference Scores Measuring Brand Preference Across Media Exposure Conditions*

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th>Television</th>
<th>Movies</th>
<th>No exposure advertisement</th>
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<tr>
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<td>St. dev.</td>
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ATTACH R OUTPUT AND HAND CALCULATIONS AS APPENDICES