

No longer a party of one

Rethinking how we research and market to families with children

Traditional models for understanding consumers have been focused on analyzing individuals' lifestyles, values, preferences and behaviors. Regardless of the target group, manufacturers, service providers, content developers, advertisers and media buyers have created an elaborate sales and marketing system based on the assumption that individuals make marketplace decisions. Likewise, the research community that supports these marketers has been focused on dissecting human behavior one person at a time - whether represented by eight women in a focus group or 1,000 Hispanics completing an online survey.

But what happens when one person doesn't make the final decision? Or when one person makes the decision but a second person makes the purchase? Or when three or more people come together to negotiate needs and desires and to evaluate the potential risks and benefits to the group? When a complex matrix of emotional and functional variables is at play across individuals?

In short, it requires that we reconsider "1" as our standard unit of analysis as researchers. It requires an acknowledgement that the "viewer" may be two co-viewers - each with unique needs but a shared desire to be entertained alongside the other. Or that the target "consumer" may in fact be five co-consumers ... literally sitting at the same table, with financial and emotional desires to co-consume but palates and developmental needs as distinct as Pop Rocks and a fiber bar.

Understanding contemporary families with children necessitates this paradigm shift. Effectively developing for and marketing to families means that classic marketing and research models simply may not work. The interdependence and egalitarian nature of today's families arguably makes the study of "moms" or "kids" alone a futile pursuit.

After all, to understand a mom is to understand her child; and to truly know a child requires being a student of the parent(s) as well.

These insights led my firm to launch the Young Love study in 2009. Originally conceived as a way to help demystify kids' perceptions and usage of brands, the study quickly morphed into an investigation of modern families, the brands they love and why. This article will draw on the recently released year-two findings from more than 4,500 families.

snapshot

Rather than focus solely on how a kid or a mom would respond to their product, marketers should consider the family unit as a whole and craft messages that communicate inclusiveness, variety, ease of use and value.



By Wynne Tyree

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Data from the online study of kids 6-12 years old and their parents is evaluated at the individual level as well as the household level. What the data on more than 270 brands across 20 categories clearly show is that several key variables drive families to develop higher affinity for and usage of brands. These drivers of family brand success include:

Bringing the family together

Today's families are incredibly fragmented due to work, school and extracurricular commitments. At the same time, products are highly individualized and media is more personalized than ever. With seemingly-infinite forces and brand opportunities pulling them apart, Young Love results reveal that what families want most is to connect with the ones they love and miss: one another. It is the reason Nintendo's Wii is the No. 1 Family Delighter brand for a second year in a row. Wii physically and emotionally brings families together regardless of age or skill level. Like Goldfish (No. 10), Disney Channel (No. 3), and Crayola (No. 7), Wii masterfully invites the whole family into a safe, easy, permissible and shareable brand experience.

Delivering variety/choice

From flavor varieties to online game choices, options mean that kids and parents don't have to leave the brand portfolio to stay personally fulfilled. Variety also results in everyone in the household feeling like the brand offers something for them. On a practical level, moms' lives are greatly simplified by delighting the whole family with one brand selection. While kids find choices empowering (think Subway at No. 21), moms and dads find that variety offers greater peace of mind. Knowing that everyone in the home will be happy with at least one of the brand's offerings is why brands like Doritos (No. 5) and M&M'S (No. 2) achieve Family Delighter status.

Making it easy

One of the core drivers of both Kidfinity and Momfinity - the study's measures of kid and mom brand affinity, respectively - is "easy to do/

Family Rank	Brand	Kidfinity Score (Of a possible 1,000)	Momfinity Score (Of a possible 1,000)
1	Wii	907	877
2	M&M'S	884	894
3	Disney Channel	880	867
4	Disney	854	888
5	Doritos	871	870
6	Oreo	877	860
7	Crayola	834	900
8	Popsicle	870	861
9	Reese's	852	860
10	Goldfish	833	869
11	Chips Ahoy!	856	839
12	McDonald's	898	796
13	Nintendo DS	873	820
14	Nickelodeon	855	829
15	Kraft Macaroni & Cheese	828	850
16	Capri Sun	848	827
17	JELL-O	818	854
18	Toys"R"Us	845	824
19	Cheetos	844	825
20	Pringles	845	819
21	Subway	789	873
22	Twix	814	847
23	Starburst	823	833
24	Skittles	835	811
25	Fruit Roll-Ups	831	812

Family Rank is calculated via the summation of Kidfinity and Momfinity scores.

make/use." Allowing kids to easily interact with a brand is critical to marketers, as it helps ensure brand engagement and adoption. From offering pop-top lids on products tweens can microwave themselves to developing simplistic, icon-driven user interfaces for digital products, developing for a nine-year-old goes a long way in securing family brand success. Moms seek brands that make their lives easier, including offerings that kids can make or use on their own. Kraft Macaroni & Cheese (No. 15) is a great example of effectively pushing the "easy" lever. Nintendo DS (No. 13) is another example of how smart brands connect with non-traditional users (in this case, gaming girls and parents) and bring them into the experience.

Speaking to the whole family

Data from our study show that delivering communications (or even cues) that assure both parents and kids that a brand was designed with both of

them in mind results in the whole family feeling as if they are invited to the brand party. This can happen via dual-targeted marketing campaigns such as Disney Channel (No. 3) or it can happen via adult-directed general-market efforts that subtly say to kids "We know you're listening." Such is the case for brands like iPod (No. 28) and Oreo (No. 6). As 50+ years of kid-directed marketing has evidenced, kids want to be part of the brand dialogue and they have brand preferences. At the same time, parent-directed communication helps ensure regular access. Interestingly, at the household level, access and frequency of use ultimately reinforce affinity for both parents and kids, so directly or indirectly communicating with everyone in the family is imperative for garnering brand love.

Being cognizant of financial constraints

Families are watching the bottom line these days and kids are more aware

than ever of their families' financial situations. Value - which doesn't equate to low price alone - is important to parents and kids as well. While moms and dads continue to tighten their belts, kids want to do their part to help their families save money, too. This is why value-based brands like Walmart (No. 30), Popsicle (No. 8) and Kool-Aid (No. 29) continue to grow with families. Family members are looking for the recognition that a brand "gets me and what's important to me now." It's one of the many reasons a brand like Old Navy (No. 74) continues to trump premium brands like Abercrombie & Fitch (No. 196) and Hollister (No. 207).

Leveraging brand heritage

Kids and parents want guarantees - whether a guarantee that dad isn't wasting \$10 on something that will disappoint the family or a guarantee that a kid will like the flavor her mom has put in front of her for breakfast. Brand names can deliver this guarantee. They provide the "I know and can trust this experience" factor that both parents and kids seek. It is one of the key factors in moms visiting the same McDonald's (No. 12) drive-thru on a weekly basis. And it is why kids robotically press the numbers for Nickelodeon (No. 14) on the remote control when they turn on the TV. Contrary to popular wisdom that kids lack brand loyalty, young consumers gravitate to brands they know and can trust. Likewise, moms love shar-

ing with their kids the brands they grew up on and still enjoy. Tapping moms' nostalgia and giving families a heritage-based "guarantee" of cross-generational delight is a surefire way to secure brand affinity and usage.

Understand and measure

The brands that will reign with kids and moms in the next decade will leverage the insight that they are part of an intimate, symbiotic family unit. Successful brands will ensure parent approval and facilitate quality time with immediate and extended family. As an industry we need to continue to explore ways to understand and measure this complex family infrastructure and the web of unique and interrelated needs that define it. | Q