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## **How Can Kids Become the Actors of Tomorrow's Hypermarkets Experience?**

### **ABSTRACT**

Targeting children should be part of hypermarkets' today's strategy as they influence grocery's purchases. To this day, the customer experience in hypermarkets is best described as the personal and unique perception of the buying process based on sensory, emotional, rational and physical aspects. However, our literature review reveals that few studies have been conducted to identify the most appealing stimuli to children. Therefore, our research problem is: "How can kids become the actors of tomorrow's hypermarkets experience?" Our literature review points out four moderators that have an impact on children's customer experience: type of product, product offering, pocket money amount and the environment. Our hypothesis states that these elements stimulate a positive shopping experience that can be measured through the 6 independent variables presented in our model: customer satisfaction, in-store conflicts, buying intention, purchase basket value, loyalty and average time spent in-store. To offer a stronger experience in hypermarkets by enhancing complicity between the brand and the children, we recommend to integrate new marketing trends. Technology through games and presence of tablets in aisles as well as neuro-marketing seem like interesting moderators to include in our model. This would allow children to have a true in-store experience through engaging stimuli and to strengthen their role in the shopping experience.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Children over the years have become an increasingly important target for companies. As competition is becoming tougher on the market, targeting children can be a strategic way to differentiate your company, develop a competitive advantage and gain market shares. Nowadays, it is fair to say that the purchasing power of children has increased. Indeed, it has been shown in a

recent study that 71% of parents in the United States asked their children's opinion for the family purchases.

To target young consumers, retailers have to offer them a true experience. Many specialty stores have already taken initiatives to specifically target children: Ikea, Nature & Découvertes, Toys'R'Us etc. (LSA). Therefore, we will consider for our research a more complex field, hypermarkets from a holistic point of view as children are not as targeted today. **Therefore, our research problem is "How can kids become the actors of tomorrow's hypermarkets experience?"**

If we go back through the literature, Holbrook and Hirshman are the first ones who have introduced the notion of experience in the Marketing field. In 2015, customer experience has been described as "the whole events experienced by customers in the process before and after the purchase which is personal and unique as well as provide stimulation to sensory, emotional, rational and physical aspects so as to create memorable experience. » (Social and Behavioral Science)

It is important to highlight that there are very few studies concerning children and retail stores. The few that exist are not quite recent. It is seen however that children develop preferences quite early about which stores they prefer to shop in and it continues to evolve overtime (Mac Neal, 1966; Bree, 1988). Indeed studies show that younger children will have a tendency to prefer smaller and more trustworthy settings with a "limited" choice of products (ex: convenience store, food store, etc.) than older children who prefer to have a large selection of products (ex: department stores). Another factor that plays an important role on a child's purchasing power is the amount of money they regularly have access to. While in the United States this number is easily found, in France and other European countries, it is more difficult since children do not

receive a regular amount of pocket money (LSA, 1980; Boniface and Gausse, 1981; Bree 1988). This limits the calculation the real purchasing power.

Also, children can have an impact and influence on their parents' purchases, but not on all products. It has been seen that children have a high influence when it comes to products that are linked to food or leisure (Ward, 1972 ; Wackman and Wartella, 1977) whereas more "important" decision such as the choice of a car or furniture, the child will have no significant impact on the final decision (Jenkins,

and sentimental value (Calder, Didow and Roedder, 1978). His or her decision is usually biased since they have a limited perception (Pollack, 1972; Simon, 1972) and attention level (Zukier and Hagen, 1978; Roedder, 1981 and 1982), their vocabulary is limited (making it hard for memorization) (Langer, 1967) and their long term memory is not fully developed and organized (Ornstein, Nuas and Liberty, 1975; Ward, 1972). This makes them an interesting target for many companies.

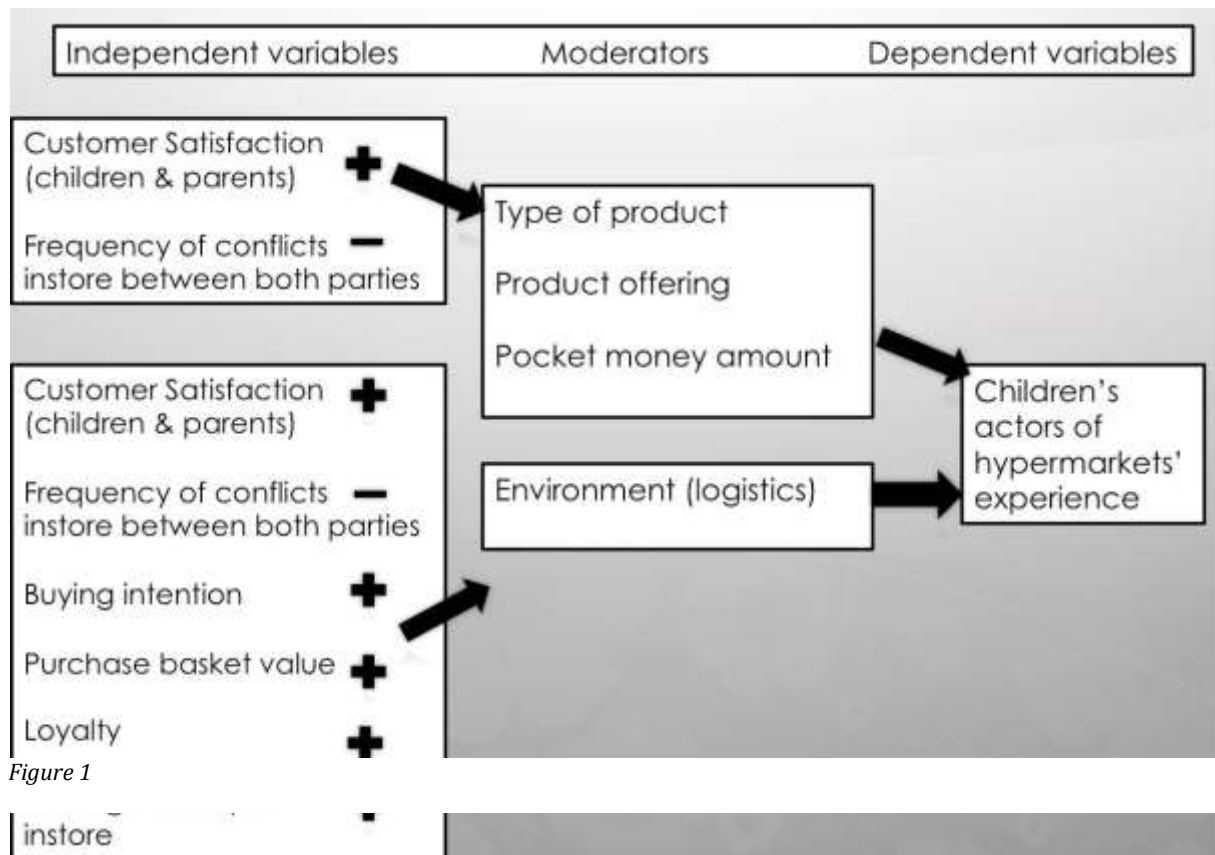


Figure 1

1979). Children's desires or cravings will be more easily accepted once in a store than at home but in the case of a refusal, the rejection will be more direct and create a distress to the child, especially at the register (Ward, Isler and Popper, 1986). There is little information on the idea that some parents might be more influenced than others when it comes to their child's cravings. No specific behavior has been observed for now. Finally, a child's decision is first of all based on his own desires (egocentrism)

Concerning children more specifically in a commercial environment, it is known that they have an active role. They consider the store as a "way to transform a boring activity to a funny one thanks to environmental stimuli" (K. Ayadi). Therefore they re-appropriate the store to play and not to influence parents' purchasing. This re-appropriation of the commercial space is restricted by physical, cognitive and social constraints (McNeal, 2007; Roedder-John, 1999). However, they ignore these constraints and transform it in a playful area (Ironico,

2012). Tensions are therefore existing between intentions of parents and children. These tensions are resulting to negative retailer performance. According to K. Ayadi findings, a digital interactive technology resulting in a store atmosphere could be a solution to reduce the conflict between parents and children.

### **MODEL DESIGN**

Based on all the findings that were made up to this day, we wanted to elaborate a model to illustrate “**How can kids become the actors of tomorrow’s hypermarkets experience?**” (fig1) This models includes exciting and new ways of doing marketing. This model also shows based on our hypothesis, how these new marketing elements, if installed in hypermarkets, could create a beneficial impact on various variables.

### **HYPOTHESIS**

According to Ward (1972) and Wackman and Wartella (1977) children have an impact on their parents’ purchase intentions. For more “important” decisions, children are rarely asked for their opinion on these matters. We believe that children start learning to become a consumer with low involvement products. Indeed since they have a limited perception (Pollack, 1972; Simon, 1972) and attention level (Zukier and Hagen, 1978; Roedder, 1981 and 1982) with not fully organized and developed memory (Ornstein, Nuas and Liberty, 1975; Ward, 1972), the less variables they have to consider the easier the choice. As they grow, they are able to consider more variables of selection. Also it has been seen that the higher the number of products available the harder the decision for the child. Mac Neal (1966) and Bree (1988) stated that younger children preferred smaller stores since it had a limited selection. Specialized shops have therefore the advantage of selecting a restricted number of goods in the same range of

products (ex: shoes) and ease the purchase selection for the child.

**H1: We believe that the lower the amount of products and the lower the product involvement, the higher the customer satisfaction and the lower the frequency of conflicts between parents and children.**

Whether a kid has pocket money impacts the way he controls his buying impulsion and as research has shown that he will be able to have more control other his desires, as he is more conscious of the value of products. Therefore, the kid is taught by having his own money to manage his funds and to become more of a conscious consumer. We believe therefore, that this will impact positively customers’ satisfactions, as less demand from the kids would be rejected from their parents and therefore reducing the frequency of arguments.

**H2 a): Having pocket money impacts positively customer satisfactions of both parties.**

**H2 b): Having pocket money reduces conflicts frequency in-store.**

Children tend to create their very own re-appropriation of a store environment and see the store as a fun area to play in. In contrast with their parents, they generally don’t pay attention to the products in themselves but seek for an interaction with the store’s atmosphere through colors, design, furniture etc.

Games are stimulating creativity and their insertion in aisles could become a real advantage for children satisfaction. Neuromarketing is based on sensory marketing, animations, and games in aisles.

**H3 a): The children's re-appropriation of the store environment into a fun and interactive atmosphere will positively impact the children's satisfaction.**

**H3 b): The smaller the store is the more satisfied the children will be and the less conflicts will exist between children and parents.**

**H3 c): The more interactive the environment is, the more time the child and the parent will spend in the store.**

**H3 d): The more interactive the environment is, the more time the child and the parent will spend in the store and the higher the value of the purchase basket will be.**

**H3 e): The more fun the environment is, the more frequently the child will want to come back and therefore the more there is loyalty.**

### **CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CRITIQUE**

Nowadays, we can notice a definite lack of research on interactivity between points of sales and consumers, particularly children.

Past research are generally based on a few number of stores and focus on specialized stores (toys, food, shoes etc.) (For example: Ayadi; Nelson, 1978; Atkin, 1978; ...). This makes it difficult to apply the findings to the general market and to hypermarkets specifically.

However, the research on this subject is not regularly updated (Some date from 1969 like MacNeal's work). For example, we live in a digital era, but the use of technology has only been slightly mentioned in past papers (for example: Ayadi).

One limit, which every paper focusing on children behavior will have to face, is the unreliability over time of child's analysis of its own behavior (seen

in Pollack, 1972; Simon, 1972; Zukier Hagen, 1978; Roedder, 1981 and 1982; Langer, 1967; Ornstein, Nuas and Liberty, 1975; Ward, 1972). This explains why it is essential to have a very large sample of children for our study in order to generalize our findings to the general population.

### **CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS**

The concept of experience stores is being increasingly used by companies for its positive impact on brand image. According to Kumar & Kim (2014), consumers today want to dive into the brand's universe and this creates complicity between the brand and its consumer. Based on today's marketing trends and on the new ways of enhancing this complicity between the brand and the consumer, we should consider the new following elements: technology through games and tablets and neuromarketing. This is bringing to a new model design (fig 2).

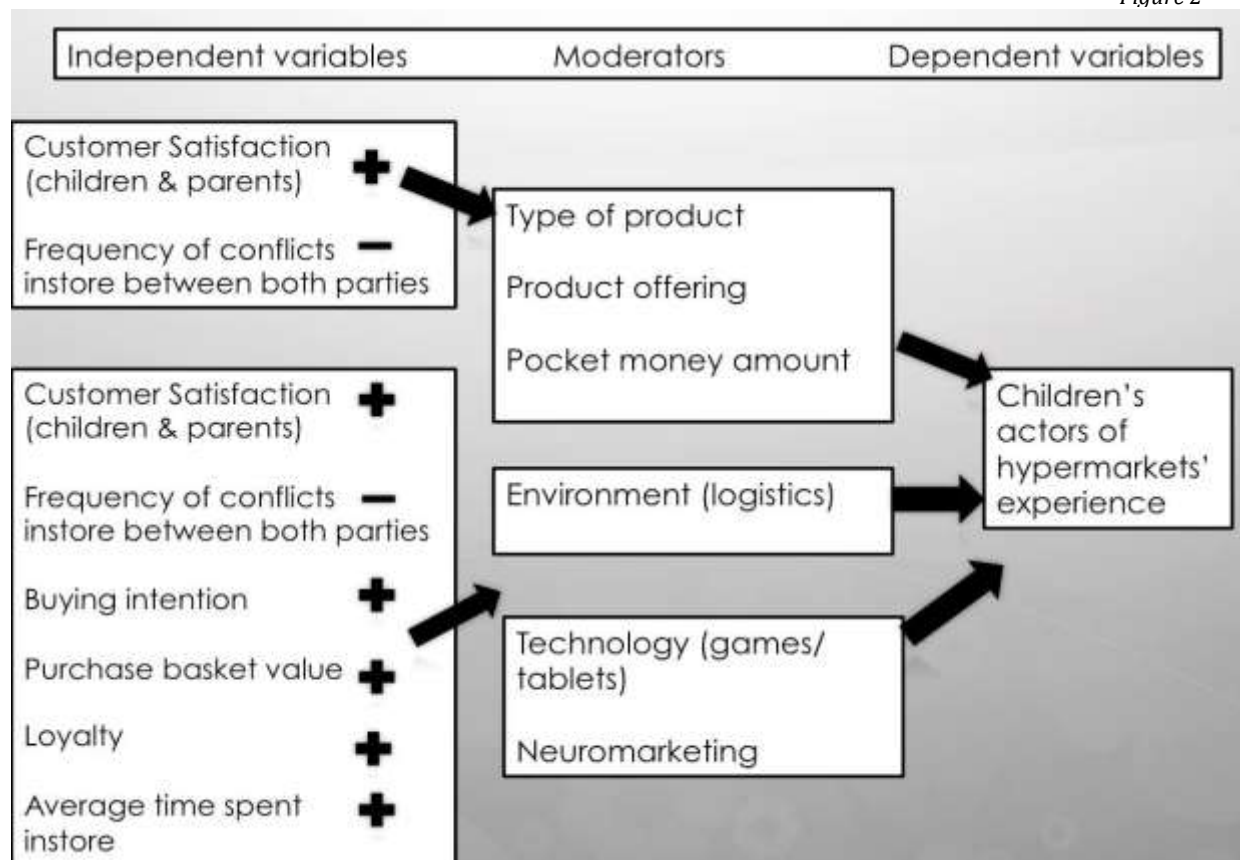
Technology is becoming a real tool to distract children and bring more and more interaction between parents and children. Games are stimulating creativity and their insertion in aisles could become a real advantage for children satisfaction. It would attract children attention and catch their sight to a specific product or scale of products. Also, as games and tablets would be linked to the products nearby, it would create a sense of interaction and raise the children's interest. We believe that the use of technology could reduce the conflicts between both parties but also impact positively the average time spent in the store. Being in a more entertained and playful environment, children will wish to come back and we believe that loyalty could be therefore increased.

Neuromarketing is based on sensory marketing. The use of specific colors in aisle could create a link between colors and a type of product. A specific smell could be associated to a brand and packagings which particularly stimulate the sense of touch could be developed by retailers and brands.

To attract kids, we could use specific sensory stimuli adapted only to

children. They could be positioned in the “kids aisles” such as toys, children clothing, children hi-tech and children books. This would help increase their awareness when walking through an aisle but it could also give us more information on children behavior. This will enable us to offer children the experience they expect.

Figure 2



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