

Sport Consumer Socialization of Children: the Role of Parents, Peers, and Siblings

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**Session 30: Socio-Cultural
Presentation (25-minute)**

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Sport consumption by children takes place in a social context and the psychological and behavioral outcomes can be reflected by the influence of parents, peers, and siblings. The decision of sport participation and their consumption behavior are dynamic in the sense that the social systems are constantly undergoing change. Family Systems Theory (e.g., Carter & McGoldrick) states that any one change in a member of a system will influence other members (e.g., family members, peers). Further, according to Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1993), the significant others that are involved in one's lives will clearly shape attitudes, beliefs, and values. This paper discusses the relative role of social systems influence on sport consumer behavior in children.

The economic power of youth consumption is well understood and marketers have prioritized youth in their efforts. Advertising directed at children is estimated at \$42.5 billion dollars annually, and nearly 80% of all global brands now deploy a "tween strategy" (Schor, 2004). The power of consumption can go both ways: social systems may influence youth consumption, and youth influence may influence consumption by significant others.

Consumer research focuses on three stages of socialization in youth (John, 1999). The first stage is the perceptual stage (3-7 years) which is characterized by a general orientation toward the immediate and observable perceptual features of the marketplace. The analytical stage (7-11 years) is when children change both cognitively and socially and contains the most important developments in terms of consumer knowledge and skills. The reflective stage (11-16 years) furthers cognitive and social development and knowledge about the marketplace concepts such as branding and pricing becomes even more nuanced and complex.

The power of social systems in the consumer decision-making of youth differs developmentally. The role of these systems has been studied in terms of patterns of communication in the development of consumer knowledge, skills, and values. Young children view parents as the dominant socializer with consumption initially, but there is a transition in late childhood and adolescents when peer influence becomes more prevalent (Moschis, 1987). The role of siblings is still unclear, but research has shown that siblings can have a significant influence on behavior (Kramer & Bank, 2005), because they spend so much time together when they are young (Bank, 1995; Waters, 1987) and become important socializers latter in life (Kluger, Carsen, Cole, & Steptoe, 2006). Consumer behavior has also looked at influence by a triadic analysis (Cotte & Wood, 2004) considering parents and two or more siblings. Lastly, peer influence operates most strongly in situations with weak family communication, and forms an understanding of consumption symbolism (Bachmann, John, & Rao, 1993) and materialism (Achenreiner, 1997).

While research has focused on socialization influences relating to choice and persistence in sport, there has been limited research done on sport consumption behavior. Parents typically facilitate children's initial entrance in to sport (Green & Chalip, 1998; Greendorfer, Lewko, Rosengren, 1996) and play a vital role with ongoing participation. During the early years, children are likely to adopt their parent's beliefs and thus their motivation in sport will reflect the beliefs system that originated with their parents (Eccles, 1993). Sibling influence on sport participation has been limited to research in birth order (Flowers & Brown, 2002), and the amount of physical activity (Davidson, 2004) but most lack continuity and have been intermittent (Partridge, Brustad, & Babkes, 2006). Peer influence may play a vital role in sport consumption based on children reporting that the desire for affiliation and social recognition are primary motives for their involvement in sport programs (Weiss & Petlichkoff, 1989). Wold and Anderssen (1992) found that the participation level of a best friend was a stronger determinant of participation for children compared to family members. With sport shoe purchases, Yoh (2005) found that peers were a greater influence for female teens than male teens; more important for teenagers from low-income families; and the most significant to the decisions of older teenagers.

Clearly more research is warranted in relation to sport consumption over the life cycle. In particular theoretical models that help understand social systems influence based on developmental stages will help youth sport marketing efforts. Quantitative instruments and possible theoretical models based on consumer behavior research based developmental stages will be discussed in the presentation.