

Communication of Kids' Wear Safety to Parents: Indian Retailers' Viewpoint

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Abstract

While purchasing outfits for children, it is very important to check whether they are manufactured according to the safety regulations. In some cases, the clothing that is worn by children have accounted to severe injuries and in some cases, it even caused death. To prevent these types of clothes related injuries, many safety rules are there internationally and the same is followed by few countries.

Whether in a retail shop or online, retailers are the initial point of call for customer. This is why normally customer associate a product with the retailer they purchased it from rather than with who made it. Customer have a right to expect that the garment they are purchasing should be safe and of high quality. Increasing the knowledge level of customers with respect to safety principles is one of the method of reducing the number of customer product related injuries.

In this study, 110 retailers were selected through stratified random sampling. The data has been collected from the Bengaluru in the state of Karnataka, India with the help of structured questionnaire.

This study reveals that most of the Indian Kids wear retailers believes that it is important to communicate kids wear safety to parents and government advertisement is the best way for the same. The Indian retailers also of opinion that there should be safety mark for kids wear like ISI/ Eco Mark so that parents can easily differentiate between safe and unsafe kids garments. Most of Indian kids wear retailer are ready to get trained on kids wear safety because they believes that by educating parents about kids wear safety they can gain their loyalty.

Keywords: Kids Wear Safety, Organized Retail, Unorganized Retail, Communication, Safety Mark.

INTRODUCTION

Market for kids apparel is the fastest growing industry in India. Manufacturers are coming up with fancy materials targeting kids who are more interested in the upcoming fashion trends. Children's garments are available in various forms and designs. There is an excellent opportunity for the organized players to lay a strong foundation in this segment. Indian market is now moving towards an international look in terms of children's apparel.

While purchasing outfits for children, it is very important to check whether they are manufactured according to the safety

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regulations. In some cases, the clothing that is worn by children have accounted to severe injuries and in some cases, it even caused death.

For instance, the drawstrings that are attached in the outer clothing of children could get entangled in the play instruments or the doors of the automobile vehicles and could suffocate the child. Clothes with improper fit or night suits that are non-resistant to fire may lead to severe injuries or even death.

To prevent these types of clothes related injuries, many safety rules are there internationally and the same is followed by few countries. The safety standards that are set up for children's outfits are meant for securing them from unwanted dangers that may be caused due to their clothing. Wearing clothes that are resistant to fire, lower in lead concentration, and without lengthy down draw strings and tiny parts will be helpful in protecting children's safety.

Whether in a retail shop or online, retailers are the initial point of call for customer. This is why normally customer associate a product with the retailer they purchased it from rather than with who made it. Customer have a right to expect that the garment they are purchasing should be safe and of high quality. As the main interface with customer, retailers have the inimitable opportunity to help customer to buy safe products and use them safely.

BACKGROUND

The Indian retail industry is generally divided into organized and unorganized retailing.

- **Organized Retail:** It refers to trading activities undertaken by licensed retailers. These includes corporate backed hypermarkets and retail chains, and also privately owned large retail business. Organized retailing is based on the principle of unity.
- **Unorganized Retail:** It refers to the traditional forms of low cost retailing, for example, local kirana shops, owner operated general stores, convenience stores, etc. Unorganized retailing is based on the principle of singularity.

PRODUCT COMMUNICATION

Communication with the customer regarding the products is an essential activity of industry, particularly retail. Communication connects retailer and customers that could assist retailer to interact, to understand and to establish relationships. Product communication assists retailer in targeting customers and retaining them. In retail store, salesman plays an important role in customer service communication.

A communication strategy is the approach any organization custom to fulfill their objective. Eventually, communication strategies should guide to a change in behavior of the customer. Customer normally has to go through some stages of behavior change, such as awareness, consideration, trial, and purchasing. Whether product is consumable, durable or wearable, a product communication strategy is an integral component of a good marketing plan. The best product communication strategies enhance the possibility of message influencing the targeted customers and resulting into more sales (Acevedo, 2012).

CERTIFICATION MARK

As per Section 2(1) (e) of Indian Trade Marks Act 1999, certification mark means a mark capable of distinguishing the goods or services in connection with which it is used in the course of trade which are certified by the proprietor of the mark in respect of origin, material, mode of manufacture of goods or performance of services, quality, accuracy or other characteristics from goods or services not so certified (The Trade Mark, Act, 1999).

The presence of a certification mark on a product can give the direction to the customer and thus empowering them to decide whether to purchase a particular product or not. Currently, a certification mark is used by several merchants to specify that their merchandise have certain characteristics, such as a specific level of product quality.

Mostly, certification marks are awarded after fulfilling certain standards. Though the certification mark is competent to distinguish the certified goods in respect to its origin,

material, and mode of manufacture or quality, or correctness, it can be used only in accordance with defined standards. Certification marks can also be used along with the trademark. The tag used as a certification mark is a confirmation that the company's merchandise meet the specific standards required for the use of the certification mark.

ISI mark is a certification mark used on industrial products in India by the Bureau of Indian Standards. The ISI mark is by far the most recognized certification mark in the Indian subcontinent.

Product labelling with the help of certification mark is a remarkable way of communication about safety to customer as information in this can be easily seen on the product package itself by the customer while purchasing. Labelling helps customers to make knowledgeable decisions.

CUSTOMER EDUCATION

There's a big difference between marketing to customer and educating them. Just elaborating upon the features, advantages, and benefits of the products to the customer is not educating customer. Educating to customer is about giving information regarding the product which is relevant to the customer and letting them know what the product can do to solve a problem for them.

The smart customer will choose to buy a product from the firm that's educated him on the issue and offers him with several options. That company's selflessness has built trust – and its ability to teach customer has bought his loyalty in the future. (Mark Quinn, 2013)

Apple's iPad, for example, was instant hit on its launch. This was not because the market had been demanding for tablet technology – instead, Apple triumphed because it had invested a decade into educating its customer base. By introducing its features and ideas one by one, the company enabled its customers to not only understand the iPad, but to see a need for it. The key to Apple's success is that the company often takes the time to explain things to the customer that no other vendor bothers

to do. Without that foundation, it's not likely the product would have been nearly the success it has been.

Another case is of Nike store. The sales staff wouldn't let buy a pair of sport shoes unless customer got on a treadmill. They record the running style of the customer and then explained what type of shoe would be best for them, based on running tendencies of customer. Because of this customer hooked into buying shoes because they'd taken the time to educate them.

When retailer or brand do marketing to customer, actually they are trying to sell them products. But when retailer or brand start educating people, then they are helping customer to understand the benefit of a solution. Customer are more educated these days and can find information anywhere but when it comes from retailer or brand, the benefit is two fold: retailer or brand establish a more knowledgeable customer base along with loyalty.

It is essential to know and understand that "customer education" means different things to different people. For instance:

- To an ordinary customer, education is viewed as information to help him/her to make better choices of goods and services in the market place.
- A business person views customer education as activities that assists in selling services and products.
- A bureaucrat views customer education as a programme to complement and supplement laws and regulations that foster trade competition. They believe that healthy competition and an educated body of customers will ensure protection for the customers.
- A customer advocate sees customer education as providing information to customers to protect them from fraudulent trade practices and exploitative market operation.

- And an educator sees customer education as development of skills and knowledge that assist customers to play their role effectively in the market place, (Singh, 1991).

Ultimately, customer education must inspire customers to involve themselves proactively in the decision making process to purchase the product. Customer education must include both the individual concerns of the customer and the shared concerns of society at large.

It is believed that meditation opens the third eye. Likewise, customer education should help to open the customer eye of the customers. The customer eye concept means that an informed customer looks at a product critically and analytically. The customer who has had his customer eye opened, analyses product on several level, like health, economics, product safety, etc. (Churchman, 1982).

One of the major basis of customer education is customer safety. Because of the education, customer knowledge will increase towards safety, as the customer is having a better understanding of how products work and customer is more able to accurately assess the hazards associated with the products, (Staelin, 1977).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kids fashion is a diminutive version of adult wear. They have all the clothing as like that of adults, and even much more. Children of today are much more intelligent than their previous generation. They like to have their own choice of clothing. This metamorphosis of children, becoming independent buyers is enhancing kids wear market. Number of research carried out to prove this fact. As per Mann, (2012), the influence of children in buying apparel has definitely increased and main reason of awareness of fashion and its latest trends is television apart from movies and friends. The research also concludes that female children are more active in decision making process as compare to male children. Further, as per Sanghani, (2014), it becomes an important aspect for parents on being accompanied by children

while shopping and major decision making is done on the conscience of parents as well as kids and now a days parents are not price conscious and ready to pay more for the cloths for their kids. The same trend is also seen in developing and underdeveloped nation as well. As per, Mohtar, (2014), in Pakistan also, young adults are very aware and well conscious about fashion, brand and the use of apparel products and that they take choice themselves which are based on their environments and female teenagers are more socially influenced, fashion, leisure and puzzled over-choice as compared to male. The similar study conducted by Köksal, (2007) in Turkey and it concludes that the age of children making their own clothing decisions varies between six and ten. But the fashion consciousness is different between the kids of developed countries and less developed countries. As per the study conducted by Parker, (2004) results show that significant differences in fashion consciousness exist between Chinese teens and their Japanese and US counterparts.

Apart from quality and look, it is important to note that kid's garments can be dangerous, if they are not manufactured and monitored properly in terms of quality. There are some cases all around the world where kids got injury & death due to improper garments they worn. In developed nation, the safety norms in kids wear are very stringent and are followed very strictly. The companies adhere to these norms and design according to the safety specifications of the clothing (especially in infant category). In developed countries like United States of America, Consumer Safety Protection Commission (UPSC) runs number of safety education programs for consumers as well as retailers.

Children of all ages are at risk of injury from wearing defective clothing that does not comply with the standard safety regulations. In developed countries like USA, numerous children's clothing items have been recalled in recent years, primarily as a result of the federal standard regulations set forth by the CPSC concerning the manufacturing and sale of children's clothing. Children's clothing can pose

a variety of risks, including the risk of small parts such as rhinestones or snaps that may detach and pose a choking hazard and one of the greatest hazards in children's clothing is drawstrings, as it has been linked to a number of injuries and deaths in recent years. The CPSC received reports of at least 27 deaths of children in connection with drawstrings on children's clothing from 1985 to 2008, as well as 70 non-fatal incidents.

It is important to focus on kids wear because kids are vulnerable. They are having less developed cognitive skills (lack of cause and effect), less developed motor skills (limited coordination, lack of ability to rescue self). Kids try to learn about the world by interaction and seeking optimal stimulation. Another major problem is that kids are not able to communicate problems effectively.

Though Kidswear regulation are strictly imposed in developed nation but the way Indian kidswear market is growing in future it will be important to look into the safety aspects of the kids wear. At present, no casualty because of apparel is reported in India as compare to USA/UK, probably the main reason is blaming the parents for carelessness in case of any accident. Currently, not many studies has been conducted on the topic in India and Abroad. This is the first attempt to do study on Kids wear safety in India. The main purpose of this research is to study the communication strategy of the Kidswear safety amongst the consumer as well as retailers in India.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In this context, the present research study was undertaken to:

1. To study the opinion of both type of retailers whether India should also have its own Standards & regulations for 'kidswear' or not
2. To find out the Mode of communication for kidswear safety to parents
3. To study the opinion of both type of retailers on educating the parent on 'kidswear' safety and its affect the sales.
4. To find out willingness of retailer about training on kids wear safety.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, 110 retailers were selected through stratified random sampling. The data has been collected from the Bengaluru in the state of Karnataka, India. To facilitate the study, Bengaluru has been divided into five strata's, i.e. East, West, North, South and Central and from each strata a sample of approx. 20 retailers has been selected.

The information was collected from retailers through a structured and well-designed questionnaire. The questionnaires were distributed to retailers of kids wear garment during Jan 2014- June 2014. The research assistants explained the voluntary nature of the survey to the shoppers, assured them of the anonymity of their responses. They provided each respondent with a copy of the questionnaire, explained how the questionnaire was to be filled out and collected the completed questionnaires.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

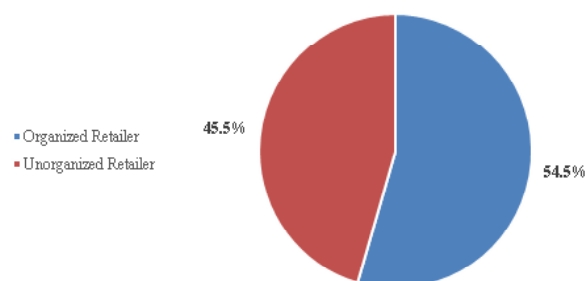
Table 1: Type of Kids wear Retailers

	n	Percentage
Organized Retailer	60	54.5
Unorganized Retailer	50	45.5

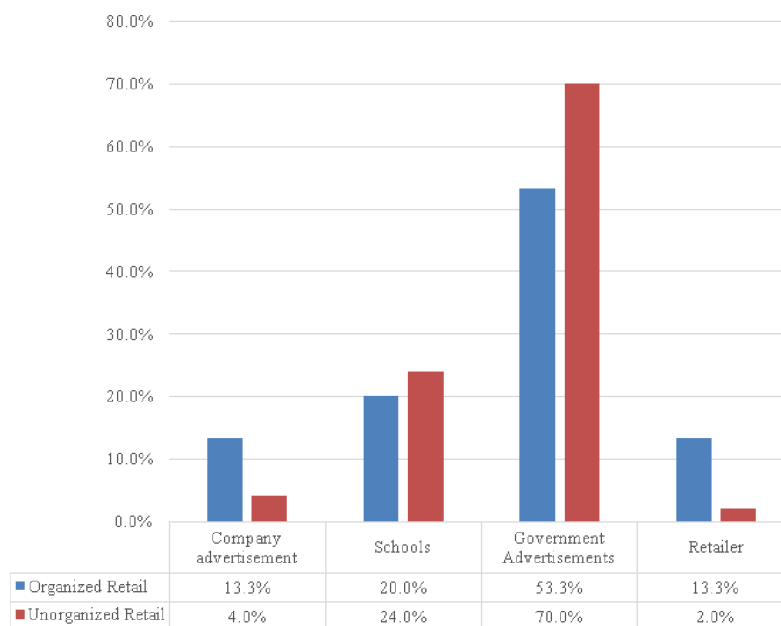
Sample size by number of respondents: n=110

Both organized and unorganized retailing is found throughout India. Table 1 highlights that there is a reasonably balanced representation

of respondents is given to both type of retailers while collecting the information.

Figure 1: Type of Kids wear Retailers**Table 2: Results of Descriptive Statistics for retailer's opinion about communication of kids wear safety to parents by type of retail organization**

	Type of Retailer	
	Organized	Unorganized
Company advertisement	8 (13.3%)	2 (4%)
Schools	12 (20%)	12 (21.8%)
Government Advertisements	32 (53.3%)	35 (70%)
Retailer	8 (13.3%)	1 (2%)
Others	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

**Figure 1: Results of Descriptive Statistics for retailer's opinion about of communication of kids wear safety to parents by type of retail organization**

Retailers were asked which mode of communication is suitable to communicate kids wear safety regulations to Indian parents. Three fifth of retailers said that Government advertisements is the best way to communicate the kids wear safety regulations to parents. Both the organized and unorganized retailers are having the same opinion with the maximum response to be 53.3% and 70.0% respectively. One of the reason for this may be the reach of government to maximum number of people in the country.

Just 20% retailers thinks that school will be the best mode of communication of safety regulation. This is way where kids can be made aware of all the safety regulations at school and

potential hazards can be prevented.

Minority of retailers think that company advertisements can be another mode of communication of safety regulation to parents. In this case 13.3% organized retailer thinks company advertisement might be helpful and only 4% of unorganized retailers are having the same opinion.

Only 8.2% retailers think that they themselves can communicate the safety regulation to the parents while selling the garments to them. Here the opinion of organized and unorganized retailers are different as 13.3% organized retailers are ready to educate the customer whereas only 2% unorganized retailers are ready to do this.

Table 3: Results of Chi-square Test and Descriptive Statistics for opinion of retailer about training on kids wear safety by type of retail organization

	Type of Retailer	
	Organized	Unorganized
No	15 (25%)	2 (4%)
Yes	45 (75%)	46 (96%)

Note: $\chi^2 = 9.205$, df = 1. Numbers in parentheses indicate column percentages.

*p < .05

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between types of retailer and training on kids wear safety regulation. The relation between these variables was significant, $\chi^2 (1, N = 110) = 9.205$, $p < .05$ and hence there is a significant difference

between Organized and Unorganized retailer about training on kids wear safety regulation. It is observed that, unorganized retailers are more interested in training on kids wear safety as compare to organized retailer.

Table 4: Results of Chi-square Test and Descriptive Statistics for opinion of retailer about educating parents on kids wear safety and its positive effect on sales by type of retail organization

	Type of Retailer	
	Organized	Unorganized
No	3 (5%)	11 (22%)
Yes	57 (95%)	39 (78%)

Note: $\chi^2 = 7.096$, df = 1. Numbers in parentheses indicate column percentages.

*p < .05

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between types of retailer and their opinion on positive

effect on sales if start they educating the parent on kids wear safety. The relation between these variables was significant, $\chi^2 (1, N = 110) = 7.096$,

$p < .05$ and hence there is a significant difference in opinion between Organized and Unorganized retailer about positive effect on sales if start they educating the parent on kids wear safety. It is

quite evident that almost all organized retailers believed that the sales will increase if they start educating parents about kids wear safety.

Table 5: Results of Chi-square Test and Descriptive Statistics for opinion of retailer about Safety mark like ISI/Eco mark for kids wear by type of retail organization

	Type of Retailer	
	Organized	Unorganized
No	19 (31.7%)	2 (4%)
Yes	41 (68.3%)	48 (96%)

Note: $\chi^2 = 13.515$, $df = 1$. Numbers in parentheses indicate column percentages.

* $p < .05$

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between types of retailer and their opinion for having safety mark like ISI/Eco mark for kids wear. The relation between these variables was significant, $\chi^2 (1, N = 110) = 13.515$, $p < .05$ and hence there is a significant difference between opinion of Organized and Unorganized retailer for having safety mark like ISI/Eco mark for kids wear. 96% of unorganized retailers believes that there should be safety mark like ISI/Eco mark for kids wear as compare to only 68.3% organized retailers who believe the same.

CONCLUSION

Customer have a right to expect that the garment they purchase will be safe and of high quality. The recent rise in consumerism has fostered a major interest in customer product safety. In today's technology driven society information is abundant and easily accessible to everyone. Increasing the knowledge level of customers with respect to safety principles is

one of the method of reducing the number of customer product related injuries.

This study reveals that most of the Indian Kids wear retailers believes that it is important to communicate kids wear safety to parents and government advertisement is the best way for the same. The Indian retailers also of opinion that there should be safety mark for kids wear like ISI/Eco Mark so that parents can easily differentiate between safe and unsafe kids garments.

In today's tough competition, it is critical to effectively communicate with customers to provide safe products and superior service. Most of Indian kids wear retailer are ready to get trained on kids wear safety because they believes that by educating parents about kids wear safety they can gain their loyalty. Educating customers about the safe garments for kids that retailer make available is not only a great service to the community, but the best way to increase the sales.

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