

## Analyzing Market Manipulation in Kids and Consequential Parental Guilt from the Denial of Advertised Products

Ananya Dua

Department of Psychology, De Anza College, Cupertino, California

**Abstract.** *With the rise of technology, market manipulation among kids -- the intenful propaganda to skew sales -- has risen significantly as well. Companies advertised as 'for kids' are deliberately pushing out content towards these impressionable children to bait them, or rather their parents, into buying kids advertised items. This study recognized, however, that not all parents fall for this scheme and some often deny their children these products. It aimed to study the causes that propelled parents to deny their children these products, and whether the parents felt any guilt after the fact. It was hypothesized that parents who denied products due to monetary concerns would associate guilt with this act, over their inability to pay for all of their child's wishes, whereas those who denied items for the wellbeing of their child associated no guilt due to their conviction that these steps were for their child's benefit. The study analyzed publicly available data on parents and their reaction to these constant advertisements and concluded results in support of the hypothesis -- there was a moderately strong association evident between the reason for denial and parental guilt associated as a consequence. The results of this study can help provide insight into the thought processes of parents as well as hint at growing parenting trends, to better inform development of resources.*

**Keywords:** parental guilt, market manipulation, children and parents

**Correspondence.** [ananyadua23@gmail.com](mailto:ananyadua23@gmail.com)

**Article History.** Received January 2022, Received in revised April 2022, Accepted June 2022

©2022. International Journal Pedagogy of Social Studies. Program Study of Social Studies Education

### A. INTRODUCTION

The current market for children's products has been diluted with advertisements that have harnessed the power of data analytics and market mapping. Parents often download 'educational' apps for children under the illusion that they are beneficial to their children's development. A study from the University of Michigan and the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor found the disturbing reality behind these products whilst analyzing children's apps. The researchers studied 135 apps meant for young children and found that a vast majority of them were riddled with problematic advertising methods, including manipulation and shaming (Lieber, 2018). Some apps even guilted the player, featuring a crying and sad character when the item was not purchased. And, this manipulation seems to be working. Children under 12 have been known to influence parental

purchases totaling over \$130-670 billion a year (Shah, 2021). While some parents buy their kids items as a way to bond, more than 53% of parents did not condone this idea (News, 2016). Some research shows that these parents might be propelled by a desire to keep their kids grounded, and not spoiled by the frequent showering of gifts (Dumpling, 2021), while a few hinted at economic constraints (Dumpling, 2021). This study aimed to analyze the effect of the reason for denying on the parental guilt felt afterwards; it hypothesized that parents who felt denied products because they were potentially bad for their children felt little to no guilt while parents who did so due to monetary constraints felt heightened level of guilt due to the inability to support their child's desires.

## B. MATERIALS AND METHODS

I utilized a publicly audible data set from Kaggle - a data repository. This data was part of a larger study administered in the Bay Area that attempted to study parenting behaviors. I utilized data from 2 of the questions asked to the 38 parents who were surveyed, because it was the best app for the phenomenon I was looking to study. I had no direct interactions with the participants. I analyzed responses to these questions:

1) What is often the reason for you denying your child the product they wanted? - Options included 'not being able to afford the product', 'the product is potentially harmful/distracting', and 'the product is not useful'.

2) How often would you say you have some sort of guilt after denying your child the products? - Options included 'often', 'very often' and 'hardly ever'.

I utilized Google Sheets to make my tables and figures, which were used to support the analysis process.

## C. RESULTS

To analyze the association between reason for denying product and parental guilt experienced, I analyzed publicly available data part of a larger study that aimed to study parent behavior to market manipulation of their child.

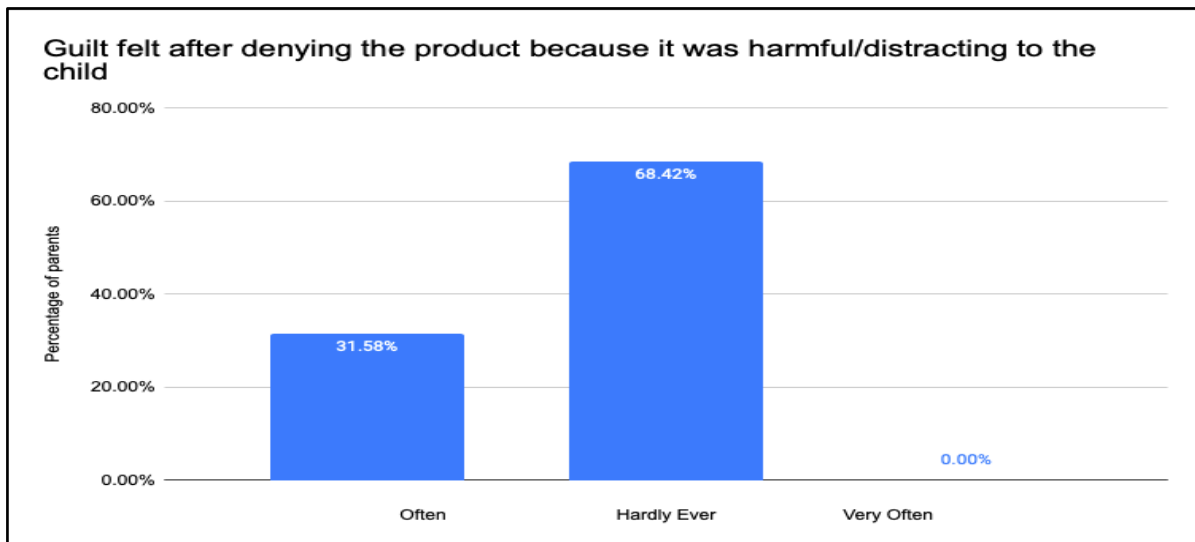


Figure 1: This figure highlights the guilt of parents after denying their children that they deemed harmful/distracting to their child.

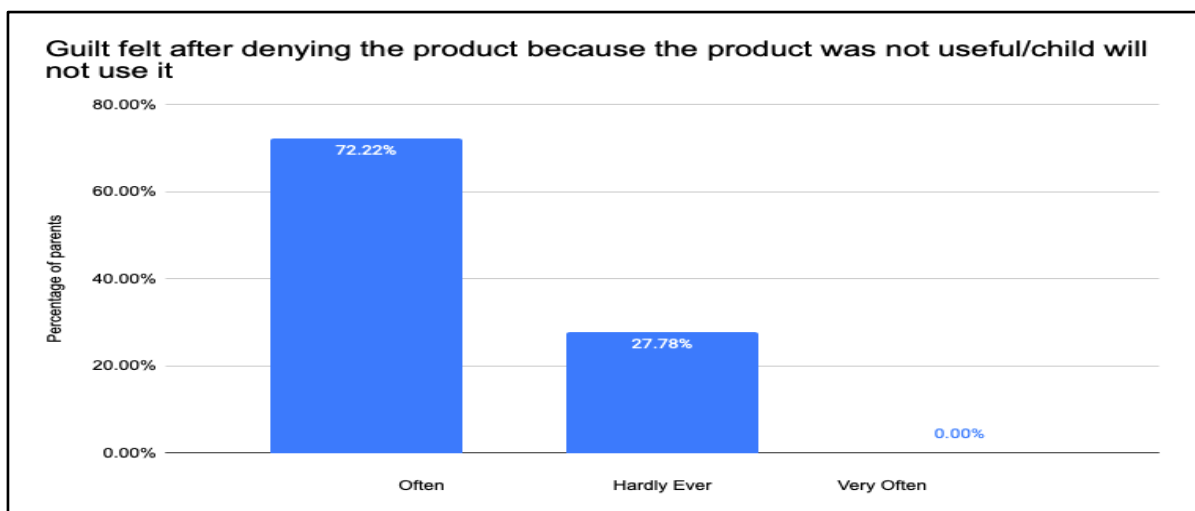


Figure 2: The figure illustrates the extent of parental guilt after parents denied their kids products because they thought the products were not useful for the child/the kid wouldn't actually use it.

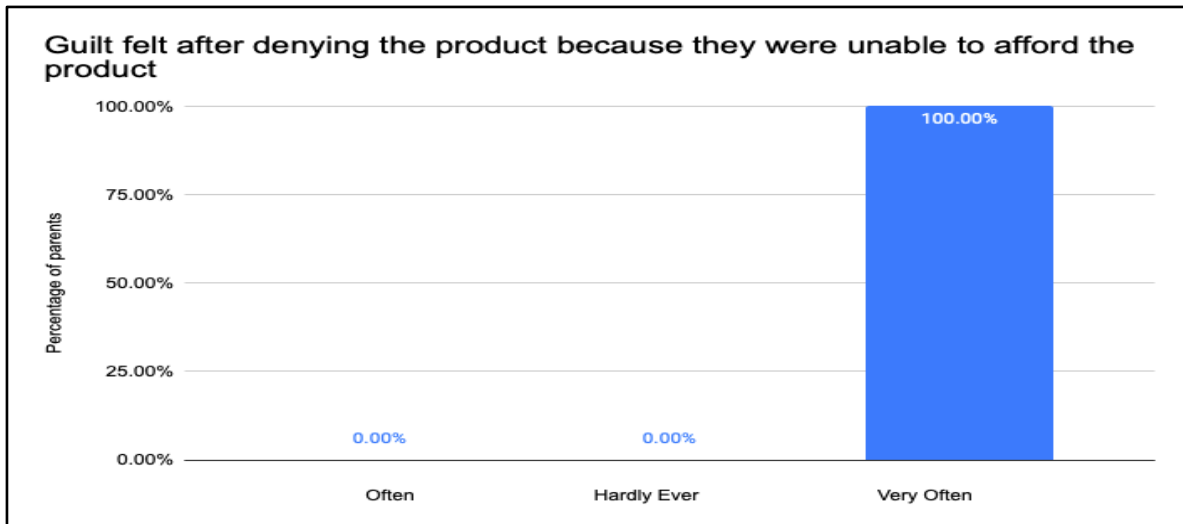


Figure 3: The figure shows the extent of parental guilt experienced after denying the product due to a lack of affordability.

Results						
	Guilt felt often after denying	Guilt felt very often	Guilt felt hardly ever			Row Totals
Deny product because it is not useful to the child/they won't use it	14 (9.83) [1.77]	1 (1.79) [0.35]	6 (9.38) [1.22]			21
Deny product because it is harmful/distracting	7 (10.30) [1.06]	1 (1.87) [0.41]	14 (9.83) [1.77]			22
Deny product because they cannot afford it	1 (1.87) [0.41]	2 (0.34) [8.09]	1 (1.79) [0.35]			4
<b>Column Totals</b>	22	4	21			<b>47 (Grand Total)</b>

The chi-square statistic is 15.411. The p-value is .00392. The result is significant at  $p < .05$ .

Table 1 This features a chi-squared table analyzing the association between the reason for denial and guilt experienced the results are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

**Note: 1 was added to each of the categories to offset the zeros in the columns**

Out of the 19 parents who reasoned that they denied the product because it was potentially too distracting, 13 of them felt hardly any guilt. That means around 68% of parents who denied products for the benefit of their child, felt guilt 'hardly ever'. In addition, the parent who said that they could not afford the product, also indicated that they felt guilt 'very often'. Finally, parents who denied products because they felt their kids wouldn't use them, felt guilt 'often'. Around 18 parents indicated this option, and 13/18 of them, 72% of them felt guilt 'often'. The results of this experiment do suggest a relationship between the reason for denial and consequent parental guilt, as parents who denied products for the benefit of their child felt guilt for significantly less time compared to those who denied them for other reasons. The results also support, to some extent, that parents who deny products due to monetary concerns, feel guilt more often, although a larger sample size would be required to confirm results.

## D. DISCUSSION

The results of this study after analyzing publicly available data, showed a moderately strong association between parental guilt after denying their child a product, and the reason for denying the product. This study was conducted in the Bay Area in California, an affluent part of the country where monetary concerns are not prevalent among parents. It was not feasible for me to gather data from participants, and thus I used data available online. Researchers intending to explore this relation further should utilize a more diverse population in areas of varying affluence to mitigate bias. This study would benefit from the diversity in subjects, as it would be more representative of overall attitudes. A cross-country study can also be administered to study trends globally; it might hint at socio-cultural differences in parenting styles. Finally, a larger sample size should be utilized within the study to better provide support for the hypothesis.

## REFERENCES

*How to keep your kids grounded over the holidays*. Peaceful Dumpling. (2016, May 10). Retrieved October 5, 2021, from

<https://www.peacefuldumpling.com/keep-kids-grounded-holidays> .

Lieber, C. (2018, October 30). *Apps for preschoolers are flooded with manipulative ads, according to a new study*. Vox. Retrieved October 3, 2021, from [vox.com/the-goods/2018/10/30/18044678/kids-apps-gaming-manipulative-ads-ftc](https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2018/10/30/18044678/kids-apps-gaming-manipulative-ads-ftc).

News, M. (2016, April 27). *53% of US parents agree that buying things for their kids is a way to bond*. Mintel. Retrieved October 5, 2021, from <https://www.mintel.com/press-centre/social-and-lifestyle/53-of-us-parents-agree-that-buying-things-for-their-kids-is-a-way-to-bond> .

Kerneler. (2020, April 25). *Starter: Dataset 39798227-0*. Kaggle. Retrieved October 5, 2021, from [kaggle.com/kerneler/starter-dataset-39798227-0/data](https://www.kaggle.com/kerneler/starter-dataset-39798227-0/data).

Shah, A. (n.d.). *Children as consumers*. - Global Issues. Retrieved October 5, 2021, from <https://www.globalissues.org/article/237/children-as-consumers> .