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The Importance of Character Education
for Tweens as Consumers

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Abstract

Tweens is a term that denotes a market segment mentality that falls between children at the lower end and teens at the upper end. Tweens marketing strategies are considered critical for most global brands. Advocates against excessive consumerism and materialism polluting innocent childhood, specifically tweens, call for values implantation through character education in the school to breed more educated consumers. The effect of implanting character building programs in schools on the consumer behavior of the exposed children in the marketplace, however, has never been tested before. This research endeavor is, in essence, an overlap between consumer behavior and educational psychology, investigating the link between personality and behavior in the market. It falls under both positivist and interpretive consumer research, specifically the consumer socialization of children. The aim of this work is to develop a conceptual model linking character education to purchasing lifestyles and consumption patterns of the exposed children as consumers. Following, prospects for future research are highlighted.

JEL classification

M30; M31

Keywords

Educational psychology, character education, attitudes and lifestyles, opinion-leadership, humanitarianism, ethnocentrism, adolescents and middle schools

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INTRODUCTION*

Theodore Roosevelt once said that “*to educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace society*”, a notion that was resonated by Martin Luther King Jr. who stipulated that “*intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education*”. In this century, Stephen Covey (2003, p. 89) continued to advocate that “*as dangerous as a little knowledge is, even more dangerous is much knowledge without a strong principled character....Yet all too often in the academic world, that’s exactly what we do by not focusing on the character development of young people*”.

Character education is a growing trend in educational psychology worldwide (Hudd, 2005; Lickona, 2004, 1998, 1996, 1991; Sewell and Hall, 2003; Andersen, 2000; McClellan, 1999; Ryan and Bohlin, 1999; Ryan, 1998). With mounting cultural misunderstandings between the East and the West, and as violence and aggression spread among world society, there has been a move toward ‘universal values’ (Covey, 2003; Lickona, 1991). On the marketing side, advocates against excessive consumerism and materialism call for values implantation in the school as an effort in favor of what is known as ‘consumer education’ (Hudd, 2005; Lickona, 1991). In Egypt, so far, the private sector has taken the lead in implementing character building programs, partially due to the high expenses of implementation. The commercial character building program utilized is the “Ruyah program” developed originally in Kuwait (www.alruyah.com).

Protagonists of character education ascertain definite changes in personality and lifestyle as a result of breeding ‘universal’ morals in the school. Antagonists, however, are doubtful of the consequences of education for character, and tend to doubt which ‘moral systems’ to teach in such programs. Even though studies have been written about the repercussions of ethical literacy on the business world (*License Europe*, 2006; Lickona, 1991) yet the effect of implanting character building programs in schools on the consumer behavior of the exposed children in the marketplace has never been tested before. This research endeavor is an overlap between consumer behavior and educational psychology. On a philosophical level, it represents a link between personality and behavior in the market.

The aim of this research is to develop a conceptual model of the effect of character building programs on the purchasing lifestyles and consumption patterns of the exposed children as present and future

* This paper represents the conceptual model of Noha El-Bassiouny’s Ph.D. research titled *The Effect of Character Education Programs on the Consumer Behavior of Middle School Students in Private American International Egyptian Schools*. It has been presented at the Third International Conference on Child and Teen Consumption (CTC’08), Trondheim, Norway. **The authors would like to acknowledge the valuable contributions of Professor Ralf Klischewski, Dean of the Management Faculty, GUC.**

consumers. The research is important not only in as far as it is an advancement in the field of character education research, but also as there are various stakeholders interested in the study including: Parents, educators/ edupreneurs, including not only middle schools but also business and marketing schools aiming at boosting the ethical integrity of their marketing graduates, government officials and public policy makers in their attempts at increasing expansion of schools and improvement of education in general, character building program setters (Ruyah and else), marketing strategists at large, as they are more keen on understanding consumption behavior patterns of a growing population and a growing trend, advocates of consumer education as they are more able to assess the purchasing style of a growing segment, and finally, humanity at large in search of more understanding through a better 'moral' generation.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RATIONALE

Grounding one's arguments in the literature and then moving on to insightful extrapolation would highlight the contribution of this research, particularly to its stakeholders. Our review of the literature will cover four dimensions as a backdrop for this research. First, we will explore the changing nature of consumer behavior in children. Secondly, we will survey the literature on the so-called "*Born to Buy*"¹ generation. Third, we will investigate the overall effect of consumerism and materialism on tweens with a focus on character education as a potential solution. And finally, we will present some prominent views about the importance of character education in middle schools.

THE CHANGING NATURE OF THE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR OF CHILDREN

In order to pinpoint how the consumer behavior of children has changed over the past decade, highlighting the importance of children as a unique market segment is necessary.

The Shift from Gatekeepers to Tweens Marketing

Children are an important segment in marketing strategies and agendas (Siegel et al., 2001; McNeal and Yeh, 1997; Mc Neal, 1998, 1999; McNeal and Yeh, 2003). According to Laczniak and Palan (2004) cited in Shoham and Dalakas (2006), on average, every two minutes children exhibit a "purchase-influence attempt" when they shop with their parents. The literature is vast on children's growing influence on their parents' purchases (Flurry and Burns, 2005; Laczniak and Palan, 2004; Mangleburg , 1990; Mangleburg

¹ Title of the book by Juliet Schor (2005).

et al., 1999; Palan and Wilkes, 1997) especially in the problem recognition stage of the consumer decision process (Beatty and Talpade, 1994; Belch et al., 1985; Swinyard and Sim, 1987; Mangelburg, 1990).

On the marketers' side, you find lectures with titles such as "Emotional Branding: Maximizing the Appeal of Your Brand ...", "Purchasing Power: Capturing Your Share of the Tween Wallet", and "Seeing the World through Kids' Eyes: An Intimate Peek into the Minds and Hearts of Kids". Consider the fact that a fifth of McDonald's growing business is in Happy Meals. Even more bizarre is the fact that six to twelve-year-olds visit stores round two to three times per week and have around six items in cart each time they shop (Schor, 2005).

Interest in this field has led to the development of what is termed the "power of tweens" and "tweens strategy" cited in Siegel et al. (2001) *The Great Tween Buying Machine: Marketing to Today's Tweens*. Tweens are a market segment that falls in between teens and children where tweening entails adapting teen products to the younger tween market segment (Schor, 2005). Siegel et al (2001) explicitly chose to define tweens as children from 8 to 12 years old, whilst noting that tweens represent not only an age bracket, but also a market segment mentality. According to Lindstrom and Seybold (2003), around 80% of global brands have a tweens strategy. The targeting of tweens has led to an extension of consumerism from the world of adults to the world of children. No research describes this phenomenon better than Juliet Schor (2005, pp. 16-7), when she indicates how marketers are now directing their campaigns openly at the children, when in the past their target was the mothers (the gatekeepers):

Marketing and advertising have been influential in transforming children into autonomous and empowered consumers. They have done this by overturning the original 1920s formula for selling children's products, which was an alliance with mothers. Advertisers had to convince moms that the product was beneficial for the child. Wheatena's proteins built bodies. Milk contained vitamin D. This approach, which the industry termed the "gatekeeper model", was practiced through the postwar era as well. Today marketers create direct connections to kids, in isolation from parents and at times against them. The new norm is that kids and marketers join forces to convince adults to spend money.... I note this history in some detail because it shows how a new alliance can remake a culture...

Schor's remarks on the changing nature of family decision making and the obsolete nature of gatekeepers are confirmed by Shoham and Dalakas (2006) as their empirical research reports that marketers influence

children and the children in turn convince parents to buy the advertised product, where parents react more to rational rather than emotional tactics exhibited by their adolescent² children.

The “Commodification of Childhood”³

The U.S., being the world's greatest economic power, has influenced the world culture through all sorts of globalization trends, particularly the media. This is evident when we consider the fact that English is the first language of cross-cultural communication in the world. "Commodity culture" and "consumer/commercial capitalism" are two terms used in the literature to highlight current trends of consumption that have plagued the world in general, and the world of children, the adult consumers of the future, in specific, according to Kevin Ryan and Thomas Lickona (1992), two very prominent character education advocates:

Western culture has come increasingly under the influence of commercial interests outside both home and school, so that both parents and teachers compete with a new constellation of socialization agents in mass media personalities. The transmission of culture through socialization agents is a relational activity where the new generation comes into contact with the older one's cultural myths, values, and so on...the message of the central myths of "commodity culture".....

I maintain that the dominant story and vision of commercial (consumer) capitalism has progressively eroded our moral sense.... The dominant story and vision of the mass media mirror is not moral action, but consumer action. The intent of a commercial is not to encourage you to be a moral agent. Its objective is to penetrate any sense of order or resistance you might have to the message and thus render you a passive subject with consumption needs. (Edmund V. Sullivan cited in Ryan and Lickona, 1992, pp. 241, 244, 251).

According to Ryan and Lickona (1992), most of the relationships in the child-imposed world of Disney are "compulsively consumerist" with high levels of seduction which few children can escape from. True, parents are responsible for giving their children more buying power, yet the other factor affecting the commercialization or the commodification of childhood is in fact the market sovereignty of the corporate giants in the industry, what Steinberg and Kincheloe (1998) call the "corporate construction of childhood".

² Adolescence starts with puberty and ends with the assumption of adult responsibilities.

³ Term adopted from Cook (2004). Another term used is “commercialization of childhood” present in Schor (2005). The two terms will be used interchangeably in this research.

Schor (2005) conducted a thorough research on what she called "consumer involvement scale" in middle schools (adolescents), and related this to psychological factors using well-established screens of psychological well-being in the literature, including depression, anxiety, and self-esteem. She found out that children with high consumer involvement exhibit a worse psychological state and have a worse relationship with their parents than their counterparts. The results of Schor's research are particularly important to us as the current research endeavor is in essence an extension of Schor's work, only it is considered an assessment of a potential solution. In the following paragraphs, we will discuss the "new child consumer" and then bridge the gap in the literature and elaborate on the effects of consumerism and materialism on children and the need for character education. We discuss more thoroughly the consumer socialization of children followed by the importance, characteristics, and implications of the "new child consumer" trend in an attempt to lay the foundations for the rationale of this research.

The Consumer Socialization of Children

According to Bush et al. (1999), consumer socialization is a progressive procedure through which children learn how to function as consumers in the market. According to Rose (1999), more research is needed on the consumer socialization of children internationally. Hence, the present research contributes to consumer socialization literature as it is related to Egypt, a typical developing country. In the following lines, we shed light on the main socialization agents of children to date, before we go into the details of the effects of the consumer culture on children.

Research shows that 37 percent of children who get through the internet ranging from five to twelve year-olds had researched or bought products online (Greenfield, 2004). Schor (2005) calls modern children the "electronic generation". Television, and the media in general, has become one very powerful consumer socialization agent. Decline in moral values has been mainly attributed to television (Wiley, 1998). According to Ryan and Lickona (1992), television is reflecting the "commodity culture". It has particularly enabled corporations to reach children as a separate segment. Children are becoming more and more "bonded to brands" (Lindstrom and Seybold, 2003). Ads are an integral part of everyday life and ad viewing is rigorous at the typical tween ages of eight to thirteen.

Ads are more and more stressing on impulses and needs (Ingall, 1997). Using children's love to taste and try new foods, corporations have capitalized on turning food to play utilizing dual appeals for mothers and children (refer to the Trends in the Tweens Segment and Marketers' Means sections to follow for more details). According to Sutherland and Thompson (2003) cited in Hudd (2005), 80% of food buying decisions are controlled by children and by the age of 10, children average store visits are around 270

times per year! Advertisers have disregarded whether or not this food is healthy and beneficial to children health to the extent that researchers are calling for the return of the "family meal" (Schor, 2005).

Parental-child relations are considered one of the consumer socialization agents for children (Rose, 1999). Food advertising, among other ads targeting children as autonomous consumers, causes conflict in the parent-child relationship (see Rose, 1999; McDermott et al, 2006). The result of all the previous socialization agents is a New Child Consumer!

THE SO-CALLED "*BORN TO BUY*"⁴ GENERATION

Corporations have invaded schools and curricula. Advertising is all over children television channels such as Nickelodeon and the Cartoon Network. The internet has changed physical play into virtual play. This is further evident when we find books titled *Brandchild* (Lindstrom and Seybold, 2003), *The High Price of Materialism* (Kasser, 2002), *Psychology and Consumer Culture: The Struggle for a Good Life in a Materialistic World* (Kasser and Kanner, 2004), *The Disappearance of Childhood* (Postman, 1994), *Children as Consumers* (Gunter and Furnham, 1998), *The Commodification of Childhood: Personhood, the Children's Wear Industry and the Rise of the Child-Consumer* (Cook, 2004), and *After the Death of Childhood: Growing Up in the Age of Electronic Media* (Buckingham, 2000) among others.

Trends in the Tweens Segment

Marketers have transformed children's generic emotional needs, such as the need for love, for social (peer) acceptance, for being cool, for being successful, for gender norms, and for innate senses' stimulation, into product and service appeals. Whereas marketers are very prudent in matching children's psychological needs to product appeals, innocent young children view advertisements as entertainment. Children generally don't comprehend the purpose of advertising before age eight. By fifth grade (around age 10), they are fully able to identify the "persuasive dimension" of ads. Hence, before that, children are considered naïve receptors whose impulses are being studied and manipulated (Schor, 2005). Those issues have led to several trends in the tweens segment that we will discuss in the following paragraphs.

The extent of marketers' success in developing children's significant attachment to certain brands is highlighted by book titles such as *Brandchild* (Lindstrom, 2003). Once a brand is successful, marketers can create strong affiliations to it through brand extension or what is termed in the literature "kidspace".

⁴ Title of the book by Juliet Schor (2005).

There's Barbie series on TV, Barbie stickers, Barbie dolls, Barbie clothes, Barbie baby, etc. Creating a proliferation of products under the same brand name increases children's attachment to the brand.

Children are becoming more of empowered consumers as mentioned previously. There's an increase in children's purchasing power of 400% according to McNeal (1999), with the highest purchases in candy. The more liberal education and the 'free' society have led to more permissive parenting styles. Marketers have made use of that and stressed on it. They now target naïve kids and push them to nag on their parents to yield to their demands even if this is only to the advantage of the marketers.

Marketing terminology is reflecting a warfare mentality. This can easily be spotted through terms like "target market", "collateral", "intercepts", "price wars", "guerilla strategy", "flanking strategy", etc. Popular books include *Marketing Warfare*, *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind* and *Guerilla Marketing*, among others. Children are carefully scrutinized and chopped up into distinct segments with tailored products and appeals. McNeal (1999) stated that by 2004, total marketing spending on kids would have reached \$15 billion. After highlighting some general trends in tweens marketing, it is necessary now to highlight marketers' tools. We will identify and define several tactics and strategies marketers have developed to appeal to the tweens segment.

The KAGOY trend involves adapting products for older children to the younger children. Marketers call this KAGOY; Kids Are Getting Older Younger. This phenomenon is most evident among the eight to twelve year olds, i.e. the tweens (Schor, 2005; Lindstrom and Seybold, 2003). Marketers also have different appeals for mothers and children. Allison James (1998) highlights this "dual campaign" trend of message differentiation in that what adults like is made to appear as mean and undesirable, whereas what adults reprimand is reinforced and made to appear desirable.

Pester power is a term used to portray the effect of children's nagging on their parents' yielding to the purchase. According to Cheryl Idell "nag factor study" cited in Schor (2005, p. 61), *"70 percent of parents are receptive to their children's product requests. A third of them are what she called indulgers, that is, impulse buyers who don't mind their children's requests for nonessentials. 15 percent are kid pals... Another 20 percent are conflicteds, who dislike kid advertising and don't like their children's requests for nonessentials, but find them hard to resist. That leaves only 13 percent unaffected by nagging, a bare necessities group...conservatives whose purchases are well considered"*. The bottom line is that marketers are advising their clients that if they can't make the kids nag for the product, they might as well forget it!

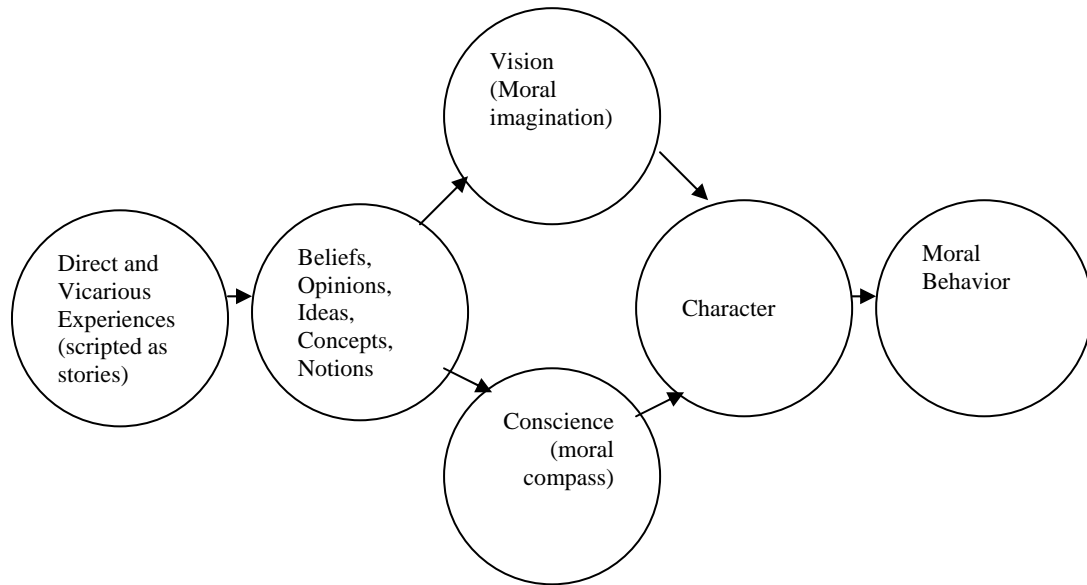
Trans-toying means converting everyday items into toys. Famous examples of those include pens with rubber characters at the top, toothbrushes and shampoos depicting famous Disney cartoon characters, among others. Even food has turned to play. SEMs or “sponsored educational materials”, such as the ones marketed by Scholastic, are an increasing trend of commercial corporate interference in academia. An example is food companies putting nutrition curricula. Another related trend is sponsoring media events and programs. This is called product placement. Having products portrayed in famous movies through sponsoring is one classic example. Still another peculiar trend is the hiring of smart children to act as consultants to companies on kids products. The famous Neuromarketing trend uses brain analysis for marketing purposes. The Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) reflects on the subconscious and has been used on children. Another related insight is the fact that advertising is able to influence viewers through stimulating the "emotional midbrain" resulting in what's known as "downshifting", with all its negative effects of child brain development, where critical skepticism of what's being watched becomes more of an impossibility, specifically if this is added to "age-inappropriate" ad content perhaps due to age compression (Schor, 2005).

THE OVERALL EFFECT OF CONSUMERISM AND MATERIALISM ON TWEENS: CHARACTER EDUCATION AS A POTENTIAL SOLUTION

High levels of consumer involvement have a significant negative impact on the psychological well-being of children. They result in high levels of anxiety, depression, low self esteem, and deteriorating parent-child relationships (Schor, 2005). With this conclusion, we move now to bridging the gap between character education and tweens' consumer behavior.

In their book, *Cultivating Heart and Character: Educating for Life's Most Essential Goals*, Devine et al. (2001) call for "conscientious consumption" through training in media literacy and character education. They argue that being overly materialistic could blind people to "life's priorities" and thus could have unethical implications, whereas if individuals use their money and wealth in a conscientious manner they will live better and their societies will benefit as well. The whole of the character education propaganda aims at getting values back to schools in an effort to combat all the previously mentioned effects of materialism and family dissolution. Marketers themselves admit that "*a line has been crossed... advertising and entertainment and all mediums are blurred now.... we are reaching a point of an overall degrading of values.... And it seems like people get desensitized, and then they have to cross yet another line*" (Richard Goldstein, creative director, major New York ad agency cited in Schor, 2005 p. 177). Children need a clarification of right from wrong. They need educators to teach them the capacity to be skeptic and judge right from wrong. They need educators to help them prioritize. They need role models.

Figure (1): A Schematic Mapping of Character Formation



Source: Wiley (1998, p. 5)

Suzanne Hudd (2005), remarks that materialism has to be accompanied by "inward reflection and idealistic action". Schweitzer (1929) highlights that this turbulence in balance between materialism and spirituality occurs when corporations rule the world (cited in Hudd, 2005). Hudd (2005) argues that there's consensus that moral education has to go back to the school (see also Ingall, 1997). She cites survey results of the Josephson Institute of Ethics (2002 and 2004) which show that children became more accepting of (and more prone to engage in) stealing, shoplifting, cheating, and other unethical behaviors compared to a decade before. She eloquently relates that *"efforts to nurture true character, which implies inner strength and the capacity for commitment, are contrary to our culture's consumer orientation, where advertising, visible trappings, and popular trends take precedence... what we think and feel is determined by the marketplace rather than the self. Consumerism has brought us to a place where true character is harder to evoke because our responses are increasingly guided by external, rather than internal cues."*

According to the literature, moral education is a "social construction" that is a mirror image of the larger culture (Ingall, 1997). According to Devine et al. (2001), it is a movement that reflects a persistent attempt to breed core values in the school, thereby benefiting both the individual and society. According to Ryan and Lickona (1992), character is the consistent manner of moral individual actions. According to Wiley (1998), even though there are external influences that can shape character, yet the individual can consciously control his choice of behavior and moral action (refer to figure (1) for a framework of

character formation according to character educator Lori Wiley). According to Thomas Lickona (1991), in *Educating for Character: How Schools can Teach Respect and Responsibility*, there's a triad for good character, which involves heart, mind, and deeds.

There are different approaches to teaching right and wrong in the classroom. Character educators opt for a "virtues⁵-centered" approach to moral instruction which is essentially in the form of "guided discussion" and "moral reflection" thereby helping the students reach ideals to live by, as opposed to a "views-driven" or a "values-driven" approach. Views are mere opinions. Values are what individuals want and give worth to. They are "idiosyncratic" (Ryan and Bohlin, 1999). To character educators, universal moral values include beliefs, virtues, and norms that guide the best of behaviors for people regardless of time, place, race, and ethnicity in general. Character educators at best should integrate "individual virtue" ethics and "normative social" ethics because some social norms (just as some virtues) are also universal due to people's "common humanity" (Devine, Ho Seuk, and Wilson, 2001).

The character education movement is in essence a wake-up call that is "gaining widespread support" in reaction to declining societal values, education from mass media, and the spread of unethical behavior. It is a revolution against relativism, "scientific empiricism", "logical positivism", and the "values clarification" movement, which relied heavily on humanistic psychology and romanticism that was spread in the 80s and the 90s and had built on the fact that values were relative to each individual, thus focusing on the process of helping students reach their preferred set of values. Merrill Harmin, one of the main advocates of the "values clarification", retreated from the movement mentioning that advocating neutrality in values caused a serious decline in "traditional morality" as it's common sense that being honest is far better than being dishonest (Devine et al., 2001; Ryan and Lickona, 1992)!

An alarming survey was conducted as an application of the "leading cultural indicators" list developed by William Bennett (1993, 1994), former secretary of Education in the U.S., which covered the period from 1960-90, and found out that the U.S. became richer where the Gross Domestic Product increased 270 percent, yet government spending on social problems increased more than five-fold, where spending on "welfare" for the poor went up by 630 percent. He mentions that this period of time also saw a dramatic decline in the "nation's character", especially the younger segment of society.

Cultural indicators included such alarming figures such as a 419% rise in rate of illegitimate birth, a 340% rise in children on welfare, a 300% rise in children living with separate parents, a 470% rise in violent crime rates, and a 200% rise in teen suicide rates according to Devine et al. (2001, p. 6) who

⁵ Virtues are lived values (Devine et al., 2001).

remark saying that "*simply throwing tremendous amounts of resources at social problems has not proven effective. This raises the question of whether a more foundational approach is needed*". The rationale is of course the fact that children are deriving their values more from mass media, especially television which was ironically called by Neil Postman cited in Ryan and Lickona (1992) as "the first curriculum", than from the school!

The greater our material power, the greater our need for spiritual insight and virtue to use our power for good and not for evil... We have never been adequate spiritually for handling our material power; and today the morality gap is... greater than it has ever been in any previous age (Historian Arnold Toynbee (1948) cited in Devine, Ho Seuk, and Wilson, 2001 p. 6).

This survey, as well as others, lead edupreneurs to pioneer a move back to instilling values in the school. According to Devine, Ho Seuk, and Wilson (2001) there is rapid development in the quality and comprehensiveness of curricula and methods, where several character education organizations have played a seminal role, acting as resource centers for the character education initiatives being implemented in school throughout the U.S. Examples include Character Plus in St. Louis, the Center for Advancement of Ethics and Character at Boston University, Thomas Lickona heads the Center for the 4th and 5th Rs at SUNY Cortland in New York, the International Center for Character Education (ICCE) at the University of San Diego, the Character Counts! Initiative in California (www.charactercounts.org), the Character Development Group in North Carolina (www.charactereducation.com), and the International Association of Character Cities in Illinois (www.charactercities.org)⁶. Popular commercial curricula include "The Core Virtues Program" (www.crossroadsacademy.org), the "Learning for Life Program", The "Giraffe Project" (www.giraffe.org/giraffe), and the "Loving Well Project" (see Ryan and Bohlin 1999, p. 249 for detailed explanations). In the Middle East, the most prominent commercial program is the Ruyah program (www.alruyah.com).

Schor's (2005) results confirm the negative effects of consumerism on children and their declining morals. Hudd's (2005) article highlights a potential solution. In fact, the Character Education movement was initiated due to the effects of a "steadily" increasing materialism (Ryan and Lickona, 1992). According to Berkowitz and Bier (2005), two prominent character education protagonists, there's a need for "well-conceptualized character education research". The present research aims at conceptualizing the possible impact character education programs potentially have on altering the consumption behavior of the exposed children as future adults and turning them into conscientious educated consumers who have their ethical priorities set right, who put society well-being into consideration, and ones who have internal strength enough to influence others with their opinions. No segment at which character education is

⁶ For organizations aiming at media education and commercial-free children ads, refer to Schor (2005, p. 225).

crucial more than middle school children (adolescents) for all the reasons mentioned in the coming section.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHARACTER EDUCATION IN MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Middle school is a period of disorientation where children exhibit a strong need for guidance. It presents challenges as those adolescents try to define their style and outlook on life. It is a period of "ego formation" and "identity" (Ingall, 1997). As mentioned previously, middle school adolescents fall under the "tweens" to which tremendous marketing is addressed. Many researchers have focused in their research on middle school children as a critical age (see Schor, 2005; Ingall, 1997). Clive Beck cited in Ryan and Lickona (1992), highlights the importance of character/moral education in middle schools as early adolescents, are being given more responsibility for their lives, facing new questions and having new experiences. They are beginning to choose their way of life, whereas before much of it was chosen for them. They are very concerned about their self-image. Strong feelings, again both internally and externally triggered, lead to questions about the nature of their personality and the meaning of their life. Those adolescents become overly interested in "differences of beliefs" and like to question them (Wiley, 1998).

Consumption-wise, television viewing is most intense at ages eight to thirteen as highlighted previously. This is one reason (Schor, 2005) chose middle school students for her research, claiming that they are the "core" of the tweens market and are therefore a key target market for marketers, being "significantly involved" in the consumer culture, they have also become more independent than the younger children in "consumer choices". She also highlights that they are well-able to answer questionnaires and that the academic literature on tweens is much less than the older teens, where intensive writings already exists. Moreover, adolescents with higher levels of materialism engage more in "risky behaviors", such as drug addiction, exhibit higher susceptibility to psychological disorders, such as paranoia, narcissism, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and are less successful as adults.

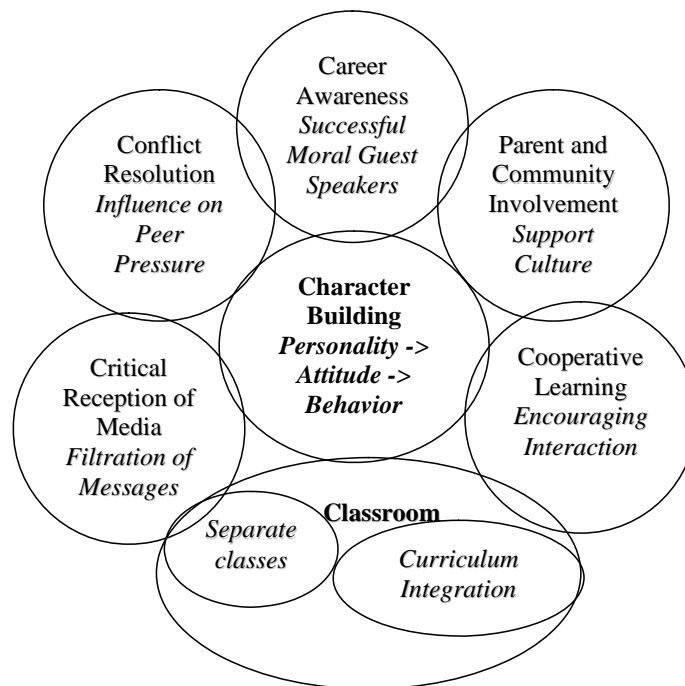
On the character education side, according to Ingall's (1997) *Maps, Metaphors, and Mirrors: Moral Education in Middle Schools*, there's an alarming increase in anti-social behaviors amongst middle school children. Moreover, studies highlight that early adolescence involves putting on so many different hats and is therefore "ripe" for character education (Ingall, 1997).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As highlighted previously, the literature is broadly classified under “character education” and “consumer behavior”, with the links between the two hardly examined. The researchers pioneered and developed figures (2), (3), (4) and (5) to simplify the basic tenets of character education in order to further explain the rationale of the conceptual framework to follow.

Character building programs are either home-grown/made or commercial, with the home-grown generally agreed-upon as being better in reaching the desired goals of moral education⁷. The character building philosophy lies upon the notion that personality change would induce attitude change which would in turn ultimately induce behavioral change (Lickona, 1991; Bulach, 2002).

Figure (2): Six-Module Conceptual Framework for the Character Education Philosophy (Home-Grown vs. Commercial)⁸

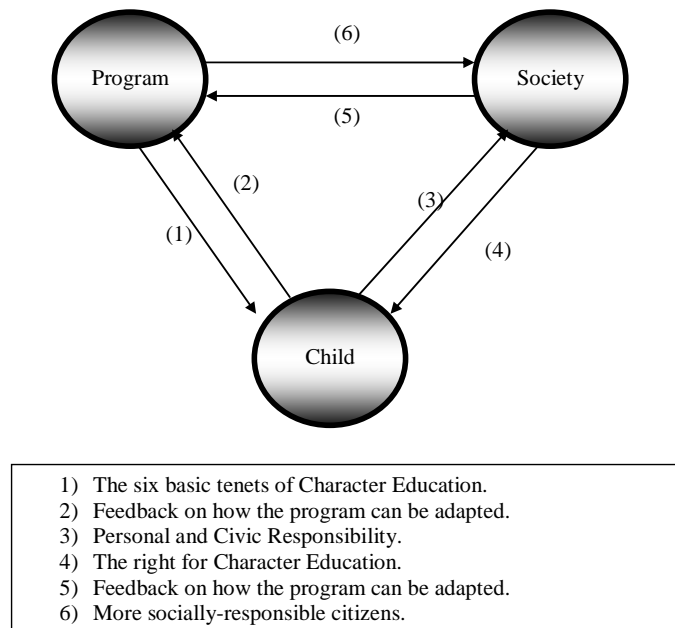


Source: Developed by the researchers

⁷ www.otal.umd.edu/~paulette/ISTC201_Spring2001/Moral_Education/Chared.html and www.wiseskills.com/facets.html

⁸ This conceptual framework is also made available online at www.ethicsbasedmarketing.net/character.html and is adapted from the literature on character education including Lickona (1991), (1996), and (1998); [www.otal.umd.edu/~paulette/ISTC2001_Spring2001/Moral_Education/Chared.html](http://www.otal.umd.edu/~paulette/ISTC201_Spring2001/Moral_Education/Chared.html); www.state.nj.us/education/chared/outcomes/year2/; www.ncpublicschools.org/charactereducation/; www.mediastudies.rutgers.edu/cmsyme.html and www.wiseskills.com/facets.html. Refer to the references section for more sources.

Figure (3): Schematic Diagram for Child-Program-Society Interaction under the Character Education Philosophy⁹



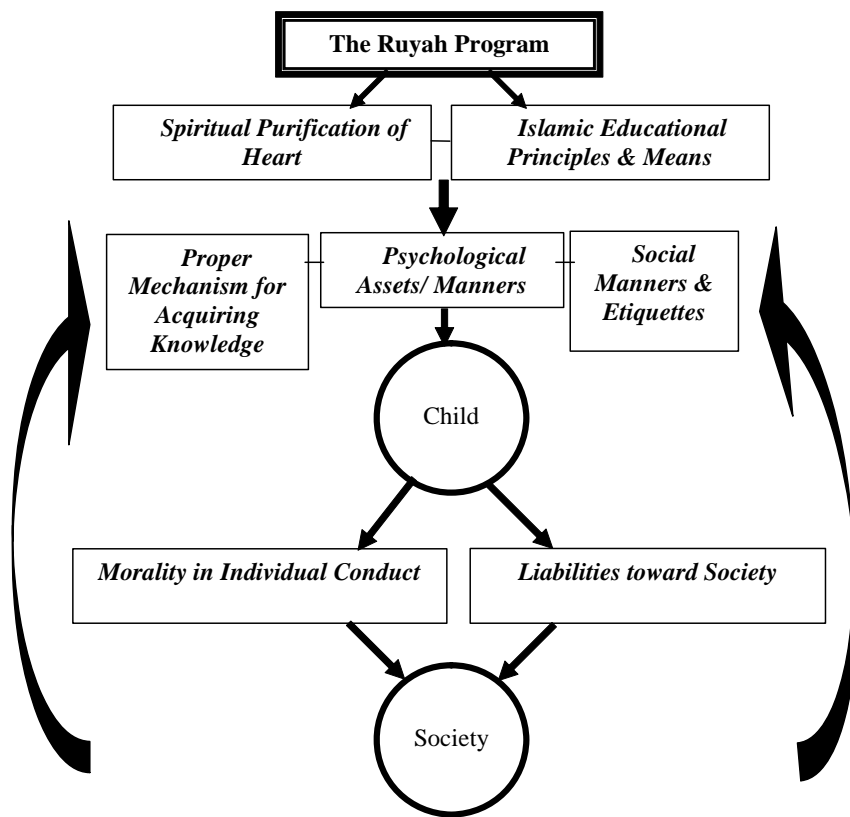
Source: Developed by the researchers

The best programs focus on implanting values in children utilizing six basic tenets: career awareness through portraying moral prominent and successful guest speakers who serve as role models; cooperative learning through encouraging team work and interaction; conflict resolution through introducing positive ways of resolving conflict which puts pressure on peer influence in the positive direction; community involvement which serves as the support culture for all values formally taught in the classroom; critical reception of the media through techniques and activities for filtration of messages; and finally formal lecturing in the classroom both as separate ethics classes and school themes, and as an integrated curriculum that blends morals into all taught disciplines.

Ideally, society recognizes the rights of the child in being trained as to what is ethical and what is not through "universal"/objective values education (Covey, 2003; Lickona, 1991) before being condemned as an unethical and an unproductive member of the society. The child through the program recognizes his rights and learns his responsibilities. Those responsibilities are classified under personal and civic responsibility or what Thomas Lickona (1991) termed "respect and responsibility" in his book Educating for Character: How Schools can Teach Respect and Responsibility. Personal responsibility represents respect for self and responsibility for being ethical on the individual level, whereas civic responsibility is responsibility for being an ethical and productive member of society.

⁹ Adapted from the literature. Specifically refer to Lickona, (2004), (1998), (1996), and (1991); www.character.org; www.charactercounts.org; www.goodcharacter.com.

Figure (4): Conceptual Framework for the Ruyah Program¹⁰



Source: Developed by the researchers

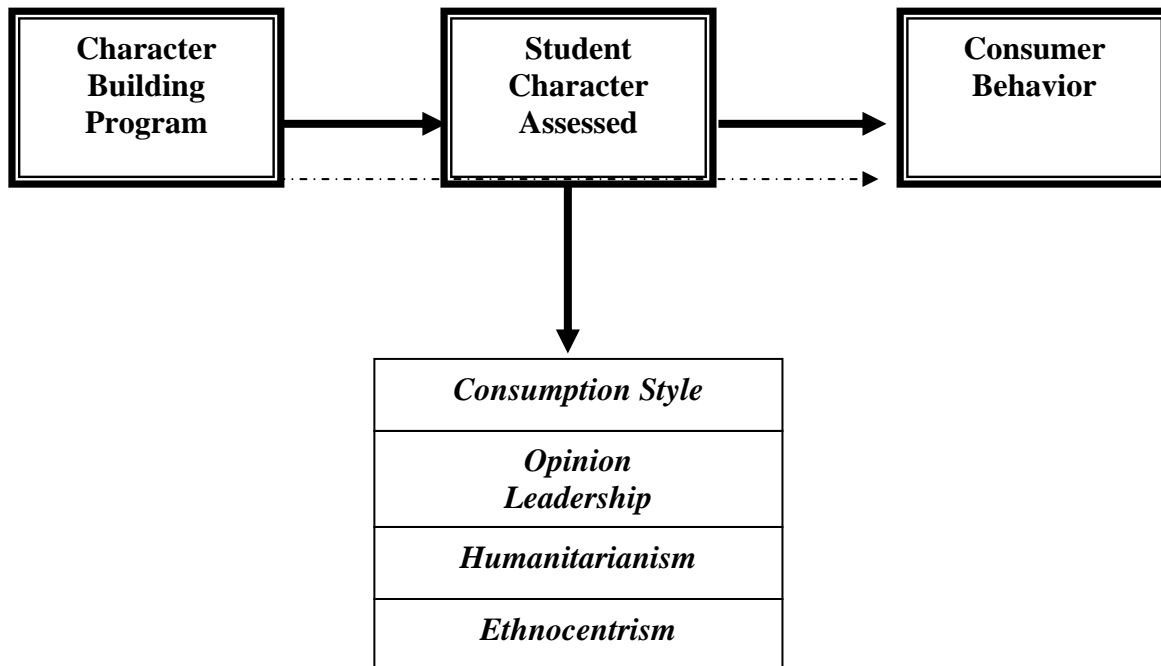
As mentioned previously, the most prominent character building program utilized in Egypt and the Middle East is the Ruyah program developed originally in Kuwait, yet being actively propagated in the Middle East as a commercial package through trainings, workshops, and material (books, multimedia, activities, etc). Even though the Ruyah is a commercial program, the program is based on the Islamic culture and thus is considered equivalent to a home-grown program with some adaptation differences between the schools implementing. Through spiritual purification of the heart and breeding Islamic principles, the program attempts to build a three-pronged multiple effect on the child. This includes implanting manners (psychological assets), the proper mechanism for acquiring knowledge, and social etiquettes. The result becomes that the child pays his liabilities through morality and success on both the individual and the social level.

Given the fact that character education impacts both personal responsibility and civic responsibility, consumption and spending-wise, then, the main research questions related to consumption and spending behaviors of the exposed children, yet to be answered, become:

¹⁰ Refer to www.alruyah.com for the English translation of the Ruyah program basic tenets. The detailed components of the program, however, are vastly described in Arabic books.

- 1) How are the exposed students' consumption styles affected due to the character building program?
- 2) Are they able to influence others with their consumption opinions, i.e. do they exhibit opinion leadership? And is it due to the program?
- 3) How is their attitude toward helping others and toward charitable organizations affected due to the program?
- 4) Given the implicit morals and beliefs taught in the program, do they exhibit country-of-origin effects? This would reflect how they interact, for instance, with world events and whether or not they boycott products from certain countries. Are they willing to forgo immediate benefit in favor of the long-term welfare of their society?

Figure (5): The Research Problem Conceptualized



Source: Developed by the researchers

Based on the literature thoroughly scanned above, exposed students should exhibit principle-centered consumption behavior. They should care to influence others with their opinions, because of the responsibility morals they are taught. They should exhibit higher levels of humanitarianism. Finally, they should show high levels of citizenship and hence should be quite loyal to their countries and communities. Consumption-wise, this is reflected in strong affinity to their national products.

PROSPECTS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In the prior discussion, based on the literature review, a conceptual model was developed proposing character education as a profound solution for the excessive consumerism at the tweens segment, with all its negative effects. This model provides room for vast research. There is a strong need for empirical assessment of the following four variables in the consumer research literature, with the most valid and reliable tools assessing them. This needed empirical investigation would validate the presumed impact of character education programs, i.e. would present scientific verification of the changed personality dimension in the child due to the program:

First, *Consumption behavior using the VALS™ test*: The VALS™ test was developed in 2002 as a modification of the original VALS test developed in 1978 by SRI International (www.sric-bi.com/VALS). The VALS™ test links personality to consumption behavior in the market and assumes that individuals have primary motivations in life. The three broad categories of consumption behavior classification under VALS™ are “ideal/principle-oriented” where individuals are guided by their principles and morals as opposed to their desire for acceptance and approval by others, “achievement-oriented” where acceptance by others is key, and “self-expression” where social and physical activity is key.

Secondly, *Opinion leadership using the King and Summers test*: Opinion leadership is defined as “the process by which one person (the opinion leader) informally influences the actions or attitudes of others, who may be opinion seekers or merely opinion recipients”. Furthermore, opinion leaders are characterized by “innovativeness, willingness to talk, self-confidence, gregariousness, and cognitive differentiation”. The King and Summers scale revised and refined in 1994 by Flynn, Goldsmith, and Eastman and published in the *Journal of Business Research* is chosen to assess the “extent to which respondents have provided others with information about a product category or specific brand or have otherwise influenced the purchase decisions of others” (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2004).

Third, *Humanitarianism using the Webb, Green, and Brashear test*: Humanitarianism is simply reaching to others in need either through charitable organizations or else. Two scales have been recently validated in the consumer research literature, namely the Attitude toward Helping Others (AHO) and the Attitude toward Charitable Organizations (ACO). Webb, Green, and Brashear have developed and validated both tests and their scales were published in the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* in 2000.

Forth, *Ethnocentrism/Country-of-Origin effects using the CETSCALE*: In order to distinctly differentiate between “consumer segments that are likely to be receptive to foreign-made products and those that are not, researchers have developed and tested (validated) the consumer ethnocentrism scale, called CETSCALE” (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2004; Shimp, Sharma, and Shin, 1995 and Shimp and Sharma, 1987). The scale identifies inclinations to accept or reject foreign-made products.

Finally, it is both relevant and important at this point to note that the conceptual model developed transcends the boundaries of the Egyptian/Islamic “core values” into desired universal values and their effect on consumption and hence is generally applicable regardless of gender, ethnicity, and religion. The universality of basic human values is in fact one of the major assumptions of the character education movement (Ryan and Lickona, 1992; Ryan and Bohlin, 1999; Wiley, 1998; Devine et al., 2001). Other than character building programs, the model does not extend into other areas of psychology of education. The model is also confined to the consumer behavior of middle school children (adolescents/ tweens in marketing terms) as present and future consumers in the market and does not extend into other areas of marketing to children in general. Scientific verification of the claims made is still pending.

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Some Online Resources:

www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-28560723_ITM

www.alrulah.com

www.hayahacademy.com

www.charactercounts.org

www.character.org

www.cortland.edu/character

www.eduplace.com/monthlytheme/september/character_activities.html

www.harlemglobetrotters.com/community

www.sric-bi.com/VALS

www.wilderdom.com/Character.html

www.wiseskills.com/facets.html

www.ncpublicschools.org/charactereducation

www.ncpublicschools.org/charactereducation/handbook/pdf/frontcover.pdf

http://members.cox.net/patriotismforall/character_ed.html

www.otal.umd.edu/~paulette/ISTC201_Spring2001/Moral_Education/Chared.html

www.consumerpsychologist.com

http://www.practicalmoneyskills.com/english/at_school/teachers/lesson.php?id=403&o=

www.mediastudies.rutgers.edu/cmsyme.html

www.goodcharacter.com

www.ysa.org

www.edsolution.org/character_ed/main_new.cfm

www.charactercounts.org/howto/teachingtools.htm

www.commercialalert.org