

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

All parents want their children to be happy and successful, and today parents are willing to spend more to have their children get the best things. Many learning programs and materials that claim to encourage the development of children's intelligence have been commercially introduced and parents have fallen for the hook. Toys are one of these materials; for instance, electronic smart word pads, electronic books, baby computers, and videos, all claim to cultivate children's intelligence. Nevertheless, how exactly do the parents expect a toy to influence their children? And is what they expect possible?

In fact, a toy is an object used in play (Manu, 1995). In other words, a toy is a kind of tool for children's work, which is play. Many items are manufactured to serve as toys, but items produced for other purpose can also be used as toys. Children can apply household appliances and articles around them to use as toys. However, some specialists, child psychologists and parents believe wooden toys have better educational value, quality, naturalness, and durability (Doctor Voranaj Raksakulthai, July 20, 2006). People who prefer wooden toys to general toys understand the importance of play in childhood. They also understand that play influences the development of multiple intelligences in children.

Many objects can be used as toys (Manu, 1995). Hand-made toys of wood and cloth were manufactured for mass-production in the 19th century while plastic and electronic technologies became popular in 20th century. Today toys have been developed to be complicated and fancy. However, it is not known exactly when wooden toys were introduced in Thailand. Play and toys became popular when Thailand (or Siam at the time) had more stability in terms of politics and economics.

Nevertheless, ฤๅโรๅง (2530, น.72-85) wrote about entertainment and recreation for Thai people when he visited Siam in the Ayudthaya period saying that all the children in Southeast Asia had the same kinds of play and entertainment as the

children in Europe, for example, wooden top-spins and kites. Therefore, all children, either in Europe or other regions, had the same culture of play and toys. Regarding top-spins, Thai people at that time also used them for betting and for fortune telling in addition to entertainment. Kites were also one of the famous entertainments for Thai people in the former days for high-class people.

คันทน์ วิระศิลป์ชัย (2549) also claimed that although play and toys were similar everywhere, they varied according to environment, geography, and weather. Popular play in the past included imitating adults' daily activities or cultural ceremonies. Dolls were one of the well-known toys for boys and girls apart from kites, especially for high-class people at the time, because dolls tended make children behave well.

However, wooden toys in mass production for commercial purpose was first recorded in 1981, when the first export manufacturer, Plan Creations Co., Ltd. was established at Daimaru Department store. At that time, there were several imported toys, including wooden toys sold in high prices at Daimaru.

Later in 1986, the Thai Toy Industry Association (n.d.) was founded to achieve three main objectives. Firstly, TTIA endorses activities to promote the quality and safety of Thai products on behalf of all wooden toys manufacturers. Secondly, TTIA had taken on the role of negotiating the terms of overall disputes between TTIA members. Finally, the TTIA was appointed to act as arbitrator among members when conflicts happen. At the present, TTIA has a total of over 200 members who are in the export and import of educational materials business.

Generally, toys have to comply with international safety standards, such as the American Safety Toy Standard (ASTM 16 CFR-2007e1) and European Standard (EN71), in order to get permission to sell in the international market legally. For Thailand, toys are supposed to comply with the Thailand Industrial Standard (TIS) requirement which is similar to ASTM and EN71 but a bit less strict in content. Unfortunately, the Thailand Industrial Standard Institute (TISI) is less consistent in terms of random inspection toys in market places throughout Thailand compared to governments who are in charge of ASTM and EN71 regulations in the international market. Likewise, the penalty for toy manufacturers or importers that fail to comply with TIS standards is very light. Hence, there are many unsafe toys found in the

market which reduced the quality of toys from Thailand in general; this bad reputation in terms of safety also dilutes wooden toys perceived value because some consumers misunderstand that all toys from Thailand are unsafe for their young children.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) which controls product quality for all American children through ASTM, recently realized Thomas the Tank train because of lead-toxins. After that, it increased CPSC staff to more than 500 for field inspections. The net market value for toys in Thailand has never been recorded but we could refer from import toy values plus the business structure of leading brands that focus on the export business that the market value should be approximately THB 40,000 million per annum. In addition, the figure has not changed significantly for a few years because of economic factors, high price competition, and the complex and costly domestic distribution structure, especially for department stores.

Consequently, the aim of this paper to find out how Thai parents perceive the value of wooden toys, as well as the desirable characteristics of wooden toys, so that any concerned parties in toy development can use this information to produce quality wooden toys in the future.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This research aims to find the answers to the following research questions:

- 1.2.1 How do parents perceive the value of wooden toys and to what degree?
- 1.2.2 What are the desirable characteristics of wooden toys?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research is designed to answer the research problems as mentioned above in the following aspects:

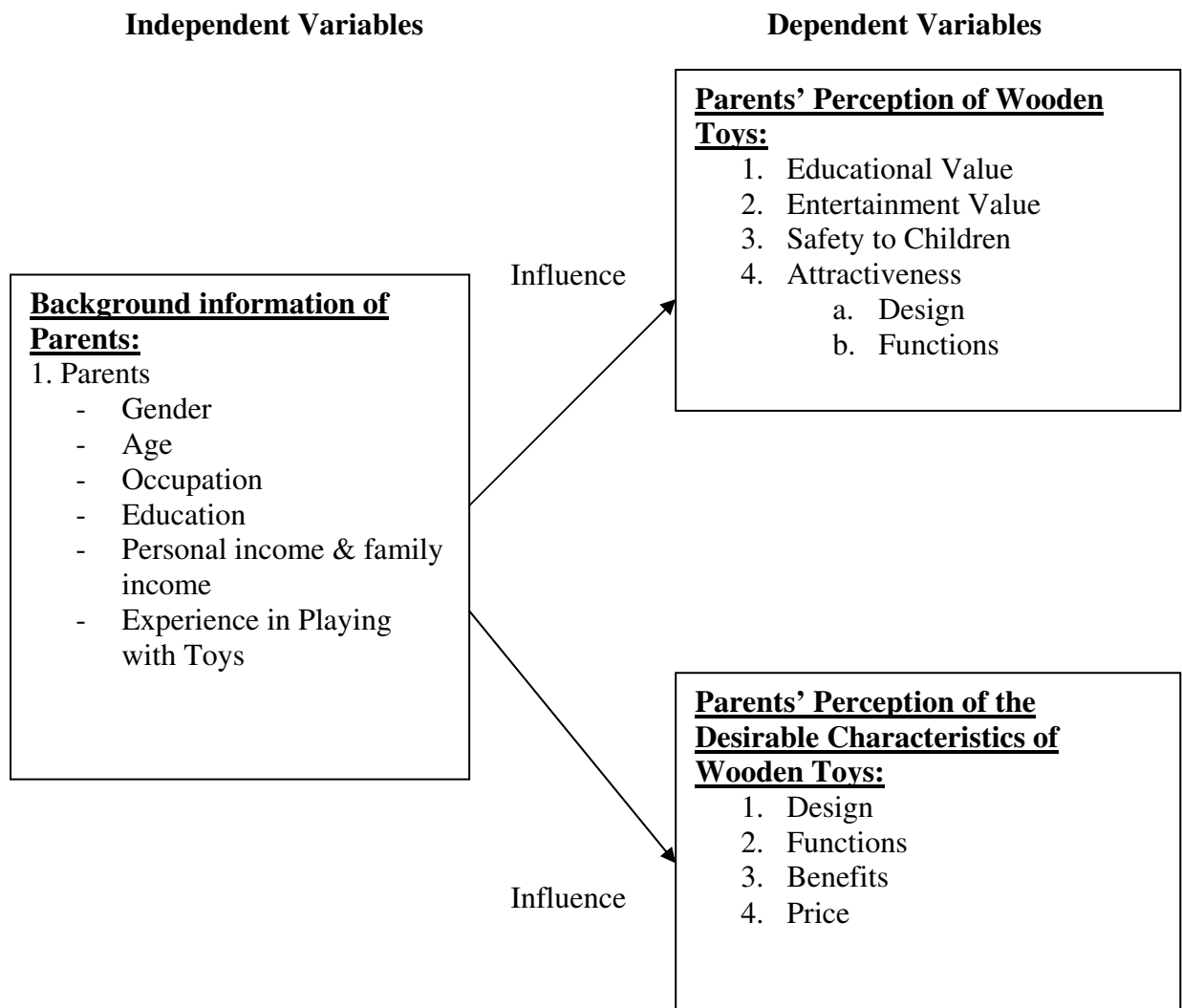
- 1.3.1 To study wooden toys perceived value by parents of children aged under 7 years old.
- 1.3.2 To clarify the degree wooden toys perceived value by parents.

1.3.3 To identify the desirable characteristics of wooden toys in the view of parents.

1.4 VARIABLES AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

1. 4.1 Variables

The independent variables and dependent variables were as follows:



1.4.2 Operational Definitions of the Terms

The terms used in this study are defined as follows:

High quality wooden toys – wooden toys that are certified to comply with ASTM, EN71 and other international toy safety standards. The toys should be well-made, have no sharp parts, no splinters and not pinch, and be painted with nontoxic paint.

Affordable – the ability to pay or spend for something.

Child Specialist – a person who specializes in child therapy and child development, including health and behavior.

Child Psychologist – a person who studies and understands a child's thoughts and behavior.

Perceived value – the evaluation of a customer of a product's quality and price.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This research study mainly focused on wooden toys perceived value and their desirable characteristics in the view of parents of children aged under 7 years old only, and did not include other kinds of toys made from other materials.

In addition, the population of the study was parents of children aged under 7 because 0-7 years is the most important period of child development. Therefore, at this time toys and play have the most influence on a child's development. The study was conducted in the Bangkok area only due to convenience and time constraints. 108 respondents obtained by quota sampling method were used in this study.

The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration 2003 reported number of children under 7 years old in Bangkok area to be 548,862. Under the assumption that the average number of children per family was two, there were approximately 274,431 families in Bangkok. In addition, the researcher assumed that the target group of wooden toys products should be approximately 25% of the total families in Bangkok, implying 68,608 families as the total population. According to sample size calculation under the Central-limit theorem, this research should have targeted 290 respondents.

However, with the time and data collection constraints, the researcher set the sample of this study at 108 instead.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

1.6.1 The result of this study will provide useful information about the perceived value and desirable characteristics of wooden toys to wooden toy manufacturers, sellers, as well as marketing and product development teams, to better understand customers' requirements and to develop the qualified products for commercial purposes.

1.6.2 The study may be useful for other researchers who would like to conduct further study regarding wooden toys and other kinds of toys both in terms of vertical and horizontal direction in the future.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

A self-administered questionnaire was used to gather the primary data from the target group at toys departments at well-known department stores (e.g, Siam Paragon, Emporium, Central Chidlom, and Tokyu), specialty toy stores (e.g, Toy R Us, For Kids), Bangkok Children's Discovery Museum (Bangkok), Yooyenwitthaya School, St. Dominic School, and work places.

The questionnaires were distributed by the researcher on weekends at the target places and collected on the same day if finished. In addition, some of the questionnaires were distributed via email to qualified participants by the researcher. When finishing the questionnaires, the participants returned the completed forms via email to the researchers within one week.