

CHILDREN’S INFLUENCE IN HOUSEHOLD PURCHASE DECISIONS: LESSONS FOR RESEARCH IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Children constitute an important target segment from the marketer’s perspective hence merit attention. In the western literature, children have been observed to wield significant influence primarily in the purchase decisions pertaining to children’s products and select family products. However, in the Indian context, their role is largely understated and has been examined with a myopic perspective. While researches examining spousal influence are less complex as it involves adults, those revolving around children are more complex and need to be conducted with caution; given their tender and impressionable minds. This paper is an attempt to examine the existing literature and contribute to the knowledge of the constraints and issues involved in researching children by making brief comparison of the western and Indian literature.

Keywords: Children, Family, Decision making unit, Influence, Purchase decision making

INTRODUCTION:

Effective marketing decisions undoubtedly trace its roots in extensive information about the consumer. Acquiring information on the beliefs, thoughts, feelings, purchase decisions and actions of consumers helps marketers in stimulating consumer purchases, achieving effectiveness in marketing strategy and gaining competitive advantage. The single most influential group in the consumption behaviour pattern of an individual is the family (Nair, 2000). Not only is the family the earliest environment, but it also happens to be the entire universe for individuals for the first few years of their life, including early childhood and youth (Raju & Xardel, 2005). It nurtures the individual and is usually responsible for the formation of an individual's attitudes and behaviour towards preferences for products, brands, consumption and disposal. Since it is an established fact that decision making by a group such as a household differs in many ways from decisions made by an individual, it is of utmost concern to the marketer to identify if the decision making unit (D.M.U) or the buying center is an individual or a group. In marketing, procurement and organisation studies, a "buying center" or a decision making unit (D.M.U), are the individuals within an organisation who participate in a given purchase decision" (Hawkins, Best, Coney & Mookherjee, 2007).

A family in its simplest form is defined to include "two or more persons living together usually related by blood, marriage or adoption" (Raju & Xardel, 2005). Hawkins et al. (2007) define a family as a group of two people or more related by birth, marriage or adoption and residing together. Raju and Xardel (2005) discuss the three broad classifications of a family: the elemental family (comprising two persons, usually a married couple), the nuclear family (comprising a married couple with one or more children) and the extended family (comprising one or two grandparents and / or other permanent live-in members such as uncles, aunts, cousins etc.). These definitions are apt to cover the majority however some household forms still get missed out. For instance, Hawkins et al. (2007) discuss the blended family (comprising a couple, one or both of whom were previously married, their children and their children from previous marriages) as one such form which is missing.

In the Indian scenario, while the extended family was and still is the most common family unit in some parts, it is the nuclear family which is gradually becoming the model family unit over time (Raju & Xardel, 2005). Within the families, there exists role specialisation with different family members playing differing roles in various product purchases. Schiffman and Kanuk (2004) have postulated that there are eight distinctive roles in the family decision making process. These are: (1) Information Gatherer (2) Influencer (3) Gate keeper (4) Decider or Decision Maker (5) Purchaser / Buyer (6) User (7) Maintainer and (8) Disposer.

The role and performer differences manifest in different forms such as a single person in a family may perform multiple roles or several family members may perform one role or role played by a member undergoes a change depending upon the product category. The variety and complexity makes family buying an interesting and challenging area of research. Understanding who plays what role in a buying situation is important for a marketer and is the first starting point in marketing strategy formulation.

Schiffman and Kanuk (2004) classify family or household purchase decisions in the following four groups: husband dominated, wife dominated, joint (equal participation / syncratic) and autonomic (solitary or unilateral). Lindquist and Sirgy (2003) discuss how decision making in a family could be autonomic (where one family member decides; could be a private or an independent purchase) or syncratic (decisions made jointly). Srivastava and Khandai (2002) postulate that a family may be patriarchial (where usually the father is the decision maker), matriarchial (where usually the mother is the decision maker) or equalitarian (where both father and mother are decision makers). Nair (2000) categorises product decisions pertaining to automobiles, tyres, television, computer as husband dominant, decisions pertaining to washing machines, kitchen appliances, carpet etc. as wife dominant and decisions pertaining to housing, recreation, outdoor entertainment etc. as equal participation decisions. Quite evidently, in existing product classifications, the dominance of children in family purchase decisions has been largely overlooked. While an impressive body of research is available in the western literature, the Indian literature in this regard is negligible; hence the need for crucial benchmarks in this stream for Indian researchers.

OBJECTIVES:

This research aims to examine the existing research attempts involving children, investigate the issues and limitations involved and identify research gaps with the ultimate aim of providing a comprehensive and holistic benchmark for Indian researchers. A wide variety of issues related to family decision making; more specifically the issues related to the role played by children in it, have been examined here.

METHODOLOGY:

This study is based on secondary data sources. In order to carry out this study, the following methodology was employed. Since the study attempted to explore issues and limitations involved in researching children, a time period of five decades was chosen starting from 1965. For this period, papers published in scholarly journals were collected towards this research. These include: Journal of Marketing Research, Journal of Consumer Marketing, Academy of Marketing Science Review, Advances in Consumer Research and Journal of Business Research. An attempt was made to trace the literature over the last five decades across different parts of the world. These research papers were analysed across five key dimensions: objectives, scope, methodology, findings and limitations.

KEY FINDINGS:

DECISION ROLES: A REVIEW:

Much of the research on family consumer behavior has been on decision role structure. Decision role structure in family decision making is defined as “the role in a purchase decision” (Commuri & Gentry, 2000). It is an assessment of who makes what decisions. Sharp and Mott (1955) were the pioneers in examining whether it was the husband, the wife, or both who made the final purchase decision; for a diverse set of product categories. Similar attempt was made two decades later by Green and Cunningham (1975), who reported shifts in such roles over time by observing that husbands made significantly fewer decisions by themselves in contemporary orientation families (greater female autonomy and sex-role orientation) than traditional orientation families. Subsequently, Belch et al. (1985) reported that while husbands made the purchase decisions for automobiles and televisions, wives dominated decisions about the purchase of appliances, furniture, and cereal. Rosen and Granbois (1983) concluded that financial decisions are more likely to be made by the husband and wife separately when the wife is working, when the years of marriage increase and when the family income increases.

Qualls (1987) studied the impact of the sex-role orientation (SRO) of husbands and wives on decision making of home-purchase in the U.S. Results indicated that sex-role orientation (SRO) plays a role in affecting family member influence and mode of conflict resolution. Secondly, changes taking place in the attitudes and behavioural orientation of men and women (changing cultural norms, increase in the number of working wives, delayed first marriages and shifting societal standards), have altered the composition and decision role structure of the traditional household unit. This paradigm contends that sex role preferences are indicative of culturally determined attitudes (traditionalism/modernity) towards the role of wife/husband and mother/father in the household. Home purchase was one of the more popular categories examined (Hempel, 1974; Kim & Lee, 1996; Munsinger, Weber & Hansen, 1975). Other popular categories were automobiles (Burns & Granbois, 1977; Cox, 1975) and financial services (Granbois, Rosen & Acito, 1986; Rosen & Granbois, 1983). Much of the discussion in studies pertaining to household decision behavior revolves around whose perception is being tested. Criticisms on earlier researches with sole samples (only husbands / only wives) have given way to the more recent research design where the husband/wife dyad is interviewed. Criticizing the oversimplification of decision roles at that time, Davis (1970) noted that the assumption that responses from one spouse were sufficient for understanding roles was essentially false. In fact, studies which investigate decision making between spouses taking both spouses as respondents, report considerable discrepancy in the responses of husbands and wives, with agreement for any particular decision being below fifty percent (Davis, 1971).

LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN: A REVIEW:

The relevance of the wife's labor force participation to family consumption has been repeatedly debated but seldom resolved. The debate has been about what convenience products and time saving appliances would find their way into the kitchens of women in the labor force and whether working wives would differ significantly from non-working wives in terms of how they shopped (Douglas, 1976). Other sub-streams included the effect of the wife's employment on her decision role structure and on the effect of income on decision role structure (Rosen & Granbois, 1983; Ruth & Commuri, 1998). Green and Cunningham (1975) concluded that husbands of employed women made fewer decisions by themselves. More recently, Ruth and Commuri (1998) identified women's entry into labor force as an important influence on how decision roles shift in an Indian household by conducting joint depth interviews among urban, middle-class Indian couples across a diverse set of products. Results revealed that husbands and wives perceived their roles in the purchase decision-making of select products, to have shifted; mainly due to greater participation of women in the workforce, higher proportion of urban population and higher literacy.

INFLUENCE OF CHILDREN IN PURCHASE DECISION MAKING: A REVIEW:

The nature of joint decisions in couple decision making units and family decision making units is seen to be different (Filiatrault & Ritchie, 1980). Marketers are interested in young people as they provide a lucrative market for many goods and influence adult spending patterns (Moschis & Churchill, 1979). It is also observed that children are socialized by their parents to act as rational consumers by gradually acquire relevant consumer skills from them after years of direct or indirect observation (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2003; Hawkins et al., 2007). McNeal (1992) developed a five stage model of how children learn to shop by visiting the various retail outlets along with a parent: Observing (making sensory contact & forming mental images), Making Requests (through pointing, gesturing and making statements), Making Selections (independently getting an item off the shelf), Making Assisted Purchases (as they understand the concept of money and are allowed to select items and express their choices of brands) and Making Independent Purchases (making a purchase without a parent overseeing it). The model indicated that children learn to shop, at least partly, by going shopping.

A child is "a young human being below the age of puberty" (Oxford Dictionary, 2003). The stage of childhood extends upto 12 years; while adolescence spreads between 12 and 21 years - recognized as a period of transition and movement towards adulthood (Hawkins et al., 2007). In India, while the Ministry of Labour and Employment define a child to be in the age-group of 0-14 years, the Ministry of Women and Child Development define a child as someone who is a minor ("Who is a child", 2007). Children do not form a homogenous group of individuals. Segmenting them into various age groups provides a clear indication of the kind of differences that exist in their needs and demands. Hawkins et al. (2007) differentiates between two important stages of childhood: early childhood (extending from birth to 5 years of age to include infants and preschoolers) and late childhood (beginning from the time the child enters school which brings about a major change in the mental and social development and extending roughly to the beginning of adolescence i.e. from 6 – 12 years of age).

Recent changes in the demographic and household structure in the West, appear to have increased the children's impact on their parent's decisions and their general involvement in family decision making (Foxman et al., 1989; Ahuja & Stinson, 1993). For instance, since both parents work full time in many American households, they may permit or actively encourage their child's active participation in family decision making. Mc Neal (1992) justifies the increased influence of children in western societies with the following: fewer children, increasing number of one parent households, postponing having children to when parents' careers are established, both parents working long hours etc. Other researchers (Ahuja & Stinson, 1993; Mangleburg et al., 1999) have also concluded that an increase in the number of single parent or female-headed households has a bearing on the role that children can be

expected to play as buyers in the family. Ahuja & Stinson (1993) concluded that better educated, more autonomous single mothers place more burden of family decision making on themselves than children.

In the west, children have been observed to wield significant influence primarily in the purchase decisions pertaining to children's products such as children's clothing (Holdert & Antonides, 1997); toys (Williams & Veeck, 1998); snack foods (Ahuja & Stinson, 1993); and breakfast cereals (Belch et al., 1985; Berey & Pollay, 1968). Children have also been observed to influence decisions for some family products such as holiday/vacations (Belch et al., 1985); eating out (Filiatrault & Ritchie, 1980; Williams & Veeck, 1998) and grocery (Ahuja & Stinson, 1993).

Williams and Veeck (1998) pointed out how urban Chinese children are growing up in a singular position to enjoy the benefits of a consumer culture with no siblings to compete with; hence display an overwhelming influence on their family's food purchases by accompanying parents on food shopping trips and pressurising them to buy children's food items. Berey and Pollay (1968) studied mother and child dyads making purchases of ready-to-eat breakfast cereals to report that most products were not directly available to a child with parents acting as intermediary purchasing agents, the mother playing the "gatekeeper" role and buying cereals strong on nutrition. Foxman and Tansuhaj (1988) examined differences in the adolescents' and mothers' perceptions of relative influence in family purchases across a wide array of products – high involvement (e.g. automobiles, computers, dress clothes) as well as low involvement (e.g. toothpaste, groceries etc.) to conclude that there is a considerable amount of adolescent influence; it varying with the user and the cost of a product. Differences were observed in the perception of mothers and adolescents; with adolescents over-rating their decision influence. Foxman, Tansuhaj and Ekstrom (1989) studied triad data as perceived by three important raters – mother, father and adolescent to get a more accurate picture and to measure divergence in perception. The study concluded that while adolescents have an influence in purchase decisions for a variety of products, the influence is more in cases where the product is less expensive and is meant for the child's own use. Children seemed to overstate their relative influence as compared to their parents. On account of contribution to family income and purchasing power, parents perceived themselves to have greater influence in purchase matters than children. Mothers' and fathers' perceptions, although not in perfect agreement, were much closer to each other than to their child's perceptions. A similar study was conducted by Beatty and Talpade (1994) with a more exhaustive set of variables: communication style of parents, number of children in the family, age of children, type of family, working status of women, teenager's characteristics (teenager's financial resources, product knowledge, product importance and product usage), household characteristics (single / dual income) and decision characteristics (product type and decision stage). The results suggested that the teens' financial authority allows them greater say in initiating self-purchases, but not in family purchases. Knowledge of the product affects teen's influence in initiating but not in searching and deciding. Product importance and usage were positively associated with the teenager influence. Parents' dual income status allowed adolescents greater influence in some family durable purchases; though self purchases where influence is already substantial were not affected. These effects were pronounced for products that teens care for (e.g., stereo) and use often (e.g., telephone). Teenagers attributed higher influence to themselves than their mothers did at both the decision stages. McNeal and Yeh (1997) observed how urban children in China begin practising consumer behaviour as early as age 4 by purchasing products such as snacks, toys, school-based products such as books, stationery etc. and sourcing their purchases from their own pocket money. They also observed that Chinese urban children are great influencers with their average influence being even higher than that of U.S children.

Chan and McNeal (2003) conducted a study among Chinese parents and reported that parents indulged in considerable gate keeping for children's products with strict control over the kinds of products that children can or cannot buy while at the same time allowing children some

freedom in choosing brands of permissible products; being distrustful of marketing and advertising due to a record of poor advertising ethics across China. Brody et al. (1981) conducted an observational study of mothers and 3-5 year old children and reported that children exposed to television food commercials made more bids for the advertised foods than children in the controlled condition; with children in the 3-5 years age bracket being successful naggers. Priya, Baisya and Sharma (2010) conducted interviews among psychologists, advertisers and parents and surveys among 5 – 11 year old children to report that demand for advertised products was highly influenced by children's attitude towards those advertisements, and also by other important factors such as parental guidance and peer pressure. Belch et al. (2005) reported that since teenagers were high users of the Internet and perceive themselves to be 'Internet mavens' (individuals who are relied upon more for providing information from the virtual marketplace), they were more influential in all stages of the purchase process—initiation, information search, alternative evaluation and final decision stages; their influence being higher in the first two stages. In an earlier study, Belch et al. (1985) reported that children don't have a large impact on instrumental decisions such as how much to spend (usually taken by the husband), but they do have an impact on expressive decisions such as colour, model, brand, shape and time of purchase (usually taken by the wife). Sim and Swinyard (1987) explored the differences in the influence of children across a wide variety of products - children's products (viz. toys, clothing etc.), activities (viz. entertainment, vacations, restaurants), education of children (school, tuitions, courses), durables (viz. TV, automobile, refrigerator, house, household appliances) and non-durables (viz. clothing, cosmetics, kitchenware, insurance), to conclude that in Singapore, children exerted only minor influence in the non-child durables and non-durables, moderate influence in schooling, TV, home, furniture and car and high influence in the child-centric products and activities such as vacation, restaurant and entertainment. Szybillo and Sosanie (1977) examined how family role structures, inclusive of children, vary over sub-decisions and stages in the buying process for two service decisions (fast food restaurants and family trips) to conclude that the trend is moving from an 'Adult only' role structure towards 'Adult with Child' or 'Complete family' role structure; more prevalent in fast food restaurants. A high degree of adult and child interaction across all stages of the decision process was reported. Hundal and Thakur (2006) studied rural buying behavior in Amritsar, Punjab to conclude that product selection decisions in rural families were mostly made by spouses together but were highly influenced by children. Verma and Kapoor (2003) studied the role played by family members across the decision-making stages in the purchase of six durables (televisions, refrigerators, washing machines, personal computers, audio systems, cars) in Indian households to conclude that individual members were associated with multiple roles; the final purchaser being the husband. The findings corroborate results on durables from the western literature. Commuri and Gentry (2000) argue that methodology-related problems such as the problem of not gathering data from all members of the family noted by Davis (1971) and Douglas (1983) continues to persist. Roberts, Wortzel and Berkeley (1981) urged that research on child's influence should focus on each of the children individually. Ruth and Commuri (1998) studied shifts in decision making processes by couples in India using the critical incident method. Such methods could be used in researches wherein children are also the respondent; though researches involving parent-child dyad have revealed that individuals differ when reporting the influence of family members. Belch et al. (1985) concluded that children tend to attribute more influence to themselves than do both parents, and they also attribute more influence to the father than the father or the mother themselves do. Commuri and Gentry (2000) argue that too much past research has focused on just one household member's perceptions. They further argue that the role of the child in the family decision making depends in part on whom one asks; hence it may not be valid to measure children's influence in an aggregate manner when a family has more than one child.

RESEARCH STUDIES ON INFLUENCE OF CHILDREN IN PURCHASE DECISION MAKING: A SUMMARY:

Table 1 presents a summary of the research studies which have been discussed in the above section.

Table 1: Chronological Analysis of studies on Family Purchase Decisions

Source / Year	Critical Research Contribution	Respondent (s)	Products / Services examined	Age group of Children researched	Variables studied	Study Implications
Research on Relative Influence of Children in Purchase Decision Making						
Berey and Pollay (1968)	Influence of children in purchase of breakfast cereals – understanding the mother child relationship	Mother, Child and Teacher	Ready-to-eat breakfast cereals for the child	8 – 11 years	1.Child’s assertiveness 2.Mother’s child-centeredness 3.Mother’s brand name recall 4.Mother’s purchases of cereals	1. Most products not directly available to a child; parents act as intermediary purchasing agents 2. Mother plays a “gatekeeper” role 3.Child-centred mothers don’t purchase child’s favourite brands; stick to their judgement 4. Mother’s brand recall affects purchases, child’s assertiveness has no impact 5. Advertising to be directed at the mother else the child’s influence may be ignored
Szybillo and Sosanie (1977)	To examine how the influence of children, mothers & fathers varies over the stages and sub-decisions of purchase of services	Mother	Vacations & eating out in fast food restaurants	5 years and above	1. Stages of the decision process – initiation, search for alternatives and final decision. 2.Sub-decisions such as when & where to go i.e. which restaurant / place to visit, how much to spend	1. Trend moving from an ‘Adult only’ role structure towards ‘Adult with Child’ or ‘Complete family’ role structure 2. Trend more in fast food restaurant than family trips 3. Trend same across decision stages & sub-decisions
Moschis and Churchill (1979)	Extent to which consumer skills of teenage consumers vary by age, social class, gender etc.	Adolescents	NA	12 – 18 years	1. Consumer skills such as attitude towards advertising, prices, stores, finance management, consumer affairs knowledge etc. 2. Age, gender & social class	1. Adolescents in higher social classes had greater economic motivation for consumption 2. Advertising more effective among older adolescents & females 3. Older child is more sophisticated consumer
Belch, Belch and Ceresino (1985)	Differences in perceptions of father, mother & adolescent of the influence of each of these in family purchases	Father, Mother and Child	Television, Automobile, Vacation, Appliance, Furniture, Breakfast cereals	13 – 19 years	1. Product type 2. Product sub-decision 3. Decision stage 4. Respondent	Fathers’, Mothers’ and Adolescents’ influence varied by product, product sub-decision, decision stage and respondent
Sim and Swinyard (1987)	To examine the perception of parents on the differences in children’s influence across different products, age	Mother / Father	1.Toys, clothing etc. 2. Vacations, restaurants etc. 3. Education 4. House, furniture,	3 – 20 years	Variation in influence by 1. Product 2.Stage of decision making 3. Age of the child	1.Children more involved in problem recognition than in actual purchase & other stages 2. Children exert : - very less influence on

Source / Year	Critical Research Contribution	Respondent (s)	Products / Services examined	Age group of Children researched	Variables studied	Study Implications
	groups and decision stages		Automobile etc. 5.Clothing, kitchenware, insurance etc.			<p>non-child durables & non-durables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - moderate influence on Education, TV, automobile, furniture and house - high influence on children's products (toys, clothing & food), vacations, restaurants, entertainment <p>3. Influence varies with age; lowest for products already high in child involvement, very high for non-child durables & non-durables</p> <p>4. Influence of children more in products for which they had self-interest and least for the most adult-centered products (alcoholic beverages)</p>
Foxman and Tansuhaj (1988)	To investigate differences in the perceptions of adolescents and mothers of the relative influence of each other in family decisions	Mother and Child	<p>1.High involvement Products (e.g.Computers, automobiles, magazine subscriptions)</p> <p>2.Low Involvement Products (e.g. groceries, toothpaste)</p>	11 – 19 years	<p>Variation in influence by 1. Product</p> <p>2. Product usage</p> <p>3.Price of the product</p> <p>4.Perceived importance</p> <p>5.Respondent (mother / adolescent)</p>	<p>1. High adolescent influence (even more than parents) in the purchase of own use products such as clothing, bicycle, magazine subscription, records)</p> <p>2. Moderate adolescent influence in family purchases(e.g. PC, groceries, toothpaste for child & family, cable TV)</p> <p>3. Adolescents have the least influence in decisions of products for parents' own use (e.g. magazine subscriptions, clothing for parents) and for infrequent family purchases (e.g. furniture, car)</p> <p>4. Variation in adolescent influence in purchase decisions by product, user, price of product and perceived importance</p> <p>5. Adolescents rated their relative influence higher than did mothers</p> <p>6. More children perceive purchase decisions to be made jointly than do mothers</p> <p>7. Positive relationship between importance & influence for cable TV, records, PC, bicycle & magazine subscription</p>

Source / Year	Critical Research Contribution	Respondent (s)	Products / Services examined	Age group of Children researched	Variables studied	Study Implications
Foxman, Tansuhaj, and Ekstrom (1989)	To investigate differences in the perceptions of adolescents, mothers and fathers of the relative influence of adolescents in family decision-making	Father, Mother and Child triad	1. Products for family: PC, car, groceries, furniture 2. Products for child: records PC, bicycle, magazine subscription	11 – 19 years	Variations in the perception of general influence in the following sub-decisions: 1. suggesting price 2.suggesting stores 3.suggesting brands 4.suggesting products 5. shopping with parents 7. paying attention to new products Variation in perceptions of influence measured by: 1. father's age 2.number of children 3.mother's work hours 4.household income	1. Parents believed they influenced purchase of toothpaste for the child 2. All three believed that children influenced purchase of children's clothing 3. Children had some influence in the sub-decisions 4. Families in greater agreement on influence had older fathers, fewer children and a mother who worked few hours outside home 5. Children overstate their influence as compared to parents 6. Parents perceive themselves to have greater influence than children 7. Mothers' and fathers' perceptions were much closer to each other than to the child
Ahuja and Stinson (1993)	To examine relationships among characteristics of female-headed single- parent families and children's influence in family decision making	Mother	Grocery products such as Breakfast cereals, Snacks, Soups, Detergents, Children's personal grooming products	Upto 18 years	1. Age of mother 2. Education of mother 3. Mother's income 4. Mother's SRO 5.Mother's employment status 6.No. of years since single 7. Household size 8. Age of oldest child 9. Gender of oldest child	1. Children's influence is product specific 2. Mother's income and Household size had positive effect on children's influence 3. Better educated, more autonomous single mothers place more burden of family decision making on themselves than children
Beatty and Talpade (1994)	To measure the adolescent's influence in the family as perceived by mothers and adolescents themselves	Mother and adolescent	Durables such as TV, Stereo, Phone,Furniture etc.	13 – 19 years	1.Teenager's financial resources, product knowledge, usage and importance 2.Product type and decision stage 3.Household's income status – single / dual	1. Teens enjoy greater say in self-purchases, but not in family product purchases 2. For family purchases, usage impacts influence, importance impacts influence on phone & furniture and knowledge impacts influence on stereo For teenager purchases, importance is the driving force 3. Product importance and usage are positively associated with the teenager influence in deciding 4. Teens enjoy higher influence in some family durable

Source / Year	Critical Research Contribution	Respondent (s)	Products / Services examined	Age group of Children researched	Variables studied	Study Implications
						purchases (stereo & telephone) due to double income status; not so in own purchases 5. Teenager influence higher at initiation than other stages for all family and own purchases 6. Teenagers attribute higher influence to themselves than their mothers do
McNeal and Yeh (1997)	Understanding if Chinese children influence parental spending, amount & sources of income of children, amount saved, amount spent, objects purchased	Mother	Bakery items, Books, Clothing, Fruits, Ice cream, Milk, Movies, Shoes, Stationery, Toys, Video games...	4 - 12	1. Income – regular and special 2. Spending 3. Saving rate	1. Chinese children have money to spend from age 4 and it continues to increase with age 2. Not all children receive regular income but all receive special income by parents & grandparents on occasions 3. Children save 60% of income & spend rest 40% 4. Purchases mostly of products consumed by children – snack & play items and of books, magazines, stationery 5. Beyond 8 years, all children make some independent purchase visits
Williams and Veeck (1998)	Understanding to what extent U.S findings on purchase influence of children are applicable in urban China	Parent, Child and Retailer	Food products	Minors	1. Type of product 2. Stage of decision-making 3. Family income 4. Age of child 5. Gender of child	1. Urban Chinese children are 'little emporors' 2. Children had an overwhelming influence on family's food purchases 3. Children accompanied parents on food shopping trips and pressurised them to buy food items
Chan and McNeal (2003)	Understand relationship between parent-child communication patterns and influence of parents on children's advertising and communication in China	Father / Mother	NA	6 – 12 years	1. Family communication patterns 2. Parental mediation of TV viewing	1. Parents indulged in considerable gate keeping for children's products 2. They control products that children can or cannot buy; at the same time allow children freedom in choosing brands of permissible products 3. Chinese parents are extremely distrustful of marketing and advertising due to a record of poor advertising ethics across China
Verma and Kapoor (2003)	Understand the role played by children roles	Family	1. televisions 2. refrigerators 3. washing	All age groups	1. Family roles 2. Decision stages 3. Instrumental &	1. Individual members were associated with multiple roles

Source / Year	Critical Research Contribution	Respondent (s)	Products / Services examined	Age group of Children researched	Variables studied	Study Implications
	across stages of purchase decision-making for six durables		machines 4. personal computers 5. audio systems 6. cars		Expressive sub-decisions of purchase	2. Initiator in a family was a young female member, likely to be the wife or a child 3. Influencer is a child who affects purchase of a PC, audio system and television 4. Final purchases were decided in consultation with other family members, mainly the husband
Hundal and Thakur (2006)	To investigate the role of family members in making purchase decisions for durables in a rural Amritsar district of Punjab		Five durables studied are: 1. refrigerators 2. televisions 3. Air coolers 4. Washing Machines			Product selection decisions in rural families were mostly made by spouses together but they were highly influenced by children
Priya, Baisya and Sharma (2010)	Study the impact of children's attitudes towards T.V advertisement on their buying behaviour	Psychologists Advertisers, Parents and Children		5 - 11 years	Children's products such as chocolates, wafers, toys, bicycles etc.	1. Demand for advertised products influenced by children's attitude towards those ads 2. Demand also influenced by parental guidance and peer pressure 3. Attitudes towards ad vary by age of child

Source: Own preparation for this research

CHILDREN IN THE INDIAN SOCIETY:

Children are a popular economic market in India as is evident from the efforts made by marketers to capture this market. One may also speculate if they are becoming more influential in the family's purchase basket now than in earlier years as their needs and tastes are different from that of adults, they are developing brand preferences at this early age. The Indian market has witnessed certain significant demographic shifts which may have contributed to this pattern: increase in number of nuclear families, increase in the number of educated women in India, increased number of Indian women joining the workforce than ever before; across different socio-economic groups and decrease in the average family size in both urban and rural area (Parameswaran, 2003).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:

Analysis of the extant literature in this stream has led to the following conclusions:

The results reemphasized the paucity of Indian literature as researchers have only partially investigated the role of children along with other members in family purchase decision making. The western literature is far too dated and lacks applicability in the Indian context due to differences in the socio-cultural and demographic settings. Indian society vastly differs from the west in terms of values, attitudes, behaviour and demographic factors. Since the socio-cultural and demographic environment in India is evolving with the emergence of dual-career, nuclear families with small family size (Parameswaran, 2003), dimensions of family purchase decision making need to be investigated in the current context.

In the western literature, researchers who have studied children in family decision making have not differentiated between active versus passive influence; knowingly or unknowingly having neglected the study of passive influence by children. An impressive body of research is available in the western

literature which examines the impact of household variables (family composition, sex role orientation, parental style, pattern of communication etc.) and child-related variables (gender, education, social class etc) on the influence exerted by children in family purchase decisions. However, the Indian literature in this regard is almost negligible.

In both Western and Indian literature, children's influence across product categories have been examined in a very restricted context, focusing mainly on products directly consumed by children. While western researchers have examined children's products such as breakfast cereals, toys, snack foods etc., Indian researchers have mostly focused on consumer durables and some children's products. A yet another serious over simplification has been the categorization of product purchase decisions as husband dominant / wife dominant / equal participation decisions; reinforcing the fact that the children's role in these purchase decisions has been largely overlooked.

Given these limitations, past research in India examining the role played by children in family purchase decision making may have yielded an incomplete or inaccurate picture of children's role and status. These gaps entail that dimensions of children's influence in family purchase decision making be investigated with a fresh perspective. It may also be worthwhile to study the impact of variables such as the child's gender, the mother's education and occupation, the family's size, composition, socio-economic status and sex-role orientation¹ – on the purchase decision making within the Indian household. Each product purchase situation is unique hence warrants a more detailed investigation across a diverse set of products ranging from those meant for direct consumption by the child to others meant for direct consumption by the parents and few others meant for the entire family.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETERS AND RESEARCHERS:

From the marketer's perspective, on one hand, it is most essential to establish whether the decision making unit is an individual or a family and on the other hand, to identify the various buying roles that family members play for each unique purchase situation. The purchase pattern of a family exerts a long term influence on the child's behaviour. On the other hand, children may be exerting influence on the purchase and consumption of a family.

¹Sex-role orientation or Socialisation (SRO) of a family is the culturally determined attitude (traditionalism / modernity) towards the role of husband / wife etc. in the household" (Qualls 1987).

The aforementioned changes in family purchase roles and influence perceptions suggest that the previous view of children as having minimal or peripheral influence in family purchase decisions may no longer be appropriate. On the contrary, it may be stated that by virtue of their vast exposure to media these days, children are emerging as an active participant in the purchase decision making process. Comprehending and decoding these finer aspects can help formulate the appropriate targeting and communicating strategy keeping the target audience(s) at the helm.

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