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Categorising Products Strategically Basis Children's Influence in Urban Indian Household

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ABSTRACT

Among all the factors that influence a buyer's behavior, the single most influential group in the consumption behavior pattern of an individual is the family. In a household's purchase decision making, since different family members pose as decision makers for different products, identifying the decision maker is of utmost significance to the marketers. Consumer behaviourists have oversimplified the classification of family or household purchase decisions into three / four groups: husband dominated, wife dominated, joint and autonomic; largely overlooking or understating the role played by the child consumer in these product purchase decisions. This paper aims to study the extent of children's influence in an urban Indian household's purchase decision making and examine the variation in this influence orientation across select products with the ultimate aim of creating a novel categorisation of products into decision categories; basis select variables. The study concluded that that the relative influence of children varied significantly across majority products and variables. Results led to the creation of four decision categories basis children's relative influence: couple dominant, husband / wife dominant, children dominant and participatory. Interestingly, most products expected to be in the parents' domain were observed to have progressed to the participatory domain or the children's sole domain. This paper is a novel attempt towards creation of decision categories and categorisation of products therein; basis children's influence and other key variables which impact purchase decision making.

Keywords: India, Children's Influence, Urban household, Family decision making, Product categorisation.

INTRODUCTION:

Decision making by a household as a consumption unit may differ in many ways from decisions made by an individual consumer (Hawkins, Best, Coney, & Mookherjee, 2007). Family purchase decisions have been very often compared to organisational purchase decisions (Hawkins, Best, Coney, & Mookherjee, 2007). A decision-making unit or D.M.U refers to the individuals and units within an organisation who participate or play a role in the purchase decision-making process (Kotler, Keller, Koshy, & Jha, 2007; Hawkins, Best, Coney, & Mookherjee, 2007). Before crafting the marketing strategy, the marketer must detect if the decision maker for his offering, is an individual or a group of members of the family unit.

A family in its simplest form is defined to include two or more persons living together usually related by blood, marriage or adoption. Mostly, three broad classifications of a family dominate: 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). There has been a rapid increase in the single-parent

family (comprising one parent and at least one child) especially in the western societies mainly due to high incidence of divorce and separation (Raju & Xardel, 2005; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2004). In the Indian scenario, while the extended family was and still is the most common family unit, it is the nuclear family which is gradually becoming the model family unit over time (Raju & Xardel, 2005).

Within families, there exists role specialisation with different family members playing differing roles in various product purchases: Information Gatherer, Influencer, Gate keeper, Decider or Decision Maker, Purchaser / Buyer, User, Maintainer and Disposer (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2004; Kotler, Keller, Koshy, & Jha, 2007). A family may have multiple decision makers and different family members pose as decision makers for different products; depending largely on the degree of involvement each has in the product area of concern. When family decisions are not made unilaterally and the D.M.U comprises a combination of family members, the marketer is interested in knowing which member normally has the greater influence on the purchase. "In the nuclear family set up, the urban house-wife is an active partner in the family decisions" (Nair, 2000); with probable linkages to their higher education levels and their participation in the workforce. Similarly, by virtue of their vast exposure to media these days, children are becoming an active participant in the purchase decision making process.

Household purchase decisions have been classified as husband dominated, wife dominated, joint (equal participation) and autonomic (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2004). (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2003) discuss how decision making in a family could be autonomic (where one family member decides) or syncratic (decisions made jointly). (Nair, 2000 and Srivastava & Khandai, 2002) postulate that a family may be patriarchieal / husband dominant, matriarchieal / wife dominant or equalitarian / equal participation. (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. In existing product classifications, the dominance of children in family purchase decisions has been largely overlooked.

In the western literature, children are observed to exert significant influence in the purchase decisions pertaining to own-use products: children's clothing (Holdert & Antonides, 1997); toys (Williams & Veeck, 1998); snack foods (Ahuja & Stinson, 1993); and breakfast cereals (Belch, Belch, & Ceresino, 1985), (Berey & Pollay, 1968), moderate influence in TV, furniture and car and minor influence in the non-child durables (Sim & Swinyard, 1987). However, most of these researches are based on older children i.e. adolescents / college students (Belch, Belch, & Ceresino, 1985; Foxman & Tansuhaj, 1988; Foxman, Tansuhaj, & Ekstrom, 1989; Beatty & Talpade, 1994). Few are based on tweenagers i.e. the 8 – 11 years old (Berey & Pollay, 1968; McNeal & Yeh, 1997; Chan & McNeal, 2003) and very few are based on lowest age-group i.e. 3 – 5 year old (Sim & Swinyard, 1987; McNeal & Yeh, 1997).

While western research studies in this stream are bounty, Indian researches are limited and have mostly focused on children's products (breakfast cereals, toys, snack foods etc.) or consumer durables. Results of the western researches have limited application in the Indian context due to differences in values, attitude, family composition and structure. The Indian environment in India is evolving with the emergence of dual-career, nuclear families, decrease in average family size, increase in number of educated women in India etc. (Parameswaran, 2003) and a resultant change in traditional sex-role orientation / SRO (the husband predominating in all family affairs).

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Children are not a homogenous group of individuals. (Hawkins, Best, Coney, & Mookherjee, 2007) differentiate between early childhood (from birth to 5 years) and late childhood (from beginning of school to beginning of teenage i.e. from 6 – 12 years) In early childhood, preschoolers accompany parents to markets, have limited exposure to television ads, are able to express desires, make product-requests and develop brand preferences. Teenage displays independence, awareness towards status and lifestyle and development of personal judgment.

Children observe, learn and are taught by their parents to act as rational consumers. After years of direct or indirect observation of parental behaviour in the marketplace, they acquire consumer skills from their parents (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2003; Hawkins, Best, Coney, & Mookherjee, 2007). In the West, changes in demographics - delayed child birth and less number of children, hence greater say in purchases, both parents working long hours & increase in number of one parent households - seem to have increased the children's influence and involvement in family decision making (Foxman, Tansuhaj, & Ekstrom, 1989; Ahuja & Stinson, 1993; McNeal, 1992).

Children in the west, also influence decisions for family products viz. holiday/vacations (Belch, Belch, & Ceresino, 1985); eating out (Filiatrault & Ritchie, 1980; Williams & Veeck, 1998) and grocery (Ahuja & Stinson, 1993). For ready-to-eat breakfast cereals, parents act as gatekeepers, hence much of the advertising efforts should be directed towards the mother (Berey & Pollay, 1968). For some high involvement (e.g. automobiles, computers, dress clothes) and low involvement (e.g. toothpaste, groceries etc.) products, adolescent influence is significantly more when it is meant for child's own-use and when the product is less expensive (Foxman & Tansuhaj, 1988; Foxman, Tansuhaj, & Ekstrom, 1989). (Beatty & Talpade, 1994) observed that teenagers' financial authority allows them greater say in initiating self-purchases, but not in family purchases. Product knowledge impacts their influence in initiation but not in search and decision-making. Teenagers' influence was positively associated with parents' dual income status and was pronounced for products that teens care for (e.g., stereo) and use often (e.g., telephone).

In China, urban kids enjoy their singular position; no siblings to compete with (Williams & Veeck, 1998). Urban chinese children begin practising consumer behaviour as early as age 4 by purchasing children's products (snacks, toys, books), sourcing purchases from their pocket money with their average influence being even higher than that of U.S children (McNeal & Yeh, 1997). But (Chan & McNeal, 2003) reported that Chinese parents indulged in considerable gate keeping allowing children freedom only in choosing brands of permissible products; as parents were extremely distrustful of marketing and advertising due to a record of poor advertising ethics across China.

Children exposed to television food commercials made more bids for advertised foods and are successful naggers (Brody, Stoneman, Lane, & Sanders, 1981). Children don't have a large impact on instrumental decisions such as how much to spend but they do have an impact on expressive decisions such as colour, model, brand, shape and time of purchase; even in India (Synovate, 2004; Belch, Belch, & Ceresino, 1985).

(Sim & Swinyard, 1987) studied differences in children's influence in Singapore across children's products, children's education, activities (entertainment, vacations, restaurants), durables and non-durables (clothing etc.). to conclude that children exerted minor influence in the non-child durables and non-durables, mid-level influence in schooling, TV, home, furniture and car and very high influence in the children's products and activities. (Szybillo & Sosanie, 1977) studied the variation in the family roles over purchase sub-decisions for fast food restaurants and family trips to conclude that there is a movement from 'Adult only' to an 'Adult with Child' or 'Complete family' role structure.

Children as customers make three distinct markets: a 'primary' market for products they themselves consume (biscuits, stationery etc), 'influence' market for products they are interested in, and a future market for products they would tend to use once they grow up (McNeal, 1992).

In India, (Verma & 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) to conclude that individual members were associated with multiple roles; the final purchaser being the husband. In Amritsar, Punjab product selection decisions in rural families were mostly made by spouses together but were highly influenced by children (Hundal & Thakur, 2006).

(Qualls, 1987) defines sex-role orientation or socialisation (SRO) of a family as a culturally determined attitude (traditionalism / modernity) towards the role of husband / wife etc. in the household. The mind-set and belief of 'men are superior and women inferior' being reflective of a traditional couple family while shared participation in family activities being reflective of a modern family. "Children pick up on the sex-role orientation of the parents and the concept of gender identity at the early age of one or two" (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2003).

OBJECTIVES:

The research purports to examine the variation in the relative influence of children across select products and variables. The research further aims to evaluate if the existing classification of household purchase decisions based on family member influence holds true in the current scenario. The influence phenomenon has been examined across a diverse set of selected 24 products. The variation in influence has been examined across select child-related variables such as product knowledge, importance and usage, the child's age, gender and purchasing independence.

METHODOLOGY:

Hypotheses and Measurement:

Relative Influence of Children and Type of Product:

Children's influence varies across different products (Sim & Swinyard, 1987; Foxman & Tansuhaj, 1988; Foxman, Tansuhaj, & Ekstrom, 1989). Hence, this variable was tested here.

H1-1: There is significant variation in the relative influence of children due to the type of product

Products proven to be influenced by children such as breakfast cereals, toys, confectionery, consumer durables were purposely excluded from the study. Likewise, children's products which have not been much researched (stationery, watch, CDs, clothing, play station, aerated and non-aerated drinks) were purposely included. A final set of 24 products was chosen and categorized as follows:

- Family products: Grocery, Furniture, Furnishings, PC/laptop (4)
- Parents' products: Shampoo, Toothpaste, Nail polish, Deodorant, Clothing, Cell phone, Automobile (7)
- Children's products: Shampoo, Biscuits, Stationery, Fast food, Clothing, Bicycle, Watch, CDs, Magazine subscription, Aerated drinks, Non-aerated drinks, I pod, Play station (13)

Relative Influence of Children and Product Importance:

Influence of children is higher for products children attach importance to or are interested in (Sim & Swinyard, 1987; Foxman & Tansuhaj, 1988; Beatty & Talpade, 1994). Therefore, this variable was tested here.

H1-2: Relative influence of children in the purchase decisions shall be higher for products they attach importance to

Importance refers to the child's involvement with the product. Involvement is "the embodiment of time, effort, consideration given and the enjoyment that is derived by a consumer while choosing a product or service" (Raju & Xardel, 2005). Involvement is "a state of interest, motivation or arousal". Involvement is "the level of perceived personal importance in an object or activity" (Antil, 1984).

(Antil, 1984) definition of involvement as the perceived personal importance was chosen and was measured by obtaining the mother's perception on a 5 point attitudinal scale.

Relative Influence of Children and Product Knowledge:

Influence of children is higher for those products of which children have more knowledge or awareness (Foxman, Tansuhaj, & Ekstrom, 1989; Beatty & Talpade, 1994). Hence, this variable was tested here.

H1-3: Relative influence of children in the purchase decisions shall be higher for products they have knowledge about

Knowledge is the awareness level of the child of the overall characteristics of the product. The focus was on the subjective knowledge and not the objective aspects (such as a specific feature or benefit). Product knowledge of the child was measured by obtaining the mother's perception on a 5 point Likert scale.

Relative Influence of Children and Product Usage:

Influence of children is higher when the child is herself a user. (Foxman & Tansuhaj, 1988; Beatty & Talpade, 1994). Therefore, this variable was tested here.

H1-4: Relative influence of children in the purchase decisions shall be higher in case of products they themselves use

Usage refers to the relative average consumption of the product by the child (as compared to parents) at any given point of time. Product usage by the child was measured by obtaining the mother's perception on a 6 point usage scale.

Relative Influence of Children and Age:

Influence of children is higher in case of older children (Moschis & Churchill Jr., 1979; Churchill, 1979; Sim & Swinyard, 1987; Williams & Veeck, 1998). Hence, this variable was tested here.

H1-5: Relative influence of older children in the purchase decisions shall be higher than their younger counterparts

(McNeal, 1992) segments children as Pre-schoolers (0 - 5 yrs), School children (5 – 7 yrs) and Tweens (8 – 14 yrs). Disney's KidSense' (2007) segments the 4-14 year old as Toothagers (4-5 yrs), Toonagers (6-9 yrs) and Tweenagers (10-12 yrs).

In this study, children were segmented into the following three categories: Toothagers / Early childhood (3

– 5 yrs), Toonagers / Late childhood I (5 – 7 yrs) and Tweenagers / Late childhood II (8 – 12 yrs). A nominal scale was used to capture age.

Relative Influence of Children and Gender:
Limited literature is available in this stream. Previous researches have concluded that advertising is more effective with girls (Moschis & Churchill Jr., 1979; Churchill, 1979). Indian families known for their traditional SRO (husband predominates all family affairs) are undergoing a transformation (Parameswaran, 2003). Children pick up gender identity and their parents' sex-role orientation at the early age of one or two" (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2003). Hence this variable was selected and tested here.
H1-6: Relative influence of boys in the purchase decisions shall be different than that of girls

Relative Influence of Children and Purchasing Independence:
Influence of children varies with the purchasing independence, it is higher when the child accompanies the parents (Szybillo & Sosanie, 1977; Foxman, Tansuhaj, & Ekstrom, 1989) (Foxman, Tansuhaj, & Ekstrom, 1989). Therefore, this variable was tested here.
H1-7: Relative influence of children in the purchase decisions shall be higher among those children who accompany their parents in the purchases.
Purchasing independence aims to identify the buying unit for the purchase: is it the parent (either / both), the parent-child dyad, the child alone or some other family member(s). Purchasing independence was captured using a nominal scale.

RESEARCH DESIGN:

This study is based on a descriptive research design. To test the seven proposed hypothesis, a quantitative approach was used by conducting a quantitative questionnaire-based family survey using a structured non-disguised closed-ended questionnaire. Probing questions were posed to understand the nuances of decision making; as and when required.

Sample Profile and Data Collection:
The choice of respondent for measuring the relative influence of children was a tricky one. For the older children, the popular approach is using the child-mother-father triad (Belch, Belch, & Ceresino, 1985; Foxman, Tansuhaj, & Ekstrom, 1989) or the child-either parent dyad (Foxman & Tansuhaj, 1988; Beatty & Talpade, 1994). For younger children (less than 12 years), either parents are the respondent (Sim & Swinyard, 1987; McNeal & Yeh, 1997) or ethnographic field methods are used (Berey & Pollay, 1968; Brody, Stoneman, Lane, & Sanders, 1981; Williams & Veeck, 1998; Chan & McNeal, 2003). It was deemed fit to quantitatively measure children's influence as perceived by the mother as she would be spending relatively more time (on an average) with the children than the father.
Personal face-to-face Interviews were conducted among families with atleast one child in the age group of 3- 12 years residing in the metropolitan city of Delhi and adjoining areas. In case of more than one child in the specified age group, the older child would be the focus. While non-probability-based judgment and convenience sampling method was used for respondent selection, care was taken to ensure that different age groups and gender groups (of children) were populated in the sample. 300 families were contacted for the study; with a response rate of 75%. Among the 225 children in the purview for the mother's survey, 60% were tweenagers (8 – 12 years); rest being in the 3 – 7 years age bracket. There was an almost equal representation of boys (56%) and girls (44%) in the sample. The Questionnaire comprised structured and closed-ended questions and the response categories were mutually exclusive. The questionnaire was validated for its face and content validity and was later pilot-tested to check for discrepancies.

FINDINGS:

To explore the variation in the relative influence of children across parents' products, children's products and household products and across select variables (product knowledge, usage, interest, age, gender and purchasing independence), descriptive statistics were generated and analysed. Results have been presented in this section.

H1-1: Relative influence of children and type of product
Based on the mean scores of relative influence of children, products were categorized into three broad

decision categories: Children dominant (high mean scores i.e. 3-5), Equal participation (mean scores in mid-range i.e. 2-3) and Parents' dominant (low mean scores i.e. upto 2); presented in the table below:

Table 1: Analysis of Categorisation of Products (based on mean scores of relative influence of children)

Mean Scores (N = 225)		
Upto 2	**2 – 3**	**3 – 5**
Parents' dominant	**Equal participation**	**Children dominant**
Furniture	PC/Laptop	Aerated drinks
Furnishings	Magazine subscription	Non-aerated drinks
Grocery	Play station	CDs
Clothing for parent	I-pod	Watch
Deodorant	Shampoo for child	Bicycle/Tricycle
Nail polish	Cell phone	Stationery
Toothpaste	Automobile	Clothing
Shampoo for parent		Fast food
		Biscuits

Source: own preparation for this research

It may be noteworthy that many products believed to fall in the parents' domain seem to have spilled over into other decision categories. A description of these decision categories shall elaborate this point:

Parents' dominant category:
Products prone to low influence of children are either those meant for parents' self-consumption (Deodorant, Nail polish, Clothing, Shampoo and Toothpaste) or those meant for household consumption (Grocery, Furniture and Furnishings). Informal probing revealed that children do state their opinion on the aesthetic decisions such as colour, pattern etc. Since the perceived risk of a wrong decision is quite high, children are perhaps not allowed to participate in the purchase decision making; corroborating Theory of Perceived Risk (Hawkins, Best, Coney, & Mookherjee, 2007) and previous findings on adolescents (Belch, Belch, & Ceresino, 1985; Sim & Swinyard, 1987; Foxman & Tansuhaj, 1988; Beatty & Talpade, 1994).

Equal participation category:
Mid-range influence ratings indicate that both children and parents play a participatory role in purchase decisions. Products in this influence domain are an interesting combination of parents' products (Cell phone and Automobile), family products (PC/Laptop) and children's products (I pod, Play station, Shampoo and Magazine subscription); most of these being high on financial risk. Informal probing also revealed how important decisions on brand, model, specifications and colour, were taken by parents in consultation with the kids. Kids are actively involved and not passive participators. The results validate previous findings on adolescents for these products (Belch, Belch, & Ceresino, 1985; Sim & Swinyard, 1987; Foxman & Tansuhaj, 1988; Foxman, Tansuhaj, & Ekstrom, 1989; Beatty & Talpade, 1994).

Children dominant category:
High influence ratings are indicative that children influence these purchase decisions; ranging from small ticket items (Biscuits and Stationery) to high-involvement products (Clothing, Bicycle, CDs, Watch) and even products like aerated and non-aerated drinks and fast food); where one would have expected high 'gate-keeping' by parents. Informal probing revealed that the mandate by children, is clearly 'my way or the highway'. The results corroborate earlier researches on adolescents (Sim & Swinyard, 1987; Foxman & Tansuhaj, 1988; Beatty & Talpade, 1994).
There are clear indications of a democratised scenario with a diverse set of products falling in the gamut of equal participation by both parents and children.
Results are suggestive that children's influence varies by products; hence supporting the hypothesis H1-1.

H1-2 to H1-7: Relative influence of children and Product Importance, Product Knowledge, Usage, Age, Gender and Purchasing Independence

These associations were assessed with a series of One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Pearson's Coefficient of Correlation (by way of bivariate analysis); results have been presented in this section.

Relative Influence of Children and Product Importance:
ANOVA and Pearson Correlation results indicated a significant, strong and positive relationship between product importance and relative influence across almost all products; with $p<0.01$, leading to accepting the hypothesis (H1-2). Informal probing revealed that children have consumer-like interests, they being very high for children's own-use products and very low for household products. Interest levels vary with gender for some products; girls being interested in mother's clothing, cosmetics and boys being interested in gadgets such as PC/Laptop, Cell phone, Automobile etc. Results corroborate earlier researches on adolescents (Sim & Swinyard, 1987; Foxman & Tansuhaj, 1988; Beatty & Talpade, 1994).
In conclusion, similar to adolescents, even the 3 - 12 year olds demonstrate consumer-like interests and preferences, which is related to their influence in the purchase decision.

Relative Influence of Children and Product Knowledge:
ANOVA and Pearson Correlation results indicated a significant, strong and a positive relationship between product knowledge and relative influence across almost all products; with $p<0.01$, stronger for equal participation products (Cell phone, Automobile, I pod, Play station and PC/Laptop), leading to accepting the hypothesis (H1-3). Informal probing revealed that for parents' personal products and family-use products, kids provide inputs on aesthetics, overall appeal, latest trends but due to low awareness and interest, their influence is not considerable. For equal participation products such as PC/Laptop, Cell phone and Automobile, kids are active in providing key inputs on brands, models and features, accessories etc.; especially boys and older kids. For children's products, children display very high awareness. Results substantiate previous researches on adolescents (Foxman, Tansuhaj, & Ekstrom, 1989; Beatty & Talpade, 1994). To conclude, children possess consumer-like knowledge and skills which is related to their influence in purchase decisions.

Relative Influence of Children and Product Usage:
ANOVA and Pearson Correlation results indicate a significant, strong and a positive relationship between product usage and relative influence across most products; with $p<0.01$, stronger for parents' products (Shampoo, Nail polish, Deodorant and Clothing) and some participatory products (I pod, Play station, Magazine subscription, Cell phone and PC/Laptop), leading to accepting the hypothesis (H1-4). Probing revealed that children are liberally using PC/Laptop and Cell phone possibly for gaming, internet surfing, making pictures, videos, music etc. Results substantiate previous findings on adolescents (Foxman & Tansuhaj, 1988; Beatty & Talpade, 1994). In conclusion, children especially the older lot, are more influential for those family products and parent's products that they use.

Relative Influence of Children and Age:
ANOVA and Pearson Correlation results indicate a significant, strong and a positive relationship between age of children and relative influence across majority products; with $p<0.01$; it being stronger for the high involvement products such as Cell phone, Watch, Play station, Magazine subscription, CDs and PC/Laptop, leading to accepting the hypothesis (H1-5). As is evident, influence exerted by children increases with their age hence supporting previous research findings on adolescents (Moschis & Churchill Jr., 1979; Churchill, 1979; Sim & Swinyard, 1987; Williams & Veeck, 1998).

Relative Influence of Children and Gender:
ANOVA and Pearson Correlation results indicate a significant and strong relationship between gender of children and relative influence; though for limited products such as Cell phone, Automobile, Bicycle, Watch, CDs, I pod, Play station, PC/Laptop and Aerated and Non-aerated drinks, with a $p<0.05$ and positive correlation implying that the high influence is attributed to boys (except Nail polish). This led to partially accepting the hypothesis (H1-6). Informally it was observed that girls tended to influence the product-aesthetics (colour, model etc.) while boys tended to influence the brand, specifications, etc. No such patterns were observed in case of children's products. Influence exerted by children varies with their gender albeit for few products. For rest products (mostly children's own-use products), the hypothesis (H1-6) is rejected. Hence, gender identity seems to be prominent in this age with influence varying with gender for products where children are not primary consumers.

Relative Influence of Children and Purchasing Independence:

ANOVA and Pearson Correlation results indicate a significant, strong and positive relationship between purchasing independence and relative influence across almost all products; with $p<0.01$ This led to partially accepting the hypothesis (H1-7). Informal probing revealed that children like to accompany parents in the purchase of products in the participatory domain (Cell phone, Automobile, PC / Laptop), some others in the parents' domain where kids may have interest (Deodorant, Nail polish, select Groceries) and very obviously in case of high-involvement children's purchases (Clothes, I pod, Watch etc.) The results corroborate previous research findings on adolescents (Szybillo & Sosanie, 1977; Foxman, Tansuhaj, & Ekstrom, 1989). In conclusion, barring some products, the trend is moving from an 'Adult only' role structure towards 'Adult with Child' or 'Complete family' role structure. The results are summarized in the tables below.

Table 2: Relative Influence of Children and Product Importance, Knowledge and Usage

	Relative Influence of Children and Product Importance		Relative Influence of Children and Product Knowledge		Relative Influence of Children and Product Usage	
Products	**ANOVA F stat. (p value)**	**Correlation Coeff. (p value)**	**ANOVA F stat. (p value)**	**Correlation Coeff. (p value)**	**ANOVA F stat. (p value)**	**Correlation Coeff. (p value)**
Shampoo with parent	13.233 (.000)	0.414 (.000)	9.309 (.000)	0.379 (.000)	12.075 (.000)	0.428 (.000)
Toothpaste for parent	8.185 (.000)	0.354 (.000)	9.855 (.000)	0.377 (.000)	5.136 (.000)	0.300 (.000)
Nail polish	12.791 (.000)	0.398 (.000)	10.330 (.000)	0.397 (.000)	11.391 (.000)	0.414 (.000)
Deodorant	11.152 (.000)	0.361 (.000)	13.488 (.000)	0.416 (.000)	26.354 (.000)	0.605 (.000)
Clothing	8.559 (.000)	0.344 (.000)	11.513 (.000)	0.383 (.000)	8.979 (.000)	0.404 (.000)
Cell phone	13.170 (.000)	0.430 (.000)	9.743 (.000)	0.360 (.000)	15.342 (.000)	0.469 (.000)
Automobile	7.665 (.000)	0.313 (.000)	8.309 (.000)	0.353 (.000)	4.808 (.000)	0.312 (.000)
Shampoo for child	9.055 (.000)	0.351 (.000)	5.839 (.000)	0.287 (.000)	3.881 (.002)	0.220 (.001)
Biscuits	4.198 (.003)	0.192 (.004)	2.113 (.008)	.176^	.580^	.225^
Fast food	2.213 (.069)*	0.193 (.004)	4.267 (.002)	0.190 (.005)	4.614 (.001)	0.288 (.000)
Stationery	7.042 (.000)	0.296 (.000)	3.224 (.014)**	0.233 (.000)	.524^	.161^
Clothing for child	12.519 (.000)	0.417 (.000)	8.978 (.000)	0.357 (.000)	.458^	.855^
Bicycle	7.188 (.000)	0.331 (.000)	6.129 (.000)	0.318 (.000)	.217^	.188^
Watch	8.781 (.000)	0.321 (.000)	8.667 (.000)	0.347 (.000)	.286^	0.162 (.017) **
I pod	9.187 (.000)	0.368 (.000)	9.477 (.000)	0.379 (.000)	9.777 (.000)	0.413 (.000)
Play station	4.190 (.003)	0.263 (.000)	6.574 (.000)	0.334 (.000)	8.463 (.000)	0.402 (.000)
Magazine Subscription	3.024 (.019)**	0.221 (.000)	4.461 (.002)	0.269 (.000)	7.441 (.000)	0.342 (.000)
CDs	4.766 (.001)	0.247 (.000)	3.046 (.018)**	0.225 (.001)	3.630 (.004)	0.260 (.000)
Aerated drinks	2.448 (.047)**	0.196 (.004)	.269^	.191^	5.485 (.000)	0.332 (.000)
Non-aerated drinks	3.789 (.005)	0.246 (.000)	.165^	.136^	5.333 (.000)	0.283 (.000)
Grocery	6.814 (.000)	0.304 (.000)	4.088 (.003)	0.262 (.000)	2.009 (.007)	0.147 (.032)**
Furnishings	12.680 (.000)	0.381 (.000)	5.062 (.001)	0.274 (.000)	3.420 (.005)	0.242 (.000)
Furniture	12.521 (.000)	0.361 (.000)	5.754 (.000)	0.310 (.000)	3.211 (.008)	0.197 (.003)
PC/Laptop	16.604 (.000)	0.435 (.000)	19.368 (.000)	0.514 (.000)	17.057 (.000)	0.516 (.000)

^*Test* insignificant, *Test significant at $p<0.10$, ** Test significant at $p<0.05$

For all others ANOVA test and Coefficient of Correlation significant at $p<0.01$

Source: own preparation for this research

Table 3: Relative Influence of Children and Children's Age, Gender and Purchasing Independence

	Relative Influence of Children And Age		Relative Influence of Children and Gender		Relative Influence of Children and Purchasing Independence	
Products	**ANOVA F stat. (p value)**	**Correlation Coeff. (p value)**	**ANOVA F stat. (p value)**	**Correlation Coeff. (p value)**	**ANOVA F stat. (p value)**	**Correlation Coeff. (p value)**
Shampoo with parent	5.150 (.007)	0.209 (.002)	.204^	.204^	26.497 (.000)	0.441 (.000)
Toothpaste for parent	5.656 (.004)	0.212 (.002)	.562^	.562^	26.145 (.000)	0.493 (.000)
Nail polish	4.136 (.017)	0.184 (.006)	11.710 (.001)	-0.226 (.001)	26.797 (.000)	0.458 (.000)
Deodorant	8.509 (.000)	0.269 (.000)	.682^	.682^	44.278 (.000)	0.550 (.000)
Clothing	5.378 (.005)	0.216 (.001)	.641^	.641	26.610 (.000)	0.429 (.000)
Cell phone	14.799 (.000)	0.344 (.000)	8.339 (.004)	0.192 (.004)	25.575 (.000)	0.463 (.000)
Automobile	8.853 (.000)	0.274 (.000)	7.074 (.008)	0.177 (.008)	29.261 (.000)	0.489 (.000)
Shampoo for child	7.449 (.001)	0.245 (.000)	.332^	.332^	14.869 (.000)	0.345 (.000)
Biscuits	3.172 (.044)**	0.153 (.024)**	.282^	.282^	6.852 (.000)	.274^
Fast food	10.902 (.000)	0.302 (.000)	.188^	.188^	15.529 (.000)	.176^
Stationery	9.888 (.000)	0.289 (.000)	.150^	.150^	32.932 (.000)	0.270 (.000)
Clothing for child	8.232 (.000)	0.254 (.000)	.304^	.304^	13.931 (.000)	0.307 (.000)
Bicycle	10.430 (.000)	0.281 (.000)	6.739 (.010)	0.174 (.010)**	9.043 (.000)	0.232 (.001)
Watch	22.057 (.000)	0.407 (.000)	6.011 (.015)**	0.165 (.015)**	21.201 (.000)	0.409 (.000)
I pod	15.126 (.000)	0.35 (.000)	5.431 (.021)**	0.161 (.021)**	15.856 (.000)	0.380 (.000)
Play station	16.780 (.000)	0.374 (.000)	5.111 (.025)**	0.156 (.025)**	11.350 (.000)	0.327 (.000)
Magazine Subscription	13.892 (.000)	0.342 (.000)	.365^	.365^	11.801 (.000)	0.319 (.000)
CDs	16.722 (.000)	0.365 (.000)	4.860 (.029)**	0.148 (.029)**	18.279 (.000)	0.257 (.000)
Aerated drinks	6.717 (.001)	0.242 (.000)	5.395 (.021)**	0.156 (.021)**	17.800 (.000)	0.215 (.002)
Non-aerated drinks	4.799 (.009)	0.206 (.002)	3.194 (.075)*	0.121 (.075)**	8.658 (.000)	0.182 (.008)
Grocery	2.969 (.054)*	0.158 (.021)**	3.873 (.050)**	0.134 (.050)	16.840 (.000)	0.314 (.000)
Furnishings	4.586 (.011)	0.202 (.003)	.341^	.341^	22.476 (.000)	0.407 (.000)
Furniture	4.561 (.011)	0.202 (.003)	.444^	.444^	25.409 (.000)	0.495 (.000)
PC/Laptop	18.539 (.000)	0.353 (.000)	9.301 (.003)	0.204 (.003)	37.367 (.000)	0.579 (.000)

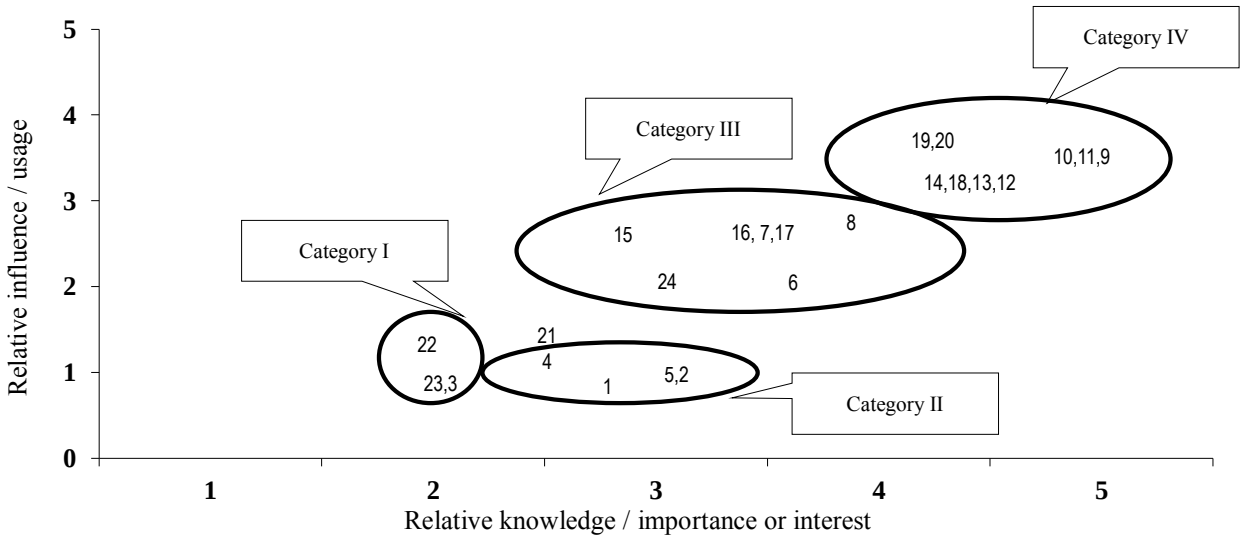
^Test insignificant, *Test significant at p<0.10, ** Test significant at p<0.05
For all others ANOVA test and Coefficient of Correlation significant at p<0.01
Source: own preparation for this research

DISCUSSION:

Categorisation of Products into Decision Categories:

In the past, various researchers (Davis & Rigaux, 1974; Foxman & Tansuhaj, 1988) have categorised products into decision categories on the basis of influence pattern and other variables such as usage, knowledge etc. Similar methods were used here. Results from this study indicate that relative influence has the strongest relationship with product knowledge, hence this variable has been chosen over others. Mean score ratings of Relative Influence and Product Knowledge for each product were plotted along the two axes and on the basis of their plotted positions, products were grouped into four decision categories. Results are presented in the figure below.

Figure 1: Graphical Categorisation of Products into Decision Categories



Source: own preparation for this research

*Code	Product	*Code	Product	*Code	Product	*Code	Product
1	Shampoo for parent	7	Automobile	13	Bicycle	19	Aerated drinks
2	Toothpaste for parent	8	Shampoo for child	14	Watch	20	Non-aerated drinks
3	Nail polish	9	Biscuits	15	I pod	21	Grocery
4	Deodorant	10	Fast food	16	Play station	22	Furnishings
5	Clothing for parent	11	Stationery	17	Magazine subscription	23	Furniture
6	Cell phone	12	Clothing for child	18	CDs	24	PC/Laptop

It may be recalled that the categorization from Hypothesis 1; based on a single variable i.e. influence ratings led to the creation of three decision categories. This categorization is an improvisation as it is based on two variables viz. influence and product knowledge and has led to the creation of four decision categories; these are (1) husband / wife dominant (2) children dominant (3) couple dominant and (4) participatory. While the children dominant and equal participation decision categories have remained intact, the parents' dominant decision category has undergone a metamorphosis as two distinct groups have emerged from here – products that are husband / wife dominant (single decision maker) and products that are couple dominant (multiple decision makers).

The second crucial revelation is that many products which were in the husband / wife domain (based on children's influence) have progressed to the participatory domain and many others in the participatory

domain have indeed progressed to the children's sole domain. A detailed description and the marketing implication of these decision categories, is presented in the next section.

CONCLUSION:

1. **Couple dominant Decision Category:**
Characterised by both the husband and wife being joint decision makers for products in this decision category; mainly household products such as furniture, furnishings, grocery. For these products, children contribute marginally in the purchase decision making by giving occasional inputs; influence is minimal probably on account of their low interest or knowledge about the product. For products in this decision category, final decision-making rests with both the parents and children do not emerge as a target customer.
2. **Husband / Wife dominant Decision Category:**
Characterised by either the husband or the wife being sole decision makers for products in this domain; these are personal-use products of the husband/wife such as shampoo, deodorant, nailpolish, toothpaste etc. It distinguishes itself from the previous one on account of children being knowledgeable, information carriers, fiercely interested, enthusiastic and participative. Their overall influence in purchase decision making is still low; perhaps due to a high degree of perceived risk associated with these purchases. With occasional inputs from children; especially the older lot, the final decision-making is still out of the children's domain.
3. **Children dominant Decision Category:**
Characterised by children being primary decision makers for products in this domain; basically products where children are primary consumers such as Biscuits, Stationery, CDs, Watch, Bicycle, Clothing etc.; also includes some where one would have expected gate-keeping by parents. Reasons could be high knowledge, interest levels and usage among children. Informal probing reveals that children emerging as 'strong decision makers' seems to be a pure play of 'brat power'. However, the prominent buying unit is still the parent-child dyad hence this overwhelming influence perception may somehow be discounted for the high involvement products (Clothing, Watch, CD)
4. **Participatory Decision Category:**
Characterised by both parents and children being joint decision makers for products in this domain; such as Cell phone, Automobile, PC/Laptop, I pod, Play station, Children's Magazines, Children's Shampoo etc. This is one of the most intriguing decision categories with equal participation of children and parents; rather surprising considering these are important high-involvement rational decisions. Informal probing reveals that gender distinction is most profound in this decision category with boys being more participative in the objective and rational aspects while girls being more participative in the expressive aspects. Immense knowledge levels bundled with a high interest, high accessibility, usage and proactive accompanying in purchases - the older boys are emerging as self-proclaimed information providers, key users and decision makers for products in this decision category.

Implications for Marketers and Researchers:
Trying to influence the individual consumer without their family will no longer be an effective strategy. A well-crafted marketing program will need to acknowledge that children (and not just adolescents) are not just influencers but consultants to parents in the purchase of most products entering the household. Their expanding sphere of influence across a diverse range of products is evidence that there is a clear departure from the traditional mindset of children being the target audience for merely their self-consumption products. It is better to think of families as consensus-seeking groups where parents are no longer gatekeepers; they arbitrate but also consider children's opinions. The era of pester power is giving way to families being democracies and children playing the role of active participators. It is therefore vital for marketers wishing to penetrate family markets to understand the influence orientation of family members for the product they are offering. While researches in India have already been pointing towards an active involvement of the teenaged children in purchase decision making within a household (Verma & Kapoor, 2003), the current research findings indicate that even the younger lot, especially the tweenagers are found to be immensely aware, vividly interested, proactively participative and influential. In light of the above discussions, marketers need to develop distinct targeting and communication strategies for the four decision categories.

- **Couple dominant Decision Category**: For products in this decision category, marketers need not focus on children as a target segment. Since findings indicate that many children unwillingly accompany

parents in these purchases, it warrantees some relationship-building activities such as creating a children-friendly arena at the retail shop. Communication needs to target only the couple.

- **Husband / Wife dominant Decision Category**: Children are not consumers for these products hence targeting or communicating with them may not yield significant results. However, they may be important future customers (especially the tweenagers) at this age the self-concept of 'who I am' and 'who I would like to be' is developing in children (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2003) and the stage where children idolise and ape their parents as parents are models of observational learning (McNeal, 1992). If the product and brand have an inter-generational influence, the legacy would naturally be carried on; though advertising and promotional messages need to communicate directly with the particular spouse.
- **Children dominant Decision Category**: Children are primary consumers hence the obvious target segment with no exceptions by age; though the buying unit is still the parent-child dyad, apparently the 'gatekeeper effect' (Berey & Pollay, 1968), especially for high involvement children's products such as Bicycle, Watch, Clothing and CDs. So while children may be targeted, addressing the parents' perceptions shall also be of crucial relevance. Marketers would need to focus on the credibility of information, the persuasive ability of the communication and the credibility of the promotional stimulus.
- **Complete family or Participatory Decision Category**: Since children, especially the tweenagers have emerged as equal participators in these purchases who are proactively accompanying the parents in these purchases, they emerge as a key target. The communication strategy will need to be 'inclusive' – targeting the entire family with child-centric promotions for boys and girls such as free gaming consoles, free gaming / music / movie CDs and movie tickets of popular children's movies, child-centric applications on cell phones etc.

While a well-crafted, appropriately targeted and effective communication and promotion strategy may not be a satisfier by itself but the reverse may prove to be an apparent dissatisfier (Hertzberg, 1959).

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