

ROLE OF FAMILY IN CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION OF CHILDREN: A REVIEW

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Abstract: In today's busy world, parents spend less time with their children and more so, changes taking place in the socio-cultural environment are allowing children to become more involved in the decision-making process. This is because of Cognitive and social development of children in understanding and performing consumer role. Various factors are involved in this change of consumer behaviour of children such as media, peers, family etc. These factors are responsible for the children to be socialised as consumers and known as consumer socialisation agents. Hence, the objective of the research is to understand the influence of family on consumer socialization of children. Extensive literature has been done to conduct this research.

Keywords: consumer socialization, children, India, family decision making

1. Introduction

With the advancement in technology children nowadays are aware of various products and services available in the market. Marketers are also using different strategies to influence them so that they themselves purchase the product or convince their parents to buy that specific product. According to McNeal, 1992 children are termed as future consumers. Children nowadays are participating and also acting as decision makers for the family beyond the section of toys and cereals. This is because of Cognitive and social development of children in understanding and performing consumer role. Various factors are involved in this change of consumer behaviour of children such as media, peers, family etc. These factors are responsible for the children to be socialised as consumers and known as consumer socialisation agents. They will help in developing knowledge, skills and attitudes in children to act as consumer to function in market place. Therefore, it is very important to understand the consumer behaviour of children in India.

2. Consumer Socialization of children:

In 1969 the term socialisation was given by Goslin which refers to the process of acquiring different patterns of cognitions and behaviours (Moschis and

Moore, 1979). Socialisation depends upon three types of variables according to theories given by researchers:

- a) Socialization Agents – Family, Peers, School and Mass Media
- b) Learning processes – Modeling (Observational learning), Reinforcement (Positive/Negative rewards) and Social Interaction.
- c) Demographic Variables Social class, age, gender, birth order etc.

Socialization is defined as "processes by which young people acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace" (Ward, 1974). The Piagetian theory as modified by Berti and Bombi (1988), which recommended that children are active participants in the economic arena. The next model was on the social role model theory (Eagly, 1987), which explains that a child is believed to play various roles such as peer, sibling, as well as consumer in the society. Consumer socialisation is the process which is possessed by young children during their developmental process i.e. from stage of childhood to adult consumers. Children go through three different stages of consumer socialisation: the perceptual stage, the analytical stage, and the reflective stage. Apart from the Socialization agents like the family, peers, Mass media such as internet and TV, schools play a major role in consumer socialisation of children.

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Children play different roles in the marketplace as consumers with their development. Children act as primary consumers in which they use up their own money for consumption and also become future consumers for the marketers as they grow up. Various factors such as peers, schools, parents, TV, etc plays an important role in consumer socialisation of children which ultimately affects the purchase decision of child (Cowell, 2001)

(Sabino, 2003) In today's busy world, parents used to spend less time with their children, so they have started to delegate their responsibilities to other members of family such as children which leads children to participate in family purchase decisions and their own spending. Children are having a remarkable impact on increased number of purchases in product categories such as sneakers, clothes, fast foods, snacks, toys, videogames, cereals, soft drinks and so on which shows extended purchase influence of children on the whole family

(Gaumer & Shah, 2004) This paper examines the consumer socialization of Japanese and American children from a socio-cultural and economic perspective. And encouraged the global marketing concept based on the differences between Japanese and Americans culture. Both of two economies are large and having different consumer culture. Japanese are following collectivist culture whereas Americans are individualistic. Effect of Pester power is more prevalent in US than Japan.

(Bao, Fern, & Sheng, 2007) This paper explained that the parental style is also an important factor which influences the children perception of purchase decisions on the basis of consumer socialisation theory and power relational theory. The integrated model was proposed on the basis of above two theories proved that parental style exerts indirect influence on children in family decisions.

(Kaur & Medury, 2011) The research reveals that the impact of internet on an Indian adolescent in family purchases is significant in case of high technology products and vacation planning in urban households. As children is more informed and connected collects consumption related information from internet and thus further influence family purchase decisions. Early consumer socialisation, single parents, limited time for children, rising media influence, peer pressure all are the factors which are affecting the purchasing behaviour of children.

(Jeevananda & Kumar, 2012) Authors explained

the degree of influence children exerts on parents buying decision. The whole study has been carried out in Bangalore. It is found that degree of influence is less in joint families as compared to nuclear. Different methods are used by children to convince their parents by asking them nicely and by buttering them that you are the best mom/dad in the world. Also it is concluded that high income families has more influence on children. . (Kaur & Medury, 2013) The SEM approach was used to explore the influence of teenagers on family purchase decisions in urban households. Results stated that teenage children significantly influence family decisions. Peers, shopping, internet exerts greater influence on teenagers involvement in purchase related decisions. Most of the studies pertaining to consumer socialisation of children conducted in USA, UK and Canada and is limited in India. Hence, there is a need to conduct the study based on socialisation of children as consumers and the agents involved in it especially, family. Indian society is different from western societies in terms of family composition and structure, norms, values, and behaviour. In India concept of joint family, and shifting of joint families to nuclear families, family interdependence, extended family system, family income etc are the factors which influence the purchase decision of family.

3. Family as a socialization agent:

Family is a primary agent of consumer socialisation. Over the past thirty years most of the research have been done on the family as a consumer socialisation agent. (Carlson & Grossbart, 1994; Hawkins et al. (2001). Most of the earlier research focussed on mutual decisions of husband –wife and child's role was not taken into consideration (Davis, 1974, 1976)

(Wanga, Hsiehb, Yehc, & Tsaid, 2005) Family decision making research on 240 different families regarding the purchase of Group package tours was conducted to extend the epistemology of this area of research. The role of parents and child varies by different stages of decision making. The child shows the maximum amount of influence in the problem recognition stage and is minimum in the stage of information search and final decision. Wives play a more dominant role in the information search stage than husbands. Children in double income families found to be more influential than children brought up in single income families.

Parents use different methods to develop

consumption skills among their children. Instrumental training, modelling and mediation are the three methods which are deliberately used by parents to teach their children so that they will learn appropriate consumer behaviour. Instrumental training is the type of teaching given by parents to children so that they will be able to differentiate between the good and bad product. Modelling is usually linked with observation process to learn consumer behaviour. Mediation refers to the modification of child's understanding or response to marketing stimulus. Family as a primary decision making unit of society plays a considerable role in purchase decision making processes of individuals. The concept of influence refers to "children's active and passive attempts to achieve their parents' permission to participate in family decision making thereby achieving specific results" (Norgaard, Bruns, Haudrup Christensen, & Mikkelsen, 2007). Older studies introduced family purchase decision making as a rational decision by all family members. It was considered a matter of pride having a big and bustling family. Now more and more couples are going for nuclear families with one child. Another important change is related to working status where both parents are working and creating a strong financial base, and it provides one of the best facilities. International schooling, high standard of materials for the day to day activities and costly games, tennis, are becoming normal for the children. These factors are moving the child to the centre of attraction for families. Now children are more often like friends to their parents.

4. Influence of family communication on consumer socialization of children:

Family communication is a process of cognitive communication and interaction between parent and the child. Moore and Moschis (1978) explained that parents teach their children to cultivate the habit of savings for future consumption, usually for big budget items. Family communication processes also arbitrate the influence of other consumer socialisation agents such as television though it is generally situation specific. Family communication plays an important role in socialising children as consumers which was proved by researchers by classifying the families into Laissez faire, protective and consensual by the use of 2D model of family communication. Also, different types of family communication result into the development of consumption related skills and competencies in children.

The effect of different types of family structures

on consumer socialisation has been confirmed by various researchers which results in different types of consumer socialisation. (Moschis et al, 1984; Moschis and Mitchell, 1986; Ozgen, 2003; Kim et al, 2009). (Moschis et al, 1984) found that children use their parents' behaviour to learn consumption related skills and this characteristic was related with the age of children i.e. Parents' influence decreases. (Rose, 1998) The authors examine consumer socialisation method to find family communication patterns and general attitudes toward television advertising among mothers of children three to eight years of age in the United States and Japan. American mothers found to have higher levels of concept oriented communication towards advertising than Japanese mothers who found to have higher levels of socio oriented communication (Rose, Boush, & Shoham, 2002). A cross national study done in USA and Japan proved that family communication processes have significant influence on children's consumption. Socio-oriented consumption (degree to which children are taught to avoid social conflict, defer to their elders, to obey the rules) and concept oriented consumption (degree to which children are free to express their opinions) has been tested in relation to child's income and to consumption dependence. The findings indicate that in US socio-oriented consumption has significant relationship with child's age and decreased child influence in Japan whereas concept oriented communication increases both the direct purchasing power of children and their influence in family purchases. (McNeal K. C., 2003) The research examined how Chinese parents of children aged 6-14 years communicate with their children about consumption. He categorised two dimensional family communications i.e. socio-oriented and concept oriented into four categories—Laissez faire, protective, pluralistic and consensual. Findings indicate that Chinese parents fall in consensual category with both high socio as well as concept oriented communication. Also different demographics of parents show that higher education levels of parents and families with higher income follow concept oriented communication. (Hsieh, Chiu, & Lin, 2006) The research conducted in Taiwan on parents and children demonstrates that parents influence the brand attitudes of children and these influences vary with the communication structures between child and the parent. Fathers who play a role of gatekeeper in the family follow socio-oriented communication by maintaining strict rules or regulations at home and influence children's perceptions of specific brands whereas mothers also influence children's brand attitude.

with concept oriented communication. (Flurry, 2007) The research on 1463 American families was carried to identify the changing role of children in family decision-making. Changing family structure and type of product are the major reasons for increased influence of child in family purchase decision making. Resource theory suggests that the greater the comparative resources of children, the more likely children will exert influence in purchase decisions. As family income and educational levels of the parents has increased which led the children to participate in the search for and purchasing decision of family. Parents with greater financial and educational level involve their children to participate and children with greater own Income were found to exert greater influence in the suggestion to purchase family products.

(Al-Zu'bi, Crowther, & Worsdale, 2008) A study on Jordanian fathers identified the communication structures and patterns and concluded that they implement concept-oriented communication and this type of communication boosts children confidence, self development and evaluation, encourages children to develop consumption related skills, competences and also believes in children decision to buy certain products for the family use which implies that Jordanian children have an influence on their family decision making. (Thakur & Khatri, 2008) A cross cultural investigation was done to study the differences in parenting styles of American and Indian parents. This type of study determined the influence of children on the different levels of buying process and the results indicate that no significant difference exists in two cultures on the basis of creating interest, desire and final decision of buying packaged food products. But the difference lies in the influential behaviour of kids on family buying decision. American children's influence was lower as compared to Indian children as parental indulgence is more in case of Indian culture

Family environment was found to be an important indicator of transfer of food learning between parent and children (Ayadi and Bree, 2010). (Ramzy, Ogden, Ogden, & Zakaria, 2012) The study examined US and Egyptian families and explores the perceptions of parents towards children influence on durable, on durable and child related products on purchase decisions. Various factors such as type of products, age of child, gender of parent and communication style of parent are taken into consideration to know this influence. Egyptians are more family oriented than US

families, hence children in Egyptian families actively participate in family decision making. Very little input has been taken from children in purchase decision of durable goods by parents and maximum in case of child related goods.

5. Role of mother in consumer socialization of children

(Ahuja & Stinson, 1993) This exploratory study examined the effect of specific single mother related characteristics on the influence children have in family decision making. Various demographic characteristics of mother such as age, education, employment, income, size of household, no. of years of separation, age and sex of oldest child etc had been used to predict the influence of children in single headed parent family. Mother's income and size of household had positive effects on children influence for cleaning products and snack products respectively. Age of oldest child shows direct relationship whereas mother's education had inverse relationship with the children's influence in family decision making

A research done by Rose, Bush and Kahle (1998 in US and Japan concluded that consensual and pluralistic mothers interact more with the children regarding TV ads than laissez faire mothers. Among all family members mother has been identified as an important socialization agent. (Ozgen, 2003; Carlson et al, 1988; Neeley and Coffey, 2007) Different parenting style of mother leads to the difference in communication with the children regarding money utilization, media exposure, views on advertising (Carlson et al, 1988; Carlson et al, 1992; Neeley and Coffey, 2007).

The research indicate that in US socio-oriented consumption has significant relationship with child's age and decreased child influence in Japan whereas concept oriented communication increases both the direct purchasing power of children and their influence in family purchases. They found that American mothers tend to be more concept-oriented in their communication with their children than Japanese mothers (Dalakas, 2003)

(Sharma & Sonwaney, 2014) concluded that mother employment status exerts more influence on children in the purchase decision making. Also findings proved that gender would not have significant influence on children during purchase as girls and boys in urban India are treated equally now. The effect is only on certain areas and type of product, stage of purchase decision exercise moderating effect

on the buying decisions. Social status and economic status of mother was also found to have a direct influence on consumer socialization of children.

6. Implications:

The type of family, family structure, family size, parenting style, family communication all are identified as family related variables because of which family is considered as essential socialisation agent. Family communication studies has been done by various authors to throw light upon the socio oriented/ concept oriented styles so as to distinguish between different consumer socialisation of children. The role of mother in socialising children as consumers has been considered important among other family members but no role of father has been found. Research on Peer influence and mass media as socialising agents has been explained widely but study on effect of siblings on children whom with children spend their childhood is limited.

Other factors which affect the consumer socialization of children are socio economic status, family income gender of child, psychology of parents, demographics of parents etc. Decisions. Most of the studies pertaining to consumer socialisation of children conducted in USA, UK and Canada and is limited in India. Indian society is different from western societies in terms of family composition and structure, norms, values, and behaviour. The nuclear families are on the rise and joint families on the decline. Indian markets cannot be predicted on the basis of research done in the west. Hence, there is a need to conduct the in depth study based on socialisation of children as consumers and the agents involved in it especially, family agent in India.

Based on the literature review some important research areas for influence of family on

Consumer socialization of children may be:

- a) Does the siblings have an effect on consumer socialization of children?
- b) Role of father in consumer socialisation of children can be explored.
- c) Role of grandparents in consumer socialization of children can be explored.
- d) Impact of culture on consumer socialisation of children
- e) Does digital marketing strategies have an effect on consumer socialisation of children?
- f) Impact of schools in the socialization process of children has still not received its due attention in the research arena.

7. Managerial implications

Marketers can start consumer education programmes in the school so as to target their future consumers. The understanding of young consumers helped them to gain insights about their consumer behaviour so as to match the rapidity of change within media and the world of brands. Hence it is important to understand the means through which children adjusts within world of consumption. It will help marketer to design the strategy to market their goods and services to tap the market more efficiently. Children and young people influence their parents purchasing is a matter of fact as is the increasing purchasing power of these young people themselves.

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