

Measurements of Children Buying Roles in Family Decision-making Process for Consumer Durables

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Abstract

This article examines children's participation and their involvement in five different buying roles (as defined by Philip Kotler, viz, initiator, influencer, decider, buyer and user) in the family decision making process while purchasing 6 different consumer durable products. A survey was carried out on 727 families on all the children between the age group of 6-14 years. Based on the survey, findings indicate that children exercise all the roles, particularly for the products relevant to them (like mobile phone, DVD players and computer/laptop for personal use). Children also participate in purchase of other products meant for other family use especially during initiation, influence and decision making stages. Hence the study outcomes have implications on managerial decision-making as it helps marketers to take in to account children's high preference for the purchase of different consumer durable products when devising an appropriate targeted marketing strategy in order to increase their involvement.

Keywords: Children, Buying roles, Consumer durables, Implications, Decision-making

Introduction

The understanding of family decision-making process is necessary as it defines the progression of different roles in the process of making decisions for buying a particular product. The knowledge about the measurements of buying roles in family decision-making process is obligatory for the development of effective marketing strategies. Researches have revealed that some family members may be involved in various roles in the purchase of high-value items, such as consumer durables that are used by the entire family. However the involvement in a particular role varies among different family members like husband, wife and children. The participation of children is quite imperative as a result of paradigm shift in Indian family setup under the influence of external factors such as liberalization and media explosion. Further, growing independence of women, development of nuclear families, more convenience-oriented life styles, less number of children per household and many other such factors have also prompted changes in the purchasing process of family decision making. Today children no longer have remained as mere passive observers, but still they display their distinctive purchase roles in the family buying decisions which differ from different product categories (Martin & Bush, 2000). For

some products they are initiator and influencer while as in others they are decider, buyer and even user and they direct the purchase through their parents by “Kidfluence”.

This study on buying behaviour is an attempt to capture the dynamics of children buying roles in family decision-making process for consumer durables. The study is unlike the earlier studies which include children in its scope for understanding their roles in decision-making process with respect to consumer durables. The study was conducted in Delhi and only those children who have played a particular role in the family purchases related to one of six durable products namely, an audio system, a car, a personal computer, a refrigerator, a television and a washing machine were counted as respondents. A structured non-disguised questionnaire was used for data collection, which later was analyzed through SPSS (16Version) and accordingly the inferences were drawn.

Literature Review

There have been several studies on family decision-making. Many of them have only focused on the husband and wife's role where children's role was mistreated, disregarded and abandoned (Veloso et al., 2008; Mary, 2009; Chikweche & Fletcher, 2010). The recognition of husband-wife dyad roles in family purchase process dates back to the 1970s, when first time Davis, (1971) researched on the relative influence of husband and wife's role in the purchase of home furniture in Chicago city and revealed a considerable variability in their role performance. Similar type of results were also reported by the study of Lakshmi, (2011), who explored the relative influence of husband and wife during the three stages of decision making viz, need recognition, information research and the final decision and found a greater tendency for collective decision making during the need recognition stage and individual decision making during the information research and the final decision stage. However Wolgast et al., (1958) in a study on American families and Singh and Kaur (2011) and Khan & Ahuja, (2014) in Indian families revealed a joint decision making by husband and wife in economic matters and implicit division of accountability, growing more obvious with increasing age and the length of the marriage. For example husband played a main role in the purchase of car and wife in the purchase of house related items. The revolutionary research work of Blood & Wolfe (1960) revealed husbands dominance in family purchase decisions as a result of cultural norms of the society, more so with husband's income, education and the occupation. Similar results were revealed by the study of Anilkumar & Jesly, (2014) in context to Indian scenario. Mowen (1993) and Virmani, (2013) reported variability in multiple roles performed by different members of the family. The performance of a particular role depends on the product category and the

situation, and it is very possible that same person to play all the roles or for many members to be involved at various stages.

Several other studies indicated the growing influence of children on their parents' purchase behaviour in a wide variety of product ranges, but it took quite a long time for consumer decision making to recognize children as chief actors in family purchase decisions. This important recognition of children's roles in family purchase decisions caught the attention of marketers because, besides being buyers or users for their own products (Calvert, 2008), they have an important role as initiator, influencer or decider over family purchases too (Caruana & Vassalo, 2003; Gaumer & Arnone, 2010; Khan & Ahuja, 2014). Today children are more vocal and autonomous and exert more influence than the previous generations and have emerged as a potential consumer market (Gupta & Verma, 2000; Shoham & Dalakas, 2005; Kaur & Singh, 2006; Rathnakar, 2012). The role children play in family purchase decisions has become a compulsory field of study, (Kozak, 2010) as marketers pay growing attention to the persuasion power of children (Shoham & Dalaksas, 2003; Khan & Ahuja, 2014). However, the problem is the lack of research on children's involvement in variant roles in buying process in Indian context and the prominent factors that affect their influence. Hence, the main the main aim of this article is to study, confirm and validate the children's buying roles in family decision-making process for consumer durables.

Research Methodology

The major contribution to the present research is the primary data. The data was collected using self-administered questionnaires distributed to children among families from different localities of Delhi (India) between March and November 2013. The questionnaires were personally administered and any clarification on the research topic or difficulty in understanding the questions were attended on site that ensured 100% response rate. Children in families were examined for their involvement in to five different buying roles (as defined by Philip Kotler, viz, initiator, influencer, decider, buyer and user) in the purchase of a durable product (Kotler & Keller, 2012). The questionnaire used for this survey was divided into three main parts: Part A, Part B and Part C and contained questions in a chronological order. Part A was used to identify children with the buying roles, Part B was addressed to the children who had really played that role in the purchase of a specific product, and the Part C of the questionnaire addressed the questions on the personal details of the children. The responses were mostly recorded on 5-point Likert scale ranging from extremely important (5), somewhat important (4), neither important nor unimportant (3), somewhat unimportant (2) and extremely unimportant (1). Each

questionnaire was printed in both languages: English and Regional language, Hindi. The Hindi side was meant for children, who were not comfortable with English language. The Hindi translation was done by an expert translator having a good knowledge on the subject. An utmost care was taken to translate the English version exactly in Hindi so as to control the response bias resulting from a bilingual questionnaire.

A total of 727 families who had freshly bought one of the six durable products were chosen for the study. Since the study aimed at studying the different roles played by children, the child was considered as the basic sampling unit. While choosing the sample items, care was taken to guarantee that the children chosen from different families represented different demographics. All the children between the age group of 6-14 years among all the 727 families were subjected to study. Majority of the families surveyed had one child, two children and three children each. Thus all those children among all the families were allowed to complete the survey who qualified the given age group. For the purpose of this study, a family was defined as comprising of husband, wife and children. The study employed non-probabilistic convenience sampling because it was only the convenient and fastest way to get their reactions to this hot and controversial topic, owing to the Indian psyche.

The reliability test of the questionnaire showed Chronbach's Alpha larger than 0.7, which proved a high degree of inter correlations among the items that were used to measure the constructs and hence were taken for the final study. The validity of the questionnaire was determined by content validity by asking three experts (i.e., two academicians and one industry expert) from the subject area to examine it and provide the feedback. Changes were incorporated in line with their suggestions and hence final study was conducted.

Data Analysis and Findings

A purchase decision comprises of a series of decisions and children from different families may play different roles at different stages (Blackwell et al., 2006; Srimannareyana,

2009). The various buying roles played by children among different families vary with respect to product type. For some products they perform the role of initiators or influencers while as in others they perform as deciders, buyer and even users. The simple description statistical method (cross tables) and multivariate statistical analysis (Khi-square probe) was used to discover whether substantial difference existed between the variables in a cross tabulation. The main outcomes of the study concerning to different roles is as follows:

The Initiator Role

Kotler et al., (2000) and Tinson & Nancarrow, (2007) defined an initiator as “any member of the family, who first expresses the need of buying a particular product or service”. Quite often the product or service in question might or might not be for an initiator's individual use, but for use by the entire family. Kurnit, (2004) states that the need of buying a product usually remains localized more to one position in family, but if family is more equalitarian then initiation will not be centralized on any particular member and children can even initiate the process of buying a product. However the children's participation in initiation stage remains latent in a family unless it is triggered by some internal and external stimuli that deepen their buying intention. Further, the nature of the product to be purchased also controls the buying behaviour of the children as an initiator. Thus it becomes very important to identify children's role as initiators in buying process and across different product categories.

Examination of the results reveal that 815 children from 727 families participated in the study for their opinion about the role as initiator-member for purchase decisions, with more than one child having their opinion as initiator in some families. Further cross tabulation was done to understand children's estimation regarding the relative importance of the family members along different product categories, so as to recognize their importance as an initiator-member for different product purchase decisions (Table-1).

Table 1. Initiator-Member of the Family

Product Purchased	Father	Mother	Children	Total
Mobile phone	23 (16.55%)	21 (15.00%)	95 (68.33%)	139
Air-Conditioner	58 (42.37%)	28 (20.34%)	51 (37.29%)	137
DVD Players	30 (25.49%)	12 (09.80%)	77 (64.71%)	119
Microwave Ovens	12 (08.33%)	109 (78.33%)	19 (13.33%)	139
Computer/Laptop	21 (15.25%)	37 (27.12%)	79 (57.63%)	137
Kitchen appliances	19 (12.90%)	98 (67.74%)	28 (19.35%)	144
Total	163 (20%)	304 (37.4%)	348 (42.6%)	815 (100%)
Chi Square	189.23/0.00**			

The chi square results reveal a significant difference at $p < 0.01$ among children for their outlook regarding the relative importance of the family members as initiators along different product categories and thus highlighting their own importance as an initiator-member for different product purchases. The descriptive statistics of the results shows that children appeared as the single chief initiator-members for the purchase of mobile phone (68.3%), DVD players (64.7%) and personal computer/laptop (57.6%). Moreover they were found to be vital co-initiators in the purchase of air conditioner (37.2%) as well as microwave ovens (13.3%) and kitchen appliances (19.3%). The father was found to be principal initiator member only for the purchase of air conditioner (42.3%), whereas the mother for microwave ovens (78.3%) and kitchen appliances (67.7%). Thus from the results, it gets very clear that children not only are initiators for the purchase of their personal use products but they also display their role as co-initiators in the wider range of products for the use by the entire family and hence validates the findings of the study results of Sangvika & Pawar, (2012).

The Influencer Role

The influencer is any member of the family, whose views or advice carries some weight in making a final buying decision and thus moves the final decision maker away from his/her choice towards the option suggested by him/her. Influencer-member of the family helps in defining the

product specifications and providing the information for evaluating alternatives and thus spans across information search and evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision-making process. But the influencer member's competence to achieve specific results by influencing the partner's buying behaviour vary depending on the member who is acting as influencer, his/her knowledge about the product and the person whom the influencer confide in assuming the role of the moderator. Today, owing the more equalitarian family setup and openness in communication, children have turned to be more knowledgeable as a result of early socialization and thus have no longer remained as mere passive observers and have turned to be active participants as initiator-members in the family purchase decisions. However the amount of influence exerted by children differs with product type.

Unlike in the case of children's opinion as initiators, the examination of the results reveals that 1087 children from 727 families participated in the study for their opinion about their role as influencer-member for purchase decisions with more than one child having their opinion as influencer in some families. Further, cross tabulation was done to understand children's estimation regarding the relative importance of the family members along different product categories, so as to recognize their importance as an influencer-member for different product purchase decisions (Table-2).

Table 2. Influencer-Member of the Family

Product Purchased	Father	Mother	Children	Total
Mobile phone	51 (27.16%)	56 (29.63%)	81 (43.21%)	188
Air-Conditioner	58 (32.47%)	63 (35.06%)	58 (32.47%)	179
DVD Players	35 (27.27%)	12 (09.09%)	81 (63.64%)	128
Microwave Ovens	65 (31.46%)	63 (30.34%)	79 (38.20%)	207
Computer/Laptop	46 (28.17%)	49 (29.58%)	70 (42.25%)	165
Kitchen appliances	69 (31.58%)	76 (34.74%)	74 (33.68%)	220
Total	325 (29.90%)	318 (29.25%)	444 (40.84%)	1087 (100%)
Chi Square	74.2/0.03*			

The chi square results reveal a significant difference at $p < 0.05$ among children for their outlook regarding the relative importance of the family members as influencers along different product categories and thus highlighting their importance as an influencer-member for different product purchases. The descriptive statistics of the results shows that children appeared as the single chief influencer-members for the purchase of mobile phone (43.2%), DVD players (63.4%), personal computer/laptop (42.5%) and microwave

ovens (38.2%). Moreover they were found to share equal influence as their parents in the purchase of air conditioner (32.4%) and co-influencer in the purchase of kitchen appliances (33.6%). The mother was found the principal influencer member only for the purchase of kitchen appliances (34.7%). Thus from the results, it gets very clear that children acted as chief influencers in the purchase of their personal and family use products as well as co-initiators in the wider range of products for the use by the

entire family and hence validates the findings of the study results of Verma & Kapoor (2003).

The Decider Role

The decider is any member of the family, who makes the buying decision regarding the purchase of a product. Irrespective of whether they execute the purchase themselves or not, they may instruct others to execute. The influencer-member of the family helps in decision-making process by the information collected in the previous stages. Although various members of the family may act as influencers, but it is actually the decider, who finally decides the product to be purchased based on various product dimensions. Today children have undertaken the responsibility as influencer-member of the family for

determining various product purchases and implementing the choice concerning sub-decisions, like whether to buy, how to buy and where to buy. However their responsibility as an influencer-member differs from product type.

From the study results, it gets very clear that 745 children from 727 families participated in the study for their opinion about their role as decider-member for purchase decisions with more than one child having their opinion as decider in some families. Further cross tabulation was done to understand children's estimation regarding the relative importance of the family members along different product categories, so as to recognize their importance as decider-member for different product purchase decisions (Table-3).

Table 3. Decider-Member of the Family

Product Purchased	Father	Mother	Children	Total
Mobile phone	53 (41.09%)	14 (13.18%)	62 (48.06%)	132
Air-Conditioner	108 (88.89%)	11 (09.02%)	06 (04.92%)	125
DVD Players	36 (34.62%)	24 (23.08%)	47 (45.19%)	107
Microwave Ovens	45 (33.90%)	53 (39.55%)	39 (28.81%)	137
Computer/Laptop	37 (32.74%)	22 (19.47%)	57 (50.44%)	116
Kitchen appliances	38 (30.40%)	54 (43.20%)	36 (29.09%)	128
Total	313 (42.99%)	169 (23.6%)	245 (33.5%)	745 (100%)
Chi Square	41.2/0.01*			

The chi square results reveal a significant difference at $p < 0.01$ among children for their view regarding the relative importance of the family members as deciders along different product categories and thus highlighting their importance as a decider-member for different product purchases. The descriptive statistics of the results shows that children appeared as the single chief decider-members for the purchase of mobile phone (48.0%), DVD players (45.1%), and personal computer/laptop (50.4%). The father was found to be principal initiator member only for the purchase of air conditioner (88.89%), whereas the mother for microwave ovens (39.5%) and kitchen appliances (43.2%). Thus from the results, it gets very clear that parents in the Indian family setup are deciders for the household items, while as children are the main deciding members for the purchase of their personal use products only.

The Buyer Role

The buyer is the person in the family, who makes an actual

purchase of a product. Traditionally, in India, most of the family related purchases are made by fathers, as being the manager of the family budget (Sheth, 1974; Stashevsky & Elizur, 2000). But owing to the changes in family structure as a result of westernized culture, different members especially children have turned to be the most active participants as an actual buyer-members of the family for different product purchases. However their influence as a potential buyer varies with respect to different products.

From the study results, it gets very clear that 750 children from 727 families participated in the study for their opinion about their role as buyer-member for purchase decisions with more than one child having their opinion as buyer in some families. Further cross tabulation was done to understand children's estimation regarding the relative importance of the family members along different product categories, so as to recognize their importance as buyer-member for different product purchase decisions (Table-4).

Table 4. Buyer-Member of the Family

Product Purchased	Father	Mother	Children	Total
Mobile phone	74 (56.92%)	14 (32.31%)	42 (10.77%)	130
Air-Conditioner	101 (80.80%)	18 (14.40%)	6 (04.80%)	125
DVD Players	59 (56.19%)	17 (16.19%)	29 (27.62%)	105
Microwave Ovens	74 (54.01%)	44 (32.12%)	19 (13.87%)	137
Computer/Laptop	69 (53.91%)	20 (15.63%)	39 (30.47%)	128
Kitchen appliances	69 (55.20%)	42 (33.60%)	14 (11.20%)	125
Total	446 (59.4%)	183 (24.4%)	121 (16.1%)	750 (100%)
Chi Square	43.1/0.04*			

The chi square results reveal a significant difference at $p < 0.05$ among children for their view regarding the relative importance of the family members as buyers along different product categories and thus highlighting their own importance as a buyer-member for different product purchases. The descriptive statistics of the results shows that father appeared as the single chief buyer-member for the purchase of mobile phone (56.0%), air conditioner (80.8%), DVD players (56.1%), microwave ovens (54.1%), personal computer/laptop (53.9%) and kitchen appliances (55.2%). Thus it seemed to be all father affairs with other members contributing a mere in the buyer's role. However in children dominated products, viz., mobile phone, DVD Players and personal computer/laptop, a relatively higher proportion of children's have acted as co-buyers. Thus from the results, it gets very clear that males in Indian families undoubtedly dominate as buyer-member of the family in any product item.

The User Role

The user is the person in the family, who actually uses or consumes the product and it can be someone other than the buyer. Since several members of a family influence the

purchase decision, the user satisfaction may differ on different grounds and it is possible that the actual user of a product may not necessarily be satisfied with the product. For example, children may be the real users of computer/laptop that has been purchased after the joint influence of various family members. The children may or may not be fully satisfied with the product, which is reflected in their post-purchase behaviour. Different family members are the users for different products; likewise children are the most active participants as an actual user-member for different product purchase. However their influence as a potential user varies with respect to different products.

The study results reveals that 1784 children from 727 families participated in the study for their opinion about their role as user-member for purchase decisions with more than one child having their opinion as user in some families. Further cross tabulation was done to understand children's estimation regarding the relative importance of the family members along different product categories, so as to recognize their importance as user-member for different product purchase decisions (Table-5).

Table 5. User-Member of the Family

Product Purchased	Father	Mother	Children	Total
Mobile phone	49 (15.22%)	81 (25.36%)	191 (59.42%)	321
Air-Conditioner	112 (53.93%)	42 (20.22%)	53 (25.84%)	207
DVD Players	46 (20.83%)	26 (11.46%)	151 (67.71%)	223
Microwave Ovens	65 (15.91%)	207 (50.57%)	137 (33.52%)	409
Computer/Laptop	91 (22.29%)	102 (25.14%)	214 (52.57%)	407
Kitchen appliances	16 (7.45%)	114 (52.13%)	88 (40.43%)	218
Total	379 (21.24%)	502 (28.13%)	904 (50.54%)	1784 (100%)
Chi Square	154.7/0.03*			

The chi square results reveal a significant difference at $p < 0.05$ among children for their view regarding the relative importance of the family members as users along different product categories and thus highlighting their own importance as a user-member for different product purchases. The descriptive statistics of the results shows that father appeared as the single chief user-member for the purchase of mobile phone (59.4%), DVD players (67.7%), Computer/Laptop (52.57). Moreover they were found to be vital co-users in the purchase of air conditioner (25.8%) as well as microwave ovens (33.5%) and kitchen appliances (40.43%). The father was found to be principal user member only for the purchase of air conditioner (53.9%), whereas the mother for microwave ovens (50.5%) and kitchen appliances (52.1%). Thus from the results, it gets very clear that children not only are users for the purchase of their personal use products but they also display their role as co-users in the wider range of products for the use by the entire family and hence validates the findings of the study results of Lackman & Lansa (1993).

Managerial Implications

The findings of this study will have various implications for managerial decision-making as it can help marketers to categorize the family members as per the roles they play for the purchase of different products and then devise an appropriate targeted marketing strategy at these members to arouse a desired response. Likewise it can help marketers to take into account children's high preference for the purchase of different consumer durable products when developing the optimum target market identification. Further it can assist marketers to appeal to children as much as parents because children's involvement with a product category has a significant impact in family decision-making process. Therefore marketers would be able to identify all the products that appeal to children and thereby doing so, they would be in a position to plan more children-friendly marketing strategies making it easier to connect with children and increasing their involvement.

Conclusion

Buying is a difficult and complex process especially when children participate with parents and influence purchase decisions directly. This study clearly acknowledges the rising role of the children in family purchase and consumption process, but their role is bound by the opportunities and limitations of their familial practices and their individual preferences. Children's competencies in manipulating their families purchase decisions are related to their rising sense of individual identity and independence. All in all, results from this research showed that children exhibit different roles in the family decision-making process where the parents ask their opinion when selecting products. In the research results, it is seen that children today have

more personal power, more influence and get more attention from their family as compared to children in the past generations due to the impact of more open family communications and lenient parental style. These transformations have made it possible for children to exercise more buying roles in the family decision-making process for different product categories. The study reveals that children exercise different roles in family decision making process especially in connection with purchases of the products which are exclusively meant for them (for example; mobile phone, DVD players and computer/laptop for personal use). These results were also found by earlier researchers like Norgaard et al., (2007), who discovered that young children influence more in product decisions for which they are the primary consumers and have little influence in those decisions for which their parents or the whole family are the primary consumers. Thus this study favors and confirms the findings of earlier researchers. Further the study revealed that children participation varied across the other product categories which are meant for other family use especially during initiation, influence and decision making stage. These finding correspond with other related studies of McNeal & Yeh, (2003); Norgaard et al., (2007). Therefore from the past research orientation, the present study clearly acknowledges the rising role of the children in family purchase of consumer durables. This important recognition of children in family purchase decisions has caught the attention of marketers because, besides being customers for their own products, they have an important role to play over family purchasing products too. Thus in totality, this study explores the dimensions of children's buying roles among different families; increases the total validity of results, and makes the study of greater use to the marketers and academicians to whom it was proposed/ tailored to be addressed

Limitations and scope for future research

The study findings provide remarkable and new insight into the purchasing behaviors of children; still it bears some limitations and hence supports the need for further research.

The study is restricted to Delhi (India). Children from various other states should also be studied because every state in India is culturally and economically different. Children of various states in India will give a much clearer picture of children's buying roles in family decision-making process for consumer durables. Hence future research in different regions and culture is required. Further the study was conducted on 727 children from different areas of Delhi within a fixed amount of time, i.e., March and November. It is felt that more time should have been put into it, which was not, owing to shortage of time. For this reason a next survey need to be conducted where children can be given appropriate time to concentrate and focus more on the questionnaires. Besides research need also to be conducted

in regard of the various ways children influence their parents purchase decisions and how parents react to their demands, which could be very beneficial from both marketers and academicians point of view.

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