

Involvement of Children in the Family Buying: A Review

Dr. Monica Chaudhary

Asst. Professor,
Humanities & Social Sciences Department
Jaypee Institute of Information Technology
Noida, Uttar Pradesh

Abstract

This paper reviews the literature on my research area “Role of Children in the family buying process. This extensive review attempts to understand the growing role of children in the family buying process. From a mere user, children have grown to influencer and now to a real buyer. With growing purchasing power children's role is very rapidly shifting from influencer to buyer. This conceptual review is very detailed in terms of different methodologies adopted by the researchers. Also this review is deductive in nature where the various factors affecting the child's role in the family buying process are identified.

Key words: Family buying, Role of children, India

Introduction

Children in India constitute 19% of the world's children population. The kids market in India today is estimated as more than \$5 billion. Researchers expressed the fact that children constitute a major consumer market, with direct purchasing power for snacks and sweets, and indirect purchase influence while shopping for expensive items. With such a huge amount of money at stake, there is a need to study kids and especially the way they behave when shopping, the way they influence their parents to shop and also the way they actually go out and buy things themselves.

Objective

This literature review is very important to understand the family buying process. My objectives of this review are

- 1.To identify the various factors affecting the children's role in the purchase decision.
- 2.To analyze the different research methodology adopted by the researchers.

Children's Role in Buying Process

With growing incomes, growing exposure, it is almost impossible to quantify children market size today. Everyone from advertiser to direct seller to marketer is communicating directly with children or through children to their parents. Most of the studies related to the family decision making process are focused upon husband and wife, because they were considered as the primary decision taking authority. But

with growing incomes, nuclear families, less number of children in family, role of children is getting stronger. Today a child aged 5-13 years gets what he wants. Whether it's about his/her clothes, toys or it's about holidays/vacation and even decisions on expensive products like car, children have their full say.

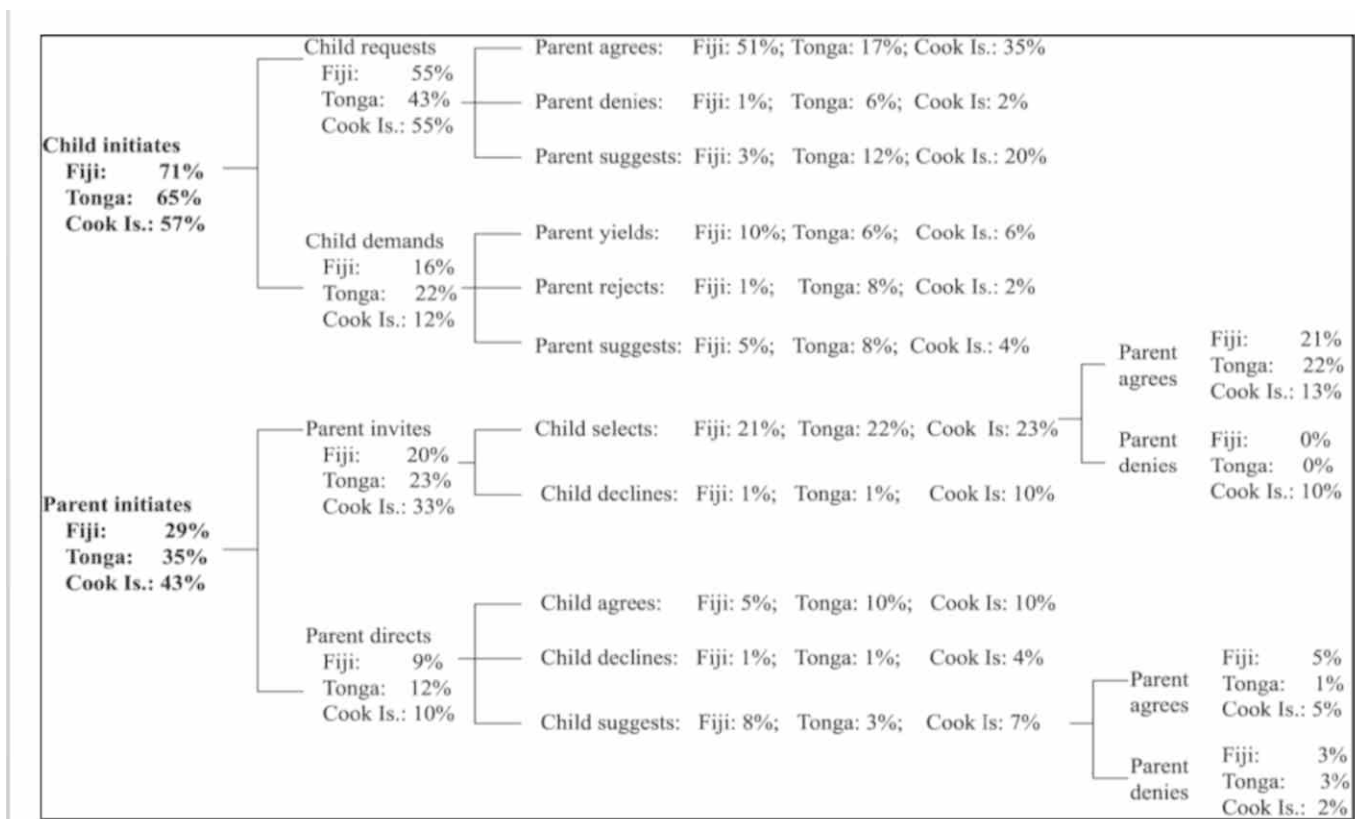
Methodology

In terms of methodology of the reviewed papers, there is lot of similarity. All the five reviewed papers have used survey method for data collection. J.S. Wimalasiri (2004) considered either of the parents as sampling unit and undertook sample of 255 parents from Fiji islands, Tonga and the Cook islands. Very similar to Wimalasiri, Martensen & Gronholdt (2008) conducted survey with 779 Danish parents. The rationale was that very young children have undeveloped cognitive abilities and they are unable to understand the questionnaire. The other three studies were wider in their coverage of survey. These studies consider a family as a sampling unit. So, one child and either both or any one of the parent is included in the sample. Flurry & Veeck

(2009) and Wut & Chou (2009) both considered child and both parents as the sampling unit. Flurry & Veeck (2009) surveyed 819 urban Chinese families, while Wut & Chou (2009) study was based on a survey of 366 family members in Hong Kong. The fifth research paper from Guneri, Yurt, Kaplan & Delen (2009) surveyed 849 families, both from either of parents and children.

As a research instrument, structured questionnaire was used by all the five papers reviewed here. Wimalasiri (2004) used a structured questionnaire to collect data from 104 families in the Fiji Islands, 101 families in the Cook Islands and 98 families in Tonga. The first part of the questionnaire captures the flow chart (table 1) of parent-child interaction to measure who initiates the selection of children's products, what is child's reaction to parent's choice and parent's reaction to child's choice, the tone and mood of response and the final outcome of the process. The second section of Wimalasiri's questionnaire was designed to identify the demonstrated influence tactics: ingratiating tactics, consultation, rational persuasion, upward appeal, exchange tactics, coalition tactics, pressure tactics and inspirational appeal.

Table1: Flow chart of parent-child interaction in purchase decisions



Martensen & Gronholdt (2008) focuses is on 5-13-year-old children. The parent is asked to evaluate whether the child is the initiator (yes or no) as well as the degree of influence. The influence is measured on a four category ordinal scale: decision made entirely by the child; the child influences the decision; parents take the child into account; decision made entirely by parents. The initiation and influence are evaluated for each of three subdecisions: a) suggesting buying the product category; b) choice of brand; and c) choice of model. Evaluation is carried out product category by product category. In total, 14 product categories are selected, that included both durables (e.g., cars, vacations) and non-durables (e.g., toothpaste, soft drinks). The parents were only asked to evaluate recent purchases (within the last three months for non-durables and within the last three years for durables). Researcher estimated the coefficients and p-values (one-tailed test) for significant independent variables for 12 product categories and the three subdecision stages. Since the dependent variable is ordinal, the appropriate statistical technique is Ordinal Regression (OR), and the researcher uses the SPSS OR procedure, or PLUM (Polytomous Universal Model). OR models were developed to investigate the relationship.

Flurry & Veeck (2009) chose cross-sectional survey as the research design of his study. Three elementary schools, and three secondary schools in Yangzhou, People's Republic of China, were selected as the sampling Frame. Qualitative research, including focus groups of parents of school age children (three) and depth interviews with families (ten), was conducted to assist in the refinement of the research questions. For survey, nine schools were provided with 75-100 adult and child questionnaire packets to be evenly distributed among each grade within the school. Recipients were asked to take home the survey packet and return it the next day. Packets contained a questionnaire for the parent, and for the child (fourth grade or older). Paired samples t tests were used to reveal the significant differences between all possible product pairs except movies and toothpaste and

children's shoes, fruits, and cookies. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to determine whether certain factors could explain why variations in children's influence have been observed. The model estimated the effects of four independent variables (i.e., child's age, child's sex, household income, and household type) on five dependent variables, including children's food for personal consumption (i.e., fruit, candy, cookies, and chocolate), children's clothing (i.e., shoes), family food (i.e., meat and vegetables), personal care products for family consumption (i.e., toothpaste and shampoo), and family entertainment (i.e., movies and television).

Wut & Chou (2009) considered only those families in which husband, wife and at least one child were living together. The child had to be at least seven years old (7-29 years old). They justifies the use of purposive sampling as achieving simple random sampling on all Hong Kong families is neither practical nor desirable, where time, manpower and financial resources are restricted. Quota sampling, one type of purposive sampling is adopted. The researcher contacts people attending a pre-organized function in a venue such as restaurant or shopping centre to ensure a higher response rate and personal contact with respondents. The structured questionnaire was distributed, followed by telephone calls were made. Since target respondents are Chinese, back translation is used to ensure the meaning of original questions is fully converted. Correlation coefficients were calculated and found to be significant at p less than 0.5. This suggests a good reliability of instrument design. In measuring choice independence (child), a scale formulated by Carlson and Grossbart (1988) was used as a seven point Likert scale measuring the degree to which a parent reports a child exercises autonomy in the purchase of products. Scale for decision role is original to the study by Kim and Lee (1997), which developed measures of children's relative influence based on multiple-informant, multiple-item responses. Both the scales are shown below.

Table2: Choice Independence Scale

<i>Child chooses for self</i>		<i>Child chooses but talks to parents first</i>		<i>Parent chooses but talks to child first</i>		<i>Parent chooses, does not talk to child</i>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Table3: Decision Role Scale

<i>Parents decide Themselves</i>		<i>All family members decide</i>		<i>Child decides him/herself</i>		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Güneri, Yurt, Kaplan & Delen (2009) carried out survey with a questionnaire that aimed to investigate family decision-making process for five different product classes and five sub-decision levels. The data was collected from 849 families, both from either of parents and children to allow a comparison of perception in influence. The sample was drawn from schools in three different levels of the national education system to allow examine age differences, (a) primary schools, (b) secondly schools and (c) high-schools. Questionnaires include two main section: In the first part, demographic data includes age, gender, number of brother

and sisters and income level evaluation for the child's questionnaire. In addition to these questions, education level and occupation of the parents and parental status are asked in parents' questionnaire. The demographic characteristics of the sample are given in table 4. In the second part, questions measuring the perceived influence of children on family purchasing decision-making are located. Data is analyzed using the SPSS software package. T-test and Chi-square test in addition to the descriptive statistics are used for the analysis.

**Table 4: Demographic characteristics of the sample
Factors Affecting Children's Role in Family Buying Process**

Characteristics	Children		Parents	
	n	(%)	n	(%)
Gender				
Female	498	59.07	523	61.8
Male	345	30.93	323	38.2
Income Level				
Low	18	21.5	18	2.00
Middle-low	51	6.09	74	9.00
Middle	387	46.18	460	54.80
Middle-high	307	36.63	254	30.20
High	75	8.95	34	4.00
Education level (Children's age range)				
Primary school (7-11)	235	27.8		
Junior High school (12-14)	159	18.8		
High school (15-18)	450	53.3		
Education level (Parents)				
Primary school (7-11)			103	12.26
Junior school			93	11.07
High school (15-18)			269	32.02
Vocational school			32	3.81
University			258	30.72
Master's			23	2.73
Ph.D			62	7.39

Demographic factors

Demographics are the population statistics with regard to socioeconomic factors such as age, income, sex, occupation, education, family size, etc. For any research, especially when used to identify consumer markets, these factors play a very important role. Many earlier studies were based on demographics: As the child grows his/her influence in the

buying process also increases. With higher family income also the children's role becomes more important for parents. Boys are observed as more knowledgeable and hence more favorable towards consumption. Girls on the other hand are more media focused. Different researchers gave different findings based on gender.

The degree of a child's influence varies with age, gender,

social class and education (Wimalasiri, 2004). There is not much difference between purchase request frequency for boys and girls (Martensen & Gronholdt, 2008). Few researchers observed males have greater influence than females in the purchase of food for the family (Flurry & Veeck, 2009). Number of siblings and the birth order of the child may also reflect the extent on child's influence. Later-born / only children have more influence on certain purchases than firstborns. Age factor is also important. Older children have significantly more influence on the family decision making process than younger children (Martensen & Gronholdt, 2008) (Flurry & Veeck, 2009).

Media Exposure

According to Hammurabi Law Code (1790 BC), it was a punishable offence to sell anything to a child. However, now everyone is after children to market variety of products. Whether it's a children product or family, the target are children. If a child is convinced, the product sells. Children's influence has been largely moderated by the role of media (Wimalasiri, 2004). Most of the advertising for children is for products like toys, cereals and chocolates / candies. TV advertising is much more effective than print because children in general watch television more and prefer to watch rather than read.

Most of the times marketers use persuasive strategy to influence children by associating fun and happiness to a product. Young children are easy to target because they are unable to understand the tactics and have positive attitude towards advertising. Also for family products, marketers are targeting children by involving cartoons and celebrities. The recent advertisement for life insurance products like Max Life Insurance (involving very young children) or TATA AIG

(using animated brand ambassadors) are good example of this. The purchase requests by children are strongly stimulated by the advertisement. Media exposure is resulting in very strong source of children socialization and is a very effective source of information for children as well as parents. Not many studies have been conducted in India to measure the extent of media in influencing children. Seeing the kind of exposure media and more important internet have on children, future research in this area would be very insightful.

Product Category and Product Involvement

Children play a very important role in making decisions about the products they use but also decisions concerning the entire family; this prompted researchers, marketers to direct attention to the study of influence of children. According to researchers the products could be categorized in three categories: products for child's own use (toys, snacks, clothes, etc), products for family use (vacation, shampoo, etc) and lastly products for household (rice, food, tea / coffee).

Most of the studies in this area are very product or product category based. A major portion of research has been done on products which are directly used / consumed by children like breakfast cereals. Ten out of fifteen studies reviewed here have taken product type as one of the major parameter for study. Children felt they have more influence on purchases that are intended for their use as opposed to purchases that are for family use. Children are more influential with regard to products typically aimed at children (e.g., juice, soft drinks, and cereals) than product categories aimed at the family in general (Martensen & Gronholdt, 2008). Flurry & Veeck (2009) provided the child's input across different product categories (table 2).

Table 5: Children's Input across Product Categories

Product Category	Mean Input
Child's shoes	3.96
Fruit	3.89
Cookies	3.87
Chocolate	3.67
Candy	3.48
Meat	3.2
Vegetables	3.07
Movie	2.91
Toothpaste	2.89
Shampoo	2.52
Television	2

SRO and Mother's Influence

Another very important factor in children's consumer behavior is SRO (Sex role orientation). Sex-role orientation has been related to sex differences in cognitive functioning. The environment shapes a child's perceptions of his / her gender and these perceptions shape a child's environment. Traditional SRO implies greater husband dominance in decision making; while in modern families, joint decision-making by family members is more common. Mother's attitude and behavior has a very direct and strong influence over children. This also depends upon the culture, norms, attitude, behavior and SRO of the family and society. Various studies in different countries have been done on mother's influence on children's purchase behavior. American mothers are in general found to have negative attitude towards advertising, Japanese mothers on the other hand are quite optimistic about advertisements. Lately, the changing role of Indian women, their education, qualification and employment has given more power to children. Children

usually accompany their mothers when shopping, mother's interaction, attitude and money in hand makes children more important. Double income families have risen giving more attention and power to little ones.

Socialization

Socialization is the process whereby a child gradually acquires the knowledge, language, social skills and hence becomes a member of society. Consumer socialization is a complex process by which a child acquires knowledge to be functional in his / her environment. Socialization of children is a global phenomenon, from developed countries to the third world nation; it took its own time to develop. Socialization of children is actually derived from parents and other family members. Different parenting style has contributed to socialization of children. Past researchers have classified parents as: Indulgent, Authoritative, Authoritarian and Neglecting. One of the major researches in this area was conducted by D R John (1999). She proposed the three stages of consumer socialization.

Table 6: Stages of socialization (D R John (1999))

Socialization Stages	Children's Behavior
Perceptual Stage (3-7 years)	Focus on product's features Use emotional appeals to influence
Analytical Stage (7-11 years)	Focus on important attribute information
Reflective stage (11-16 years)	Brand awareness

Other members of the family like grand parents and elder or younger siblings also affect the socialization of a child. Children often form coalitions with the siblings and parents to exert influence on the purchase decision. Besides family members, exposure to media is also a big contributing factor in the consumer socialization of children. Through media, children get to know about market, different products, and new brands.

Buying Process Stages and Sub-decisions

The consumer buying process can be understood by the detailed five stage model: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, decision stage and post purchase evaluation. Children's role varies across the different buying process stages. Studies have shown that children influence the most in the initial stages of problem recognition and the influence declines in the choice stage.

Parents have final say in decision making; child has influence in the choice making stage.

It is a child who initiates the buying process most of the times (Wimalasiri, 2004). Children are to a greater degree initiators rather than influencers in their family's purchase decisions, independent of the sub-decision stage (Martensen & Gronholdt, 2008). Sub-decisions are something which children have major control. Sub-decisions about color, brand, etc are greatly influenced by children. Children tend to have greater influence on brand and model and are more influential with regard to products aimed at them (Martensen & Gronholdt, 2008). Children consistently exerted the most influence in item selection and the least influence in how much to spend (Flurry & Veeck, 2009). Parents are the ultimate decision taker. In India, studies show that final decision is usually made jointly by husband and wife (influenced by children). The brand selection decisions are

also made jointly by the couple but influenced by children.

Limitations & Discussion

One general limitation is the small sample size of the studies. A small sample size does not warrant generalizations across the different geographical and demographical conditions. Only one paper by Guneri, Yurt, Kaplan & Delen (2009) uses the sample size of 849 pairs, which is a relatively large sample. The reviewed papers leave out the behavioral concepts as, leadership, power, culture and the environment. Another common limitation is the use of convenience sampling. The five papers reviewed here use one or other form of convenience sampling in the name of purposive sampling or quota sampling. Flurry & Veeck, 2009 highlighted the given the speed of social and economic change currently being experienced in China, cross-sectional analyses of age groups may misrepresent the actual differences among differentiated children. Another consideration of this study is the product categories chosen. It is important to note that Chinese are spending a smaller proportion of their incomes on necessities, such as food and clothing, and a larger proportion on electives and luxury items. Martensen & Gronholdt (2008) and Wimalasiri (2004) limit their study to use parents as respondents and thus reveal parents' perceptions of children's influence.

Though these studies are very helpful, they leave out much of the discussion pertaining to other aspects which help us in better understanding of children's influence. Listed below are some of the parameters for future research.

Different Perception of Parent and Child

One approach of contributing our knowledge is to incorporate the parent's vis-à-vis child's perception about the influence children have on the buying process. Children believe they have less influence versus what parents believe children have all the influence (Wut & Chou, 2009). While studying the issue, it becomes very important for the researcher to study this aspect. Even for marketers the difference in the perception becomes very important. An advertisement may make perfect sense for a parent but child may not be convinced.

India: Double Income Families

In India, future research focusing on the earning mother, families with double income and probably one or two kids is needed. The rise of urban India, with more and more educated mothers having more money and decision taking power would give new insights to the current knowledge.

Observational Studies

Most of the studies reviewed used surveys by parents to investigate children's influence. More observational studies involving children and especially young children are needed. Observational studies can reduce subjectivity and biases.

Joint Decisions

The decision taking process had been identified by few researchers as a joint process, where both parents and child jointly takes the decisions and sub-decisions. Children tend to form the sibling and cross generational coalitions which affect the family buying process. In India there are different forms of family structure like nuclear families, joint families, single-parent family exists, and to study how decisions are taken jointly would be very interesting and useful.

Conclusion

To conclude, this review has been very enlightening to understand the different methodologies adopted by the researchers. Based upon the review of the literature, children's influence varies with a number of parameters. Rising consumerism among children in different countries have given rise to new implications for marketers. The review summarizes the understanding of various factors contributing to children's important role in the family buying process. It appears that research on children's influence need to be more methodological. Also in India such studies are very limited, there is very pressing need to conduct studies specific to Indian families, culture, environment. Also a discussion regarding possible directions for future research (more specific to India) had been provided. To summarize, Indian children may not have huge purchasing power than their counterparts in western countries, Indian children are becoming stronger. They are the binding factor; they are the center in Indian family and are not only influencer but also the future consumer. The table below also summarizes the five reviewed papers:

Review Summary

	Paper	Objective	Methodology	Findings
1.	A cross-national study on children's purchasing behavior and parental response (2004)	To measure the effects of children's influence on the parental decision making process.	A sample of 255 parents selected from the Fiji Islands, Tonga and the Cook Islands were interviewed using a structured questionnaire. The research instrument was designed by the author, pre-	In majority of cases, the child chose a product & the parent. In two-thirds of the situations the child initiates the purchase

		To identify the demonstrated influence tactics used by the children in the island nations.	tested and implemented through a team of research Assistants.	decision process. The children are less demanding & more persuasive in their attempt to obtain parental approval
2.	Children's influence on family decision making (2008)	To examine parents' perception of their children's participation/ influence on the family decision making process when purchasing in 14 different product categories. Focus is on three sub decision stages (suggesting buying the product category, deciding on the brand, and deciding on the model).	Internet survey has been conducted with a representative sample of 779 Danish parents only. 14 product categories are selected durables (e.g., cars, vacations) and non-durables (e.g., toothpaste, soft drinks). The parents were asked to evaluate recent purchases.	Children exercise strong influence on family decision making in connection with purchases relevant to them & during the initiation stage. Children's influence also varies with subdecision stages. The gender of the children does not contribute much to parents' perception of their children's influence.
3.	Children's Relative Influence in Family Decision Making in Urban China (2009)	To examine children's influence in purchase decision making. To explore factors which explain variation observed in children's influence.	A survey of 819 urban Chinese families (one parent & child) was conducted through questionnaire.	Influence of children varied by product category and by the character of the purchase decision. The children's influence was less dominant than would be suggested by the popular image of China's only children.
4.	Children's influences on family decision making in Hong Kong. (2009)	To examine child's vs parent's influence in the choice making & decision stage of family purchase.	Quota sampling, one type of purposive sampling, is used to collect data from 366 family members (parent & child) in Hong Kong.	Children are found to have more influence in the choice-making stage and parents still control the final decision.

5.	The Influence of Children on Family Purchasing Decisions in Turkey (2009)	To examine the children's influence on family purchases in Turkey, with regard to several variables such as sub-decision, demographics and product classes [family-major (home appliances), family-minor (milk), child-major (cellular phone), child-minor (shoes) & a service (dining outside)]	Data was collected from 849 families, both from either of parents and children to allow a comparison of perception in influence. The sample was drawn from schools (primary, secondary & high schools).	Children are more influential on need recognition, where to buy, when to buy and which to buy sub-decision. Parents perceive children to have very little influence on family decision making, as they state themselves as the most influential units of family decision making.
----	---	--	---	---

References

- B. Guneri, B., Yurt, O., Kaplan, M.D. and Delen, M. (2009) The Influence of Children on Family Purchasing Decisions in Turkey. *Asian Journal of Marketing*, 3(1): 22-32.
- Flurry, L.A. and Veeck, A. (2009) Children's Relative Influence in Family Decision Making in Urban China. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 29(2): 145-159.
- John, D.R. (1999) Consumer Socialization of Children: A Retrospective Look at Twenty-Five Years of Research. *Journal of consumer research*, 26: 183-213.
- Martensen, A. and Gronholdt, L. (2008) Children's influence on family decision making. *Innovative Marketing*, 4(4): 14-22.
- Wimalasiri, J.S. (2004) A cross-national study on children's purchasing behavior and parental response. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 21(4): 274-284.
- Wut, T.M. and Chou, T. (2009) Children's influences on family decision making in Hong Kong. *Young Consumers*, 10(2): 146-156.