

Adolescent's Role in Family Decision Making: Gender Insights from a Developing Economy

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to investigate the relationship between gender of adolescents and their gender role expectations. Also, this paper aims at understanding the involvement in decision making of adolescents in family vacation and dining out with them on the basis of their gender. Despite a large number of studies in various western countries in this area, few studies investigate adolescent (children aged between 13-19 years) influence in family decision making in India. The present study takes into account the gender of the adolescents (aged between 16-19 years) for the two experiential services family vacation and dining out. A relationship was found between the adolescents' gender and their gender role orientation. Also, no differences in the involvement of adolescents with respect to gender was found in the family decision making process for vacation and dining out. However, male adolescents were found to be more involved in crucial (instrumental) decisions regarding family vacation and females in 'when to go' sub decision for dining out.

Keywords: Adolescents, Family Decision Making, Services, Gender, Developing Economy

Introduction

Changing role structure with time and greater emphasis of research on adolescents, it is really unexpected that very little consideration has been given to their gender roles in developing economies (Mensch, et al., 2003). They constitute an important customer base as they are the future markets and therefore of immense significance to academicians and marketing practitioners alike (Fikry & Bustami, 2012; Fikry & Jamil, 2010; Singh & Nayak, 2014). The proportion of adolescent population is considerably higher in India as compared to developing and developed countries, like Pakistan, China, USA, etc. (Ashraf & Khan, 2016b). They are also influential in the family purchase decision making process (Wang et al., 2007) therefore, of immense importance to marketers regarding their product/service offerings as well as communications.

Gender and gender roles have been a significant area of research in family decision making. Also, the behaviors and attitudes of the people/members are defined by the culture primarily based on gender and the respective roles (traditional/modern) (Bartley, Blanton & Gilliard, 2005). When gender differences in adolescents after

puberty sets in, they are expected to modify their behaviors, attitude and psyche according to them (Galambos, Almeida, Peterson, 1990). In developing countries, due to the prevailing patriarchy, gender roles are mostly traditional, with female being more submissive to men, having a lesser say in decision making. However, the gender roles adopted by the adolescents today will have an effect on their decision making in future, especially regarding the affairs of the family finances, upbringing of their own children, inclusion and progression of women in their career and the formation of future family systems and relationships (Mensch, et al., 2003). There is a dearth of gender insights in family decision making among adolescents in India, being a developing economy. The present study is an attempt to shed insights on such decision-making.

According to a report by United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 50 million Indians would travel to foreign destinations by 2020. Moreover, Indians have become a favorite for tourism industry all over the world as they are ready to spend a large amount on their vacations (Business Line, 2015). The restaurant industry in India is worth INR 75,000 crores, and is growing at an annual rate of 7%. There are around 1.5 million food outlets in the country. About 3,000 outlets come under organized sector (outlets registered with the government) which is growing at the rate of 16% annually. The growth rate for quick service restaurants (QSR) is 21%. The growth of organized segment can be attributed to the rise in dual income families, nuclear families, disposable incomes, working population in the country and increase in urban culture (Restaurant Industry - SMERGERS Industry Watch, n. d.).

Although there are a number of family decision making studies on children, there is lack of research on the adolescents in the Indian context, apart from a few, like, Singh and Nayak, (2014), Ashraf and Khan (2016b), etc. Most of the studies on adolescents have been conducted in the USA and Central Europe (Chavda, Haley, & Dunn, 2006). Marketers in the developing economies have been witnessing an increase in the involvement of children in the family purchase decision making, which can be attributed to the lifestyle changes and a spurt in the growth of various media. The marketing strategies which were built to cater to the needs of young consumers before, will cease to work in the present times (Chaudhary & Gupta, 2012).

The study by Ashraf & Khan (2016b) tried to understand the involvement of adolescents for the two services, family vacation and dining out on the basis of family type. The present study also specifically studies the gender perspective in family vacation and dining out decision making and the objectives are as follows:

- a) To investigate the relationship between the gender of adolescents and their gender role orientation.

- b) To understand the role of adolescents in the family vacation and dining out process on the basis of gender.

The research article is structured as follows. The introduction describes the significance of gender and gender roles and the need for a pertinent research on involvement of adolescents in family decision making. The literature review explains the previous work done on involvement of adolescents and hypothesis are developed accordingly. The paper concludes with theoretical implications, marketing implications, limitations and future research directions.

Literature Review

Family as a consumption and purchase decision making unit is important (Cox, 1975) because it not only act as a primary group but as well as the reference group. Family altogether influences purchases made for itself and also, individual purchases by its members (Das Gupta, 2013).

Consumer behavior regarding tourism decision making is complex and changing with the developments, innovation and globalization, such as, easy access to information, emerging trends for pleasure, etc. Vacation decision making is an amalgam of various services and activities and therefore a complicated process (Kozak & Karadag, 2012). Also, children are highly influential in the decision making regarding dining out at restaurants, especially in non-traditional households, where gender role attitudes are considered to be egalitarian (Labrecque & Ricard, 2001). They play an important role in family purchase decision making (McNeal, 1992), and therefore, they make a significant target market (Kümpel et al., 2007). They continue to intrigue the marketers. Most studies in the area of family decision making have emphasized the role of marital dyad and the role of children has been overlooked (Thomson, 2004; Ashraf & Khan, 2016b). According to an estimate by Mc Neal (1992), the children significantly influence 17 % of the household purchases, which amounts to \$132 billion of spending's each year in China (Fikry & Bustami, 2012). They are also found to be highly influential in food choice (Lake et al., 2003). The children contribute to family decision making in four different ways Mc Neal (1992):

Children influence their parents for buying products according to their preferences.

- a) Older children have pocket money and shop for themselves.
- b) They also influence purchases for the whole family
- c) Children also influence their parents' purchase choices.

In the family decision making, adolescent children have been found to be highly influential and are continue to be of significance to the marketers. Adolescents are a large and

growing segment. The influence at initiation stage is consistent with their influence at the final decision stage, which is different from the previous literature of the 80s and 90s (Wang, Holloway, Beatty, & Hill, 2007). However, the study on their influence in family vacation and dining out decisions in the Indian context prove otherwise. Their influence is not consistent in the initiation and the final stages, in fact there is a decrease in their influence across them for the two services studied (Ashraf & Khan, 2016b). The consumer behavior of Indian youths do not confirm with the findings from studies conducted outside India.

A pertinent research on families relating to gender role orientation by Tinson and Nancarrow (2007), found children from liberal families to be involved 'looking around a lot' regarding the purchases of casual clothes and packed lunches. They also discuss these purchases with their mothers more, as compared to their traditional counterparts. Also, liberal children perceived more influence in the 'final say' regarding the purchase of casual clothes.

Hypothesis Development

The research on both adults and children (aged 10 to 12) by Tinson and Nancarrow (2007) suggests that gender does not have any effect on the GRO preferences of members in the family. Therefore, gender as a moderator variable was eliminated from their study. However, adolescents with modern gender role orientation were found to be more influential in the family decision making as compared to their traditional counterparts in India for instrumental decisions such as, spending and selection of travel agents when deciding to go on a family vacation (Ashraf & Khan, 2016b). The relationship between gender and GRO remains unexplored in the Indian context. Since India is a patriarchal country (Green et al., 1983) with traditional cultural norms, the instrumental decisions are expected to be highly influenced by the male adolescents. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that,

H1: There is a significant relationship between the gender of the adolescents and their gender role orientation in the Indian context.

The previous literature, like, Atkin (1978), Moschis & Mitchell (1986) have suggested gender differences in the decision making. They reported more female child influence in the various decision making stages. However, with the evolution of the role structures in the family, the gender differences are expected to disappear. Still, the findings from recent studies have been somewhat contradictory in this regard. A cross cultural study by Wang et al., (2007) on the US and Chinese adolescents found no gender differences in their influence in the decision making process. Although a study on Chinese children in general, found more female child influence in the matters regarding food purchases (Flurry & Veeck, 2009). The study on Malaysian teenagers

also reported more male influence in the purchase of gaming consoles (Fikry & Bustami, 2012). Therefore, it can be hypothesized that,

H2: There are no gender differences in the adolescent children in the major decision making as well as the sub decision making stages for family vacation

H3: There are no gender differences in the adolescent children in the major decision making as well as the sub decision making stages when dining out with family.

Methodology

This research study involved a purposive convenience sample of 202 adolescents (aged between 16-19 years) studying in senior secondary schools and colleges from a metro, Tier I city and two Tier II cities. These cities are urban and relatively affluent. The convenience sampling was employed because of the absence of a reliable sampling frame. The data was collected from the adolescents who had gone on a family vacation and dined out with their families. The response rate was 44.88% (202 responses) as the contact sample size consisted of 450 adolescents.

Survey Instrument

The questionnaire administered to the adolescents was structured. It comprised of three sections. The first section comprised of the demographic profile of the respondents, such as their age, highest academic qualifications, and gender. Table 1 gives the demographic profile of the respondents. The second part was regarding the involvement of adolescents in the decision making process for family vacation and the family dine out. The decision making process consisted of the three major decision making stages, viz., idea initiation, information collection and final decision, and the sub decision stages in accordance with the services studied (Tables 2 and 3). A three point scale has been used to measure the involvement of adolescents used by Khan and Khan (2002); Ashraf and Khan (2016 a, b), where, 1=Highly Involved, 2= Moderately Involved and 3= Not Involved. The third section consisted of the refined Scanlon's Sex Role Orientation Scale (SSRS) to assess the gender role orientation (GRO) of the adolescents. The SSRS has already been used as a measure of GRO in the previous literature by various researchers like Samsinar, et.al. (2004); Lee and Beatty (2002); Kaufman (2000), Ashraf & Khan (2016b), etc. The refined SSRS scale is a five point scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" consisting of 9 items. This scale was taken to measure the GRO because it has been tested to be reliable and valid in the Indian context by Ashraf and Khan (2016b). The scale in the present study was found to be reliable with the Cronbach α reliability coefficient >0.6 . For the GRO scale, normality of the data was also tested. The values were found to be in the acceptable range.

Analysis and Discussion

Chi square test has been used employed to test the hypotheses. This test is used to measure the existing significant differences or systematic associations between two variables (Malhotra, 2010). Also, the mean of the refined SSRS scale was calculated to divide the adolescents as having a 'traditional' or 'modern' GRO. The score above 2.4 is taken as 'modern' and below it as 'traditional'. This is similar to how the GRO scores have been calculated for the study by Lee and Beatty (2002).

The hypothesis H1 is accepted as significant association is found between the adolescents' gender and their gender role orientation ($p < 0.05$). The male adolescents (65.4%) were significantly found to be having more modern gender role orientation as compared to their female counterparts (48%). Female adolescents (52%) portrayed more traditional gender role orientation. (See Table 6) The conclusion that can be drawn from this result is that, even though with the changing gender role patterns, rise of gender equity and egalitarian attitude, most female adolescents are less liberal towards the role structure than their male counterparts. It can be inferred that the male fraternity has accepted or are willing to accept the alterations in the gender role with the changing times, the females are still stuck with the traditions. As evident from the findings of Ashraf & Khan (2016b), female adolescents are mostly involved only in the expressive decisions for the two services studied, family vacation and dining out. This finding is dissimilar from the study by Tinson and Nancarrow (2007) which found no statistical significance between gender and their gender role preferences.

The hypothesis H2 is accepted with the exception of the sub decision stage, 'purchase of tickets, vacation package, etc.' ($p < 0.05$). The male adolescents are either highly (19.2%) or moderately involved (17.3%), while female adolescents are mostly not involved (73.3%) in this sub decision stage. For the major decision making stages and the other sub decisions, there is no significant difference in the involvement of male and female adolescents, when going with their families on a vacation. (See Table 5)

The hypothesis H3 is also accepted with the exception of the sub decision stage, 'when to go' ($p < 0.05$). The female adolescents are highly involved (54.7%) in this sub decision stage as compared to their male counterparts who are mostly moderately involved (51.9%). For the major decision making stages and other sub decision stages when dining out with family, no significant differences between the genders were found. (See Table 6)

The analysis showed that there is no difference in the involvement of adolescents by the gender for family vacation and dine out decision making. The results corroborates with the findings of the study by Wang et al., (2007) and contradicts conclusions of the earlier literature Atkin (1978), Moschis and Mitchell (1986) as well as from recent studies by Fikry and Bustami (2012) and Flurry & Veeck, (2009). The reason for the above findings might be that the services suggested in the present study are experiential in nature and not sex typed. The gaming console is a sex typed product purchase, wherein male teenagers are highly influential. Also, with the changes in the socio-economic and demographic profile, gender equity is expected to be prevalent in the Indian adolescents. However, more involvement of male adolescents in the purchase sub decision for family vacation does prove that they are more involved in instrumental decisions.

Theoretical and Managerial Implications

The theoretical implication that can be drawn from the present study is that, in Indian context researchers should use gender as a moderating variable in the family decision making studies. This is because there is a significant relationship between the gender and the individual's GRO. As compared to the study conducted by Tinson and Nancarrow (2007) in Western context, with a different demographic data and sampling procedures, the findings of the present study are distinct.

Following from the discussion, it can be advised to marketing practitioners that family vacation package, ticket offers, discounts and rebates should be communicated in a way that it takes into account male adolescent in the family. Since, the 'when to go' sub decision for dining out are influenced by female adolescents, the restaurants can entice them with varieties on their offerings, discount coupons on the additions in the menu which could lead to an increase in the family arrivals.

The adolescents with modern gender role orientations are found to more influential in the spending and selection of travel agent when planning for a family vacation (Ashraf & Khan, 2016b) and the present study suggests male adolescents to be more modern in their attitude. Therefore, it can be inferred that the travel agents and the various service salespersons must target male child in the families regarding these sub decisions.

Another implication that can be drawn from the present study is that the young female consumers or the female heads of the future families will be dependent on the male folks for the instrumental sub decisions in the decision

making process. Now, the onus lies on the marketing practitioners to work in the area of responsible marketing where the gender advocates have failed. They can gain the confidence of the female folks by making their service processes simple and hassle free.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Before looking ahead for future research, it is important to take into account the various limitations. The sample of the present study is limited to the northern region of the country, the findings cannot be a representative of the whole country. There must be some geographical bias present. Children from other age groups have also not been considered in the study. Moreover, the study takes into account only the experiential services, family vacation and dining out decision making. The research can be extended to other services of family consumption which are high on credence qualities like education of the adolescents, especially, their choice of career, subjects and educational institutions or colleges. The researchers could extend the research in this area by studying the various influence strategies and how the influence takes place. Moreover, a qualitative research approach could unravel more insights in the behavior of adolescents in family decision making.

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Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

| Variables | Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Age | 16 | 20 | 9.9 |
| | 17 | 98 | 48.5 |
| | 18 | 47 | 23.3 |
| | 19 | 37 | 18.3 |
| Gender | Male | 52 | 25.7 |
| | Female | 150 | 74.3 |
| Education | Class 11 | 30 | 15.3 |
| | Class 12 | 97 | 48.0 |
| | Graduation first year | 44 | 21.8 |
| | Graduation second year | 31 | 14.9 |
| Family Type (Gender Role Orientation) | Traditional | 96 | 47.52 |
| | Modern | 106 | 52.47 |

Table 2: Family Vacation decision making stages

| Stage | Family Vacation (items) | Item Source |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| Idea Initiation | Brought up the idea of family vacation | Henthorne, LaTour & Hudson (1997); Stafford <i>et al.</i> , (1996); Davis & Rigaux, (1974); Wang, Chen & Chou (2007) |
| Information Search/Collection | Got information to plan the vacation | Zalatan (1998); Henthorne, LaTour & Hudson (1997); Stafford <i>et al.</i> , (1996); Davis & Rigaux, (1974); Wang, <i>et. al.</i> (2007) |
| Final Decision | Final decision to go on vacation | Henthorne, LaTour & Hudson (1997); Davis & Rigaux, (1974); Wang, <i>et. al.</i> (2007) |
| Mode of travel | How to travel | Bjork & Jansson, (2008); Zalatan (1998); Davis (1970) |
| Where | Where to go | Bjork & Jansson, (2008); Swarbrooke and Horner (2001); Stafford <i>et al.</i> , (1996), Zalatan (1998) |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| When | When to go | Bjork & Jnason, (2008); Stafford <i>et al.</i> , (1996) |
| Choose one | Selected a travel agent/online travel sites | Kozak&Karadag,(2012); Swarbrooke and Horner (2001); Stafford <i>et al.</i> , (1996) |
| Spend | How much to spend | Kozak&Karadag,(2012); Stafford <i>et al.</i> , (1996); Wang, <i>et. al.</i> (2007) |
| Purchase | Actually made the purchase (bought tickets etc.) | Stafford <i>et al.</i> , (1996); Zalatan (1998) |
| Duration | Length of stay | Swarbrooke and Horner (2001); Kozak&Karadag,(2012); |
| Place | Place of stay (Lodging) | Swarbrooke and Horner (2001); Kozak&Karadag,(2012); Zalatan (1998) |
| Note: The stages in bold are major decision making stages and others are sub decision making stages | | |

Source: Ashraf & Khan (2016b)

Table 3: Dining out decision making stages

Source: Ashraf & Khan (2016b)

Table 4: Gender of the adolescents and their gender role orientation

| Gender Role Orientation | Male Adolescents (n=52) (%) | Female Adolescents (n=150) (%) | Chi Square |
|---|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Traditional | 34.6 | 52.0 | 4.679 (0.031) |
| Modern | 65.4 | 48.0 | |
| Note: The figures in bold are significant. | | | |

Source: Prepared by the researcher

Table 5: Adolescent involvement in the family vacation decision making by gender

| Decision stage | Involvement | Male (n=52) | Female (n=150) | Chi Square |
|--|---------------------|-------------|----------------|------------------|
| Initial Idea | Highly Involved | 63.5 | 68.7 | 0.872 (0.647) |
| | Moderately Involved | 28.8 | 26.7 | |
| | Not Involved | 7.7 | 4.7 | |
| Information Collection | Highly Involved | 48.1 | 48.0 | 0.404 (0.817) |
| | Moderately Involved | 34.6 | 38.0 | |
| | Not Involved | 17.3 | 14.0 | |
| Final Decision | Highly Involved | 34.6 | 47.3 | 2.540 (0.281) |
| | Moderately Involved | 44.2 | 36.0 | |
| | Not Involved | 21.2 | 16.7 | |
| When to go | Highly Involved | 32.7 | 54.7 | 7.695 (0.021) |
| | Moderately Involved | 51.9 | 36.7 | |
| | Not Involved | 15.4 | 8.7 | |
| Choice of menu | Highly Involved | 61.5 | 66.7 | 1.185 (0.553) |
| | Moderately Involved | 34.6 | 27.3 | |
| | Not Involved | 3.8 | 6.0 | |
| How much to spend | Highly Involved | 11.5 | 11.3 | 0.746 (0.688) |
| | Moderately Involved | 32.7 | 26.7 | |
| | Not Involved | 55.8 | 62.0 | |
| Choice of restaurant | Highly Involved | 51.9 | 46.0 | 3.492 (0.174) |
| | Moderately Involved | 42.3 | 38.0 | |
| | Not Involved | 5.8 | 16.0 | |
| Note: The figures in bold are significant. | | | | |

Table 6: Adolescent involvement in the family dine out decision making bygender

| Decision stage | Involvement | Male (n=52) | Female (n=150) | Chi Square |
|---|---------------------|-------------|----------------|--------------------------------|
| Idea Initiation | Highly Involved | 32.7 | 50.0 | 4.667 (0.997) |
| | Moderately Involved | 57.7 | 42.7 | |
| | Not Involved | 9.6 | 7.3 | |
| Information Collection | Highly Involved | 46.2 | 32.7 | 3.046 (0.218) |
| | Moderately Involved | 36.5 | 45.3 | |
| | Not Involved | 17.3 | 22.0 | |
| Final Decision | Highly Involved | 23.1 | 37.3 | 4.333 (0.115) |
| | Moderately Involved | 51.9 | 37.3 | |
| | Not Involved | 25.0 | 25.3 | |
| Where to go | Highly Involved | 46.2 | 51.3 | 0.439 (0.803) |
| | Moderately Involved | 44.2 | 39.3 | |
| | Not Involved | 9.6 | 9.3 | |
| When to go | Highly Involved | 32.7 | 46.7 | 3.091 (0.213) |
| | Moderately Involved | 48.1 | 38.7 | |
| | Not Involved | 19.2 | 14.7 | |
| How to travel | Highly Involved | 28.8 | 26.7 | 0.396 (0.820) |
| | Moderately Involved | 42.3 | 47.3 | |
| | Not Involved | 28.8 | 26.0 | |
| How much to spend | Highly Involved | 9.6 | 10.7 | 0.54 (0.974) |
| | Moderately Involved | 26.9 | 26.0 | |
| | Not Involved | 63.5 | 63.3 | |
| Place to stay | Highly Involved | 23.1 | 29.3 | 3.405 (0.182) |
| | Moderately Involved | 51.9 | 37.3 | |
| | Not Involved | 25.0 | 33.3 | |
| Overall length of the trip | Highly Involved | 19.2 | 26.7 | 1.376 (0.503) |
| | Moderately Involved | 48.1 | 46.7 | |
| | Not Involved | 32.7 | 26.7 | |
| Selected a travel agent | Highly Involved | 11.5 | 8.0 | 2.095 (0.351) |
| | Moderately Involved | 30.8 | 23.3 | |
| | Not Involved | 57.7 | 68.7 | |
| Purchase | Highly Involved | 19.2 | 6.7 | 6.833 (0.033) |
| | Moderately Involved | 17.3 | 20.0 | |
| | Not Involved | 63.5 | 73.3 | |
| Note: The figures in bold are significant. | | | | |