Family Communication Patterns and Influence of Children in Family Purchase Decisions

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ABSTRACT

This article revolves around the validation of family communication pattern scale along with its subsequent influence on child influence in family purchase decisions. The perceptions of parents of 6-12 years old children in Delhi NCR were taken into consideration to carry out research. Both primary and secondary studies were conducted to complete the research process. Exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis were used to validate family communication patterns scale and multiple linear regression was used to find the influence of family communication patterns on children influence in purchase decisions across product categories. The findings resulted in four factors of family communication patterns with an excellent fit. Also, there was a significant influence of family communication patterns on children influence on child goods and services and not on family-related goods.

KEYWORDS
Child Related Goods, Children Influence, Consumer Socialization, Family Communication Pattern

INTRODUCTION

India is one of the fastest growing consumer markets. It is touted to become the third largest consumer market by 2025, as the projected consumption is expected to rise to $4 trillion (Singhi et al., 2017). The primary reason behind this is shifting of consumers’ aspirations and spending patterns in India. With the rise in digital exposure and its consumption and influence, changing family structure, expanding gender roles especially of women, and dual working parents—the involvement of family members in purchase-related decisions has increased manifold. Generation gap has reduced and is still reducing in families, thereby parents are getting closer to their children than they were in the earlier times, in lieu of the age gap before. A change in their relationship dynamics is noticed, with parents starting to pay attention to the opinions of their children. Owing to many factors like the changing face of the aforementioned family dynamics, time shortage, limited family support structures, etc.—children face decision making at a very young age. Children hold various roles and responsibilities in the family purchase decision-making process, but that role in purchase related matters may vary. This is because of differences in the consumer socialization of children, pertaining to them as a consumer and in their consumption process of the product/service (McNeal, 1992).

“Consumer socialization is the process by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the market place” (Ward, 1974). Family
communication about consumption is an essential variable of consumer socialization. It is the communication between family members on matters related to consumption. Traditional manner of family communication involved the process of learning by younger family members from elders about various things, contextually about purchase and consumption. But this view has been challenged with the advent of technology and in the modern scenario with the change in dynamics of family structure. In this contemporary environment, reciprocal consumer socialization is followed in families, wherein younger family members also educate older ones during communication with each other (Watne et al., 2014; Watne and Brennan, 2011). Yet different scales are used to measure family communication in such purchase related matters. Scales are deemed to be accurate when they have invariance across researchers, time, settings, and participants (Levine et al., 2006). Although many researchers have developed scales for measuring invariance, however these validated measures cannot be generalized to other populations than those they were measured on (Byrne and Watkins, 2003; Wichert et al., 2005). This is justified by the finding that—little modifications in the statement of an item of the questionnaire can lead to more significant changes in the model fit of the research project (Levine et al., 2006).

**Contribution of the Research**

The paper is contributing to both managerial as well as academic fronts. On the academic front, it contributes to the body of existing knowledge on family communication patterns and children's influence in family purchase decisions. Many studies have previously investigated children's influence in family purchase decisions by using children and parental demographics as dependent variables. Though other socialization agents like media, peers, school, and so forth are well studied; very few studies on family communication patterns have been conducted in the Indian context (Kaur & Singh, 2006; Chaudary & Gupta, 2012; Sharma & Sonwaney, 2014, 2015; Chaudhary, 2015, 2016).

India scores 48 points on the Hofstede Individualism Collectivism index, which is used to measure the national culture (Hofstede insights, 2018; Brewer & Venaik, 211). Indians come at the middle of the scale and are blessed with both types of traits, that is individualism and collectivism. The scores indicate that they are less individualistic than collectivistic yet progressing towards individualism, which indicates to the change in their family dynamics. Hence, this paper aids in helping marketers to plan and develop marketing strategies accordingly, as per the consumer socialization of children in the families; such as what kind of family a child belongs to and has more influence on or is exerted upon by, etc. Thereby marketers are able to comprehend better about the relevance and suitability of products and services for both children and parents. They are also able to understand that those products and services which are influenced by parental decisions would be catered separately to them. Rather than wasting money, it is ideally advised to advertisers and marketers that they pay attention towards relevant products and services to each strata and its pertaining needs, in order to earn profit.

**BACKGROUND/LITERATURE REVIEW**

Newcomb defined communication as “the co-orientation of two persons (A and B) to one another and toward some external topic of issues (X)” (1953). The concept of family communication is also based on the general models of communication and socialization (McLeod and Chaffee, 1972). Family communication was operationally defined as an open interaction between parents and the child/children, concerning goods and services (Churchill and Moschis, 1979). The scale to measure this concept of family communication was developed by Moschis and Moore in 1979. It has two different types of communication patterns, in which one, socio-oriented while the other, concept-oriented, is an issue-based communication. They further classified concept and socio-orientation dimensional model into four patterns of family communication: (1) Laissez faire—low on both orientations, concept and socio; (2) Protective—high socio-oriented, low concept-oriented communication; (3) Pluralistic—low socio-oriented, high concept-oriented communication; and (4) Consensual—high on both orientations (McLeod and Chaffee, 1972). These four patterns are used by researchers empirically,
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