

## Influence Perception Differences about Children's Influence in Family Buying Decisions- an Exploratory Study

Harikishni Nain

Department of Commerce, Bharati College, University of Delhi, Delhi

Email Id: [harikishni@gmail.com](mailto:harikishni@gmail.com)

**Abstract.** This study has been undertaken (i) to examine the extent of disagreements in the perceptions of children and their mothers about the influence exerted by children in family buying decisions; (ii) to evaluate the impact of child's gender on the agreement in the perceptions of children and their mothers about the influence exerted by children in family buying decisions. A cross-sectional survey method was carried out with "structured non-disguised" questionnaires to collect the primary data from 400 families residing in rural and urban areas of Delhi, capital of India. Children's influence across stages of decision making process was measured by using an eleven-item scale developed by Talpade and Talpade (1995). The primary data are analyzed and interpreted with the help of statistical tools such as means, standard deviation, and paired t-test by using SPSS (version 16). Descriptive analysis has also been used to support the results of statistical analysis. The analysis results indicate that disagreements exist in the perceptions of children and their mothers about the influence exerted by children in Indian family buying decisions irrespective of child's gender. The analysis results, thus, supported all the hypotheses except H3 (a/b).

**Keywords:** Influence, Family Buying Decisions, Stages of Family Decision Making Process, Child-Product, Paired t-test

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### Introduction

Children are no longer passive observers; they are increasingly becoming an important customer segment for various industries (McNeal, 1992). The roles that children play in influencing the family's decisions have enticed researchers to analyse them. For some products, children are the active initiators, information seekers and buyers; whereas for other product categories, they merely influence their parents' purchases. Past researches in the area of children's influence (Wimalasiri, 2004) sufficiently indicate that not only children have significant influence on purchase decisions for a wide array of products but this influence is also increasing over time (Madhavi et al., 2011). Most previous studies have found that children tend to believe they have more influence than their parents attribute to them in family purchase

decisions (Wang et al., 2007), accordingly, low levels of agreement have been observed between children and their parents on the extent of child's influence in the decision making process (Foxman et al., 1989). The findings from former research studies also suggest that female children (probably due to the early learning of sex roles) have more influence than male children (Lee and Collins, 2000).

To extend these findings in Indian context, this study has been undertaken (i) to examine the extent of disagreements in the perceptions of children and their mothers about the influence exerted by children in family buying decisions; (ii) to evaluate the impact of child's gender on the agreement in the perceptions of children and their mothers about the influence exerted by children in family buying decisions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Until the eighteenth century, the child was considered as a passive, small, and immature adult who almost had no necessities in his life. However, since the beginning of nineteenth century, improvements in education and care for the children coupled with certain demographic and household structural changes have resulted in rising influence of children in society, in general, and in family, in particular (Cowell, 2001).

Interfamilial decision-making, the communication in the family has become more modern, open and democratic and had a reflective influence on the growing economic power, control, and independence of children, with the result they are now taking charge of their families' decision-making process more than they did in previous generations altogether (Mikkelsen, and Norgaard, 2007).

However, children tend to believe they have more influence than their parents attribute to them at all stages of the family purchase decisions (Wang et al., 2007). As a result, low levels of agreement have been observed between children and their parents on the extent of child's influence in the decision making process (Foxman et al., 1989). Similar results were observed by Belch et al. (1985), in their northern European study.

Wang et al. (2007) found that the children attribute greater influence to themselves than their parents at all stages of the family purchase decision process only in case of me purchases.

Children overestimate their influence in decisions than their parents attribute to them, owing to a self-serving bias or to social norms (Corfman, 1997). Thus, it is hypothesized that:

**H1: Parents and children disagree in their perception on the extent of child's influence in family buying decisions.**

**H2: Children attribute greater influence to themselves than their parents attribute to them in family buying decisions.**

The issue has further been investigated in a few studies in relation to same-sex versus opposite-sex pairs. Based on some sex identification processes addressed in the psychoanalytic literature (Acock and Bengton, 1978), mothers may have greater knowledge about their daughter's influence than about their sons', leading to higher levels of agreement between mother and daughter versus mother and son. It therefore seemed logical to hypothesize that:

**H3 (a/b): Mothers of females are more likely to agree with their daughters' estimation of influence (H3a) than mothers of males (H3b) in family buying decisions.**

## OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the extent of disagreements in the perceptions of children and their mothers about the influence exerted by children in family buying decisions.
2. To evaluate the impact of children's gender on the agreement in the perceptions of children and their mothers about the influence exerted by children in family buying decisions.

## METHODOLOGY

**Product Profile** –Past studies have found that children have the strongest influence for products meant for their own use and lower for expensive products meant for the joint consumption by the whole family and involve substantial financial outlays (Ali and Batra, 2011) due to the higher financial risk associated with these products. Consequently, a durable product (mobile/cycle/computer) for the child's sole consumption was chosen in this study to measure children's influence in the purchase of this product purchased recently (in the last one year), in order to ensure a high probability of accurate recall.

**Sample Design and Research Instrument** - The sample consisted of families with children studying in class 8<sup>th</sup> to class 12<sup>th</sup>. A cross-sectional survey method was carried out with “structured non-disguised” questionnaires to collect the primary data from 400 families residing in rural and urban areas of Delhi, capital of India. This study solicited responses from both mothers and children to allow a comparison of perceptions about children’s influence in family buying decisions. The surveyed families were selected non-randomly to allow a reasonable representation of different socio-economic groups and cultures. Data collection period was March 2015 to October 2015. Table 1 provides a profile of the sample used in the study.

**Table 1: Sample Profile**

Characteristics	Aggregate		Rural Families		Urban Families	
	Number (N = 400)	%	Number (N = 200)	%	Number (N=200)	%
<b>Children’s Age (years)</b>						
13-14	140	35	60	30	80	40
15-16	156	39	90	45	66	33
17-18	104	26	50	25	54	27
<b>Children’s Gender</b>						
Male	220	55	112	56	108	54
Female	180	45	88	44	92	46
<b>Family Income (monthly)</b>						
Low (0-20,000)	112	28	56	28	56	28
Middle (20,000 - 60,000)	240	60	136	68	104	52
High (above 60,000)	48	12	8	4	40	20

**Children’s Influence Measures**—Children’s influence in the stages of the family decision making process is conceptualized in this study as the extent to which s/he had been engaged in various acts or activities which have contributed to each of the four basic stages (purchase initiation, information search, decision making, and actual purchase) of the decision making process for the purchase of child product.

Eleven item scale developed by Talpade and Talpade (1995) has been used to measure influence perceptions of children and their mothers process on a 5-Point scale (5 = Very high and 1 = Nil). Out of the eleven items, three items measured child’s influence in purchase initiation stage, two

items measured child's influence in information search stage, five items measured child's influence in decision making stage, and one item measured child's influence in the actual purchase stage.

Cronbach alpha was calculated to assess the reliability of the scale items (Table 2). As the values of Cronbach alpha of the scale tapping children's influence across three stages of family decision making process are equal to or greater than 0.60, thus adequately meeting the standards for the present paper.

**Table 2: Reliability Analyses of Measures**

Scale Items (Decision Making Stages)	No. of Items	Cronbach Alpha ( $\alpha$ )
- Purchase initiation stage	3	0.79
- Information search stage	2	0.69
- Final decision making stage	5	0.70
- Actual purchase making stage*	1	-

\*Note: Cronbach Alpha coefficient could not be calculated for the actual purchase making stage as it consists of only one item.

**Statistical Tools Used for Analyses** - Collected data have been analyzed and interpreted with the help of statistical tools such as mean, standard deviation, two-way and mixed-factorial repeated measures ANOVA using SPSS (version 16).

## RESULTS

Hypotheses H1 and H2 were examined simultaneously with the help of children's mean influence scores across all the stages of the family decision making process from the responses of children as well as their mothers along with paired *t*-test (Table 3).

**Table 3: Children's and Mothers' Perception of Children's Influence in the Stages of Family**

### Decision Making Process: Paired *t*-Test

Decision stages	Responses by		Mean difference	<i>t</i> -value
	Children	Mothers		
Purchase initiation	3.52 (0.83)	3.38 (1.03)	0.14	3.22*
Information search	3.42 (1.21)	2.90 (1.24)	0.52	9.71*

Decision making	3.15 (0.92)	2.81 (0.96)	0.34	8.42*
Actual purchase	3.21 (1.19)	2.76 (1.32)	0.45	7.61*

Notes: 1. \*Significant at  $p \leq 0.01$ , \*\*Significant at  $p \leq 0.05$

2. The responses are measured on a 5-point scale where 5 = very high, 4 = high, 3 = moderate, 2 = low, and 1 = nil.

3. Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

The maximum difference in children's and their mothers' ratings about children's influence was observed in the information search stage (M children = 3.42, M mother = 2.90) followed by actual purchase stage (M children = 3.21, M mother = 2.76), decision making stage (M children = 3.15, M mother = 2.81), and purchase initiation stage (M children = 3.52, M mother = 3.38). When these differences in ratings by children and their mothers were examined with the help of paired t-test all the differences in ratings were found to be statistically significant leading to the acceptance of H1, i.e., parents and children disagree in their perception on the extent of child's influence in family buying decisions, and H2, i.e., children attribute greater influence to themselves than their parents attribute to them in family buying decisions.

To examine the validity of H3(a/b), i.e., mothers of females are more likely to agree with their daughters' estimation of influence (H3a) than mothers of males (H3b) in family buying decisions, first the mean influence scores across all the stages of the family decision making process were obtained from the responses of pairs of daughters' and their mothers', and sons' and their mothers' and thereafter, paired sample t-test were conducted and the respective results are summarised in Table 4 (daughters and mothers) and Table 5 (sons and mothers).

**Table 4: Daughters' and Mothers' Perceptions of Daughters' Influence in the Family Buying Decisions: Paired t-Test**

Decision stages	Responses by		Mean difference	t-value
	Daughters (N = 180)	Mother (N = 180)		
Purchase initiation	3.54	3.39	0.15	2.15**
Information search	3.37	2.90	0.47	5.81*
Decision making	3.10	2.75	0.35	5.49*
Actual purchase	3.25	2.77	0.48	5.01*

Notes: 1. \*Significant at  $p \leq 0.01$ , \*\*Significant at  $p \leq 0.05$

2. The responses are measured on a 5-point scale where 5 = very high, 4 = high, 3 = moderate, 2 = low, and 1 = nil.

3. Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

Results in Table 4 clearly suggest that contrary to the expectations, daughters and mothers are in total disagreements about their ratings of daughters' influence in family decision making process across all the decision stages. Daughters have overstated their influence across all the four decision making stages than their influence as reported by their mothers.

The maximum difference in daughters' and their mothers' ratings was observed in the actual purchase stage (M daughters = 3.25, M mother = 2.77) followed by information search stage (M daughters = 3.37, M mother = 2.90), decision making stage (M daughters = 3.10, M mother = 2.75), and purchase initiation stage (M daughters = 3.54, M mother = 3.39).

When these differences in ratings by daughters and their mothers were examined with the help of paired t-test all the differences in ratings were found to be statistically significant leading to the rejection of H3 (a).

Similarly, in Table 5, results of the analysis show that sons and mothers are in total disagreements about their ratings of sons' influence in family decision making process across all the decision stages. Sons have overstated their influence across all the four decision making stages than their influence as reported by their mothers. The maximum difference in sons' and their mothers' ratings was observed in the information search stage (M sons = 3.54, M mother = 2.99) followed by, actual purchase stage (M sons = 3.32, M mother = 2.87), decision making stage (M sons = 3.10, M mother = 2.77), and purchase initiation stage (M sons = 3.45, M mother = 3.32). when the differences in ratings by sons and their mothers were examined with the help of paired t-test all the differences in ratings were found to be statistically significant, thus, leading to the rejection of H3 (b).

**Table 5: Sons' and Mothers' Perceptions of Sons' Influence in Family Buying Decisions: Paired *t*-Test**

Decision stages	Responses by		Mean difference	<i>t</i> -value
	Sons (N = 220)	Mothers (N = 220)		
Purchase initiation	3.81	3.32	0.49	2.41*
Information search	3.54	2.99	0.55	7.80*
Decision making	3.10	2.77	0.33	6.42*
Actual purchase	3.32	2.87	0.45	5.77*

Notes: 1. \*Significant at  $p \leq 0.01$ , \*\*Significant at  $p \leq 0.05$

2. The responses are measured on a 5-point scale where 5 = very high, 4 = high, 3 = moderate, 2 = low, and 1 = nil.

3. Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

## CONCLUSION AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE STUDY

The results of this study found that in Indian families' buying decisions (i) parents and children disagree in their perception on the extent of child's influence, (ii) children attribute greater influence to themselves than their parents attribute to them, and (iii) parents and children disagree in their perception on the extent of child's influence irrespective of child's gender. These findings provide scope for the researchers, policy makers, and the marketers dealing in various related aspects of family products and services.

The main limitation concerns the context of the study which is region specific (Delhi). Hence, to generate findings in this area with wide generalizability, future research should expand its scope to include a larger number of families from other states as well.

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