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Pillai, Rajasekharan and Thomas, Julia and Prasad, Saloni

Birla Institute of Technology, Kingdom of Bahrain

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Dr. K. R. Pillai

Julia Thomas

Saloni Prasad

Birla Institute of Technology
Kingdom of Bahrain
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Abstract

With the changes in the notion of family structure, movement from joint-family to nuclear family, children started acquiring unique stake in family decision making. It ranges from purchasing a semi-durable cloth to automobile, which have long durability. Sometimes their pattern of intervention is transformed into nagging, which is technically called pester power. This study explores the influencing role of children in consumer buying decisions focusing on the expatriate Indians in Bahrain.

Key words: Pester power, expatriate children, child's role in consumption

JEL Classification: M 30, M 39

Introduction

The present day notion of nuclear family arrangements have ascribed considerable leverages to children and young generation in exercising their power of persuasion in family decision making. Studies from across the world (Mangleburg, 1990; McNeal & Ji, 1996; Williams & Veeck, 1998; Kaur & Singh, 2006) have confirmed that kids always play an increasing influential role in what their parents bought on their behalf, by making it easier for their parents to give in rather than tolerate inexorable badgering. This invincible capacity of children's to nag their parents into purchasing items, they may not otherwise buy, is technically called pester power. This concept was coined in the late 70's and was used in the context of children using all the influence they could muster up to make their parents purchase items of their choice. Parents, however, in modern days, are more likely to take a child's demand more seriously in comparison to times where in children were expected to be happy with whatever that was bought and given to them. Marketing to children signifies the understanding of pester power.

Kids of present day have more autonomy and discretion in exercising their decision making power within the family than in previous generations, implying the substantial vocal power of children about what their parents should or should not buy (Gupta & Verma, 2000). In this regard children today are customers, buyers,

spenders, shoppers, consumers as McNeal (1992) puts it. This notion exemplifies that children have emerged as a very important and potential consumer group. Their importance and need is felt as they have been recognised as a primary market, an influencing market, and a future market (Mangleburg, 1990). In fact, for parents, it is hard to say “no” all the time. It is rare to find those parents, who manage not to yield to their wards’ endless whining and sleeve tugging for purchasing products of the latter’s choice. For some products, children have found to be, at times, active initiators, information seekers and buyers; whereas for other product categories, they influence the purchase made by the parents (Sinha, 2005). Hence children play a very important role in the family buying process. There is a general opinion that nuclear family norms and the non-proximity of other kith and kin’s play a major role in making children as the most influential group as decision makers in family circles (Williams & Burns, 2000). This situation puts the parents in enigmatic situation in exercising their own discretion for effectively purchasing for their kids. Children seem to capitalise the parental predicament in a foreign country. In this backdrop an exploratory study was undertaken to understand the magnitude of pester power among the expatriate Indian children in Bahrain.

Objectives and Methodology

The present study attempts to explore the influencing role of children in consumer buying decisions focusing on the expatriate Indians in Bahrain. The research followed Survey and exploratory methods. The major input contribution to the present research was the primary data. It was collected through structured questionnaires administered to those families with children in the age category of 12 – 18. The survey method was used to collect data to study the behavioural traits of expatriate Indian parents as well as their children to understand the degree of influence exerted by the kids to acquire items of their interest.

The research study consisted of a comprehensive questionnaire that was designed to attain a better understanding of the varying degree of influence the expatriate Indian children in Bahrain create on their parents while making a purchase decision. Fifty expatriate Indian families working in the kingdom of Bahrain, with children in the age category of 12- 18 were identified for administering the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was so designed that it could encompass structured questions that specified the response alternatives and the response format. It consisted of Multiple-Choice Questions, Dichotomous Questions and Scale preferences. The questionnaire tried to target the level of pester power exerted by children on their parents as well as identifying the most prime age of children practicing their prerogative along with their methods used. The age group between 12 to 18 was chosen because it was felt that children falling in this age category were suitable to comprehend the questionnaire. The study could ensure 100% response rate as the questionnaires were personally administered and any clarifications on the research topic, or difficulty in understanding the questions, were attended on site concurrently. The sampling technique used was Judgment sampling. Judgment sampling is a very commonly used non-probability technique where respondents are chosen based on researchers judgment and involves a choice of selecting those respondents that the researcher finds the most advantageous. The sample size included 100 respondents; 50 parents and 50 children, from the same family, of Indian nationality residing in the kingdom of Bahrain. Slightly different questionnaire was developed separately for parents and children.

Research Problem in detail

Pester power is the residue of westernisation, where in children acquire militant power to get the things done to their end. Scores of studies (Mangleburg, 1990; McNeal & Ji, 1996; Williams & Veeck, 1998; Kaur & Singh, 2006) have been done around the world, but little has been done in the regional perspective. The present study attempted to fill the research lacuna in the regional perspective. To understand the extent of the research problem a brief review of some past studies was presented here. Williams & Veeck (1998) examined a child's role as influencer, in family purchase decision-making in urban China. Their objective was to explore to what extent U.S. findings related to the purchase influence of children that was applicable in the newly emerging market economies of urban China. The study underscores the children's influence on purchase decisions varied by products. They found that children have more influence in products selection for which the child is a primary user or consumer. Dewan & Thomson (2010) brought to light that children were not only the target of chocolates, ice-creams and toy-makers, but to even companies that

wants to sell insurance policies, power inverters, air conditioners and even cars. Marketers and ad-makers are increasingly getting convinced about the kid being a compelling force in the family. Children watch TV, mature faster and is willing to assert themselves and therefore when it's the time for the family to take a decision to buy something, the children are playing a bigger role.

Mangleburg (1990) studied that children's influence in family purchase decisions vary by products and decision related factors as well as by parental, family and child characteristics. One important source of variation in children's influence is product type. In general, children seem to have significant influence in product decisions for which they will be the primary consumer, like, breakfast cereals, snack foods, toys, children's clothes and school supplies. Children also influence decisions about family leisure time activities (such as vacations, movie attendance, eating out and cable TV subscriptions), although their influence is less in these decisions than in decisions for products for their own use. Kaur & Singh (2006) attempted to study the influence of children in the family purchase decision making in India and the West and revealed how children evolved as influencers in purchase decisions when traditionally women were seen to be the purchasing agents for their families. Increasing participation of women in the workforce has prompted a shift in this role as children are increasingly the "buyers" for the entire family. Children enjoy greater participation not only in making routine consumption decisions for the family but also in pestering their parents to buy other products desired by them. Indian children recently attracted considerable attention from marketers because the market for children's products offers tremendous potential and is rapidly growing.

Schiffman & Kanuk (2007) discuss how reference groups and family influences the children in the family's purchase decisions processes. Reference groups are an extremely important and powerful idea. A reference group is any person or group that serves as a point of comparison for an individual in forming either general or specific values, attitudes or a specific guide for behaviour. Reference groups are groups that serve as frames of references for individuals in their purchase or consumption decisions. It could be normative and comparative based on the values or behaviour derived from it. The degree of influence that a reference group exerts

on an individual's behaviour usually depends on the nature of the individual and the product and on specific social factors.

Children belonging to different age categories respond to the addition of new choices into the already existing set of products purchased by their parents. With the rise in competition among the children's products, the market had resulted in an exceptional rise of launching new innovations to the existing product lines of cereals, toys and even electronics. The effect the introduction of new products alters a child's choice behavior towards purchasing it and to what age group of children get easily influenced to accept that new innovation to their existing set. David *et al.* (2002) explore the various patterns of children's requests and parental responses to those requests across three different cultures namely the United states, Japan and Great Britain. The frequency and intensity of such requests is thought to lead to a corresponding increase in family tensions when parents especially those in lower socioeconomic brackets deny the requests. Patterns of children's purchase requests and parental responses would seem to be an important part of children's consumer socialization processes. These processes generally refer to the development of consumption-related knowledge, attitudes and skills, and they are influenced by many factors, including advertising, peers, children's experiences, and parental behavior. Consumer socialization processes will vary depending on the children's experiences resulting from the pattern of reinforcements as children request products and parents respond to these requests. Parents who agree to buy most things their children request probably encourage their children to be attentive to advertising and to request things frequently. On the other hand, parents who routinely discuss children's requests with them may encourage children to develop particular skills in selecting and interpreting product information, and in defining product needs carefully. Due to cultural differences, American and British children have been taught to be more independent whereas this is not a case in terms of Japanese kids. American families are more likely to use psychological rewards and punishments, and to employ guilt-inducing methods whereas, Japanese parents rely on persuasion and reasoning. British families, on the other hand, employ physical punishments. American parents are less likely to fall victims of the pester power as their nature to reason with children is stronger than the British and Japanese parents.

Greenspan (2002) analyses the extent of children's say in purchasing electronics and identify the sources of influence among the children of the United States of America. The study concludes that children, indeed, have a very strong hold in the purchase of electronic items as they were recognized to be the ultimate decision makers of products such as computer software's, mp3 players and PDA's whereas they had a 50 percent chance when it came to other electronic items such as cell phones, digital cameras and internet access. The author concludes stating that the breadwinners are no longer the decision makers for electronics in American households.

Findings

The main objective of this study is to identify the extent of influence children exert on their parents while making a purchase decision. Keeping the aim of the study in focus, data was collected to study the behavioral traits of expatriate Indian parents as well as their children to understand the degree of influence exerted by the kids to acquire items of their choice. Children have become the prominent initiators of consumers purchase decisions. The study examines two important factors such as general buying behaviour and children's influence in buying. The analytical results of the study are presented in the subsequent titles.

Demographic Profile of the target group

This section analyses four major variable in the personal profile of the children of the families, contacted for the purpose of the study. The personal information includes information on age and gender of the children contacted for the study, the number of years of residence in Bahrain and the economic status of the families along with any other sources of earnings were also investigated as depicted in table 1. The result shows that around 64 per cent of children are females. With respect to the age category around 56 per cent are from lower teenage (12 – 15 years) and the rest are from upper teenage group. An interesting aspect of the study is that a clear majority (68 per cent) of the children contacted had been their stay in Bahrain for more than nine years. Many confided that they were born and brought up in Bahrain. Parental economic status also plays a significant role in materializing the children's requests. On attempting to find the economic position of the families, it was understood that both the parents were employed in 64 per cent of families.

Sl. No	Factors	Percentage
1	<i>Gender</i>	
	Male	36
	Female	64
2	<i>Age group (in years)</i>	
	12 – 15	56
	15 – 18	44
3	<i>Duration of stay in Bahrain (in years)</i>	
	Below 3	0
	3 – 5	12
	5 – 7	20
	7 – 9	0
	Above 9	68
4	<i>Economic status of parents</i>	
	Both employed	64
	One employed	36

Source: estimated from primary survey

Shopping Behaviour

The shopping behaviour of family plays an important role in determining, whether the parents will yield to the pressure tactics. A family that maintains regularity in shopping tendency may not have much positive response towards pressure tactics. Whereas, the children's relentless and invincible pestering may induce the family to undertake frequent shopping at irregular intervals. In this situation the shopping frequency is determined by the effectiveness of pestering. The data show that (refer table 2) more than half of the respondent families have no regular routine for making purchases; they buy as and when the need approaches. Next in line are those families that shop once a week at any random day implying no fixed day schedule for shopping. Only 16 % shop every weekend entailing the category of regular shoppers and a meager 4 % show signs of over shopping by visiting the stores twice a week.

Table 2: Shopping trend

Sl. No	Factors	Percentage
1	Every weekend	16
2	Twice a week	04
3	Once a week at random	24
4	No regularity	56

Source: estimated from primary survey

More than half of the parents, contacted as part of the study, responded that their kids accompany on shopping trips, only when the venue of purchasing interests them. However, a significant 44 % responded that the location of shopping or any other factor does not stop their kids from accompanying them where ever they go. The response of children to the same question gave more varied as shown in table 3.

Table 3: Children tagging along – Children’s Opinion

Opinions	Percentages
Always, they accompany us wherever we go	34%
Once in a while, only when the place interests them	46%
Never, I dislike shopping with them	10 %
So I can get what I want at that time	10 %

Source: estimated from primary survey

As it is seen from the table above, there lies inconsistency in the parents and the children’s shopping behavior. Around 10 % of the respondent kids admitted disliking shopping with their parents whereas the so was not in the case of their parents perception. Similarly, another 10 % disclosed that the only reason they like going out with their parents is to get what they want at that particular time without having to pine for it later on.

Children’s Influence in buying

This section analyses the degree of influence a child of the family has on the four main categories of products in a household, the percentage of parents who have to work extra hours for their children’s growing fantasies, to understand if parents feel

their children are more privileged because they stay in Bahrain as compared to a stay in their home countries. This area also understands to know how frequently parents materialise their kid's requests and to what extent they succumb to it, along with if parents are overspending to satisfy their kid's and to identify the number of items that they have purchased with the approval of their child.

The study understood that children have the highest degree of influence while purchasing apparels, followed by electronics and vacation packages. Automobiles are one of such items, off late, the kids started presenting their strong preference to a particular make or model. It was evident from the data that around 48% of the respondent parents agreed that they had to work extra hours to satisfy their children's whims and fancies and the rest 52% disagreed implying they can manage their budget well or that they trim down their own expenses to fulfill request of their younger ones.

An attempt to ascertain the comparative position of the expatriate kids from that of their counterpart in India, with respect to their persuasion capacity, discloses that around 61% of the parents felt that their children were more privileged residing in Bahrain as compared to their stay in India. Still around 29% were not sure as to whether they could provide the same lifestyle and fulfill all requests irrespective of their location. Only an insignificant 10% felt that they could provide the same standard of living even in India. Testifying the predominance of pester power in effecting purchases delineates that that 80% of the parents quite often materialize their children's request and only a 16 % rarely do. This revelation substantiates the influence of children in making their parents buy the items of the former's choice. It is evidenced that very few parents retain some amount of discretionary power not to yield to the temptation of children always.

An interesting finding of the study is an evenly distributed response of parents pertaining to overspending to satisfy their kids' fantasy. Half of them nodded positively and the other half poised on their opinion of maintaining within budget limit. This shows that parents are pushed to unsustainable spending habits for materializing their kids' requests. About 76% of the respondent families accorded that children have considerable stake in their purchase behaviour, signifying parents'

predicament, and 4% take no regard of their kids' preference while shopping. With respect to the age group of children in registering more pressure tactics, it is the lower adolescent (12 – 15 years), who can better sensitize the parents, being 60% of the respondents are in congruence to the importance tender tongue. This is, despite, upper adolescent kids' aggressiveness, maturity of age, sleeve tugging behaviour etc, the parents lay down their arms, out of affection, to lower adolescents.

Never-the-less, a few of the parents believe that their children's requests are always logical in nature. However, a majority of them do believe that sometimes their child makes an illogical request. Disagreement over purchasing for a child's personal request, temporary hostility and arguments with the spouse occurs at times but this pattern tends towards rarely, implying there are exceptional scenes of family unrest transpiring.

Discussion

This study was conducted on the expatriate Indian families in Bahrain for the purpose of identifying the most influential age group of pestering, the degree of influence exerted by children in the purchase decision making process and the most used method of pestering. It has been identified that the most influential age group of children as per the study conducted has been identified as 12-15 years. The parents are seemed to be so generous to the young children that they become defenseless to the whining or/and sycophantic behaviour of young age group. Only a few of the respondent parents believed that their kid's requests are always logical in nature, whereas, a majority felt that the requests made are illogical. Disagreement over purchasing for the child's personal request, temporary hostility and arguments with the spouse does occur sometimes, but the same do not lead to a long run family unrest. Children's influence in purchasing of apparels and electronics is the highest as compared to vacation packages and automobiles, where the intensity of their opinions is not as supported. With regard to decisions relating to the selection of vacation packages, kids solely did not play the role of the ultimate decision maker. About 96% of the parents take the consent of their younger ones while purchasing items in general and for their homes, indicating that children play a very strong role in family purchase decision making.

This clearly indicates the increased pressure on today's parents to work longer office hours in order to attain enough cash so as to satisfy their children's wants indirectly leading to a creation of a cash rich but time poor society (Szybillo, 1977; Singh, 1998). The present study itself shows that children will be more influential when both the parents are employed than otherwise.

Conclusion

The results of the present study show that children, irrespective of their age groups, use effective methods of pestering they adopted to satisfy their personal wants. The study conducted has clearly analyzed the most influential age group of children as 12-15 years as compared to 15-18 years which was perceived by parents. Certain families experience temporary discord of opinion and perception, between spouses, with regard to catering to the needs of the children. The expatriate status of Indian children, who are residing in the Kingdom of Bahrain, have more pester power comparing to their counterparts in India. Hence the expatriate children enjoy a premium position in exercising a high degree of pester power.

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