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Influence of Family Structures on Pester Power and Purchase Outcomes-A Conceptual Framework

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Abstract

Children have emerged as a significant consumer group that cannot be ignored. From followers of parental choice to co-decision makers while purchasing, children's influence in purchase decisions have been of significant interest to marketers across the globe. The purpose of the study is to explore how different family communication structures influence pester power in children, which helps in forming a final purchase outcome. The paper presents a conceptual framework which helps in understanding how pestering in children varies under the influence of different family communication structures and thus shaping a final purchase outcome. The model is developed as a result of extensive literature review in the area of pesters power, family communication structures and purchase outcomes. The type of family structures namely the laissez-faire family, the protective family, the pluralistic family, and the consensual family has a lot of bearing on the way children use different types of pester power. Pester power comes to play through a wide array of persuasive and emotional strategies/ behavior at a market place in which the type of family structure becomes a major factor to reckon with. This behavior can lead to a culmination of a purchase outcome by a parent and thus it indeed becomes a significant pre cursor to many a purchase decisions. The proposed model is an attempt to explore these relationships thereby enriching and adding to the existing body of knowledge.

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1. Introduction

Children are considered as the brightest stars of consumer constellation and often they pay high price for it since they attract it all – the good, the bad, the ugly (McNeal, 2007). Children are always exposed to an environment of different influencers like their peer groups, parent's etc. The exposure to persuasive intent of advertisers, access to different information sources like internet, blogs etc. has armed a child with different emotional and persuasive tactics which they deploy at a market place. Often parents and children enter into a set of negotiations, bargaining arguments and even positive interactions, which in turn leads to purchase decision-making. The influence of a child on family purchase decision increases as the child grows into a consumer with specific consumer skill, knowledge and attitude to behave as a consumer/opinion giver/co-decider.

India has 29.5% of the total population below the age of 15, (Census, 2011) which clearly puts an impetus on recognizing the pool of young consumers. The research in India in this area can still be enhanced due to the fact that India will continue to have young consumers for decades to come. There have been many studies conducted in developed nations; both ethnographical and empirical, but little has been explored in emerging markets like India. This study intends to investigate the different persuasive and emotional strategies that children adopt to interact with their parent's in a specific family structure. The main objective of the study is to develop a model, which depicts how different family structures influence the types of pestering, and the subsequent purchase outcomes, which is otherwise a less explored area. The type of family structure that the child is brought up has a lot of influence in the manner in which the child behaves and usually this gets reflected in the way a child communicates to his/her parents in a certain purchase scenario.

The paper discusses the theoretical background of the context, and defines the various persuasive and emotional strategies used by children. The paper proposes a conceptual model on how the different types of pestering vary with the family communication structures and how it influences the final purchase outcomes. The paper then comes up with its contribution to the theoretical background and the practical implications it will have to the marketers

2. Literature review

2.1 *Pester power*

Pester power has been a very controversial and sensitive topic in the marketing world. Ever since children were considered to have a significant role of influencer in the family purchase decisions, the area of pester power has been of a great interest to marketers. Pester power can be defined as children's influence on family consumption patterns (Gunter and Furnham, 1998). The term pester power also has not been free from negative connotations with the term been defined as 'nag factor' according to Bridges and Briesch (2006). Nevertheless there have been also views of it being a natural phenomenon that occurs in a family set up and thus is free from any negativity (Nash and Basini, 2012). Pester power can also be termed as a socially driven game and not a commercial relationship (Nash and Basini, 2012). Children have got substantial amount of power and they deploy various tactics to exert their influence over their parent's and hence the term pestering.

The power of children has been so much so that the families have been led to many purchase decisions due to the power exerted by children. McNeal (1999) describes the three sources of power for the child consumers; they have their own spending power, the role as customers whose loyalties repay early courtship and their power over adults purchasing behavior. Children have been found to exert the power over adults purchasing behavior to products ranging from relatively inexpensive purchases such as food products (Marquis, 2004) to expensive items such as a family's choice of car (Dotson and Hyatt, 2005).

A discussion about pester power would not be complete without mentioning the aspect of consumer socialization of children. According to Ward (1974), consumer socialization can be defined as "processes by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the market place". Cognitive

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