

Children's Influence in Family Consumption Decisions in Iran

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the influence of children on family purchasing decision making in Iran. Primary data were collected from a sample of 385 children aged 8-11 using questionnaire survey. Various statistical methods such as Univariate ANOVA and t-tests were used to analyse the data. Findings indicate that children exert strong influence on the family decision making, for products that are consumed by them. Older children influence more compared to younger children, but gender does not significantly influence on family purchasing decision making. Thus, marketers should explicitly acknowledge children's role in the family decision making.

KEYWORDS: children, consumer decision making process, influence, Purchasing, Iran

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of children in purchase decision making has increased over the recent years, mainly because children not only make purchasing decisions for their own personal consumption but also because they influence family purchase decisions [1]. Academic findings support applied market research, indicate that children have substantial influence relative to their parents in family purchase decisions [2,3]. Today children are seen as different from past generations; especially among the 8-11 year-olds. "They've grown up faster, are more connected, more direct and more informed. They have more personal power, more money, influence and attention than any other generation before them" [4]. Family structures have changed, which influence family decision-making [5], and, as some authors argue, family communication has become more open and democratic, therefore, today parents pay more attention to their children and their opinions. These changes in family communication have made it possible for children to exert influence on family decision-making [6,7,8].

Studies commissioned by cable television networks in the USA, found that an average of 43 percent of total purchases made by parents were influenced by children [9]. Leibeck (1994) reports that "mothers who shop with their kids wind up spending 30 percent more than they originally intended and fathers spend 70 percent more" [10]. Also McNeal (1998) estimated that children 4 to 12 years of age influence approximately US\$188 billion annually in family-related purchases [3]. Other researchers reported that children's influence on parents spending has increased 54% since 1997 [11], with children influencing 80% of family food spending. Finally, Cooper (1999) reports that in 43% of their purchases, parents requested input from their children [9].

Marketing research on children's influence on their parents' weekly purchases showed socializing agents such as demographics, parents, peers, media, and communication within the family all played a part [12,13]. Kaur and Singh (2006) explored what motivated parents to make purchases of various types of goods [1]. Previous research yielded various findings based on the effect of demographic factors (e.g., age, gender, social class, and race of the children) on children's influences on the family decision making [14,15].

This study try to direct one major research question, that is, to examine the attitude of the mother about children's effect on family purchasing decisions in relation to product type and family communication pattern and demographic variables such as child's age and gender, number of children in family, parent's income and education and whether the mother is working or not.

1.1 Age

In most of the studies, the child's age was found to be the main factor of effect on family decision-making. Previous research concluded that older children have higher influence on family purchase decisions compared to the younger ones [2,16,17,18,19,20]. These results are among other things due to older children's greater perceptive ability [21], as compared to younger children. This effect is greatly because of the development of perceptive

capabilities and gathering of information about the products and markets in older children. Based on the above discussion, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Older children have significantly more influence on the family decision making process than younger children.

1.2 Number of children

In previous studies, a child's status in the family has been evaluated by the number of children in family. Churchill and Moschis (1979) first mentioned that number of children could be related to a child's involvement in decision-making, with first-born children exerting greater purchase decision influence [22]. Sociological trends of the 1990's lend doubt to the concept that number of children should moderate children's influence. Reducing birth rates indicate more households with fewer children and many households with single children. Due to that, number of children may have less importance in current family structures. To further examine the impact of number of children, the following hypothesis is suggested,

H2. No difference in purchase decision influence will be found due to children's birth order.

1.3 Socio-economic status

Family demographics such as household income, parent's educational levels are joined with the children's influence on the family purchasing decisions [23]. Research on the effects of socio-economic status, containing household income and parents' education levels, on children's influence has been combined. Jenkins (1979) shown that children influence on the family purchasing decisions is much more intensive in families with high income levels [18]. Correspondingly, Tansujah et al.(1991) have reported that the higher the income of the family, the more influential is the role of children to select the restaurant where they will eat [24]. Similarly, research mentioned that the higher the parents' educational achievement, the more that children influenced purchase decisions [25]. Thus, the following hypotheses will be tested;

H3a. Children whose parents have reached higher educational levels will have more influence in purchase decisions than children whose parents have reached lower educational levels.

H3b. Children in households with higher incomes will have more influence in purchase decisions than children in households with lower incomes.

1.4 Gender

Past research show that female children were more powerful than male children across all stages of the decision-making process [16,25]. Changes in the current family, such as delayed child-bearing, reducing household size and united relationships suggest that the mediating effect of gender may no longer be in effect. In fact, gender role socialization in many aspects is egalitarian. Parents socialize their sons and daughters equally in regard to the amount of time spent with them, training, and communication [26]. Based on the above discussion, it is hypothesized that:

H2. No difference in purchase decision influence will be found between male and female children.

1.5 Occupational status of the mothers

A quick growth in the number of working mothers has meaningfully influenced the child's identity and the treatment of mothers to their children. Today's children encourage their mothers to work because of money, prestige, and status expectations. Studies show that working mothers think that they are not caring their children enough so due to feeling of guilt, they tend to endure their children's misbehaviors. These mothers have been reimbursing their absence at home and have less conversation with their children. As it is shown by child market research, 92 percent of 1,000 children's mothers stated that they could not say "no" to their children [27]. Parents who believe that they do not spend enough time with their children feel guilty and try to pay back for it by giving and spending more money for their children:

H3. Children of working mothers have more influence on the family purchasing decisions than those of mothers not working.

1.6. Product type

While children have the greatest effect on buying a fruit flavor junk food they have the lowest effect on buying a car. Frideres (1973) interviewed the mothers buying toys for their children and asked them the reason behind their choice selection [28]. The most regularly stated reason was the demand of the child for that toy. This is followed by the fact they like the toy when they see the toy on the display and the toy will serve well for the education of the child. The first reason especially prevails in the purchase of the parents during "special" days such as Christmas and the study also disclose a direct relation between the price of the product and the selection of the parents:

H6. Children exert more influence on the family purchasing decision for products more specific to their own use than for those common to the family.

1.7 Family communication patterns

Family communication patterns are instrumental in the amount of influence that children exert on family decision in the present, and the way children will behave as consumers in the future. The socio-and concept-orientations are two patterns of family communication between parent and child. Socio orientation reflects a desire for harmonious interpersonal relationships in the family, and the measures may reflect the parent's efforts to achieve harmony through the emphasis of conformity and control. Accordingly, socio-oriented parents report an interest in telling their children to avoid controversy and arguments. In contrast, concept-oriented parents tend to consider communication a tool to convey and share views. Conflict, controversy, and resolution all can occur through candid discussion. They consult their children and value their opinions in purchase decisions even for products that are not for their consumption [29,30]. In view of this and the above it is expected that:

H7a. There is a positive relationship between a child's perceived influence on consumption choice decisions and the level of concept-orientation held by the parent.

H7b. There is a no relationship between a child's perceived influence on consumption choice decisions and the level of socio-orientation held by the parent.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research design:

Family decision-making studies that focus on family roles require the collection of data from both the parent and the child [17,31]. Consequently, the field research in this study was based on one questionnaire directed at the parent-child dyad, consisting of a young child and a parent.

The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section included six demographic questions, which is proposed to have a significant impact on children's influence. In the second part, questions measuring the perceived influence of children on family purchasing decision-making and measuring both the socio-and concept-orientation. A Likert-scale ranging from "very seldom" to "very often" was used. The final questionnaire consisted of 21 items (13 items for the children and eight in that for adults). Besides these items, demographic data were collected from the questionnaire. A total of 385 questionnaires were collected over a period of a month.

2.2 Data collection and sample:

The research was conducted in 2013. The data was collected from 385 families, both from parent and children in 2 schools in north and center of Shiraz, Iran, to allow a comparison of perception in influence. The family is the sampling unit of this study. In this context, children aged between 8 and 11 were included in sample. The reliability analysis for the items included in the questionnaires generated Cronbach Coefficient Alpha scores of 0.717 for the questionnaire, which are higher than the adequate levels of internal consistency, as the minimum is stated to be 0.70. Data is analyzed using the SPSS software package. Chi-square, T-test and univariate ANOVA in addition to the descriptive statistics are used for the analysis.

3. RESULTS

Several characteristics were found to moderate children's influence on the purchase of a product for the child's personal consumption. Similar to past researches, the child's age and gender, number of children, parent's income and education, whether the mother is working or not, product type and Family communication patterns had a moderating effect. The ages of mothers who participated in the study ranged between 33 and 57 years and the age of the children ranged between eight to eleven years. Of children respondents, 63.1 percent were girls while 36.9 percent of children were boys. 64.2 percent of mother participate in this study, were university graduates, 23 percent housewives and 73 percent working at the time of the study. Other demographic characteristic of the sample are shown in Table 1.

Univariate ANOVAs, Chi-square and t-test were computed to determine statistical significance of each hypothesis at $p < .05$, and these findings are summarized in table 2,3 and 4.

To test the hypothesis, we consider three types of products to evaluate the children's influence on family purchasing decisions, suggesting buying the product category is studied by Isin and Alkibay (2011). The first type consisted of products and services that children closely relate to and were consulted about, products such as toys. The title of this type of product is "the products consumed by the child" which are cheap and involve low

purchasing risks. The second type is about the products that were consumed by whole family but with low risk, product such as dairy product. The third type is about the products that were consumed by whole family but with high risk, product such as holiday decision. The titles of these types of products are ‘‘high and low risk product used by the whole family’’ which consumers compare based on the price, quality, color and fashion. These three types of products evaluate the children’s influence on the family purchasing decisions.

Consistent with anticipated, child’s age was found to dominate the extent of child’s influence on decision purchasing over first types of products, ($p < 0.05$). The results suggest that the influence of the child has a relationship with age, for the first product classes analyzed in the research. But by contrast, the child’s age was not found to dominate the extent of child’s influence on decision purchasing over second and third types of product, ($p > 0.05$). The Chi-square results reveals that the age of children is a determining factor on the decisions of the family to purchase first types of products but is not a determining factor on the decisions of the family to purchase second and third types of products (see table 2)

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the sample

Demographic characteristics of the sample	N	%
Age of children:		
Eight	100	26
Nine	89	23.1
Ten	84	21.8
Eleven	112	29.1
Education:		
High school	98	25.5
University degree	247	64.2
Graduate or PhD degree	40	10.3
Household income:		
\$400-\$600	3	8.1
\$600-\$1000	224	58.2
More than \$1000	130	33.8
Working or non-working:		
Working	280	72.7
Non-working	105	27.3
Number of children:		
1	191	49.6
2	149	38.7
3	31	8.1
4	14	3.6
Gender:		
Boy	143	36.9
Girl	242	63.1

Table2: The Chi-square results regarding the influence if demographics on children’s influence

	Age	Number	Education	Income
Product used by the child				
Candy	0.00**	.539	.102	.124
Ice cream	0.00**	.85	.619	.523
Toy	0.00**	.932	.788	.517
Shoe	0.00**	.724	.577	.667
Alpha = .868				
Low risk product used by whole family				
Fruit	.132	.791	.781	.445
Bread	.056	.916	.496	.138
Dairy product	.075	.728	.321	.345
Alpha = .805				
High risk product used by whole family				
Furniture	.238	.641	.099	.511
Stove	.262	.473	.414	.495
Holiday decision	.223	.555	.167	.605
Alpha = .96				

**Significant at $\alpha = 0.01$

The Chi-square tests were run to investigate the effect demographics on children’s influence. Income level was measured as being placed in three socioeconomic status groups (see table 2).

The Chi-square analysis of the first types of products with the inclusion of the number of children in the family is not statistically significant ($p>0.05$). The number of children in the family does not reveal statistically significant difference [e.g., $p= .539>0.05$]. The Chi-square analysis of the second and third types of products with the inclusion of the number of children in the family is not statistically significant ($P>0.05$). The number of children in the family does not reveal statistically significant difference (e.g., $p=0.791>0.05$). The analysis reveals that the number of children is not a determining factor on the decisions of the family to purchase any of the products classified here. So, H2 is accepted.

In order to test the H3 hypothesis, Chi-square results showed that no moderating effects were found for child's socio-economic status over three type of product, as evidenced by their household income and parents' educational levels. The results of the present study are not congruent with the literature. So H3 is rejected.

Table 3a. t-test, determine statistical significance of each hypothesis at $p< .05$. (Product used by child)

Variables	index	N	mean	standard deviation	Std. Error Difference	Mean difference	df	T-value	sig
Gender	Boy	143	7.802	2.34	.259	-0.007	382	-0.027	0.16
	Girl	242	7.809	2.514					
Working or non-working	working	280	7.753	2.474	.24	.28	383	-0.777	.275
	Non-working	105	7.971	2.379					

Table 3b. t-test, determine statistical significance of each hypothesis at $p< .05$. (Low risk product used by family)

Variables	index	N	mean	Std. deviation	Std. Error Difference	Mean difference	df	T-value	sig
Gender	Boy	142	8.51	2.21	.232	.084	382	.364	.75
	Girl	242	8.43	8.43					
Working or non-working	working	280	8.4	2.123	.251	-.257	383	-1.024	.135
	Non-working	105	8.65	2.377					

Table 3c. t-test, determine statistical significance of each hypothesis at $p< .05$. (High risk product used by family)

Variables	index	N	mean	Std. deviation	Std. Error Difference	Mean difference	df	T-value	sig
Gender	Boy	142	4.18	1.44	0.152	0.0136	382	0.09	0.903
	Girl	242	4.16	1.43					
Working or non-working	working	280	4.12	1.42	0.164	-0.17	383	-1.036	.104
	Non-working	105	4.29	1.46					

In order to test the H4 hypothesis, independent t-test results showed that the values of t-test were [$t(385) = -0.027$, $p>0.05$] which does not reveal statistically significant difference between girls and boys regarding the first group of products. For the second type of products, the t-test value [$t(385) = 0.364$, $p>0.05$], and for the third type of products, the t-test value [$t(385) = 0.09$, $p>0.05$] does not indicate a statistically significant difference for these two types of products by the gender of the children. The evaluation of the results indicates that the gender of children is not a determining factor in the purchase of any of the product groups. H4 is accepted.

In order to test H5 hypothesis, the results of the t-test [$t(385) = 0.77$, $p>0.05$] did not reveal statistically significant difference for the first type of products as regards to the occupational status of the mothers. For the second and third type of products the outcome [for the second type, $t(385) = -1.024$, $p>0.05$ and for the third type, $t(385) = -1.036$, $p>0.05$] did not show a significant difference between the working and non-working mothers as regards to family type of products. The data revealed that the occupational status of the mothers is not a determining factor on the influence of the children on the decisions of the mothers regarding the purchase of all types of products. H5 is rejected (see table 3a,b,c).

Table 4. Univariate ANOVAs determine statistical significance of each hypothesis at $p < .05$.

Variables	SSB	df	MSE	F-value	Significance
Product used by the child	2323.766	14	165.983	47.853	0.00
Error	1283.392	370	3.469		
Total	3607.158	384			
Low risk product used by whole family	506.774	5	101.355	12.39	0.00
Error	3100.385	379	8.18		
Total	3607.158	384			
How risk product used by whole family	776.587	2	388.294	52.402	0.00
Error	2830.571	382	7.410		
Total	3607.158	384			

Dependent variable: Group = children's influence on the family purchasing of first group product +children's influence on the family purchasing of second group product +children's influence on the family purchasing of third group product.

The fact that the values are $P < 0.05$, reveal statistically significance differences between the related products as regards to the children's influence on the family purchasing decisions (see table 4). The average scores are quoted in order to define the difference created by the independent variables (three product categories) on the dependent variable. Average scores show that average score of the first group ($X = 7.81$) is higher than that of the second group ($X = 4.58$), and also is higher than the third group ($X = 4.17$). Average differences show the significance differences between the second and third groups, first and third groups and first and second groups ($p < 0.05$). So, H_6 is accepted.

In order to test the last hypothesis of the study, the regression analysis was undertaken. The criterion variable consisted of the sum of the consisted of the sum of the cores for the concept- and socio-orientation. The correlation test in Table 5, show that the concept- and socio-orientation variables are not correlated. The regression provides a statistically significant R^2 of 73.5 percent ($F = 5.30$; $p < 0.05$). Examination of the coefficients table shows that only the independent variable for the concept-orientation construct is statistically significant ($\text{std } \beta = .853$, $p < 0.01$). These results provide support for H_7a and H_7b . Perception of influence by children, are related to a concept-orientation of parents but not to a socio-orientation.

Table 5. Pearson correlation

	1	2	3
1.Influence of children	1		
2.Concept-orientation	0.853**	1	
3.Socio-orientation	0.088	-0.03	1

4. DISCUSSION

The analyses reveal the fact that the children's influence on the family purchasing decisions varies by the group of products involved. The children have a maximum influence on the purchase of the products related to the children. The literature suggests that the extent of children's influence varies among product classes [18,19,31,32]. In this study a total of ten product classes were used, four aimed at children's use and six aimed at family use. The products were selected to represent high involvement-low involvement, as well as high risk- low risk situations. The findings of the research reveal that children's influence is statically higher for product classes targeted at child's use. This finding is also parallel to the literature. It is suggested that products which the child exerts greatest influence on the purchasing decision of the family are those which carry low purchasing risk and used by the child. Further, the paper provides insight for the marketers about which product advertising is effective on children.

Demographic characteristic are one of the most prominent factors on children's influence, frequently mentioned in the literature. Within these, the child's age [20,33], socioeconomic status [2,34], child's gender [25,35], number of children [36], and occupational status of the mothers [27] often proposed to have effect on the extent of child's influence. In this study six demographic variables were entered into the model.

Isin and Alkibay (2011) found no relationship between number of children and influence of children over family purchase decision [27]. Carlson et al (1990) who looked at number of children in the family, also report no relationship [31]. Like Isin and Carlson, we found no relationship between number of children and influence of children over family purchase decision.

The previous studies reveal that the children of working mothers have a bigger role on the purchasing decisions of the family [37]. The results of the present study are not congruent with the literature. In contrast to past research, no moderating effects were found for child's socio-economic status, as evidenced by their household income and parents' educational levels and occupational status of the mothers. The fact that occupational status of the mothers has no effect on children's influence is that most of Iranian women are employed in part-time jobs hence they can go to work whenever their children go to school, so they felt less guilty of not being with their children.

Results show that there is no relationship between gender of children and influence of children over family purchase decision. This is congruent with the results in the literature [38, 16]. Only Collins and Lee (2000) reported that the girls have more influence in the purchasing decisions of the family than boys do [35]. The fact that child's gender has no effect on children's influence is suggested to be due to cultural context as well as sample characteristics. Iran shows little difference in terms of masculinity/femininity in Hofstede's studies (1984), which imply that the influence of children are not expected to vary with regard to child's gender, which is also reflected in finding [39].

Also another purpose of this study has been to investigate whether parental communication style effect children's perceived influence on purchases. Results show that children of concept-orientated parents have an influence on purchase decisions, while those with socio-orientation parents do not. Since concept-oriented parents encourage children to develop their own skills and competence as consumers it is likely to result in higher yielding to demands by children. These finding have implication for the marketing strategy. The characteristics that make up the two categories of parents can be used for market segmentation purposes.

One implication of this research is that children are receptive to external socialization agents and can be shaped as future consumers. Children are assimilating marketplace knowledge at earlier ages than ever before, putting them in the unique position of developing brand loyalties at much younger ages. Estimates are that children are requesting products by brand as early as age 2 and making independent purchases as early as age 8. Marketing strategies must be developed to reach this segment. Some recommended strategies include premiums, attractive packaging. These types of studies should be repeated in order to obtain more comprehensive data and should also be extended to children with different age groups. The factors such as loyalty to a certain brand, educational level, social and economical status of the parents should be appropriately addressed. The mothers might have been biased because of social pressures. That is why the children should be included in similar studies in future.

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