



A Study on Influence of Children in food buying on the Family Decision-Making Process

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ABSTRACT

Children represent an important target market segment and gain respective attention from the marketing point of view. Current changes in social and demographic structures are increasing children's influence on their parents' decisions and their general involvement in family decision making. Higher family income and more women in the workplace have been debated as some of the factors that cause the greater influence of children in the family. As the children's role in family decisions increases, the research and studies concerning this matter have also become more remarkable and more interesting, especially for marketers and food industries. This study will investigate the category of food products since food and children are attached closely to one another. This study also evaluate at which stage of buying and consumption process children influence more and analyse the perception of parents and children in family decision making process.

KEYWORDS :

INTRODUCTION:

Current changes in social and demographic structures are increasing children's influence on their parents' decisions and their general involvement in family decision making. Higher family income and more women in the workplace have been debated as some of the factors that cause the greater influence of children in the family. As the children's role in family decisions increases, the research and studies concerning this matter have also become more remarkable and more interesting, especially for marketers and food industries.

"Kids today are customers, buyers, spenders, shoppers, consumers". Children represent an important target market segment and gain respective attention from the marketing point of view. Children play an important role in the consumer market by influencing their parents' purchases either for the product used in the household or for the children themselves. The marketers and advertisers have observed and analyzed the mother-child bond as a primary market relationship. Children today are spoiled, have more power to decide on what they want, especially what comes on the table. The purchasing power of a child has increased beyond what he or she can earn when their "purchase influence" is considered.

It is believed that the norm tradition and rules of parents deciding in the family have begun to disappear. Communication in the family becomes more open and democratic. There is an increasing recognition of the child's importance in the family purchase decisions. Not only are children important players in the family decision-making process, but they are also the significant influencers in situations where influence is exercised indirectly through the structure of agreement within the family members. Consequently, children achieve more influence on family decision making. Children have more freedom to choose instead of things being chosen by the parents on what they eat, wear, or buy. The freedom of a child's will and desire has brought benefit to the food market and other children's industries. This research paper focuses on the children's influence, where children play an important role in the consumer market by influencing their parents' purchases either for the product used in the household or for themselves.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

As the children's role in family decisions increases, the research and studies concerning this matter have also become more remarkable and more interesting, especially for marketers and food industries. There are some empirical family decision-making studies involving children. The majority of recent family research involving children has focused on the consumer socialization process, investigating how children's influence is affected by their family or environments through consumer learning (MCNEAL 1987; MOSCHIS 1978; SZYBILLO 1977). Fewer studies are concerned about the type and extent of

influence of children on family decisions (ATKIN 1978; BELCH 1985; DARLEY 1986; MOSCHIS 1986; ROBERTS 1981).

Six studies in Table 1 are based on the perception from one of the parents, mostly are the mothers together with the children in the household (CONVERSE AND CRAWFORD 1949; WARD AND WACKMAN 1972; ATKIN 1978; FOXMAN AND TANSUHAJ 1988; FLURRY AND BURNS 2003; TINSON ET AL. 2008). Six studies involve only single-respondent data (e.g. mothers' perceptions) and thus do not allow the comparison of family members' perceptions on decision-related matters (PERREAULT AND RUSS 1971; MEHROTRA AND TORGES 1977; SZYBILLO, SOSANIE, AND TENENBEIN 1977; NELSON 1979; ROBERTS, WORTZEL, AND BERKELEY 1981; DARLEY AND LIM 1986). One study includes teachers as the respondents together with the mothers and the children (BEREY AND POLLAY 1968). One study involves only the parents as the respondents (JENKINS 1979).

The remaining eight studies (BELCH ET AL. 1980; BELCH ET AL. 1985; FOXMAN AND TANSUHAJ 1988; FOXMAN ET AL. 1989; LEE 1994; MIKKELSEN 2006; NØRGAARD 2007; MARTENSEN 2008; WUT 2009) include complete nuclear family members of fathers, mothers, and children as the respondents. ROBERTS (1981) supported the research on a child's influence and focused on measuring individual children's influence.

Research on children's influence has analyzed many different age groups. Five studies (DARLEY 1986; JENKINS 1979; MEHROTRA 1977; NELSON 1979; ROBERTS 1981) investigate the influence of all children living at home, not focusing on specific age groups. Two studies surveyed college-aged children (CONVERSE 1949; PERREAULT 1971). Seven studies focused specifically on adolescents: (BELCH ET AL. 1980 AND BELCH ET AL. 1985) involved children ages 13 and older (with a mean of 17 years old); FOXMAN (1988) and FOXMAN (1989) included 11 to 19-year-old respondents (with a mean of 15 years old); LEE (1994) involved high school children; TINSON (2008) included children age 10 to 16 years old, and WUT (2009) included children with a maximum age of 29 years old. Seven studies focused on young children and the parental yielding aspect of child influence: BEREY (1968) involving children from age 8 to 11; ATKIN (1978) observed mothers and their 3 to 12-year-old children; WARD (1972) focused on children from age 5 to 12; FLURRY AND BURNS (2003) analyzed children from age 8 to 11 years old; MIKKELSEN (2006) and NØRGAARD (2007) analyzed children age 10 to 13 years old; and MARTENSEN (2008) focused on children age 5 to 13 years old.

In the study from ATKIN (1978), children age 3 to 12 were found to play a dominant influence in the family on the cereal selection in the supermarket. ATKIN pointed out that children tend to rely on pre-es-

established preferences based more often on premium incentives offered on a purchase than the nutritional features of a cereal at the time of influencing cereal purchases. A study from BEREY (1968) conferred that the relationship between mother and child determines the child's influence on cereal purchases. WARD (1972) showed that age plays a big role in affecting children's influence in the family. According to him, children's purchase influence decreases with age, and it depends on the product categories.

The study from MIKKELSEN (2006) presented the preeminent applicable method for the study of children in Jakarta. In his study, MIKKELSEN applied the quantitative as well as qualitative method, using the ethnographic study from 20 families. The difference from his study is that the ethnographic study was carried out first before the survey was conducted. The study of children's influence in Jakarta conducts the survey first and then applies the ethnographic study from 17 families. The influence score from MIKKELSEN study is used as the guidelines for the study of children in Jakarta because it gives a suitable measurement and brings a clear result afterwards concerning the degree of children's influence.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

- To define the relationship, including the conflict between parents and children during food planning & buying process.
- To identify the children product preferences during food buying or grocery shopping.
- To examine the behavior and attitude of children during food buying.
- To evaluate in which stage of the buying and consumption decision process that children have the most influence.
- To compare and analyze the perception and behavior of the parents and children in the family decision-making process.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Research Approach & Nature of Data:

For gathering primary data, survey approach was used

Research Instrument:

For this research questionnaire was used.

Sampling Survey:

Sample unit: Rural respondents

Sample Size: Respondents comprise of 150 children and 150 parents.

Sample Procedure: Non probability Convenience Sampling

PRIMARY DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION:

Table 1: Personal information from parents:

Gender		Age	
Gender	Percentage	Age	Percentage
Male	22	20 - 30	18
Female	78	31 - 40	70.67
		41 - 50	11.33

Education Background		Level of Income	
Up to 12th	23.33	Less than 10000	19.33
Bachelor	49.15	10001 - 25000	40
Master	27.52	25001 - 40000	18
		40001 - 55000	12
		More than 55000	10.67

From 150 participants' parents, 117 parents are mothers (78%) and 33 parents are fathers (22%). Most of the participants' parents are mothers who are housewives; therefore most of them are not in a working position and they are the ones responsible for food buying, preparing, and cooking the food for the family members

The age range from the participants' parents starts at 20 and goes to more than 50 years old. Most parents are between 31 and 40 years old and only few from them are between 41 and 50.

Table 2: Personal information from Children:

Gender		Age		Number of siblings	
Gender	%	Age	%	0	15.33
Boys	46.67	6 years	2	1	53.37
Girls	53.37	7 years	30.67	2	22
		8 years	38.67	3	3.33
		9 years	26.67	4	4.67
		10 years	2	More than 5	1.33

From 150 participant's children: 80 children are girls (53.37%) and 70 children are boys (46.67%). From 150 participants' children, 58 (38.67%) of them are 8 years old, 46 children (30.67%) are 7 years old, 40 children (26.67%) are 9 years old, 3 children (2%) are 6 years old and 3 children (2%) are 10 years old. Most children are between seven and nine years old. During the questionnaires, children were asked to define the amount of siblings that they have. From 150 participants' children, 80 children (53.37%) have one sibling, 33 children (22%) have two siblings, 23 children (15.33%) have no siblings which meant that they are the only child in the family, 5 children (3.33%) have three siblings, 7 children (4.67%) have four siblings, and 2 children (1.33%) have more than five siblings in their family.

Food Purchase Planning and Grocery Shopping

In this context, the frequency of occurrence with regard to food purchase planning and grocery shopping is presented as follows.

Sources of Information

Table 3: Sources of Information		
Source of Information	Children	Parents
Family members (Father, Mother, Brother, Sister)/Children	73	33
Friends	21	59
School	9	3
Market (including shops and malls)	48	71
TV advertisements	77	92
TV Programs	15	25
Newspaper	29	42
Magazines	33	30
Radio	23	6
Hoardings	2	2
Internet	23	5
Other sources	7	16

According to the survey, 92 parents and 77 children agree that TV advertisements have become their main source of information about foodstuffs. Although 73 children think that family members are also the most important source for them, parents think that their friends give them more information about food products than their children. Since the answers can be more than one option, most parents and children gave three answers here. Overall the statistic results show that: 77 children compared to 92 parents think that *TV ads* are the most important source of product information, 73 children compared to only 33 parents think that family members are important sources for them, 48 children compared to 71 parents opt for the *supermarket*, 33 children compared to 30 parents for *magazines*, 29 children

compared to 42 parents for the *newspaper*, 23 children compared to 6 parents for *radio*, 21 children compared to 59 parents for *friends*, 15 children compared to 25 parents for *TV programs*, 23 children compared to 5 parents for the *internet*, 7 children compared to 16 parents for *others* (e.g. *brochures*), 9 children compared to 3 parents for the *school of their children*, and finally 2 children and 2 parents think that *billboards* give them information about food products. Interestingly, parents and children agree that TV ads give lots of food product information, and TV ads are the most important source compared to other information sources. It is concerning that TV ads present a variety of unhealthy food products and encourage children to purchase and consume these types of food.

Most important factors in choosing the food products:

Product Criteria	Children	Parents
Price (Cheap, Expensive, On sale)	94	60
Pictures, colors and form of the package	21	9
Pictures, colors and form of the food	24	8
Taste	91	78
Toys	47	4
New in the market	31	5
Seen in advertisement	31	18
At cash counter	4	3
Because children/other family member like it	12	108
Other	3	35

Price and taste seem to be the most important criteria for children when choosing the food products, followed by premium / gifts. For parents, what their children like appears to be the most important factor when they want to buy food. It shows that children have a strong influence on parents' decision-making process. Table 4 shows that **94 children compared to 60 parents stated that price is important for them in choosing the food products**, 21 children compared to 9 parents for the *packaging pictures*, 24 children compared to 8 parents for *pictures of the food*, 91 children compared to 78 parents for *taste*, 47 children compared to 4 parents for *premiums/gifts*, 31 children compared to 5 parents for *new in the market*, 31 children compared to 18 parents for *TV ads*, 4 children compared to 3 parents for *near the cashier*, **12 children compared to 108 parents for family or my children like it**, 3 children for *others* (such as the *expired date*) compared to 35 parents for *others* (e.g. *healthy*). Besides taste and price, parents also were concerned about health, whereas children believed what comes in the food (gifts) could attract them to buy the products.

Helping parents during grocery shopping:

	Children	Parents
Listing items on the shopping list	51	61
Browsing through circulars	29	50
Taking the goods from the shelves	56	93
Pushing the shopping cart	99	112
Taking out the goods and put them on the check out counter	61	48
Comparing the price between products	16	13
I don't help them	0	0
Other	7	0

Both parents and children agree that children help their parents during grocery shopping mostly by pushing the shopping cart. Some children also mentioned that they also help by looking at the expiration (best before) date of the food products or by taking care of their little brother or sister outside the supermarket while the parents shop. In this question, parents and children can answer more than one option with a maximum of three answers. The results show that: **99 children compared to 112 parents think that during the grocery shopping children help parents by pushing the shopping cart**, 61 children compared to 48 parents for taking out the goods from the cart and putting them on the *check-out counter*, 56 children compared to 93 parents for *taking the goods from the shelves*, 51 children compared to 61 parents for *writing the shopping list*, 29 children compared to 50 parents for *browsing the circulars*, 16 children compared to 13 parents for helping parents in *comparing the price* of the goods, 7 children and none of the parents think that the children can help doing *other things* not mentioned in the list (e.g. taking care their younger siblings), and neither the children nor the parents believe that the children *do not help* parents during grocery shopping.

Food mostly recommended by children:

	Children	Parents
Fruits	54	66
Vegetables	28	20
Cereals	42	39
Breads	36	39
Jams	2	1
Milk	56	76
Juice	15	12
Meat	24	16
Egg	7	5
Noodles	35	24
Rice	7	4
Snacks (Chips, Chocolates, Candies)	48	65
Cola/Soft Drinks	17	7
Ice Cream	36	38
Others	1	3

Both parents and children agree that milk and fruits are the food types mostly recommended by children. Snacks and cereal are also recommended highly by children. In this question, children can select more than one answer with a maximum of three. Figure 6 shows that **56 children compared to 76 parents think that milk is the most recommended food or drink chosen by children**. Other food categories are: 54 children compared to 66 parents for *fruits*, 28 children compared to 20 parents for *vegetables*, 42 children compared to 39 parents for *cereal*, 36 children compared to 39 parents for *bread*, 2 children compared to 1 parent for *jams*, 15 children compared to 12 parents for *juice*, 24 children compared to 16 parents for *meat or fish*, 7 children compared to 5 parents for *eggs*, 35 children compared to 24 parents for *noodles*, 7 children compared to 4 parents for *rice*, 48 children compared to 65 parents for *snacks*, 17 children compared to 7 parents for *soft drinks*, 36 children compared to 38 parents for *ice cream*, 1 child and 3 parents for *other product* categories not mentioned on the list. From this result, children influence most of the food related to what they eat or prefer daily, such as milk, fruit, cereal, and snacks.

Parents' and Children's Perception:

Table 7: Do children influence their parents?

	Children	Parents
Yes	102	109
No	35	36
Don't Know	13	5

Both parents and children agree that children can influence their family in the decision-making process.

Table 8: Children's opinion towards their role in the family

	Boys	Girls
Primary decision maker	0	0
Co - decision maker	41	47
The influencer	29	33
No influence	0	0

88 out of 150 participants' children believe that they are the co-decision maker (the decision in the family is decided 50% by children and 50% by parents), whereas 62 children think that they can only act as the influencer, and none of them believe that either they are the primary decision maker or have no influence at all in the family decision-making process.

Table 9: Parent's opinion towards children's role in the family

	Fathers	Mothers
Primary decision maker	0	0
Co - decision maker	3	17
The influencer	30	99
No influence	0	1

Different from the children's opinion, Table 9 shows that most parents think their children are influencers in the family.

Chi Square test for various demographic characteristics:

Table 9: Chi Square test

Criteria	Family Decision making process	P value	Significant	Hypothesis
	(Children's perception)			
Income	Food Planner	0.03	Significant	Children from high income families have more influence on planning the food for the family
	Food decision maker	0.427	Insignificant	There is no influence difference between children from all income levels
	Responsible for buying the food	0.263	Insignificant	There is no responsible difference between children from all income levels
Education	Food Planner	0.772	Insignificant	There is no influence difference between children from all education levels of the parents
	Food decision maker	0.781	Insignificant	There is no influence difference between children from all education levels of the parents
	Responsible for buying the food	0.426	Insignificant	There is no responsible difference between children from all education levels of the parents
Age	Food Planner	0.002	Significant	Older children have more influence on planning the food for the family
	Food decision maker	0.551	Insignificant	There is no influence difference between older and younger children
	Responsible for buying the food	0.995	Insignificant	There is no responsible difference between older and younger children
Gender	Food Planner	0.52	Insignificant	There is no influence difference between genders.
	Food decision maker	0.326	Insignificant	There is no influence difference between genders.
	Responsible for buying the food	0.01	Significant	Girls are more responsible for buying food for the family
Family size (Siblings)	Food Planner	0.09	Insignificant	There is no influence difference between children from big or small families
	Food decision maker	0.0	Significant	The fewer children in the household, the more influence they have in deciding what food to buy for the family
	Responsible for buying the food	0.09	Insignificant	There is no responsibility difference between children from big or small families

The above table shows result of various demographic factors with children's food planning, food decision maker and responsibility for buying the food for family.

Findings of the study:

Most of the participants' parents were mothers, since they are the ones who are responsible for buying, preparing, and cooking the food for the family members. From 150 participants' parents, 117 parents were mothers (78%) and 33 parents were fathers (22%).

The age range of the participants' parents started from 20 to more than 50 years old; most of them were **between 31 and 40 years of age**.

Some respondents' parents hold a **Bachelor degree** (49.15%).

Most of the families were in the **low-income bracket with below 25000 per month**.

Most participants' children were girls with a total of 80 children (53.37%), and the other 70 children (46.67%) were boys.

The plurality of children was 8 years old (58 children (38.67%). Children during this age are able to perceive, select, and evaluate the information before they buy the product.

Out of 150 participants' children, 80 children (53.37%) **had one sibling**.

TV ads were the most important information source for products according to the majority of parents and children (77 children and 92 parents).

Price and taste were the most important product criteria according to parents and children. **Parents considered "what my family or children like" as the most important criterion** (108 parents) when buying the food product, whereas **price was the most important product criterion for children** (94 children).

Children helped the parents during grocery shopping **mostly by pushing the shopping cart** according to 112 parents and 99 children.

56 children and 76 parents thought that **milk is the most recommended food or drink chosen by children**.

Age and gender of the children affect the degree of children's influence on family decision making in food buying and the consumption process.

Household income has a modest effect on children's influence in the family decision-making process.

The **majority of parents** (109) and **children** (102) think that **children can influence their parents in deciding what to buy and what to eat**.

Most children (88) think that they are the **"co-decision maker"** in the family, meaning that **the decision in the family is decided 50% by children and 50% by parents**, whereas **most parents** (129) think that **children are the influencer"** in the family, meaning that **parents have more to say** or parents often decide for the children in deciding what to buy and to eat.

Conclusion to the Study

Children do have roles in the family, and based on the results, it has been proved that children participate in the food buying and consumption process. Children have influence on the family food when they adjust their participation to the parents' set of daily routines in cooking or shopping. Children have both a direct and indirect influence on family food buying process. Overall, not only children, but the majority of parents also thinks that children have influence on the family decision-making process during food buying. Although **parents think that their children** can influence them, they still think that children are only **influencers**. On the other hand, **children think they are the co-decision makers** or partners for their parents. In this case, children are overestimating their own influence, while parents are underestimating children's influence. **Children exert influence** on the decision stages in buying decision process but **mainly in the "evaluation of alternatives" stage**, where the majority of parents admit that what their children want or like is the most important criterion for them when they want to buy the food.

Children have less influence on the last stage of buying decision process, which is **"purchase act" stage**. Even though parents might ask the children's opinion, in the end they have the last word, or they are the ones who mostly decide. The budget available for groceries is limited; this is also one of the factors why parents exclude children in the purchase act stage.

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