

# AAYAM

## AKGIM Journal of Management

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# AAYAM: AKGIM Journal of Management

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# Family Types, Parental Communication Patterns and Children's Influence in Family Buying Decisions – An Integrated Approach

Harkishini Nain \*

## Abstract

This research paper provides an update and extension to the existing literature on children's influence in family buying decisions integrating the combined effect of family types and parental communication patterns on children's influence in family buying decisions. Two underlying dimensions of parental communication patterns (concept-orientation and socio-orientation) were measured by integrating communication across family types (rural and urban) and regressed on the influence exerted by children in buying decisions. In addition, non-durable family products across three decision-making stages. Based on the online survey of 361 teenage children in India, study results show a significant association between parental communication patterns and the influence exerted by children in family decisions.

## Keywords

Family, Family buying decisions, Parental communication patterns, Children's influence, India

## INTRODUCTION

Family as a primary consumption (Assael, 1998) and decision-making unit (Ghouse et al., 2020) has always been an area of intense investigation for researchers, marketers, and policymakers (Chaudhary et al., 2018). The researchers initially focused on the roles played by husband and/or wife in family buying decisions (Challa et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2009; Moore et al., 2002) and gradually started including children also as an integral part of these decisions for a broad spectrum of goods and services (Rao, 2020; Chaudhary et al., 2018). These studies also indicate that children's participation in the buying decisions in their families has increased over time to an extent that for many products they are now the sole decision-makers (Rao, 2020). The constant elevation in children's role in family buying decisions propelled the researchers for in-depth investigation of this area across countries (Sharma et al., 2022; Ali and Kerpacarova, 2019; Vyataas et al., 2019; Cicero and Teichert, 2018; Curiale, 2018).

The previous studies have identified parents as the primary socialization agents who play a pivotal role in shaping the personalities and identities of their children by providing the most intimate and interactive learning context (Chaudhary et al., 2018). Studies have also revealed that a strong, positive, and nurturing parent-child relationship brings a world of difference and lays the foundation for the child's physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioral development;

hence, for a strong parent-child relationship to exist, of communication within a family becomes pertinent, and Mohan, 2016).

It is the prevailing communication processes through children across generations learn about the family's consumption needs, wants, knowledge, experiences, tastes, beliefs, and preferences. Open, honest, and democratic communication builds understanding and trust among family members and allows each one of them including children to freely express their views even in domains directly related to them. Effective communication with parents not only boost children's self-esteem but also makes them more influential in family buying decisions (Chaudhary et al., 2018; Sunder and Mathew, 2016). This aspect entails special significance in today's time when the number of children per family is decreasing, the number of dual earning but time-poor parents is increasing, families are becoming nuclear, and of external socialization agent, such as social media is gaining momentum (Anitha and Mohan, 2016). Though important, this area has not been thoroughly researched, particularly in culturally different country like India, the second most populated (Worldometers, 2022) and the sixth biggest economy (Central for Economics and Business Research, 2021).

From this perspective, the present study is an effort to integrate

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## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Sample Design and Composition

This is an exploratory primary-data based study conducted to provide an overview of children's influence in family buying decisions in terms of their parents' communication orientations. Primary data was obtained through an online survey of 361 teenage children (13–18 years) from rural ( $N = 185$ ) and urban ( $N = 176$ ) areas of India in January 2022. A snowball sampling technique was adopted for surveyed sample selection. The response rate was restricted to one child - one family - one response.

The research instrument (questionnaire) consisted of four parts. Part 1 discussed the nature and objective of the study, necessary directions to fill the questionnaire, the rights of the respondents, and a statement of confidentiality to use the data for this study only. Part 2 comprised of demographics-related information. Part 3 consisted of 22 statements on the children's influence in family buying decisions for one durable (television/refrigerator/laptop) purchased in the last year and one non-durable (toothpaste) family product, and 13 statements enumerating parental communication patterns formed Part 4.

The surveyed sample comprised of 225 male and 136 female children spread across three age categories, i.e., 13–14 years (43 percent), 15–16 years (36 percent), and 17–18 years (21 percent). Three-fourths of the children had single-earning parents and the remaining one-fourth had both parents working. Sample composition is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample Composition

Characteristics	Aggregate		Rural Families		Urban Families	
	Number ( $N = 361$ )	%	Number ( $N = 185$ )	%	Number ( $N = 176$ )	%
Children's Gender						
Male	225	62	107	58	118	67
Female	136	38	78	42	58	33
Children's Age (years)						
13–14	155	43	81	44	74	42
15–16	129	36	77	42	52	30
17–18	77	21	27	14	50	28
Dual-Parents' Employment						
Single parent working	271	75	140	76	131	74
Both parents working	90	25	45	24	45	26

### Dependent variable measures

Every purchase in a family generally passes through a certain process through which it becomes aware of, evaluates, and finally purchases a product or service. Hence, in this study, the dependent variable, i.e., "children's influence in family buying

decisions" is conceptualized as the extent of influence of children (as compared to other family members while buying a product (television/refrigerator/laptop) and a non-durable product) across three buying decision stages: Stage 1 – awareness stage (at this stage the family member(s) starts looking for need for a product or service); Stage 2 – consideration stage (at this stage different available options in terms of product/service are being critically evaluated and the required product is being purchased). A five-point scale, where 1 = no contribution by child to the decision and 5 = entire contribution by child to 1 = no contribution by child across eleven statements (Foxman et al., 1989) was adopted to measure the responses separately for both the product.

### Independent variable measures

The independent variable about the consumption-related "communication patterns" were measured using Rose et al.'s 13 item scale. Out of these 13 items, 5 items (e.g., my parents forbade me to buy some particular products and services) measure the socio-orientation of parents, and 8 items (e.g., my parents let me full freedom to buy products/services all by myself) measure concept-orientation of the parents. Surveyed children provided responses on a five-point scale ranging from "always" to "never". The variable "family type" was measured in terms of respondents' area of the family residence according to the pertaining to two types of families, i.e., rural and urban, and obtained.

### Reliability analysis of measures

Cronbach alpha values were calculated to assess the reliability of the scales adopted for this study. As per the minimum recommended cut-off limit of 0.60 (Churchill and Peter, 1996) and hence acceptable.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis of Measures

Scale Items	No. of Items	Durable product (a)	Non-durable product (b)
Buying Decision Stages			
- Awareness stage	3	0.74	0.82
- Consideration stage	2	0.76	0.81
- Decision stage	5	0.71	0.77
Parental Communication Patterns			
- Socio-orientation	5	0.71	
- Concept-orientation	8	0.72	

## RESULTS

A methodology similar to the one used by Foxman et al. (1989) has been adapted in the examination of the impact of parents' communication patterns on the influence exerted by children in family buying decisions. Accordingly, children's responses were summed across 5 items for the construct "socio-orientation" and 8 items for the construct "concept-orientation", averaged, and then split on the mid-value that was calculated as 2.5, with





In case of rural families, significant pairwise differences were observed in children's mean influence scores across socio-oriented and concept-oriented parents in case of durable product at the consideration stage ( $M_{\text{Socio-orientation}} = 3.26$  and  $M_{\text{Concept-orientation}} = 3.65$ ), and decision stage ( $M_{\text{Socio-orientation}} = 2.82$  and  $M_{\text{Concept-orientation}} = 3.29$ ), and in case of non-durable family product at the decision stage ( $M_{\text{Socio-orientation}} = 2.69$  and  $M_{\text{Concept-orientation}} = 3.02$ ).

Moreover, in the case of urban families, the impact of parental communication patterns is even more prominent where excepting the consideration stage ( $M_{\text{Socio-orientation}} = 3.43$  and  $M_{\text{Concept-orientation}} = 3.62$ ) about the durable product, significant pairwise differences were observed in children's mean influence scores across socio-oriented and concept-oriented parents in case of durable as well as the non-durable family product across all the three decision stages. Further, in rural and urban families, all the differences between mean influence scores of children across socio-oriented parents and concept-oriented parents are negative, thus, suggesting that as compared to socio-oriented families, children even more influence in family purchase decisions in concept-oriented families.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Indian children are emerging as key decision-makers in the purchase of durable and non-durable products in their families as per the analysis results of this study. This study further strengthened the existing literature on the subject by providing

Table 5: Results Relating to Pairwise Comparisons (Bonferroni Adjustments)

Residence	Products	BDS <sup>1</sup>	(i) Parental communication patterns	(j) Parental communication patterns	Mean difference (i-j)	Std. Error	Sig. <sup>2</sup>	95% Confidence Interval for Difference	
								Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Rural families	Durable product	1	Socio-orientation	Concept-orientation	-.168	.126	.181	-.415	.079
		2	Socio-orientation	Concept-orientation	-.391*	.163	.017	-.711	-.071
		3	Socio-orientation	Concept-orientation	-.471*	.125	.000	-.716	-.236
	Non-durable product	1	Socio-orientation	Concept-orientation	-.005	.151	.972	-.303	.292
		2	Socio-orientation	Concept-orientation	-.248	.178	.165	-.598	.102
		3	Socio-orientation	Concept-orientation	-.331*	.131	.012	-.588	-.074
Urban families	Durable product	1	Socio-orientation	Concept-orientation	-.438*	.131	.001	-.695	-.180
		2	Socio-orientation	Concept-orientation	-.185	.170	.275	-.519	.148
		3	Socio-orientation	Concept-orientation	-.479*	.130	.000	-.735	-.224
	Non-durable product	1	Socio-orientation	Concept-orientation	-.368*	.158	.020	-.678	-.057
		2	Socio-orientation	Concept-orientation	-.502*	.185	.007	-.866	-.137
		3	Socio-orientation	Concept-orientation	-.532*	.136	.000	-.800	-.264

Notes: 1. BDS: Buying Decision Stages (Stage 1: Awareness Stage; Stage 2: Consideration Stage; Stage 3: Decision Stage); 2. Significant at  $p < 0.05$

ample support for the notion that children are assuming roles in the purchase of a wide variety of products irrespective of the fact whether the products are meant for their self-use, parental-use, and/or family-use (Rao, 2020; Chaudhary et al., 2018; Rose et al., 2002). The findings also extend the previous research by integrating family type and parental communication patterns with the influence exerted by children in their family buying decisions in an Indian context. As expected children influenced the entire buying process for both the products, they were comparatively more influential at the early decision stages, i.e., awareness and consideration stages where monetary investment is minimum as compared to the decision stage where monetary investment is maximum and that too mainly for durable products for their use (Rao, 2020; Martensen and Grønhaug, 2008).

Another implication that emerges from the aggregated, as well as disaggregated sample analyses, indicates that parental communication has a strong impact on children's participation in their families' purchases as children with concept-oriented parental communication were found to be more influential across all the three buying stages in case of durable as well as the non-durable product as compared to socio-oriented parental communication. This points out that concept-oriented parents are supportive, open, more engaged, and do encourage their children to be more participative in family purchases as compared to the socio-oriented parents who believe more in controlling and monitoring the behavior of their children.

These results also suggest the patriarchal nature of Indian society as the study comprised more socio-oriented parents. Contrary to the research on the combined impact of the variables "parental expectations", and "family type" on the influence exerted by children in family decisions was found to be significant. This implies that the overall position of children in their families is improving irrespective of their residential area. These results are particularly important for the marketers engaged in designing, producing, and promoting the goods and services for the final consumption by households. The understanding of the role played by different family members will help them efficiently execute their responsibilities. These results can also be used as indicative directives by policymakers to formulate consumer-protection-related policies.

#### FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study laid down a constructive foundation for further research in the area. The findings of this study may be replicated with an even more comprehensive randomly selected sample by including more intervening variables that may have a bearing on parental communication patterns such as communication quality and consumption interaction frequencies. India is a patriarchal society; hence, future research may also extend the study findings to examine the intergenerational impact of parental communication patterns with the gradual improvement in children's position, power, and involvement in family purchases. Additionally, research focus may be placed on understanding children's influence in other fastest emerging family settings such as single-parent families.

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