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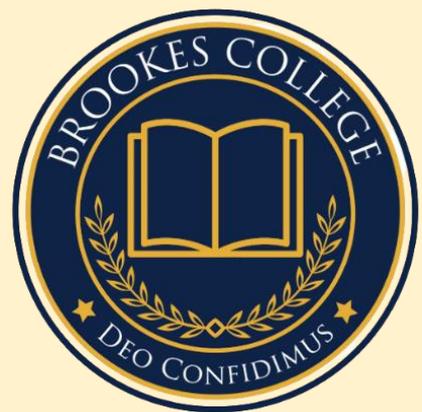
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**IMPACT OF PARENTAL CHARACTERISTICS
ON TEENAGERS' INFLUENCE IN FAMILY
BUYING DECISIONS IN INDIA DURING THE
COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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IMPACT OF PARENTAL CHARACTERISTICS ON TEENAGERS' INFLUENCE IN FAMILY BUYING DECISIONS IN INDIA DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

This paper aims to examine teenagers' influence in family buying decisions and the extent to which this influence is moderated by parental characteristics (parents' sex-role orientation, and the locus of control) in India during the on-going Covid-19 pandemic based on the responses gathered during February 2021 from a web-survey of 720 mothers of teenagers (13 to 18 years old) from Delhi (India). A pre-tested, structured, four-part questionnaire created on Google Forms was used for data collection. Statistical tools used for data analysis include mean, standard deviation, repeated measures ANOVA, and pairwise comparisons (Bonferroni adjustments). The key findings that emerged from this study indicate that teenagers exert significant influence in families' buying decisions in India and this influence is significantly moderated by the parents' sex-role orientation and to a large extent by the parents' locus of control. The findings of this study will significantly contribute to the enrichment of theoretical knowledge about the consumption behavior of families in India which is the second most populous and fastest-growing consumer economy in the world, and by extension in other similar countries. Results of this study extend practical implications for (a) marketers to amend their existing marketing strategies and use multiple methods (e.g., phygital marketing); (b) researchers to explore new research avenues; and (c) policymakers to protect the welfare of consumers, on the bases of results of this study to adapt to rapidly changing consumer needs, aspirations, and behaviors to survive and grow in the post-pandemic era.

Keywords: family, sex-role orientation, locus of control, bonferroni adjustments, India

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1. Introduction

Family is a most complicated yet important buying and consuming unit. It buys and consumes a wide variety of goods and services regularly for its survival. Hence, the character, influence, and extent of interactions among the family members constitute an important dimension of family buying decisions and a widely researched topic in the field of marketing. As a family member, children also play an important role in family buying decisions (Ghouse et al., 2020; Rao, 2020). Literature has validated that a family provides an environment whereby a child is nurtured to learn various consumption related skills to influence, contribute, and participate in his/her family's buying decisions (John, 1999), consequently, children's influence varies not only across decision-making process and products but also across the parents' child-rearing practices (Flurry, 2007; Lee and Beatty, 2002) that depends largely on parents' sex-role orientation (traditional/modern) and locus of control (internal/external). The impact of these two dimensions is not yet been explored extensively in a traditional country like India, which is one of the fastest-growing economies and is significantly different from other countries in terms of family size, structure, values, gender-norms, and behavior (Dinisman, et al., 2017). Due to expansion of education, better health facilities, decrease in family size, and increased women participation in labor force, children's participation is visible throughout the family buying process including the consumption basket, behavior, pattern, and composition (Rao, 2020; Chaudhary et al., 2018). Children, in India, constitute a significant portion of total population (50% of 1.32 billion), watches more than 100 TV channels, buys on-line, techno-savvy, assertive, well informed, influenced by influencers/bloggers on Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, has a taste towards modern western culture, and have an impact on India's development and its positioning in the world (Mittal et al., 2020). Thus, in a collectivistic Indian society, where children are greatly welcomed and valued, the present study is being undertaken at a time when the entire world is being affected by the Covid-19 pandemic which may have an impact on adolescents' position, power, and participation in families' buying decisions due to the various mitigation strategies adopted worldwide to slow down the rapid spread of Covid-19, including complete or partial lockdowns, travel bans, restrictions on mass gathering, closure of educational institutions, digitalization of education, work from home, social distancing measures, and personal protective actions (Vyas and Butakhieo, 2021) forcing the children to spend more time: (i) on social media, and (ii) with parents as many of the parents are working from home. More precisely, this study seeks to empirically examine the following research questions:

1. Whether parents perceive their teenage children to exert influence in family buying decisions?
2. What relationship do parental characteristics (parents' sex-role orientation and locus of control) have with the parental perception of influence exerted by teenagers in the family buying decisions?

2. Literature review and hypotheses formulation

Literature has recognized that children exert a considerable amount of influence in family buying decisions in respect of a wide array of products and this influence is increasing over time (Ghouse et al., 2020). Acknowledging their influence, in recent years there has been a steady increase in attention paid to the children as a distinguished market segment by policymakers, researchers and marketers (Chaudhary et al., 2018). As compared to earlier times, now the relations between parents and children are becoming more open, friendly, democratic and participative thereby upgrading children's power in families across countries

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and cultures (Rao, 2020; Ali et al., 2013). Most of the parents not only provide ample support but also encourage and motivate their children to actively participate in family decisions for their better economic socialisation. Literature reports children's influence to vary across stages of the decision-making process and type of product under consideration (Martensen and Gronholdt, 2008) and concluded that due to the limited financial resources, children generally exert the maximum influence at those stages where the finance (money) is not involved i.e., the primary and secondary stages whereby the demand to buy a product is felt and discussed in a family, and minimum at the final stage whereby the discussed product is actually bought by the family (Wang et al., 2004). Research also validates the positive relationship between the relevance and the perceived importance of the product to the child, and the influence exerted by him/her in the purchase of such product. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Parents perceive their teenage children to exert influence in family buying decisions and the influence varies across (a) products, and (b) decision stages.

Literature provide some evidence suggesting that the sex role orientation of husband and wife significantly affects the quality and quantum of participation of different family members in the family decision making (Qualls, 1987). A person's sex-role orientation refers to his/her perception about the duties and responsibilities of each sex (male/female), in terms of household work allocation (Eriksen et al., 1977), equality-rights (Meier, 1972), handling of money matters (Schaninger et al., 1982), purchase of goods and services (Qualls, 1987), caring of children, and marital behavior (Scanzoni, 1975). Past studies have conceptualized sex-role orientation as a continuum having two extreme ends: at one end are the sex-role moderns who believe in total gender equality, and at the other end are the sex-role traditionalists who believe in the superiority of males as providers and subordination of females as housekeepers (Tomeh, 1978). Past research has found a significant relationship between parents' sex-role orientation and the nature of buying decisions as in modern families most of the decisions are taken jointly as compared to traditional families where the decisions are either husband-dominated or wife-dominated (Lee and Beatty, 2002).

However, changes in education, awareness, family size and structure, cultural norms along with women's increased labor force participation have resulted in narrowing down the roles which were ones too sex-specific (Haas, 1980), for example, the number of househusbands or stay-at-home fathers is constantly increasing across countries (Skolnick, 1991). Scanzoni and Szinovacz (1980) suggested that modern parents will perceive children's participation in buying decisions as a tool for child's economic develop and maturity, and hence, children will enjoy more decision-making power in such families. Thus, in all possibilities, parents' sex-role orientation is likely to be reflected in the amount of influence exerted by their children in family purchases. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H2: The traditional parents will perceive their teenage children to exert less influence than the modern parents.

Children's influence in family purchase decisions also varies by the child-rearing attitudes of the parents (Flurry, 2007), more precisely, significant differences can prevail in goal setting behaviours and in the amount of effort extended toward achieving these goals between the parents who believe too much in external factors such as fate, luck, or chance (known as the external locus of control parents), and others who believe in internal factors such as self-confidence, self-abilities, or self-hard work, (known as the internal locus of control parents) (Marsiglia et al., 2007; Rotter, 1966). Individual's locus of control is one of the most studied variables in psychology and few studies have also examined its impact on children's influence

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in family purchase decisions and concluded that as compared to the internal locus of control parents, children exert more influence across higher number of product categories and sub-decisions in families with the external locus of control parents (Darley and Lim, 1986). For further investigation of these findings, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H3: The external locus of control parents will perceive their teenage children to exert more influence than the internal locus of control parents.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Research design

The literature review suggested the suitability of survey method for the collection of required data for this study which was executed through a web-survey of mothers of 720 teenagers residing in different localities of Delhi (India). A purposive sampling technique was applied to make it a representative sample of “mini-India” in terms of demographic composition. Mothers are selected as the respondents in this study mainly for two reasons, firstly, children often tend to overestimate their own influence in buying decisions (Wang et al., 2007); and secondly, mothers, in general, spend more time at home with children and hence are the recipients of more influence attempts made by them (Cowan and Avants, 1988). The sample consisted of only those mothers in whose families at least one (i) child is in the age group of 13 to 18 years and is staying with his/her parents; (ii) one product out of three products (mobile, computer, and cycle) must be purchased during January 2020 to January 2021 in their families. The respondents were requested to provide their inputs about the influence exerted by one of their children (age group 13-18) in the purchase of the selected product as compared to the influence exerted by other family members.

The surveyed sample consisted of mothers of 453 male children and 267 female children belonging to the age groups of 13-15 years (N = 250) and 16-18 years (N = 470). All the parents were educated and about 33 per cent of mothers and 39 per cent of fathers at least had graduation degrees. On the basis of number of family members, surveyed families were categorised as small families (upto 2 children) and large families (more than 2 children), accordingly, the sample had 304 small families and 416 large families. Mothers were in full time employment only in 19 per cent of the families.

3.2 Research instrument

The measuring instrument used is a structured questionnaire developed on the basis of the gaps as identified by literature review. The questionnaire consisted of close-ended questions aimed at achieving better objectivity of responses. It was divided into four-parts. Part I contained 5 general questions regarding family demographics (parents' education, mothers' employment, family size, age and gender of teenagers); part II contained eleven statements aimed at measuring a teenager's influence in the purchase of any of the three durable products; part III contained 10 statements to measure parents' sex-role orientation, and part IV consists of 21 statements to measure parents' locus of control. The data collection period was February 2021.

3.3 Dependent variable

Family is a unique buying identity where a majority of the consumption decisions are collective and generally passes through a number of stages depending on various factors including the nature and price of that product. In this study teenager's influence is the dependent variable, which is conceptualized as the extent to which s/he has been engaged in each of the three

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decision-making stages i.e., primary stage (whereby a need to buy a product is felt and discussed in the family); secondary stage (whereby the family members acquire and evaluate the information needed to buy a product); and the final stage (whereby a series of decisions regarding the finally purchased product are taken e.g., color, price, style, etc.). A modified version of an eleven-item scale developed by Talpade and Talpade (1995) is used for this purpose and the required responses are measured on a five-point relative scale (1 = teenager has no influence at all to 5 = total influence of the teenager).

3.4 Independent variables

3.4.1 Parental Sex-Role Orientation

Modified version of Scanzoni's (1975) 21-item Sex Role Orientation Scale (SSRS) is adapted in this study to measure parents' sex role orientation using a five-point Likert scale (5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree). Responses were summed across 21 items, averaged, and then split on the mid-value into high (traditional) and low (modern) sex-role oriented parents resulting in 553 traditional parents and 167 modern parents.

3.4.2 Parental Locus of Control

Modified version of Campis et al.'s (1986) ten-item scale was used to measure the parental locus of control using five-point Likert scale (5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree). Responses were summed across ten items, averaged, and then split on the mid-value into high (external) and low (internal) parental locus of control groups, accordingly, the surveyed sample consists of 594 external locus of control parents and 126 internal locus of control parents.

3.5 Reliability analysis of measures

The internal reliability and consistency of the measures was examined by Cronbach alpha coefficient (Table 1). All the alpha coefficient values are greater than the desired threshold of 0.60 (Nunnally, 1967), thus the scales adequately met the standards for the present.

Table 1: Reliability Analyses

Scale Items	No. of Items	Mobile (α)	Computer (α)	Cycle (α)
Dependent variable: Decision-making stages				
- Primary Stage	3	0.69	0.76	0.75
- Secondary Stage	2	0.74	0.72	0.73
- Final Stage	6	0.71	0.77	0.78
Independent variables:				
(i) Parental Sex-Role Orientation	21		0.71	
(ii) Parental Locus of Control	10		0.79	

4. Results and discussion

The first hypothesis (H1) was validated in two-steps. In step-one, mean scores of teenage children's influence for three decision-making stages were computed, separately for all the three products (Table 2). The mean influence scores are different (range 4.22 – 3.05), and well above the mid-value of 2.5 on a scale of 1 to 5 that indicates parents do perceive their children to exert influence in buying decisions for these products at each of the decision stages. Children's influence is the maximum at the primary stage. This means that children play a powerful role in introducing a new product in their families. These results are indicative of the emergence of children as the influencers, deciders, and initiators in Indian families.

Table 2: Teenagers' Influence in Family Buying Decisions - Mean and Standard Deviation

Decision Making Stages	Mean and Standard Deviation
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	Mobile Phone (N = 381)	Computer (N = 176)	Cycle (N = 163)
Stage 1: Primary Stage	4.22 (0.91)	3.88 (0.93)	3.91 (0.82)
Stage 2: Secondary Stage	3.91 (1.11)	3.70 (1.19)	3.78 (0.95)
Stage 3: Final Stage	3.46 (0.83)	3.05 (0.83)	3.24 (0.73)

In step-two, repeated-measure ANOVA tests were used to examine the significance of the difference in the means at decision making stages across three products as calculated in step-one (Table 3). The analysis results indicate significant differences across (i) three decision stages when the products were taken together ($F = 190.658$, $p < .05$); (ii) three products when the decision stages were taken together ($F = 3.571$, $p < .05$); and (iii) interaction effect between the products and decision stages ($F = 9.260$, $p < .05$) thus leading to the confirmation of H1: parents perceive their teenage children to exert influence in family buying decisions and the influence varies across (a) products, and (b) decision stages.

Table 3: Teenagers' Influence in Family Buying Decisions - Repeated-Measure ANOVA

Source	Sum of Squares	df1	df2	Mean Square	F-ratio	Sig.
Decision-making stages	166.133	2	1355.13	83.066	190.658*	.000
Products	12.715	2	717.00	6.357	3.571*	.029
Decision-making stages × Products	16.138	2	1344.12	4.247	9.260*	.000

* Significant at $p < .05$

Bonferroni adjustments were used to validate the second hypothesis (H2) whereby the differences in the mean scores were computed between two groups: modern and traditional parents, in terms of influence exerted by teenagers for the purchase of three products across decision stages (Table 4). The results indicate that both modern and traditional parents perceive their children to be influential in the purchase of selected products but the extent of perception was significantly higher at alpha value more than .05 in case of modern parents than traditional parents. This hypothesis was, therefore, supported by the analysis results.

Table 4: Teenagers' Influence in Decision-making Stages - Parental Sex-role Orientation-wise

Type of product	Parental Sex-role orientation	Decision Stages: Mean (SD)			Mean differences (p - value)		
		Primary Stage	Secondary Stage	Final Stage	Primary and Secondary	Primary and Final	Secondary and Final
Mobile (N = 381)	Traditional (N = 294)	3.99 (0.95)	3.76 (1.13)	3.41 (0.86)	0.232* (.040)	0.580* (.000)	0.354* (.000)
	Modern (N = 87)	4.28 (0.74)	3.99 (1.01)	3.61 (0.72)	0.290* (.000)	0.383* (.000)	0.477* (.000)
Computer (N = 176)	Traditional (N = 143)	3.97 (0.96)	3.69 (1.19)	3.00 (0.82)	0.283* (.001)	0.973* (.000)	0.689* (.000)
	Modern (N = 33)	4.23 (0.79)	3.75 (1.22)	3.27 (0.80)	0.474* (.009)	0.962* (.000)	0.488* (.001)
Cycle (N = 163)	Traditional (N = 116)	3.87 (0.84)	3.66 (0.94)	3.04 (0.73)	0.210* (.043)	0.833* (.000)	0.621* (.000)
	Modern (N = 47)	3.99 (0.87)	3.78 (0.99)	3.31 (0.69)	0.213* (.046)	0.681* (.000)	0.472* (.000)

* Significant at $p < .05$

To validate the third hypothesis (H3), i.e., the external locus of control parents will perceive their teenage children to exert more influence than the internal locus of control parents, first the mean scores were computed between two groups: the external and internal locus of parents, in terms of influence exerted by teenagers for the purchase of three products across decision stages, and then to ascertain the statistical significance of these differences, pairwise comparisons were undertaken by using Bonferroni adjustments (Table 5). The results indicate that although parents of each locus of control perceive their children to be influential in the

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purchase of selected products but the extent of perception was significantly higher in case of parents having the external locus of control at alpha value more than .05 across primary and secondary stages, and secondary and final stages but not at the primary and secondary stages. This hypothesis was, therefore, partially supported by the analysis results.

Table 5: Teenagers' Influence in Decision-making Stages - Parental Locus of Control-wise

Type of product	Parental Locus of Control	Decision Stages: Mean (SD)			Mean differences (<i>p</i> - value)		
		Primary Stage	Secondary Stage	Final Stage	Primary and Secondary ³	Primary and Final ³	Secondary and Final ³
Mobile (N = 381)	ELOC ¹ (N = 308)	3.94 (0.88)	4.05 (1.08)	3.56 (0.82)	-0.113 (1.000)	0.375* (.001)	0.499* (.000)
	ILOC ² (N = 73)	3.91 (0.91)	3.88 (1.11)	3.43 (0.83)	0.035 (1.000)	0.478* (.000)	0.443* (0.049)
Computer (N = 176)	ELOC ¹ (N = 142)	4.25 (0.70)	4.17 (1.10)	3.42 (0.64)	0.085 (1.000)	0.829* (.000)	0.744* (.000)
	ILOC ² (N = 34)	3.96 (0.97)	3.59 (1.19)	2.96 (0.84)	0.375* (.000)	1.005* (.000)	0.630* (.000)
Cycle (N = 163)	ELOC ¹ (N = 144)	3.99 (0.90)	3.94 (0.99)	3.26 (0.71)	0.055 (1.000)	0.726* (.001)	0.671* (.002)
	ILOC ² (N = 19)	3.87 (0.79)	3.75 (0.95)	3.23 (0.73)	0.107 (.643)	0.635* (.000)	0.527* (.000)

Notes: 1. ELOC: External Locus of Control

2. ILOC: Internal Locus of Control.

3. Significant at $p < .05$

5. Conclusion and implications

The findings of this study indicate that Indian parents perceive their teenage children to exercise strong influence throughout the buying process for each of the three products and this influence is significantly moderated by the parents' sex-role orientation (traditional/modern), and to a large extent by the parents' locus of control (external/internal) whereby the parents perceived teenagers to exert maximum influence under three conditions: (i) at the primary decision stage, (ii) when the parents are modern, and (iii) when parents believe in more in external locus of control factors. The findings of this study will provide a guiding force to the marketers, government agencies, and researchers to manage and mitigate the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The study results have clear indications for marketers to integrate the latest technology in their products which can attract children and parents together. The impact of the on-going global pandemic (Covid-19) would certainly be typical for the marketing people as they are the ones who directly deal and manage the different aspects of consumer behavior for goods and services. Under the changed scenario, partly due to the effects of this pandemic and partly due to the structural changes that are taking place in Indian families, marketers have to re-design, re-organise, re-think, and re-focus on the elements of existing marketing-mix to remain relevant to the families and specially to the children who are in majority of the Indian families are the initiators of the purchasing process for a large variety of products in their families. Post-pandemic recovery would need unconventional solutions making it imperative for the marketers to adopt 'phygital' (a blending composition of physical and digital) in their marketing mix strategies. The responsibilities of government agencies in this regard include (i) the risk assessment of the digital environment to which the children are exposed to on a 24×7 basis, and (ii) the creation of child-safe digital space. The researchers can extend the findings of this study by replicating and including new variables with a bigger and more comprehensive sample.

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