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DO THE TEENAGERS EVALUATE THE PRODUCT WHILE INFLUENCING THEIR PARENTS TO PURCHASE?

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ABSTRACT

In general, it is believed that teenagers tended to have more influence in the purchase of products that were less expensive and for their own use. Parents of adolescents perceived their role similarly. The study reveals how teens influence on their parents not only on less expensive products but also consumer durable products purchased for the family use like walkman. The study also reveals that while purchasing walkman teenagers are influenced by updated information of the product and hence they go for information search, collect information from different dealers on various aspects like price, technology and so on. Further teenagers predominantly apply emotional approach and less logical approach to convince their parents to get the product. In respect of product characteristics it is found that product value is more popular among the teenagers than product image. Teenagers give more importance to product value and apply either emotional or logical approach to influence their parents. However while evaluating the product it is found that product convenience has more influence on the purchase decision than perceived value addition. This implies that teenagers are inclined to get the product for the best value for money more than the social image, perceived prestige etc.

KEYWORDS

Emotional approach, Logical approach, Product evaluation, Product value.

INTRODUCTION

Though much research has been done into the husband-wife interaction in the purchase-decision process, relatively a few studies only have dealt with the role of teenagers in the family buying process. Early studies suggested that teenagers did not have much influence in household purchases. But contemporary research indicates that teenagers constitute a major consumer market, with direct purchasing power on items such as snacks and sweets; electronic items and indirect purchase influence while shopping for big-ticket items, such as automobiles, vacations, grocery and fast food etc. Teenagers tend to attribute more influence to parents than the better half. No doubt fathers and mothers clearly dominate the decision process. But teenagers attribute more influence to father or mother than the better half. (Belch, G, M A Belch, and G Ceresino, 1985). In general, it is believed that adolescents tended to have more influence in the purchase of products that were less expensive and for their own use. Mothers and adolescents perceived their role similarly, but fathers felt that the adolescents had less influence than the adolescents thought they had (Beatty, Sharon E, and Salil Talpade, 1994).

Adolescents have greater influence in a concept-oriented environment where they are encouraged to develop their own ideas and express their views more openly (Foxman, Ellen, Patriya S Tansuhaj and Karin M Ekstrom, 1989b). Adolescent, children are also primed to assume a more active role in purchase discussions after years of listening to their parents' description why certain requests can/cannot be honored. Influence attempts by adolescents are likely to be effective when they match them to their parents' decision-making style (Palan, Kay M, and R E Wilkes, 1997).

Teenagers are exposed to technologies and so they are found to have the greatest relative influence across two areas: suggesting price and learning the best way to buy. The responses for these are of two measures, which harmonized for parents as well as Teenagers. Sometimes, growing children gathered more favourable information for favourable product profiles and less information when cost versus benefit of acquiring information is high. (Paxton, Jennifer Gregan, and Deborah Roedder John, 1995). Not only that younger children use few dimensions to compare and evaluate brands, relying on dominant perceptual features, rather than functional features, in gathering information and making choices (Capon, N, and D Kuhn, 1980).

Presently, parents are encouraging children to participate in decision-making process. It may be that the age of the parents, fewer children, and working mother are the situations reporting greater influence.

Teenagers are also effectively fitting into the consumer role owing to time pressures and income effects in dual career families. Moreover, exposure to mass media and discussions with parents ensure that teenagers are not only aware of the new brands available, but also know how to evaluate them on various parameters. While younger children clearly affect parental behaviour and purchases, adolescents have full cognitive development and an understanding of the economic concepts required for processing information and selection (John, D R, 1999). This aspect is developed through family life cycle stages.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary objectives of the study are:

To investigate the strategies adopted by teenagers to influence their parents towards purchase of a Walkman used by teenagers.

The design and nature of the study is focused on the techniques of problem solving as it analyses within the purview of the main objectives. The research design also provides a scope for drawing logical conclusions. The study relies mainly on the primary data collected through questionnaires supplemented by personal interview. As such, teenagers' influences are a bundle of characteristics comprising product attributes; and the influencing strategies.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION

Teenager: A teenager is a person in the age group between 13 and 19 at the School level, or in the first year degree level of Arts, Science and Professional courses in the colleges in the Metropolitan City of Chennai who possess walkman, two-wheeler and computer. For the purpose of this study, "Teenager" and "Adolescent" are the terms used interchangeably.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE**ROLE OF TEENAGERS**

A cursory review of research on family consumption and decision making behaviour would lead one to wonder whether the field should be called spousal decision making or whether one should continue to use the misleading term "family". Much of this research had been focused on the husband and the wife, and the role of teenagers, which had been ignored often (Lackman and Lanasa 1993). Considering the complexity of relative influence between two decision makers, it was easy to understand why the three-factor interaction (father-mother-teenager interactive influence in decision making) was very challenging.

Ward and Wackman (1972) found that attempts by children at influencing purchase were negatively related to the age of the child; however, the tendency of mothers to yield to such influence rose with the age of the child but varied across product categories. They also examined children's purchase influence attempts and parental yielding in terms of these variables, demographics, parent and child interaction and mother's mass communication behaviour. The study was conducted among various age groups. The result showed that child's purchase influence attempts on the type of product were increasing when mothers yielded to requests. Mother's time spent on watching TV was positively related to influence attempts and yielding. The mothers with more positive attitude towards advertising were more likely than the mothers with negative attitude to yield to influence attempts.

Mehrotra and Torges (1977) suggested that the extent to which mothers yielded to the influence of the teenager also depended on the extent to which mothers and teenagers were exposed to advertising together.

Atkin (1978) found that while teenagers tended to make forceful demands at the point of purchase, their success depended on whether they "ask" or "tell". Atkin reported a greater success rate in the case of teenagers who "tell" rather than "ask".

Belch and Ceresino (1985) later studied the diversity in the influence of teenagers. They reported that the extent of such influence varied with product and stage in the decision making process, thus supporting the assertions of Szybillo and Sosanie (1977). It was found that while the role of the teenage child was most prominent at the initiation stage, it was limited thereafter.

Michael A. George E Belch and Donald Sciglimpaglia (1979) reported the discrepancy in reports of influence. They detected that while teenagers attributed greater influence in decision making to them, they consistently attributed more influence to the father than to the mother.

Foxman, et al (1989b) also found that personal resources of the teenager (such as grades in school) and perceived product knowledge determined the extent of the influence. Supporting Foxman et al.'s (1989a) evidence, Beatty and Talpade (1994) reported similar effects on the usage of the teenagers' influence. They supported the findings of Belch et al. 1985) about discrepancy in reports when they found that discrepancy was greater between father and teenager, rather than between mother and teenager.

Betty, Sharon and Sabit Talpade (1994) found several elements of Foxman, P Tanushaj, and K. Ekstrom (1989a&b) in the study of adolescents influence and a new scale of perceived relative influence. Further, the study examined the effect of parental employment status on teenager's influence, as well as gender-based differences in perceptions. Motivational aspects including product importance and usage provided the strongest and the most consistent explanations of teenager's perceived relative influence across stages and purchase situations. In addition, parental employment status positively influenced teenager's perceived influence of durable family purchases. Mothers and daughters generally did not differ in their ratings of the daughter's perceived influence in the durable purchase decision-making process, while fathers and daughters differed much.

Ahuja and Stinson (1993) examined the role of children in woman-led households and found that the influence of the child varied across several parameters such as product, the age of the child and the sex-role orientation of the mother. No conclusive patterns could be detected.

The studies of Simpson and Linda Diane (1994) revealed that adolescents generally decided alone in catalogue purchase decisions; however, when influenced, friends were considered the most influential people in this regard. Adolescents' parents had more influence on higher risk purchases, such as coats, than on lower risk purchases, such as socks. The adolescents' parents generally paid for the purchaser. Information generally sought by adolescents is on size and price; brand and product specific attributes most often considered were style, colour and fit. Adolescents tended to compare shops by looking at each page of the catalog used before purchase.

Palan Kay Marie (1995) studied family decision making and parent adolescent interactions in the main process of purchase decision. The study examined the effect of family communications, consumer socialization, and gender role identification and power resources on adolescents' decision. Here the two types of purchase decisions were used, namely, adolescent clothing decision and family restaurant decision. Simultaneous measurement of each family member's relative influence was made using a constant sum scale. The second process examined parent-adolescent interactions and influences through content analysis of personal interviews conducted with the mother, the father, and the adolescent from each family.

Several factors were found to influence perception of adolescent significantly. However, the impact varied with respondents and purchase decisions. The types of influence strategies, which were used, by adolescents and parents in purchase decisions identified the usage of patterns and strategy that were developed. In addition, linking strategy used for other study variables developed typologies of adolescent and parent strategy groups. The study revealed that adolescents and parents were engaged in much specified patterns of interaction in family decision process. Adolescent's choice of strategy and pattern interaction were dependent on purchase type. Adolescents used more influence strategies for purchases they were personally involved Parents responded to adolescent influence attempts with one of the two patterns: (1) Engaging in strategies that allowed interaction with adolescents and (2) usually controlling strategies intended to preempt the use of adolescent influence strategies.

Palan and Wilkes (1997) presented a classification of influence strategies and reported that adolescents were most successful in their influence attempts when they mirrored their parents' strategies.

INFLUENCE STRATEGIES

Woodside and Moles (1979) identified three unique dimensions in the marital decision making roles for 6 products studied. They were problem recognition, product related and shopping related problems. These dimensions were generalized to some extent across products. Higher level of internal family role agreement was evident with a majority of couples assured agreeing on the spouse's role of the decision making in the aggregate as well as in disaggregate analysis.

Park (1982) examined more closely the actual process of family decision making. The decision heuristics developed through methodology for examining such decision making, particularly, with respect to similarities and dissimilarities of strategies. He conceptualized a joint decision as characters by a muddling through process rather than by a systematic strategy with limited knowledge and awareness of each spouse's decision strategies.

Spiro (1983) examined the influence strategies used by husband and wife in resolving disagreements concerning purchase decision. The study also identified those characteristics of the individual and situation, which affected the spouse's use of influence. Six different influence strategies were considered such as expert influence, legitimate influence, bargaining, reward influence, emotional influence and impression management. Individuals were grouped first on the basis of combination of influence strategies that they used most often. Six groups were formed in this manner and were labeled non-influencers, light-influencers, subtle influencers, emotional influencers, combination influencers and heavy influencers. These groups were then examined in terms of several socio economic and life-cycle variables that significantly discriminated them. The result also indicated that most partners' perceptions of each others' influencers were not agreeable.

Palan and Wilkes (1997) also found that parents used five different influence strategies like Bargaining, Persuasion, Emotional, Request, Legitimate and Directive based on their different roles as authorities, and that teenagers generally accepted and respected this authority. Further, the study dealt with various characteristics, affecting teenagers' influence, which were classified as teenager, parental or household decisions.

Beatty, Sharon and Salil Talpade (1994) found a clear connection between product importance and adolescent influence in family decision making. The researchers found that teenagers' knowledge did affect their perceived influence for the search and deciding process for a family Stereo, which suggested that for some products expertise mattered. Teenagers' financial clout seemed to allow them greater say in initiating self-purchases, but not in the decision making for a family purchase except for stereo. The study also dealt with parents' dual income status, which allowed teens greater influence for some durable family purchase but not for self-purchases where the influence was already substantial.

SAMPLING PROCEDURE

According to the Government of India census 2001 Chennai had a population of 6.4 million, in which teenagers' population was 5,92,784. Since the population size is very large, it is decided to use non-probability quota sampling technique with a sample size of 600. This figure was arrived at as follows. During the consumer satisfaction survey done by Business World in the middle of June 2003, published on the 25th October 2003, it was found that 80,653 walkman computers were sold in Chennai. An average of 63,864 individuals possessed the products. Hence, it was decided to take a convenient quota sampling of 600.

Area blocks were used for the selection of sample and it was decided to target the teenagers studying in schools and colleges. The reason for conducting the study at Chennai is that Chennai is one of the four largest cities in India. It is a city of contrast and diversities, a melodious blending of old and new, traditional and modern outlook where opposite poles meet, agile and maintain a balance of acrobatic agility in a unique ambience. To conduct the study the whole Chennai was divided into four areas as North, East, South and West Chennai. Teenagers who were at different educational stages, viz., school, polytechnic, arts and science colleges and engineering colleges were identified. Further, under quota sampling method two higher secondary schools, two polytechnics, two Arts and Science colleges and two professional colleges in each area were identified and data was collected accordingly. Hence, the survey covered, teenagers in the age

group of 13-19, studying in school, first year students of arts and science colleges and professional colleges in Chennai, Metropolitan city students are volunteered to participate in this exercise were chosen for the study.

After explaining purpose and content of the tool 150 questionnaire was distributed in each area. But, the completed response distribution was as below.

AREA BLOCK	NUMBER OF TEENAGERS RESPONDED
North	147
East	86
South	101
West	133
Total	477

Out of 600 copies Questionnaires distributed, only 569 were returned. Out of 569 received responses only 477 were found fit for the purpose of this study.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

PRODUCT EVALUATION- WALKMAN

The Varimax factor analysis was carried out over nine statements of product evaluation process aimed at the reduction of the variables into profound explanatory factors. In this factor analysis, two factors are identified. They are product convenience and value addition.

FACTOR 1: PRODUCT CONVENIENCE

The related statements are:

- Convenience of the product
- Dealers' display
- Discount offered by the dealer
- Financial options available with the dealer
- Easy and free availability of the product
- Maintenance cost of the product

FACTOR 2: VALUE ADDITION

The related statements are:

- Perceived prestige in possessing them
- Social Image for the product
- Resale value of the product

TABLE 1: PERCENTAGE OF VARIANCE PRODUCT EVALUATION

Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
Eigen value	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Eigen value	% of Variance	Cumulative %
3.106	34.514	34.514	2.503	27.810	27.810
1.430	15.892	50.406	2.034	22.596	50.406

Source: Primary data

TABLE 2: FACTOR LOADING OF PRODUCT EVALUATION

Product evaluation process statements	Factors	
	Product Convenience	Value Addition
Discount offered by the dealer	0.788	
Financial options available with a dealer	0.743	
Easy and free availability of product	0.595	
Maintenance cost of the product	0.582	
Approach by the dealer for purchasers convenience	0.564	
Dealer display	0.535	.
Perceived prestige in possessing the product		0.845
Social Image of the product	.	0.854
Resale value of the product		0.456

Source: Primary data

The total variation explained by the two factors of the product evaluation process is 50.406 percent (Table 2).

The first factor is named as "Product convenience" which is supported by *discount offer* has the highest factor loading of 0.788, followed by *financial options available with the dealers* with a factor loading of 0.743. Then *easy and free availability of product* has a factor loading of 0.595, *maintenance cost of the product* with 0.582, *convenience of the product* 0.564 and finally *dealer display* with a factor loading 0.535 also supported the factor.

The second factor "Value Addition" is contributed by *perceived prestige in possessing the product* with a high factor loading of 0.845, followed by *social Image for the product* with a factor loading of 0.854 and *resale value of the product* with a factor loading of 0.456 (Table 1)

From the above analysis, it is inferred that *product convenience* has more influence on the purchase decision than *value addition*. This implies that teenagers are inclined to get the product for the best value for money more than the social image perceived prestige. This behaviour of the teenagers is manifested in their responsibility and realization, the glue that binds Indian teenagers to their parents.

PRODUCT EVALUATION AND INFLUENCING STRATEGY

Product evaluation consists of two factors, namely, 'Product convenience' and 'Value addition'. Teenagers influencing strategy is divided into two factors, namely, *emotional approach* and *logical approach*.

In order to find out the relationship between the influencing strategy and the two factors, namely, Convenience and Value addition, Karl Pearson's co-efficient of correlation is applied and the details are given in the table 3

TABLE 3: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRODUCTS EVALUATION AND INFLUENCING STRATEGY

Influencing strategy	Tools used	Product Convenience	Value Addition
Emotional Approach	Pearson Correlation	0.039	0.168(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.395	0.000
	N	477	477
Logical Approach	Pearson Correlation	0.097(*)	0.093(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.034	0.043
	N	477	477
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
	N	477	477

Source: Primary data

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

From the above table, it is found that *emotional approach* has a significant positive correlation with value addition ($r = 0.168$) at 1% level. Similarly, in respect of logical approach, it has a significant positive correlation with both *convenience* and *value addition* factors $r = 0.097$ and $r = 0.093$ at 5% level.

It could be inferred that the *emotionally approaching teenagers* try to put forth their points emotionally, in respect of various *value addition factors* like social image, perceived prestige in possessing the product, resale value of the product and try to influence their parents to get the product.

Similarly, *logical teenagers* try to interact and convince their parents with both *conveniences of the product and value addition factors*. *Convenience cues* like *convenience of the product, dealer's display, discount offered by the dealer, easy and free availability of the product and maintenance cost of the product* are given more priority.

CONCLUSION

Teenagers are inclined to get the product for the best value for money more than the social image perceived prestige. This behavior of the teenagers is manifested in their responsibility and realization, the glue that binds Indian teenagers to their parents. *Emotionally approaching teenagers* try to put forth their points emotionally, in respect of various *value addition factors* like social image, perceived prestige in possessing the product, resale value of the product and try to influence their parents to get the product.

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