

# Adolescents' Role in Family Buying Decision Making

Harleen Kaur, Deepika Jindal Singla

**Abstract**—Buying decision making is a complicated process, in which consumer's decision is under the impact of others. The buying decision making is directed in a way that they have to act as customers in the society. Media and family are key socialising agents for adolescents'. Moreover, changes in the socio-cultural environment in India necessitate that adolescents' influence in family's buying decision-making should be investigated. In comparison to Western society, Indian is quite different, when compared in terms of family composition and structure, behaviour, values and norms which effect adolescents' buying decision-making.

**Keywords**—Adolescents', buying behaviour, Indian urban families, consumer socialization.

## I. INTRODUCTION

**S**Ocialisation is a psychological process that determines the behaviour of a person. It is a broad term for the whole process by which an individual develops his patterns of socially relevant behaviours and experience. Socialisation has been described as "the process by which individuals acquire the knowledge, skills and dispositions that enables them to participate as more or less effective members of groups and the society".

Consumer socialisation has been defined as the process in which an adolescent learns the skills, values and knowledge related to consumer behaviour due to interaction with socialisation agents such as parents, media, school and fellows. Consumer socialisation is defined as "the process which helps young people in acquiring knowledge, values and skills necessary for their functioning as consumers in the marketplace".

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines adolescence as "the phase in human growth and development which occurs after the childhood and before adulthood, from ages 10 to 19". "Consumer Socialisation of Adolescents" is a practice which helps adolescents' in learning to become consumers. Adolescence is a period in life when young people learn different roles in society; being a 'customer' is one such role. During adolescence, young people start purchasing independently [3].

The merchandiser faces difficulty in determining an appropriate strategy, in order to counter the customers' behaviour changes. This study attempts to find out the role of adolescents' in buying decision-making, as there is a radical

change in the buying behavior of the adolescents' due to urbanisation, which leads to change in product marketing strategies. India has just started to witness the change and coping with it is the need of the hour [1].

Parent's employment status also has an impact on adolescents' buying decision-making. If parents are working, adolescents' are given more freedom for their choices and spending. Parents provide autonomy, support their views and opinions and restrict them, if needed [13], [14].

Each family member plays a different role in decision-making within the family. They may initiate demand for any product or service, may decide on what to buy, from where to buy, how to pay for products and services, ways to consume them and benefits expected from such products and services and sharing their roles in maintaining the products and services. The role of the mother and father varies in the family. Adolescents' play a significant role in a family's buying decision-making for their own products, as well as those for other members of the family.

Adolescents' vocalize their wishes, and parents are often co-operative and attentive. Parents understand that adolescents' influence on what is bought but it was also found that they do not agree on the influence adolescents' have. Thus, there is a gap in the knowledge about what is happening, and seemingly, this cannot be solved through retrospective data collection.

In our society, being patriarchal, adolescents' play an important role in buying decisions in the family, which may be due to the sociological changes that are taking place. Parents have the decisive vote, but in this "decisive vote" they take adolescents' views and prior experiences with them into account [20], [23].

At the present time we see a drastic change, where adolescents' are now viewed as customers for every type of product. Adolescents' are now treated as a segment in the market which cannot be ignored. They are considered as a primary market of customers, who have their own money for their own needs and direct the use of their parents' money for their benefit, and as a future market for all the goods and services will provide a steady stream of new consumers when they reach the market. So, when considering these factors, marketers have understood the potential of this segment, and have therefore started targeting it [25], [26].

With increasing competition and the changing social and economic environment, it is essential for the marketers to be customer-oriented. The buying behaviour of customers plays an important role in marketing planning. The awareness of consumer behaviour has presented new dimensions in

Harleen Kaur (Research Scholar) is with the School of Management Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala (corresponding author, e-mail: tanghiharleen@gmail.com).

Deepika Jindal Singla (Assistant Professor) is with the PG Deptt. Of Commerce, MM Modi College, Patiala.

marketing practices, and it is important for every business enterprise to know its customers and their buying behaviour. As culture influences a family unit, it is quite likely that socialisation of the adolescents' is influenced by these.

Adolescents' while buying, impose their demands on parents because they have many sources of information along with greater exposure. They somewhat succeed in pressuring their parents for desired products, as parent's value their views and nurture their self-expression; but on the other hand, some demographic factors minimize this influence. With dual income, the purchasing power of the family increases, and this has a psychological aspect attached to it [8].

The world is changing at a very rapid pace and so too is the behaviour of members of today's family. Marketers face many problems in determining an appropriate strategy to counter the changing behaviour of the family members. There is a drastic change in the buying behaviour of adolescents' with the growth of urbanization and the change in the product marketing strategies. Thus, it becomes very clumsy to determine the true behaviour pattern of the family members. India has just begun to taste the change and coping with the change is very much necessary.

Understanding buyer's behaviour is of the utmost importance to marketers, so as to develop effective strategies in the market place. Though it is the end result of purchasing a product that is most important to marketers, it is equally important for them to understand what goes on in the minds of the consumer before they actually purchase the product. If we consider the basic unit of a family, with a number of members, and these numbers and members vary from family to family, there is a lot of say that goes into the decision of selecting a particular product, which many times is unseen and unknown to the marketer. Members in a family influence the decision-making process for different products and to varying degrees, based on the kind of product and the way they intend to use the product. Thus, the marketer should not just target individual family members, but rather the entire family as a whole. Studies show that out of all the family members, adolescents' have started to emerge as a growing influence on family purchase decisions in a variety of product ranges – not just products meant for them, but also those used by the entire family. Gone are the days when marketers would solely focus on the adults as targets to market their products.

Adolescents' then were not considered as an important segment of the market that needed to be focused on. Now, well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we see a vast change, wherein adolescents' are now viewed as consumers for every type of product - be it a household or a luxury product. They are now viewed as an important segment in the market that marketers cannot afford to ignore. They are viewed as a primary market of consumers who spend their own money on their own wants and needs, as an influence market directing the spending of their parents' money for their own benefit, and a future market for all the goods and services that if cultivated now will provide a steady stream of new customers when they reach the market of a particular firm. Thus, when considering these three markets together, marketers have come to understand the

potential of this huge segment, and therefore, have started directly targeting this segment.

Adolescents' do not think like adults and they don't buy like adults - but they certainly have pull. Adolescents' can dominate family life. They can influence - even veto - their parents' purchases of everything from cars to toys to groceries as well as determine their household's television and entertainment choices. Adolescents' impact on familial spending adds up to billions of dollars every year.

Due to these factors, every message targeting adults must be reframed. Marketers should consider ways of capturing the attention of two different audiences in a single message. They must appeal to the adults, as well as to the adolescents' who influence them. Adolescents' neither think nor buy like adults, but influence their parents' purchases of everything [29].

## II. REVIEW

Ward and Wackman examined the influence of mass media and family on adolescents' consumer learning. Indirect consumption as well as social utility was significant predictors of materialism [28].

Moore and Moschis concluded that "expressive" aspects of consumption have been developed due to peer communication. As in this, the influence of parents and peers as socialisation agents has been investigated, along with the effects of demographic variables on materialism among adolescents [15].

Moschis and Churchill examined the impact of family, school, peers and mass media on consumer skills and effectiveness of existing consumer education material and practices. Older adolescents' are able to manage finance better than younger ones and have socially more desirable behaviour. Male adolescents are more aware about consumer matters than their female counterparts [17].

Moschis et al. described the role of family's communication in adolescents' consumer learning and determined the importance of the various mechanisms such as social interaction, modelling and reinforcement, through which such learning occurs. Protective families, where ultimate decisions are taken by parents, are more likely to have negative reinforcement. Consensual families, where parents take decisions but adolescents' are given the opportunity to voice their opinion and the parents explain then their decisions [19].

Moschis et al. conducted a study for examining the influence of different family patterns and attitude towards the market. Adolescents' belonging to laissez-faire families are less likely to have brand preferences, as the adolescents' from pluralistic families have a negative attitude towards the marketplace. On the other hand, consensual adolescents' are more likely to have positive attitude towards the marketplace and are not satisfied with the products they buy or use [18].

Clark et al. examined the influence of role models on adolescents' market knowledge. A significant relationship has been found between market knowledge of adolescents' and mother's and teacher's role model influence. Similarly, a positive relation exists between adolescents' market knowledge and athlete and entertainer's role model influence,

but there was not any such relationship between father's role model influence and adolescents' market knowledge [5].

North and Kotze examined the role that parents and television advertisements play in consumer socialisation of young adolescents. It was concluded that parent's efforts to socialize them by using television advertisements are not highly valued [21].

Moscardelli and Liston-Heyes described the factors that create doubt in adolescents' mind towards advertising. The Internet was found to be negatively related in convincing them. Older adolescents and those belonging to high economic class were found to be less reserved [16].

Roberts et al. examined the impact of family structure on materialism in the case of older adolescents. The results obtained were quite similar to earlier results by Roberts et al. for younger adolescents. As it is evident that adolescents become more materialistic when they are under stress because of their parent's divorce. Family structure affects compulsive buying, in the case of older adolescents' whereas there is no such relation in the case of younger adolescents [24].

La Ferle and Chan established peers as positive predictors of materialistic consumption values, while advertising is not a significant predictor. The main objective here was examining influence of peers, media celebrities and advertisements on adolescents' materialistic values [11].

Ozmete examined the interaction between adolescents' and parents relating to television advertisements as a consumer socialisation agent, and thus, the impact of advertisements on the buying decisions of adolescents'. It has been concluded that the age and gender of adolescents' impacts the interaction with their parents relating to television advertisements as well as the way they observe them [22].

Chaplin and John studied the interpersonal influences on materialism and found that adolescents' having materialistic parents and peers, are also materialistic [4].

Ukpore found a positive attitude of secondary school students towards consumer education and a majority of them apply it to a great extent in the market, but because of inadequate facilities, consumer education is a barrier [27].

Gudmunson and Beutler studied the relation of media use and parental caring with conspicuous consumption and found that adolescents' who felt less maternal care and those who spent more time using media are more likely to consume evidently [7].

Haq and Rahman examined the role of reality TV as a consumer socialisation agent. It was evident that adolescents' involvement with reality TV resulted in consumer socialisation through values and attitudes related to consumption [9].

Ishak and Zabil established a significant relationship between consumer awareness and behaviour. Less consumer awareness was found in residents of suburban areas as compared to urban area residents [10].

Luczak and Yonkin provided a framework that describes the influence of buying intentions and social consciousness of adolescents'. They also proposed that how adolescents' participation could increase within groups and role of

antecedents' variables such as age, etc. towards purchase intentions of adolescents' [12].

Alsmadi and Khizindar examined consumers' attitude towards marketing practices and consumer rights and suggested that there is a need to reconsider the way consumer rights were being targeted by marketers and public policy makers [2].

Fu et al. found that materialistic values are not endorsed by Chinese adolescents'. Moreover, younger adolescents' had lower level of materialistic values as compared to older ones. Parental rejection was found to significantly affecting adolescents' materialistic values [6].

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