



## **Influence of Teenagers on The Mobile Phone Purchase Decision By The Head Of The Family: Differences Based On The Users**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper examines how teenagers influence the purchase decision of the head of the family with regard to mobile phones due to their expert knowledge regarding technical and hi-tech products. The objective of this study is to investigate the nature of influence and its impact on the purchase decision by the head of the family. Data were collected from adolescents through an unstructured interview and analysed using SPSS package. The study reveals that children have a strong influence on parents for purchase of mobile phones. This indicates that children have more influence in decision making as far as technology related products are concerned due to their expert power. The results indicate that the information dependence is highest when the user is mother followed by father.*

**Keywords: teenagers, expert knowledge, mobile phones, purchase decisions.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

With increasing competition and changing socio-economic environment, it becomes essential for the marketers to be customer-oriented. Buying behaviour of customers in the marketplace plays a significant role in the strategic marketing planning. The recent awareness of consumer behaviour has introduced many new dimensions in the marketing philosophy and practices. Today it is important for every business enterprise to know its customers and understand their buying behaviour in the market place and how they develop and adopt this buying behaviour and who influences their buying behaviour in the marketplace.

Consumer socialisation has generated a significant amount of research over the years, particularly in relation to marketing to children (Ekström, 2006, John, 1999). The most common definition of consumer socialisation is the definition offered by Ward (1974 p. 2) "the process by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace." Consumer socialisation research has been mainly concerned with how children learn to function as consumers in the marketplace (e.g. Lueg and Finney, 2007, Chan, 2006, Taeho, 2005) but very few studies have focussed on how adults learn from children to adopt to the changing market trends and how children influence the family purchase decisions.

Thus, both marketers and consumer researchers have ignored children as a consumer segment because of their little disposable income (Ward 1974). Since the 1980s, interest has been growing in children's purchase behaviour, especially their influence in family purchase decisions. Teaching and learning consumer related skills, attitudes and knowledge is a complex and a lifelong process and is called consumer socialisation. Since it is an ongoing process it can be either primary socialisation or secondary socialisation which occurs at different life stages. While primary socialisation is concerned with the establishment of a framework to function in society, secondary socialisation relates to adjustment to this framework.

Reverse Consumer socialisation is becoming increasingly important because of the rapidly changing market trends & the need for the older consumers to adopt & adjust their behaviour according to the



changing market because many products commonly used today did not exist 30 years ago. Ward (1974) defines "Reverse Socialization," as a process by which children may influence their parents' knowledge, skills and attitudes relating to consumption. The young might be the most important socialisation agents for adult consumers, because they did not have to adapt to these changes as they were born into this society. Learning about these products for adult consumers will therefore have to be done through secondary consumer socialisation where they need to update their framework. The young on the other hand, may have established a different framework because they were primarily socialised with these new product categories. Consequently, the young may have gained expert power over the adults thus making it inevitable for the adults to learn and take advice for the younger generation so that they can update their skills, attitude and behaviour according to the changing market thus giving rise to secondary or reverse consumer socialisation.

The influence of dependent teenage children on the purchaser, mainly the head of the household has been found to be very high for technology products. Mobile phone is one such product. The reasons for the influence have been found to be many. One of the reasons is the demography of the decider like gender, education and the income. Other factors are the dependence of the decider on children for information due to their access to information and the ability to process complex information. Apart from this the availability and ability to process information gives expert power to the children such that the decider depends on children for decision. This study examines the nature of influence and its impact on the decision.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Kohly M.P.(2015); in "Reverse Socialisation: A Myth or Reality? A study on technology related products and services" researched whether reverse socialisation is prevalent in the case of technology intensive products and services. Data were collected from adolescents through an unstructured interview and analysed using the protocol of phenomenology. The agent learner relationship method used by Moschis in the model of consumer socialization was adopted. The study revealed that the presence of reverse socialization is evident in the case of technology intensive products. The younger generation acts as a socialization agent due to their expert knowledge and information power. The study revealed that modelling and reinforcement are the most common methods used in the socialization process.

Bodkin et.al.,(2013) in their article, "An Exploratory Investigation of Secondary Socialization: How Adult Children Teach Their Parents to Use Technology" tried to examine the teaching processes adult children used to teach their parents/guardians about technology. Data were collected from adolescents through an unstructured interview and analysed using the protocol of phenomenology. The study highlighted that modelling was the most frequent teaching method utilized in the secondary socialization process followed by reinforcement. Simplification was identified to be a new way of teaching the parents/ guardians. The study further concluded that the adult children felt that the parents/ guardians may become more dependent on them and this led to frustrations among the adult children.

Ekstrom et. al. , in "Children's Influence In Family Decisions And, Consumer Socialization: A Reciprocal View" revealed that child's influence differs under different circumstances. The type of family communication environment will affect a child's potential influence in family decisions. Family structure (i.e., typical two-parent or single-parent family, and sex-role) is also expected to affect a child's decision influence, as well as various household socio-economic characteristics. They also pointed out that the child's influence will depend on his or her personal resources. The product's importance and the family's knowledge about the product to be purchased are expected to influence the child's involvement in family decisions as well.



Othman, et. Al. in their paper(2013) “Adolescent’s strategies and reverse influence in family food decision making” tried to address the research gap by testing adolescents’ bilateral strategies in influencing their family decision using family power theory. A survey of 500 adolescents from urban area was conducted to investigate their influence based on their involvement in family consumer tasks. Key findings include strong relationship between perception of influence and rewards thus indicate the existence of strategies in adolescents influence attempt. They also found out that with increasing age the influence of children on parents decreases because the children are no longer dependent on parents for money and also they no longer want to accompany parents. & that there is a inverse relationship between age and perception of rewards by the children. They also stressed on the fact that single or dual siblings have lesser influence on purchase compared to families where there are four or five siblings.

Watne et. al.(2011) in their paper “Children as secondary socialisation agents for their parents” investigates how children function as socialisation agents for their parents in influencing their purchase intentions of computer and high-tech products – essentially the idea of the young educating the old. A structured survey which was required to be completed by dyads (i.e. children and parents) was mailed to Australian families in the state of Victoria. Data obtained from 180 usable responses from the dyads were analysed to test the hypotheses Children are seen to possess expert power over their parents with regards to computer related and small high-tech products; which make them an important agent of secondary socialisation for their parents. Men are perceived as being more knowledgeable than women, a phenomenon which leads mothers to be more inclined in seeking their children’s (son’s in particular) advice.

Geuens, et.al.(2002) in their paper “Children’s influence on family purchase behaviour: the role of family structure” tried to investigate if current changes in family structure (one-parent families, two out-working parents, more busy parents, and less children) impact the degree of influence children have on family decision making. They found out that children influence is stronger in single parent family than dual parent families. They also pointed out that there is hardly any significant influence of the income level on children’s influence on buying decisions rather lack of time especially in families in which the parents work more hours, children have more impact on the buying decisions as a way of compensating for the lack of time devoted by the parents to their children. Finally, children in smaller families seem to have more impact on buying decisions, especially for children’s products like candy and snacks.

Chaudhury R. Sarita(2009), in “Child Influence in Female Headed Single-Parent Households: Agenda for Consumer Research” indicates that single mothers often have to multi-task and consequently allot less time to their children so as an added perspective, a single mother may rely on a greater division of household duties with her child. This arrangement could result in the child having an adult equivalent role not perceived in dual-parent households. The paper further pointed out that materialism and compulsive consumption behaviour in children have been found to be more in single-parent households than in dual-parent households. Parental authority and its impact on children’s consumption patterns also reflect a disparity in single-parent families. The research method used to gather data was open-ended, in-depth interviews of single mothers who are household heads.

Martensen A. and Gronholdt L (2008), in Children’s influence on family decision making examines parents’ perception of their children’s (5-13-year-olds) participation in and general influence on the family decision making process when purchasing in 14 different product categories. They pointed out that the children exercise quite strong influence on the family decision making processes, particularly for products relevant to them (like cereal, juice, soft drinks, and mobile phones). Children’s influence varies with sub-decision stages and children who are initiators influence the subsequent decision making more than non-initiators. Older children influence more than younger children, but gender does not contribute significantly to parents’ perception of their children’s influence.



## PROPOSITIONS

### Proposition 1

Information dependence, decision dependence and the decision of the decision maker varies significantly based on the user of the product

### Proposition 2

There is a significant difference between the information dependence and decision dependence of the decision maker on the teenage children

### Proposition 3

The difference between information dependence and decision dependence varies based on who is the user of the product

### Proposition 4

Information dependence and decision dependence significantly predict the influence of the children on the decision of the decision maker

### Proposition 5

Demography of the decision maker has a significant influence on the decision of the head of the household.

## METHODOLOGY

The entire study is based on perceptual measures of the teenaged college going children. 200 college students of the undergraduate classes of city-college in Goa have been administered a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire contained three questions of information dependence and two questions on decision dependence. The dependent variable was the extent to which the decision was made by the father himself. All the perceptual measures were measured on five point likert scale.

The differences between user groups in information dependence, decision dependence and extent of decision made by head of the household have been tested for statistical significance by using one way ANOVA. The difference in the extent of information dependence and decision dependence has been tested using paired sample t test and similarly the differences between information dependence and decision dependence for different user groups have been tested again using paired sample t test by dividing the file by user-groups. The influences of information dependence, decision dependence and demography have been tested using ordinary least square regression.

## RESULTS

The results indicate that the information dependence is the highest when the user is the mother followed by the user being the father and then the child. On the other hand decision dependence is highest when the user is the child followed by the user being the mother and then the father. Quite differently the decision score for the head (father) was found to be the highest when the user is father himself followed by when the user is mother and then the child. The ANOVA test reveals that the differences in the three variables based on user groups were significant at 5% level.

The results are provided in table 1 and table 2. Further the paired sample t test revealed that the average decision dependence (3.8) is higher than the average information dependence (3.3583). The difference was found to be significant at 5% level. The results are provided in table 3 and table 4. User-group-wise paired sample t test revealed that the difference between decision dependence and information dependence were significantly different when the users were mother and the child. But



there was no difference when the user group was father. However the highest difference was when the user was child followed by the user being the mother. The results are given in table 5, table 6 and table 8. Regression analysis revealed that the information dependence and decision dependence together explained a variance of 9.7 percent in the decision by the father. The t test on beta coefficients indicate that while decision dependence had a significant influence on the decision by the head of the household at 5% level, information dependence did not have a significant influence. The results are provided in table 8. Demographic variables of income and education were found to have no influence on the decision, or the information dependence or the decision dependence.

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Informationdep	Mother	49	3.6327	.92106	.13158	3.3681	3.8972
	Father	50	3.3200	.70618	.09987	3.1193	3.5207
	Self	100	3.2567	.88744	.08874	3.0806	3.4328
	Total	199	3.3652	.86430	.06127	3.2443	3.4860
Decisiondep	Mother	49	3.8776	.85714	.12245	3.6314	4.1238
	Father	50	3.4800	.89762	.12694	3.2249	3.7351
	Self	100	3.9200	.86375	.08637	3.7486	4.0914
	Total	199	3.7990	.88609	.06281	3.6751	3.9229
father decides for himself	Mother	49	2.7347	1.25458	.17923	2.3743	3.0951
	Father	50	3.1200	1.13641	.16071	2.7970	3.4430
	Self	100	2.3100	1.16076	.11608	2.0797	2.5403
	Total	199	2.6181	1.22056	.08652	2.4475	2.7887

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Informationdep	Between Groups	4.785	2	2.393	3.276	.040
	Within Groups	143.124	196	.730		
	Total	147.910	198			
Decisiondep	Between Groups	6.854	2	3.427	4.520	.012
	Within Groups	148.605	196	.758		
	Total	155.460	198			
father decides for himself	Between Groups	22.754	2	11.377	8.191	.000
	Within Groups	272.221	196	1.389		
	Total	294.975	198			

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Informationdep	3.3583	200	.86752	.06134
	Decisiondep	3.8000	200	.88397	.06251



**Table 4 Paired Samples Test**

		Paired Differences			T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean			
Pair 1	Informationdep - Decisiondep	-.44167	1.01726	.07193	-6.140	199	.000

**Table 5 Paired Samples Test<sup>a</sup>**

		Paired Differences			T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean			
Pair 1	Informationdep - Decisiondep	-.24490	.82151	.11736	-2.087	48	.042

a. Mobile Phone of the respondent = Mother

**Table 6 Paired Samples Test<sup>a</sup>**

		Paired Differences			T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean			
Pair 1	Informationdep - Decisiondep	-.16000	1.00957	.14277	-1.121	49	.268

a. Mobile Phone of the respondent = Father

**Table 7 Paired Samples Test<sup>a</sup>**

		Paired Differences			T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean			
Pair 1	Informationdep - Decisiondep	-.66333	1.05595	.10559	-6.282	99	.000

a. Mobile Phone of the respondent = Self

**Table 8 Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	4.346	.425		10.234	.000		
	Informationdep	-.051	.101	-.036	-.502	.617	.894	1.118
	Decisiondep	-.412	.099	-.298	-4.161	.000	.894	1.118

a. Dependent Variable: father decides for himself

**Discussion**

Teenage college going children were found to have two types of influences on the decision maker and they are for information and decision. Whereas the decision dependence had a negative influence on the independent decision making of the purchaser, information dependence did not have a bearing on the decision independence. The present study revealed that the decision dependence for technology



products particularly mobile phone was found to be high and was found to be more than the information dependence. This means that the purchaser did not have sufficient capacity to make the decision. Previous studies have identified teenaged children as initiators, influencers and information providers. However, this study reveals that they have considerable influence on the decision making. This has marketing implication such as directly targeting children for technology products for use by the children as well as for use by the parents. This is very similar to targeting baby food to mothers. The importance assumed by the teenage children in the information search, processing, deciding and disposing the product is phenomenal. This has several implications for all realms of marketing of such products.

Although differences have been observed in the relative importance of the variables in terms of the user groups, the overwhelming significance in terms of the magnitude of presence and magnitude of influence of decision dependence children assume enormous significance in the marketing of technology products.

### Conclusion & Future Recommendations

The present study reveals that children have a strong influence on parents for purchase of mobile phones. This indicates that children have more influence in decision making as far as technology related products are concerned due to their expert power. The results showed that the information dependence is highest when the user is mother followed by father and than the child.

Parents take advice from children before purchasing technology related products because of their children indepth knowledge about these products. Thus this indicates a bi- directional flow of knowledge and information which means, the younger generation tend to acquire a significant role as socialization agents for adult consumers.

Demographic variables of income and education were found to have no influence on the decision, or the information dependence or the decision dependence.

With respect to the directions for future research, the current study was limited to teenagers as the sample. Future research should examine children influence on parents with younger children, adolescents, adult children and their parents. In addition, the current study relies on only one side of the parent/child dyad for purposes of data collection. Future research needs to examine the reverse socialization process from the perspective of the parents. These types of studies could focus on motivations, learning processes, and the parents' perceptions about reverse socialisation. Future research also needs to examine children influence on parents decion making across a variety of contexts, beyond technology. As today's baby boomers continue to live longer, teenagers may need to socialize their parents in services, such as financial planning and health care management.

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