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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Background
The influence of children on family decision making has continued to increase in recent years. Recent research estimates that children between the ages of 2 and 12 years of age indirectly influence $320 billion worth of household purchases, in addition to the $290 billion worth of goods and services that they purchase independently with their own money (McDonald and Lavelle 2001).

Previous research has concentrated primarily on adolescents and established that adolescent influence varies across product categories and families. Surprisingly, only one study (Foxman, Tansuhaj, and Ekstrom 1989), has examined the relationship between child’s influence and family communication. That study assessed the influence of socio- and concept-oriented communication on American adolescents’ purchase influence. This study, in contrast, assesses the relationship between four specific types of family communication and children’s purchase influence among the Israeli parents of children between the ages of 8 and 12.

Method
A questionnaire was distributed to mothers and fathers of children between the ages of eight and twelve years old in Israel. The sample was obtained from cities in both the Northern and Southern part of Israel. A total of 260 questionnaires were distributed and 117 were returned for a response rate of 45% from different mothers and fathers. The sample consisted of primarily employed, educated, upper income families.

All measures were translated and back translated from English to Hebrew by separate bi-lingual individuals with any discrepancies settled by a meeting of the translator, the back translator, and a separate bi-lingual individual.

Two dimensions of family communication were assessed and four types of family communication were created based on a median split of these dimensions. Both were assessed with Moschis, Moore, and Smith’s (1984) scale which included a total of ten items. Typical items for these dimensions were: “I tell my child that buying things that he/she likes is important, even if others don’t like them,” for concept orientation, and “I tell my child what things he/she should buy” for socio-orientation. All items were measured on a 5-point scale with 1 being very seldom and 5 being very often.

Child’s influence (Mangelburg, Grewal, Bristol 1999) was measured for three product categories: durables, non-durables, and children’s products. Durable products included a family TV, living-room furniture, and a microwave. Non-durable products included family toothpaste, family cereal, family sweets, and family soft drinks, while children’s products included children’s clothing, a discman, children’s bed sheets, deodorant, movie, shampoo, and aftershave / perfume. All three scales were measured on a seven point scale where 1=the child makes the decision alone to 7=the parent makes the decision alone.

A MANOVA was conducted with mothers’ or fathers’ perceived influence of their children for durables, non-durables, and children’s products as the dependent variables and family communication pattern as the independent variable.

Findings
The influence of product type can also be assessed and our findings are consistent with the literature regarding this issue. The higher mean value for family durables than for non-durables or children’s use products indicate that children have a lower level of influence on these products. This finding is consistent with findings among adolescents and their families, where the perceived influence of the adolescent varies inversely with the expense and importance of the product with some consideration given to the extent of product use by the adolescent (Foxman and Tansuhaj 1988; Foxman, Tansuhaj, and Ekstrom 1989; Moschis and Moore 1979; Beatty and Talpade 1994).

Differences across family communication patterns were generally consistent with previous theory and findings. Child’s influence was generally highest for pluralistic and consensual parents, which is consistent with Foxman, Tansuhaj, and Ekstrom’s (1989) study where the authors found that adolescents had more influence in concept-oriented family communication environments. More specifically, pluralistic parents allowed their children a significantly higher level of influence than protective or laissez-faire parents for durables, a significantly higher level of influence than protective parents for non-durables, and a significantly higher level of influence than all groups, including consensual parents, for children’s products.

Gender differences were also found among family communication patterns. The observed differences among family communication patterns, moreover, fit traditional gender roles quite well, where females are considered more communal and males are considered more agentic. Mothers were categorized primarily as pluralistic or consensual. Fathers, on the other hand, were more likely to be categorized as protective (high on vertical socio-oriented communication but low on horizontal, concept oriented communication).

Citations


