Who’S Got the Power? a Social Power Perspective on Teen Purchase Influences
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Social influences on teen purchase are examined by applying social power theory (French and Raven 1959). Prior consumer research has largely ignored some potential sources of social influence (e.g., legitimate power). Preliminary results suggest that parental expert and coercive power, as well as peer expert and legitimate power, significantly predict the type of product purchased by teens. Furthermore, socio family orientation significantly interacts with parental coercive as well as peer legitimate and reward/coercive power, while concept orientation significantly interacts with parental expert and coercive power as well as peer expert and legitimate power.

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A Social Power Perspective on Teen Purchase Influences
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Two main agents of social influence on teen purchase, parents and peers, are evaluated in by applying social power theory (French and Raven 1959). The five types of social power (French and Raven 1959) are summarized briefly below:

2. Legitimate power: legitimate right to influence behavior
3. Referent power: personal identification
4. Reward power: ability to confer a reward
5. Coercive power: ability to confer punishment

Prior consumer research called for examination of peer and family influence (Bachmann and Roedder John 1993; Roedder John 1999), but social power theory has not been evaluated.

Conceptual Development
Parents and peers significantly influence teen purchase decisions (Rousseau 1982; Rousseau 1984; Mascarenhas and Higby 1993; Moschis and Moore 1979; Martin and Bush 2000; Boyle, Claxton, and Forster 1997; Felscher, Derevensky, and Gupta 2003), while siblings have significant, but lesser influence (Cotte and Wood 2004). This study’s focus is on parental and peer influence.

Most corporate studies of social power indicate that expert and referent power positively influence subordinates while legitimate power effects are mixed (Backman 1968; Elangovan and Xie 2000; Frazier and Summers 1986; Skinner, Dubinsky, and Donnelly 1984). Reward power can motivate, but coercion negatively affects work performance (Frazier and Summers 1986; Elangovan and Xie 2000). Similarly, consumer research suggests informational and referent influence on teen purchase decisions (Mangleberg, Doney, and Bristol 2004; Moschis 1976), while normative influence can have a negative effect (Mangleberg, Doney, and Bristol 2004). Although peer influence increases as teens mature (Koester and May 1985; Felltham 1998; Simpson and Douglas 1998; Mangleburg and Bristol 1998; Lueg et al 2006), parental influence strongly affects teen consumption (Martin and Bush 2000; Blood and Wolfe 1960).

H1: Parental expert and referent power will have a positive effect on teen purchase decisions, while reward power will have a lesser positive effect.
H2: Parental coercive power will have a negative effect on teen purchase decisions

Corporate research on peer influence indicates that expert, referent, reward and legitimate powers are rated highest (Gemmill and Wilemon 1972; Pitts 1990; Thomas 1982), but that legitimate power and reward power might have lesser positive effect (due to mixed research results; Yukl and Falbe 1991; Fiorelli 1988), while coercive power has a negative influence (Fiorelli 1988). Consumer research (e.g., Mangleberg, Doney and Bristol 2004; Moschis 1976) is largely consistent with corporate results.

H3: Peer expert and referent power will have a positive effect on teen purchase decisions, while peer legitimate power and peer reward power will have a lesser positive effect.
H4: Peer coercive power will have a negative effect on teen purchase decisions.

Two other factors, family and product characteristics, potentially moderate parental and peer influence. Socio-oriented family communication (child avoids controversy and does not argue; Foxman, Tansuhaj and Ekstrom 1989; Moschis and Churchill 1978; McLeod and Chaffee 1972, McLeod and O’Keefe 1972) is associated with stronger peer influence (Moschis and Moore 1979; Bristol and Mangleberg 2005), while concept-orientation (child encouraged to develop own ideas) allows greater parental influence (Aribarg, Arora, and Bodur 2002).
H5: Family communication style will have a moderating effect on social power influence, with socio-orientation having a more positive effect on peer influence and concept orientation having a more positive effect on parental influence.

Product category (e.g., public or private, luxury or necessity) moderates informational (“expert”), utilitarian (“reward” and “coercive”) and value-expressive (“referent”) influences (Park and Lessig 1977). Necessity products have greater value-expressive and utilitarian influences (Bearden and Etzel 1982), while luxury goods have greater peer influence, particularly for value-expressive and informational components (Childers and Rao 1992).

H6: Product type will have a moderating effect on social power influences, with greater peer expert and referent power for higher-priced public/luxury products and greater parental and peer reward, coercive and legitimate power for necessity products.

Methodology
Data were collected via written survey (175 Southeastern U.S. high school students). Social power scales (Gaski 1986; Hinkin and Schriesheim 1989; Flurry and Burns 2004) were adapted to teens, and socio/concept scales were used from prior research (Moschis and Moore 1979). Product was student-defined with an open-ended question (“last product you bought for yourself for more than $40, with your own money, in the past 12 months”). Product categories were assigned post-survey by two Ph.D. students using prior definitions (Childers and Rao 1992). Interrater reliabilities were .88 and .84, with disagreements resolved through discussion.

Exploratory factor analysis yielded 9 social power factors. Reward and coercion factors loaded unidimensionally (e.g., Beier and Stern 1969; Gaski 1984; Kohli 1989) for peers but yielded only one unique parental coercion factor. All factors had good reliability (α>70; Nunnally 1978). Confirmatory factor analysis indicated acceptable measurement model fit (CFI = .90, IFI = .90, χ²/df<2; Bentler and Bonett 1980; Kline 1998) and acceptable discriminant validity (high item loadings of .50 or more, low cross-loadings, and low inter-factor correlations (.63 or below); Bagozzi 1994).

Preliminary Results
Peer and parental social power factors, as well as their interactions with socio and concept factors, were regressed against product type, using logistic regression. Grade level was a control factor. Preliminary results indicate that parental expert (p<.05) and coercive (p<.01) power, as well as peer expert (p<.05) and legitimate power (p<.01), significantly predict the type of product teens purchase, partially supporting H1-H4.

Furthermore, concept orientation significantly interacts with parental expert (p<.05) and coercive power (p<.01) but also with peer expert (p<.01) and legitimate power (p<.05), while socio orientation significantly interacts with peer reward/coercive (p<.01) and legitimate (p<.10) power but also with parental coercive (p<.01) power, partially supporting H5.

The results suggest that parental coercive (p<.05) but also peer legitimate (p<.05) power significantly influence “public necessity” purchases relative to “public luxuries,” while peer expert power (p<.05) significantly influences public luxury purchases, consistent with H6.

Referent power was marginally significant for parental referent power for concept teens (p<.10). As expected, high school grade was significant. Overall, these results support prior teen purchase decision research, but lend greater insight into specific factors, such as legitimate power, that affect teen purchase.

References