A Qualitative Study of Mother - Adolescent Daughter - Vicarious Role Model Consumption Interactions

Yossi Gavish, University of Haifa, Israel
Aviv Shoham, University of Haifa, Israel
Ayalla Ruvio, University of Haifa, Israel

Usually parents are perceived as consumption role models for their children through a socialization process. Yet, today's Western culture emphasizes a youthful ideal, strengthened by the mass media leading individuals to use different means to feel or look younger than their age. Hence, in contrast to the parent-child direction mostly assumed in previous research, many mothers emulate their daughters and consume similar perfumes, make-up, or clothes to look younger. Notably, studies of family consumption decisions have investigated children's relative influence in different stages of the buying process mostly on products directly relevant to them or to the family as a whole but not on the influence of children on consumption of products that are used by parents. We address this gap in the literature in a qualitative study that focused on tri-directional mothers- adolescent daughters- vicarious role models interactions as drivers of consumer behaviors.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/13212/volumes/v35/NA-35

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
A Qualitative Study of Mother-Adolescent Daughter-Vicarious Role Model Consumption Interactions
Yossi Gavish, University of Haifa, Israel
Aviv Shoham, University of Haifa, Israel
Ayalla Ruvio, University of Haifa, Israel

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Conceptualization

The traditional paradigm in marketing views parents as role models for their children in the consumption domain (Clark et al. 2001). This paradigm is based on the perspective that experienced parents serve as a primary source of information for their children. However, in today’s Western cultures, an ever-increasing emphasis on a youthfulness ideal may cause a shift in role modeling, making children potential role models for their parents. Struggling to feel, look, and behave youthfully, parents might perceive their children as experts/role models.

Women engage in youthfulness-oriented activities and annually spend $30000 more than men to stay young (Weiss 2002). Additionally, maturing women seek reaffirmation of their self-concept of youthfulness as a normal, healthy, positive, and acceptable image of aging (Barak and Stern 1985). They recalibrate their inner age scale to make youth the most important and tend to adopt consumption patterns fitting a younger cognitive rather than chronological age. Integrating a youth ideal with lower cognitive ages may lead mothers to view their daughters (especially adolescents) as role models in certain consumption situations. Consequently, the mother-daughter dyad may serve as a preferred unit of analysis (Moore et al. 1988). Additionally, vicarious role models, such as celebrities, can impact both mothers and their adolescent daughters’ consumption behaviors.

This paper develops and qualitatively evaluates an integrative perspective on consumption interactions of mothers, adolescent daughters, and vicarious role models. These interactions are studied using three theoretical frameworks (consumer socialization, intergenerational influence, and role models) and focusing on the influence of adolescent daughters on their mothers’ self-consumption.

The first framework, consumer socialization, suggests that parents serve as socialization agents to their children through consumer learning (Moschis and Churchill 1978; Caruana and Vassallo 2003). Though consumer socialization provides insights on how children acquire motivations, attitudes, and behaviors about the marketplace (Carlson et al. 1994), it has focused mainly on a uni-flow of socialization from parents to their children.

The second framework, intergenerational influence (IGI), refers to the within-family transmission of information, beliefs, and resources among generations (Moore et al. 2001). Although studies under this framework have emphasized mostly information transmission from older to younger generations, it can also explain adolescent daughters’ influence on their mother’s consumption, adding a dimension to socialization theory.

The third framework, role modeling, deals with the impact of role models on individuals’ consumption behavior (Bush and Martin 2000; Clark et al. 2001). Any person individuals have direct or indirect contact with, who can potentially influence their behaviors can be a role model (Bandura 1977). Given Western cultures’ increasing emphasis on youthfulness (Thompson and Hirschman 1995), adolescent daughters and their mothers might use similar consumption role models (e.g., celebrities) for expressive products, which are consumed to fit one’s personality and lifestyle and to make favorable social impressions (Shah and Mittal 1997). Thus, the approach developed here extends beyond the mothers-adolescent daughters relationships.

Children’s influence on family consumption decision-making, children’s socialization, IGI, and role models have been researched before. In combination, these frameworks could explain if, when, and how adolescent daughters impact their mother’s behaviors for products that are relevant to and used by the mothers. To the best of the authors’ knowledge, this combined approach has not been studied before. The frameworks are described first. Then, the results of a qualitative study, conducted to assess the consumption interactions are presented and discussed.

Method

The study was qualitative and exploratory and included in-depth interviews with dyads of mothers and their adolescent daughters. The mothers and their adolescent daughters were interviewed separately in order to avoid bias in their answers. Three issues were examined: if and when adolescent daughters serve as role models for their mothers; if and when mothers serve as role models for their adolescent daughters; and whether the youthfulness ideal of Western cultures exists and influences the consumption behavior of mothers and their adolescent daughters. Ten dyads of mothers-adolescent daughters were used as the study’s sample.

While a convenience sample was used, the dyads included mothers and daughters at different ages (daughters: 15.5-18; mothers: 39-51), from different social strata (low to high), and in different geographical locations (two cities in Northern/Central Israel).

Major Findings

Three issues were examined: whether adolescent daughters serve as role models for their mothers; whether mothers serve as role models for their adolescent daughters; and whether the emphasis of youthfulness in Western cultures exists and influences the consumption behavior of mothers and their adolescent daughters.

The interviews partially answered these questions. Regarding adolescent daughters’ use as role models and fashion markers for their mothers, most mothers referred to this issue and confirmed that their adolescent daughters’ fashion opinion was very important. This is compatible with Zolo (1995), who suggested that teenagers serve as trendsetters for their parents. The second question, drawing on the consumer socialization literature, asked if and when mothers serve as role models for their adolescent daughters. This question was answered positively. Most interviewed dyads shop for fashion items together and in the same stores. Moreover, many adolescent daughters occasionally borrow their mothers’ fashion items.

Regarding the issue of cognitive versus chronological ages, the interviews suggest that there is a gap between mothers’ cognitive and chronological ages in support of cognitive age theory and the youthfulness ideal of Western cultures. Notably, such a gap
mostly failed to materialize for adolescent daughters. Hence, consumption similarity appears to be driven more by the gap for mothers than the gap for daughters.

Finally, external role models such as celebrities did not have a great influence on mothers or their adolescent daughters. Thus, the cognitive ages’ gap, which is narrower than the cognitive ages’ gap, did not lead to the use of shared role models. While a convenience sample was used, the dyads included mothers and daughters at different ages (daughters: 15.5-18; mothers: 39-51), from different social strata (low to high), and in different geographical locations (two cities in Northern/Central Israel).

References


A Qualitative Study of Mother-Adolescent Daughter-Vicarious Role Model Consumption Interactions


