



A Study of Children's Influence in Family Purchasing Decisions: Parents' Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: *Child consumerism is a topic that has been given prominence and attention by the fields of marketing, psychology and sociology recently. Children are at the center of family decision-making. As a result of the socialization process, children have gained a depth of knowledge and are able to bargain with their parents for a variety of products. Thus, the main motive of this study is to explore the influence of children's involvement in family purchasing decisions.*

Design/methodology/approach: *The study established a qualitative design, with the participation of parents who have children aged between 5 years to 11 years. Accordingly, 20 parents who have shopping experiences in two leading supermarkets in the Anuradhapura District were selected based on convenience and purposive sampling techniques. Furthermore, throughout the store's opening hours, data was gathered through semi-structured interviews. Then the findings were analyzed using the thematic analysis approach.*

Findings: *According to the findings of the survey, the children have been exposed to the field and become more aware of products and services through different agents of socialization. They used negotiation strategies like exchange tactics, coalition tactics, inspirational appeal, and consultation tactics to persuade their parents. But this persuasion can be varied in reference to the child's age, gender, family income, and structure. Furthermore, children's perspectives of selecting items are mostly formed on the extent of colorfulness and the physical shape of products rather than what is contained inside. Also, they mostly demanded sweets, toys, stationery items, and instant products. Notably, children's preferences are given more consideration and priority in the matter of purchasing items. Moreover, the children hold a positive sense towards shopping tasks according to the parents' point of view whereas the parents hold a negative attitude on children's involvement.*

Originality: *The study has contributed to the body of knowledge about Sri Lankan children as consumers. Furthermore, this study identifies the impact of the store environment as a socializing agent, which has received less attention in prior studies. The findings could aid businesses in better understanding the shopping habits of Sri Lankan children.*

Implications: *Overall, it can be mentioned that the outcome of this study provided important implications for consumers, marketers, and policymakers.*

Keywords: *Family buying behavior, child involvement, socialization agents, persuasion, negotiation strategies.*

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INTRODUCTION

In marketing and consumer behavior, the family as a consuming and decision-making unit is a fundamental and significant phenomenon (Gbadamosi, 2012). However, interest in the role of children is now gaining momentum in the field of marketing. Regardless of the children's involvement in direct purchasing, their unintentional enormous interference in the parental decision-making process is huge and places a significant mark in the marketplace silently (Wimalasiri, 2004).

Children are never born with consumer skills. They observe the market and learn things with their capacity. Though at first, they knew little, their cognitive capacity has grown and converted into socialized consumers, bypassing their age. They try to stand as independent customers and fulfill their desires without negotiation with others. We call this process 'consumer socialization processes' and it flows with the impact of different kinds of socialization agents. Parents, media, peers, and the store environment are some types of key agents that influence children's buying behavior.

With the impact of these socialization agents, children gain awareness about certain products. But they can't purchase these as they wish because they do not have financial independence. With the absence of this economic power and sufficient knowledge, children try to fulfill their desires by influencing their parents. The main reason would be that parents have economic power in every family and they are the responsible parties who manage the family budgets (McDonald, 1980; Othman et al., 2013). To influence the family purchasing behavior, children used different influence strategies. However, this influence may vary with demographic factors of children and families. Children's demographic factors like age, gender, and their family income all play significant roles in the family buying decision (Foxman, Tansuhaj and Ekstrom, 1989). According to the common scenario, parents are considered as income earners and they have the responsibility to nurture their children (Ward and Wackman, 1972). Further, parents' income, number of family members and family communication patterns are also considered important factors.

Wimalasiri, (2004) interpreted USA estimate of its value of the kids' market as being about US\$188 billion. It means, children create more opportunities within the market and marketers can gain more benefits by targeting this segment. Furthermore, children socialized immediately because of the powerfulness of socialization agents then tend to pursue their parents. Thus, it is important to investigate how children's involvement influences family purchase decisions by focusing on the impact of socialization agents, negotiation strategies, and demographic variance. Although more researchers identified different negotiation tactics, several types of research discussed the impact of different demographic factors of children and families on that persuasion. And also, more researchers have given less focus on the impact of the store environment as a socialization agent.

Further, more previous research was conducted in developed countries such as the USA and Australia, but researchers give less consideration to the role of children in the developing countries (Akter, 2017). However, South Asian countries such as

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India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have conducted some research regarding the children's influence on family purchase behavior but there is a huge research gap available in Sri Lanka.

An average household in Sri Lanka, like many other developing countries, consists of the father, mother, and typically a large number of children. Thus, children's involvement is a common thing in these families. As a result, this research might be seen as a small step toward better understanding the nature of children's influence and impact on parental purchase decisions in Sri Lanka. According to that, the study focuses following objectives;

- To identify different socialization agents and their role in family purchase decision
- To explore different influence strategies used by children to persuade their parents
- To investigate the influence of demographic factors to the family purchase decision
- To identify and analyze the different product categories based on the child's influence
- To identify children's role within the family purchase decision

LITERATURE REVIEW

Family Buying Decisions

A fundamental and crucial phenomenon in marketing and consumer behavior is the family as a customer and decision-making unit (Gbadamosi, 2012). Its value as a unit of analysis in consumer purchasing decisions is widely established (Xia et al., 2006). Family buying decision has been the center of attention of different studies in different fields such as rural sociology, social anthropology, social psychology, home economics, consumer psychology, marketing, and economics (Sheth, 1974). According to these theories, the total consumption of a family is classified by: 1. consumption by the individual member, 2. consumption by the family as a whole, and 3. consumption of the household unit (Sheth, 1974). Further, Sheth, (1974) divides the family buying decisions into two types; when it is done autonomously by one single member or when it is done together by several or all family members. Chaudhary and Gupta, (2012) state that in the 1940-1950s children were not considered part of the buying experience; they were just their parents' extensions. But now, with the influence of television and the internet children have become experienced consumers and have the buying power for almost every product category as research shows (Chaudhary & Gupta, 2012).

Children view their impact to be greater than that of their parents because children consider their role to be more essential than that of their parents (Beatty

&Talpade,1994; Belch, Belch,&Ceresino, 1985; Talpade et al, 1993 cited by Nanda et al., 2007).

Consumer Socialization

Children are new to the market. Therefore, they didn't know anything at the beginning. But they want to learn about the market to survive. Simply, this process is called the "Consumer Socialization Process". This concept was first defined by Ward, (1986). According to the model suggested by Mowen, (1995), consumer socialization is underpinned by three components: background influences, socialization agents, and learning mechanisms such as cognitive learning, operant conditioning, and modeling. Consumer socioeconomic status, sex, age, social class, and religion background are considered under background factors in socialization. Socialization agents are those who are closely associated with a customer and have influence over them because of their frequency of interaction with them. Parents, siblings, and sisters, friends, teachers, the media, and celebrities such as athletes, movie stars, and rock stars are all examples of socialization agents (Ekasasi, 2009).

Family or parents are considered as primary socialization agents. Ghouse, Chaudhary and Durrah, (2019) noticed that family provides four basic functions for a child: 1) economic well-being; 2) emotional support; 3) family lifestyles, and 4) child socialization. Further, Ekasasi, (2009) recognized several ways that parents used to make their children as effective consumers. Parents first teach their children about product pricing and quality. Parents also teach their children how to compare shops and buy discount items. Additionally, parents may assist their children in learning about various brands and how to choose the best one. Parents also teach their children how to choose or distinguish the correct products from advertisements that exaggerate. Chaudhary & Gupta, (2012) revealed that television, the internet, and parents have all been identified as major predictors of a child's position as a co-decision maker in purchase decisions for loud goods, noisy goods, and quiet goods. Further, parents have emerged as the most prominent socializing agents for small children in all three product categories, according to the majority of studies in this area.

According to McNeal, (1987) cited by Ekasasi, (2009), the result of peer influence can be categorized in two ways; Conformity and satisfaction of needs. Conformity means children normally want to fit in with a group, usually their age group, in order to gain acceptance. And also, this influence helps to satisfy needs in the following ways:

Need to understand: With the help of others' direction, children can gain an understanding of certain products and certain aspects of this environment.

Need for affiliation: It helps to build a good relationship with others.

Need for avoidance: Children may be embarrassed frequently because their limited knowledge causes them to make mistakes. Thus, peer influence helps to prevent these mistakes.

Need for achievement: There are some societies that highly encourage achieving recognition, winning awards, achieving high grades, and gaining friends.

In a research of children aged 6 to 14 years, it was discovered that the older age group was the most sensitive to peer group influence and that peer group influence was closely proportional to the product's conspicuousness (Mandrik & Bao, 2005). But, Chaudhary & Gupta, (2012) stated that although friends have been ranked as the third most influential socialization agent they do not have any significant impact on children when making family purchase decisions for loud goods, noisy goods, and quiet goods.

Media becomes more trending within this segment because many studies stated that children's socialization has been largely moderated by the role of media (Wimalasiri, 2004). Fan and Li (2009) conducted a study regarding children's buying behavior in China and the findings implied that TV advertisements are considered as the most important information source for the new product for children. Furthermore, Galdolage and Wijesundara (2007) conducted research about the impact of TV advertising on children's behavior and the findings revealed that television not only entertains youngsters but also forces them to desire certain products. Earlier, advertisers used to avoid targeting young children, but now they do. Not only TV advertisements, the new source of media such as the internet has become a strong agent of a child's socialization (Kwai Choi Lee & Collins, 2000).

Children's Negotiation Strategies in Family Decisions

Wimalasiri, (2004) found that older children resort to rational persuasion than their younger counterparts because they try to justify their opinion or request by using some sort of factual evidence like television and radio advertisements. But Gbadamosi, (2012) claimed that Nigerian children start to request any good and service through direct request; if a direct request fails, a child would resort to the use of persuasion, and if that does not yield the expected result, the child resorts to the emotional tactic, with reference to the other.

Based on previous literature, Chaudhary, (2013) identified five influence strategies to conduct the research. They are aggressive, persuasion, rational, knowledge, and emotional strategies. As a result, it showed that there is a positive link between buying behavior and all the strategies except for emotional strategy where no link was found. Ali and Kerpčarová, (2019) used these same strategies to conduct their research. And it implied the same result; aggressive, persuasion, rational and knowledge strategies are positively affecting parents' buying behavior.

Demographic Factors of Children and Involvement in Family Purchasing decision

The literature explains how children's demographic factors influence on family purchase decisions. Ali et al., (2013) found that the gender of the child has a significant influence on family purchase decisions. Boys dominate on several product items such as video games, toys such as racing cars, sports items, etc. On the other hand, girls dominate on household products such as clothes, makeup, bakery items, and dolls (Akter, 2017). But Demo, David H., Cox, (2000) argued that children's gender differences do not always influence the family buying process differently because modern families' parents consider their children equally and not differentiated based on gender.

Children's age was also found to be important in their involvement with family decisions because, when children are growing their cognitive abilities also develop. McNeal (2007) cited by (Ali et al., 2013) stated that with increasing age, adolescents showed higher participation in the process of making purchase decisions. The socialization process also occurs under three stages based on children's age; Perceptual (3-7 years), Analytical (7-11years) and Reflective stage (11-16 years). Ali, Ravichandran and Batra, (2013) identified that older children influence their parents through negotiating than younger children who use enticing as an influencing strategy in family purchase decisions. Further Ali et al., (2013) revealed that the order of the children in a family also contributes a lot in the choice of influence strategy in the family purchases. Early born children have the least ability to influence their parents through negotiation.

Several scholars said that children influence higher in high-income families. Because parents of these families have enough ability to pay for all the children's desires (Williams and Veeck 1998 cited by Ali, Ravichandran and Batra, (2013). However, there are some pieces of evidence that children from lower-income families also highly influence to family purchase decisions (Ali et al., 2013).

The change in family structure also has elevated the role of children as influencers in family purchase decisions (Flurry and Burns, 2007 cited by Ali, Ravichandran and Batra, (2013). Most of the families take joint decisions and these families allow children to share their opinions in purchasing decisions. But a few families didn't consider others' opinions and all of the family decisions are taken by one member who holds control power of the family.

Demanded Product Categories

North, Birkenbach and Slimmon, (2007) stated that children can influence their parents for different types of products which include: a) Major products for the family and/or children, b) Minor products for the family and/or children. According to Mangleburg, (1990) children seem to have a significant influence in product

decisions for which they will be the primary consumer, like breakfast cereals, snack foods, toys, children's clothes, and school supplies. Soni and Upadhyaya, (2007) found the top five products which children influence most in the family buying process. These are a) selecting the fast-food restaurant b) clothes c) chocolate and chips items d) games e) toys. According to Assael (1992) cited by Ekasasi, (2009), clothes, toys, cereals and ice cream have a high influence percentage while records, tapes, movie admissions and sports equipment have a low demand rate.

Concept Indicator Model

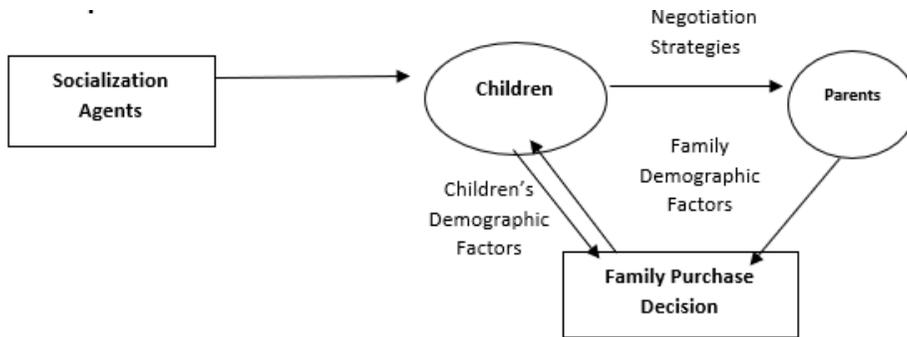


Figure 1: Concept Indicator Model

Source: *The author compiled*

METHODOLOGY

This research required detailed information, experiences, opinions, and ideas of the parents and it helps to attain the objectives through in-depth analysis. Therefore, the researcher uses qualitative research that has been designed to assess how children influence on family purchasing behavior.

As a population, this study selected parents who have children aged between 5-11 years. The preteens, aged five to eleven, are the operational definition of children in this article. They eventually learn to connect their knowledge of fantasy, morality, and economics at this age (Bever et al., 1975 cited by Gbadamosi, 2012). Then convenience and purposive sampling were used in the collection of the sample. Due to accessibility problems arising from the "distance" factor, the researcher selected the respondents in a more convenient manner. And this COVID-19 pandemic situation also directly influenced to select the convenience sampling technique to conduct this research. When considering the purposive sampling technique, parents are deal more with their children and can observe their involvement in proper family purchasing. Further, they have more experience regarding children's involvement in supermarket shopping. Based on that the researcher selected 20 respondents from the above population who have had the shopping experience from Cargills Food City and Alankulama Family Super during store opening time. In the Anuradhapura

District, these are two of the most well-known supermarket chains. When compared to other supermarkets, these two used more family-friendly strategies. Large interior space, parking facilities, and a varied product selection are just a few of them. Data collection for 20 respondents came to an end since respondents gave the same answers during interviews. And semi-structured interviews were used to acquire primary data.

Before conducting interviews, permission was obtained from authorized personnel at these two supermarkets. Then, using the purposive sample technique, parents who bring their children to supermarkets were picked and interviews were conducted anonymously with their approval. Audio recording equipment was used to capture the voices of the respondents, because it helped in identifying a specific pattern of statements by listing them repeatedly, and it benefited analyzing the gathered data accurately. Furthermore, depending on the interview guidelines, one questionnaire took around 15-30 minutes to complete. The interviewer does not use formalized or strict questions, and the interview guidelines are established based on the literature and objectives. Instead of that, the interviewer uses more open-ended questions. Therefore, interviewee can give their answers to these questions freely. And also, it helps to access additional information provided by the respondents, and through that, the research can analyze these data properly. A pilot study was conducted with four respondents to evaluate the questions for potential errors and ambiguities. Further, it helped to determine the time length that respondents take to answer these questions. After collecting the data through semi-structured interviews, by using the transcriptions and transcribed conversations, patterns of experiences and motives were listed using direct quotes or paraphrasing common ideas with the help of the Microsoft excel 2010 and coded into nodes. All the conversations that fall within the particular pattern are classified and placed with the corresponding node. And sub-themes were built under main themes representing specific patterns of statements within the theme itself.

Demographic Profile of Sample

The study collected information from 20 parents who have shopping experiences with Cargills Food City and Alankulma family super in Anuradhapura. There are three groups in this sample group based on who gave the responses to the questions: mothers, fathers, and both. The majority of mothers (13 out of 20) carry their children to the supermarket alone. Two fathers carried their children without the help of their wife. The children in the last group are in the supermarket with both their father and mother. They also answered questions together (05 out of 20). This table shows the demographic profile of 20 respondents;

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Table 1: Demographic factors of respondents

Participant No	Interviewee/s	No of children	Gender of children		Age of children (Female- Male- M) F/
			Female	Male	
01	Mother	2	2	-	7 years 8 years
02	Mother	1	-	1	9 years
03	Mother and Father (Jointly)	2	1	1	6 years (F) 9 years (M)
04	Mother	2	-	2	7 years 11 years
05	Mother	2	-	2	10 years (Twins)
06	Father	1	-	1	5 years
07	Mother	2	1	1	11 years (F) 10 years (M)
08	Father	1	-	1	7 years
09	Mother and Father (Jointly)	1	1	-	8 years
10	Mother	2	1	1	10 years (F) 7 years (M)
11	Mother and Father (Jointly)	1	-	1	6 years
12	Mother	2	1	1	8 years (F) 11 years (M)
13	Mother and Father (Jointly)	1	-	1	7 years
14	Mother	2	-	2	6 years 8 years
15	Mother	1	1	-	9 years
16	Mother	1	1	-	7 years
17	Mother	1	-	1	6 years
18	Mother and Father (Jointly)	2	2	-	8 years 11 years
19	Mother	1	-	1	5 years
20	Mother	1	-	1	10 years

FINDINGS

The gathered information is analyzed using the thematic analysis method. These are the major themes that emerged from this research: These findings were categorized under socialization agents, negotiating methods, demographic factors, demanded products, and children's involvement in family purchase decisions.

Socialization agents in Children's involvement in family purchasing

This is the parent theme used to assess influence of socialization agents on the family purchasing. Under that, the researcher identified the main four sub-themes. These are the media, peers, family, and store environment.

Media: Children are more addicted to television and watch cartoons, kids' movies, and discovery programs frequently. And parents said that they give more consideration to TV advertisements which were telecast at that time. If any product advertisements related to children are telecast, they could remember it and influence parents to purchase it. Some of the example statements extracted from the transcripts is shown below;

"They watch TV always. And watch all cartoons in the evening, till I warn them to stop. So they remember every advertisement and they act them also. If any product gives free items like toys, mug, water bottle they remember this and when they visit the supermarket they try to find it and requested me to purchase it" (Mother; 2 Sons, 7/11 years)

Peers: In some cases, children share their ideas regarding related advertisements with their friends, because they prefer to associate with their friends and learn more things from those groups. They normally want to fit in with a group, usually their age group, in order to gain acceptance. That's why more children demanded the same items which their friends have. Findings also prove that children are aware of most of the stationery items from their peers and tend to demand those items by influencing their parents.

"Yes. When their friends bring new items, my children also demand them. Sometimes they have this item with another brand. But it is not enough for them. They demanded the same brand which their friends have" (Mother; 2 Sons, 6/8 years)

Parents: However, when parents escort their children to the supermarket, they are confused with some product items. In these cases, most of the parents give sufficient advice to their children when selecting products. Therefore, the family constructs the main foundation of children's buying behavior. Because children spend more time with their family and examine all things then learn step by step. Example statement extracted from transcripts is shown below;

"When he hasn't a clear idea or knowledge about some items, he asked about that from me. Before he puts any items into the trolley, I advised him about the good and bad side of these products; then he understands it clearly. Today most of the food and beverage items are full of chemicals thus I gave more advice to my son when he selected these items" (Mother; Son, 6 years)

Store Environment: Before children enter the supermarket, they demand one or two products from their parents. But after they enter the supermarket, their needs are aroused, and they demand more items which were not highlighted before entering the supermarket. According to the findings, more children demand products from supermarkets without any prior plan. It means, they create impulse buying behavior through the store environment. Following is an example statement extracted from transcripts;

“When I bring children to the supermarket, from the entrance to the exit they look at all the shelves. Sometimes, they promise not to disturb me in the supermarket but by looking at shelves they select more items. If I didn't buy them, they are disappointed and disturb me, so I have to buy them”
(Mother; Twin sons, 10 years)

Children's Negotiation methods in engaging family purchase decisions

Although children are aware of products, they can't purchase these items as they wish because they do not have financial independence. With the absence of this economic power, children try to fulfill their desires by influencing their parents through different negotiation/influence strategies.

Exchange tactics: Most of the children make an explicit or implicit promise to give you some sort of service such as washing the car, cleaning the house, doing homework, or taking care of the baby, in return for a favor. According to findings, most of the children (12 out of 20, 60%) used this tactic when demanding their desired products. Parents revealed that their children practice this behavior when doing school homework and parents have to accept these requests to finish homework.

“My son has this type of demanding style. Before he does his homework, he said "I want a toy car". I have to accept this request because I want him to finish his homework. But now my daughter doesn't demand in this way”
(Mother; Daughter & son, 10/7 years)

Coalition tactics: Some children seek the aid of others to comply with his/her request or use the support of others as an argument for you to agree with him/her as a strategy. It indicates they enlist the help of saviors to get their desired items. Findings also revealed that 13 out of 20, (65%) children expect support from their father or mother when any party rejects it.

“My husband accepts any opinions of our daughter. She knows about that. Therefore, once I reject something, she tells her father to buy that. That's why she likes to be shopping with her father than with me mostly”
(Mother; Daughter, 8 years)

Inspirational appeal: Children use a variety of tactics to get their parents to approve their demands. Most of the children (16 out of 20, 80%) make an emotional appeal or proposal that arouses enthusiasm by appealing to the parent's values and ideals. They demand needed products emotionally then parents tend to purchase them because of deep love. Children know when they demanded something emotionally, parents consider this request.

“Yes, they have this trick. Most of the time they demanded products emotionally. Then I become helpless and purchase it. But if the demanded product causes a negative impact, I never purchase it although they request emotionally” (Mother; 2 Sons, 6/8 years)

Consultation tactics: Although they practice different tactics, they seek parents' involvement in making a decision. Children can't take independent decisions till they have a clear understanding of the market. According to the findings, 18 out of 20 (90%) children need their parents' support when making purchasing decisions.

“My son hasn't much knowledge about selecting goods. He needs my help more. But my daughter doesn't need that much help. In some cases, my daughter gives advice to my son too” (Mother; Daughter & son, 10/7 years)

Children's Demographic factors and involvement in family purchasing Decisions

Children's age: Any of the children didn't demand products which are the same as that of another. The researcher found younger children have more influence than older children because younger children don't have much knowledge about the marketplace and any products that they see, they tend to demand.

“In previous ages, they tend to purchase all new things which they see in the supermarket and didn't think whether it is useful or not. But now they have enough knowledge and before purchasing anything they consider its price and usefulness” (Jointly; Daughter & son, 6/9 years)

Children's gender: Further, compared to the female children, the male children interfere more in the family decision-making process; they use a different strategy actively for pursuing their parents.

“My son demanded electric equipment, toy cars, and batteries. But my daughter demanded books, purses, erasers and beautiful pencils. However, my son influences my purchase decisions more than my daughter” (Mother; Daughter & son, 6/9 years)

“On every supermarket visit, my son demanded toys car and he didn't consider the availability of money. But the daughter demanded stationery

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items mostly. She is not like my son and gives fewer troubles to me” (Mother; Daughter & son, 11/10 years)

Family structure: Most Sri Lankan families take buying decisions jointly. That's why parents involve their children in the decision-making process. As a result, families allow children to share their opinions in purchasing decisions.

“I never blame them if they tell their desires. I also asked about desired products. If I have available money, I will buy it. If not, I buy it the next day” (Mother; Daughter & son, 10/7 years)

Family income: Parents assume that if they purchase everything that their children demanded although they have sufficient money, children may practice bad behavior. Thus, they control their purchasing activities by saying that money is unavailable.

“Sometimes I rejected their opinion by considering family income. When I tell them “I don't have money now to purchase It.” they understand & never disturb me by demanding it again and again. Normally I never purchase all items they demand in every time although I have enough money. Because I think they practice bad behavior from that” (Mother; Son, 9 years)

Children's involvement in the family purchasing decision

Priority member/s within the family: In the Sri Lankan culture, children take an active part inside the family because of the joint family purchase structure. That is why the majority of families prioritize their children when making family decisions. This priority arises from the love and care that parent have for their children. An example statement extracted from transcripts is shown below.

“Yes, I consider all family members' expectations when engaging in shopping. And I give more priority to my daughter's desires than others because she is my everything and I try to give all things that she needs.” (Jointly; Daughter, 8 years)

Children's experience: When parents escort their children to the supermarket, they are more likely to walk everywhere in the supermarket, looking at all shelves, selecting different goods, and play with trolleys.

“When I give the trolley to him, he brings it in front of me and puts in goods that he needs. He likes to do it when we go to the supermarket” (Father; Son, 5 years)

Parent's perception: However, children's involvement creates more trouble for parents. Thus, most of the parents have a negative perception regarding children's involvement in supermarket shopping. Parents said that with a lack of market knowledge, their children create disturbance to them. And also in some cases, they have forgotten needed goods.

“She is small and hasn't a clear idea of some products. Therefore, she makes trouble sometimes. Therefore, if my husband can look after her in his free time, I don't bring her to the supermarket” (Jointly; Daughter, 8 years)

But some parents state that their children gave support although they create trouble situations.

“Sometimes it is a trouble for me. But in some cases, they support me. They decide the size of the trolley and move it with me always, therefore, I bring them” (Mother; 2 Sons, 7/11 years)

DISCUSSIONS

Though children don't have enough knowledge about the market initially, they stand fully-fledged customers with the help of socialization agents. Media is one of the socialization agents which has been the subject of many Western researchers - especially television advertising (Ghouse, Chaudhary and Durrah, 2019). According to the findings children are more addicted to television and learned more about related product items. Fan and Li (2009) conducted a study regarding children's buying behavior in China and findings implied that TV advertisements are considered as the most important information source for the new product for children. Moreover, children study “expressive elements of consumption” (materialistic values and social motivations) or “affective consumption” (styles and moods of consumption) from their peers (Parsons et al., 1953 cited by Ghouse, Chaudhary and Durrah, (2019). These findings also revealed that children demanded more stationary items from peer influence. Although they have the same items with another brand, they demanded the same brand which their friends have. Furthermore, the family is considered one of the main and important socialization agent groups. According to Ghouse, Chaudhary and Durrah, (2019), the family provides four basic functions for a child from the consumer behavior point: economic well-being, emotional support, family lifestyles, and child socialization. Findings revealed that all of the children learned about the marketplace from their families. The supermarket has a free environment to select needed products as they wish. When they escort their children, they asked questions to clarify information. If any sales promotion and unknown goods are available, they asked it from their parents. Marketers also create the store environment to emerge the impulse buying behavior. To attract children, they put children-related products at children's eye level. Thus, the store environment also helps children to stand as socialized consumers.

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According to Wimalasiri, (2004), these are the most common influence tactics that children used; pressure tactics, upward appeal, exchange tactics, coalition tactics, ingratiation tactics, rational persuasion, inspirational appeals, and consultative tactics. It was found that the most frequently used influence strategies were ingratiation, consultation, rational persuasion, and upward appeal. But this research indicates that exchange tactics, coalition tactics, inspirational appeal, and consultation tactics are the most frequent tactics used by Sri Lankan children.

Children's involvement in family purchasing is different from one another. Based on demographic factors of children and families, this involvement may vary. Flurry and Veeck, (2009) suggested that, relative to younger children, children of older ages have a greater impact on family purchase decisions. But findings revealed that younger children have more influence than older children because they have less awareness of the market. Further, compared to the male children, the female children interfere more in the family decision-making process; they use a different strategy actively for pursuing their parents (Ali, Ravichandran and Batra, 2013). But, according to the Sri Lankan context, male children interfere more in family purchasing decisions than female children. Furthermore, Sri Lankan families make family purchasing decisions jointly. Thus, they consider every member's desires including their children. Several scholars said that children influence higher in high-income families because parents of these families have the ability to pay for all their children desires (Williams and Veeck 1998 cited by Ali, Ravichandran and Batra, (2013). According to the research, the majority of children accept their parents' financial availability. Furthermore, despite having sufficient money, parents practice controlling their children's demanding behavior by telling them about financial limitations, because children are prone to misbehave when they get everything they want.

Children stand at the initial level of the socialization process. Thus, they haven't enough knowledge regarding purchasing activities. As a result of that, they consider the external appearance of products like color, shape, and packaging than the product itself. Moreover, Soni and Upadhyaya, (2007) found the top five products which children influence most in the family buying process. These are a) selecting the fast-food restaurant b) clothes c) chocolate and chips item d) games e) toys. According to this research, most of the children demanded sweet items, toys, stationery items, and instant product categories and show less involvement in regular products in common consumption.

Children are an important part of a family and play a crucial role in shaping the decision-making process of buying (Jan & Akhtar, 2008). In the family, children are more and more a priority and have greater awareness than their parents in many instances. Today, children are considered consumer-buyers (Polya, 2012). These findings also implied that in the Sri Lankan context children play a crucial role within the family and they involve them when making family purchase decisions. And children occupy the priority place within the family because of deep love for their parents. Children are considered trolley loaders who fill the trolley of their parents with unnecessary items and pesters or naggers that provoke their parents to

indulge in such transactions (Snacks Magazine, 1993, Gelperowic and Beharrell, (1994). Findings revealed that children have a positive perception regarding shopping experience according to parents' perspective. But parents hold negative perceptions regarding children's involvement in the shopping experience.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

According to Wimalasiri, (2004), pressure tactics, upward appeal, exchange tactics, coalition tactics, ingratiating tactics, rational persuasion, inspirational appeals, and consultative tactics are the most common influence strategies that children used to pursue their parents. These findings revealed that most of the children used exchange tactics, coalition tactics, inspirational appeal, and consultation tactics. These are the most frequent tactics used by Sri Lankan children. But pressure tactics, upward tactics, ingratiation tactics, and rational persuasion indicates less percentage when compared to other tactics.

However, this influence may differ from children's and families' demographic factors. In the previous age level, they haven't enough knowledge thus they tend to influence more. But with the growing up process, they have enough skills as a consumer. Therefore, younger children have more influence on family purchase decisions by having a lack of market knowledge. Further, when referring to findings, it was revealed that male children influence more than female children in the Sri Lankan context. Family income and its structure also directly influence to family purchase decisions. The findings of this study show that some parents limited or rejected children's desires by considering their family income. Moreover, most of the families have a joint family structure. Thus, they take family purchasing decisions by acquiring all members' ideas.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Marketers have a responsibility to identify trends of consumer buying behavior and should implement strategies in accordance with that. If marketers didn't consider these dynamics, they can't survive within the competitive boundary. Children's involvement is one kind of emergent side in family purchasing decisions. Thus, this study was conducted to identify how children's involvement influence on family purchasing decisions.

When comparing with the past, children's involvement has been increasing recently and it can be concluded that the main reason can be the growth of socialization agents. The findings of this study revealed that parents are the main socialization agents of children because children start to observe their parents and learn things from birth. Because of that all of the children gained market knowledge with the help and guidance of their parents. Furthermore, most of the children are aware of most of the stationery items from their friends. Also, children acquired knowledge about various product categories from TV advertisements. Not only that, but the

store environment is also a trending socialization agent created from the supermarket shopping boundary.

Most of the children make their purchasing decisions based on the external appearance of the products. Thus, they are more concerned with the colorful background and its shape rather than what is contained in the product. And they mostly demanded sweet items, toys, stationery items, and instant product categories.

Findings also revealed that most of the families give their priority to children's likes and dislikes than other members which is mainly influenced by their deep love and caring. And also, this study claimed that according to parents' perspective, most of the children have a positive experience regarding the shopping experience. However, parents have the opposite of this. Most of the parents said that children's involvement creates troubles for them.

Under the implications, marketers can use sales promotion techniques by considering children's involvement and customize the children-related products based on this involvement as well as, they can gain knowledge regarding trends of socialization agents. Furthermore, the store environment was added to that socialization agent group by creating a free shopping environment recently. Therefore, sellers can design store layouts by considering children's perceptions. This study supported parents to build the main foundation of market knowledge of children by identifying children's behavior. Also, it helps parents to gain knowledge of how children's socialization process flows and the impact of various socialization agents. Furthermore, policymakers should examine the food color code for related products and unethical /misleading advertisements that are broadcast/telecast by targeting children. They can take action against products that cause harm to children's health.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Due to the Covid-19 crisis, travel restrictions have been imposed. It's also difficult to communicate directly with consumers during this pandemic. Due to the limited time frame, the sample was limited to twenty respondents from two supermarkets in the Anuradhapura District. However, this result did not represent the overall population. Another important limitation is, the data collected for the research are more related to children's influence. But parents didn't like to disclose their real experience of children's behavior.

This research is primarily based on supermarket purchasing habits. However, this influence can also be seen in selecting clothes and food in restaurants. This study can be carried out not only with the help of the parents' responses but also with the help of the children's responses. Furthermore, the media category in socialization agents primarily highlights the impact of television, but future researchers can utilize a variety of media categories to determine its impact. Furthermore, the impact of children on different stages of purchasing behavior was not examined in this study. As a result, future researchers will be able to identify children's effects at

various stages of the buying process. Future scholars can use a quantitative study approach to assess the children's impact. Furthermore, studies can be undertaken to utilize a mixed research strategy to assess the impact of children on family purchasing decisions.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declared no competing interests.

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