



# EAT OUT: CHILDREN'S ROLE IN FAMILY DECISION MAKING

DR. SUDHANSU SEKHAR NAYAK

Lecturer in Commerce, R.N. College, Dura, Berhampur-10, Ganjam (Odisha).

## ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the influence of children over their parents' decision of family eat-out. As per our culture and tradition the head of the family is the decision maker in case of any family purchases. But at the same time, the role of children cannot be ignored. Various studies related to children's role in family decision making has been undertaken to explore the decision making pattern. Significant growth of the disposable income, better education, heavy consumerism, change in family structure and social condition over the years lead to make shift in the decision making pattern in the urban families for both products and services. As marketers are keeping their eyes on children to make them their target through advertisement for influencing family purchases and considered them as their future customers, children became one of the important units for family decision making which cannot be ignored at this stage. Therefore, the research explored the role and the degree of influence by the children on the parents in the family decision making when it comes to consume service like family eat-out in restaurant.

**KEYWORDS:** Consumer Behaviour, Buying Roles, Family Decision Making Process, Children's buying role, Service Marketing.

## Introduction :

Children as one of the major source of information and decision maker in case of family purchase decision are yet to be explored. With mushrooming of organised modern restaurants and substantial increase in aspirational class, eat out became a regular phenomenon among families living in cities. In the study of consumer behaviour, family is considered as an important unit of decision making. The bread earner or the head of the family usually makes decisions in each and every type of purchases. But due to substantial increase in disposable income and education, heavy consumerism, increase in media reach, overall globalization impact, the trend of decision making by head of the family has seen a shift. The paradigm shifts lead to shift the values, beliefs and behaviours of the consumers. Young children are increasingly the target of advertising and marketing personnel not only in selling products but also in services. This is not only because of the influence they have on their parents spending, but also because they are going to be adult consumers of the future. As services are intangible and difficult to offer standardise service, it is quite difficult on part of marketer to satisfy the consumer. However marketer always searches for innovative ideas to make the consumer satisfy, in this process marketer try to make the consumer satisfy through children. This particular paper will explore buying roles of children in family decision making process for service like eat out. This study also concerns about the degree of involvement of children in the various stages of family decision making process of eat out.

## Literature Review :

In general, the husband or the head of the family is the family's chief decision-maker, but in the changing paradigm the child's influence cannot be ignored. Empirical studies regarding family decision making have tried to test the relative influence of children and parents during purchase. Assael (1995) found that children play an important role in family decision-making and the influence by them varies by product categories, services, and different decision stages. Marketers are interested in the roles and relative influence of the husband, wife, and children on the purchase of a large variety of products and services (Quester, Pettigrew, & Hawkins, 2010).

According to Ruth 65 per cent of those born a generation ago admit they were neither offered nor took any role in making family decisions when they were young. Researchers found that 80 per cent of children will complain about service and other problems (Ruth, 2013). Previous studies claim that children's influence is lowest in the sub-decisions of where to purchase (Belch et al., 1985; Jenkins, 1979; Foxman et al., 1989), where to gather information (Darley & Lim, 1986), and how much to spend (Belch et al., 1985; Darley & Lim, 1986; Jenkins, 1979; Nelson, 1978; Szybillo & Sosanie, 1977).

Ward and Wackman (1972) studied parental yielding for 22 product purchase categories. Yielding was positively related to the child's age but unrelated to family size and social class. Beyond the age of five, children are generally as involved in this decision pro-

cess as their parents except in making a final decision and deciding how much will be spent. Influence of children varies by product, product sub-decision, stage of the decision-making process, nature of socialization of children, families' gender role orientation, demographic features such as age and gender, and also by respondent selected for investigation of relative influence (Belch et al., 1985).

Belch et al. (2005) proposed that since teenagers are high users of the Internet, they have greater access to market information which could impact their influence in family decision making.

Szybillo and Sosanie (1977) examined 190 New York families' last decisions to have dinner at a fast food restaurant and to go on a one day family trip. Counts of families showed children involved at approximately 60-80% of all decision stages. According to a study conducted by Viacom's Nickelodeon, kids pick what to eat 85% of the time at fast-food visits. It's not just food choices that kids are dictating — or at least voting on. "Decision-making within families today is almost entirely collaborative – and as kids become more influential, they're impacting purchasing decisions," Christian Kurz, Vice President of research at Viacom International Media Networks wrote on Viacom's blog. The Nickelodeon study found that family decision-making in general is more inclusive these days; more than half of parents seek their kids' input, and just under half say their family discusses and decides major decisions together (White, 2013).

Researchers have also observed that children exert considerable influence during the problem recognition and search stages and the least influence in the final decision stage (Belch et al, 1985; Filiatrault and Ritchie, 1980; Hempel, 1974) for family activities such as choice of vacations and restaurants and consumer durables. Children have been observed to influence decisions for family products also, such as eating at particular restaurants or even decision making for the family to eat out (Filiatrault and Ritchie, 1980; Williams and Veeck, 1998)

Howard and Madrigal (1990) stated that various studies have found that the relative influence of the husband, wife or child is likely to vary according to: (1) the type of purchase decision; (2) the stage of the decision-making process; and (3) the family characteristics.

### Statement of the Problem :

For the current study the research has undertaken on the children's role and influences on purchase decision for family eat-out. Since our society follows the

decisions of the head of the family, this particular research has made an effort to understand whether the decision making pattern and influence pattern has been shifted in case of a family eat out. We cannot avoid each family members role and varying degree of influence on the decision making process. The study will focus light on degree of influence exercised by the children in parents purchase decision as well as different roles played by children in family decision making process for availing service from restaurant.

Hence the statement of the problem is to study the degree of children influence on parents purchase decision and different buying roles played by children in our society for family eat out.

### Objectives of the Study :

- To study the involvement of children in family purchase decision making.
- To analyse the relative influence of children on family purchase decision.
- To explore the different buying roles played by children during eat out.
- To find out the importance of different factors influencing children in decision making.
- To explore the relationship between socio-economic variables and different decision stages.

### Statement of Hypothesis :

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference in involvement of children in different stages of decision making of dining out.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant difference in roles played by children in decision making.

### Design of the Study :

The present study employed descriptive research design. The survey method is followed in this study and a set of questionnaire were used for collecting primary data. Random sampling is used for collecting data. The sample consists of 100 children and was surveyed in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. From which 20 questionnaire were rejected. The children in the survey were between 8 and 14 years old.

ANOVA and Correlation Analysis are used by the latest version of MS-excel. Also this study took the help of Graphs and charts.

**Data Analysis :**

While analysing the collected data, the following results are reflected.

On investigating the degree of importance given to the children at different stages of decision making, the outcome varies (Table – 1). Importance given to the children at the initial stages i.e. Problem recognition and Information Search are higher than other stages of decision making. Gradually the importance reduces towards the final stages of decision making.

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics of importance given to children at different stages**

Decision Making Stages	Count	Average	Variance
Problem Recognition	80	2.9375	1.07199367
Information Search	80	2.9375	0.69224684
Alternative Evaluation	80	2.75	0.82278481
Final Purchase Decision	80	2.625	1.12341772

**Table 2: ANOVA-1**

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	5.625	3	1.875	2.02132196	0.110835	2.633182
Within Groups	293.125	316	0.927610759			
Total	298.75	319				

In the above table (Table – 2),  $F_{crit}(2.633182) > F(2.021322)$ , thus we accept the null hypothesis. The means of the four populations i.e. the score provided by the children about the importance given to them while dining out are all equal. In different stages of decision making parents give equal importance to their children's involvement which is clearly evident from ANOVA-1 Table (Table - 2).

**Table 3: Descriptive statistics of role played by children**

Groups	Count	Average	Variance
Initiator	80	2.9375	1.07199367
Information Seeker	80	2.5545	0.69224684
Influencer	80	3.0625	0.82278481
Decision Maker	80	1.002	1.12341772
Purchaser	80	0.987	1.09731013
Consumer	80	2.9125	1.34667722

**Table 4: ANOVA-2**

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	9.7916667	5	1.958333333	2.90919375	0.091352	2.233031
Within Groups	486.2	474	1.025738397			
Total	495.99167	479				

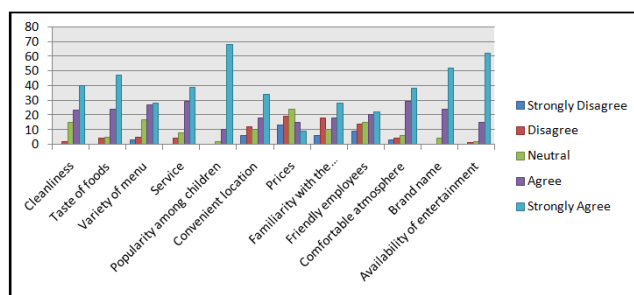
In the above case (Table - 4) as,  $2.909 > 2.233$  we reject the null hypothesis. The means of the six populations are not all equal. At least one of the means is different.

ANOVA – 2 informs us that the roles played by the children in making decision of dining out are significantly different from each other while the descriptive statistics given in table- 3 shows us that children as influencer, Initiator, and consumer played a greater role.

**Table 5: Correlation Analysis of Demographic data and stages of Decision making**

Decision stages	Family Size	Income Level	Education
Problem recognition	0.28*	0.13	-0.15
Provide Information	-0.25*	0.12	-0.07
Influencing decision	-0.18*	0.16*	-0.09
Final Decision	0.23*	0.24*	-0.12
purchasing the Service	0.26*	0.22	-0.2
Consuming the Service	0.17*	0.12	0.2

In the above table (Table – 5), Spearman rank order Correlation is significant at  $\alpha=0.05$  for the figures where (\*) marks are given. Family size is related to all decision stages are significant. Family size is negatively related at providing information and influencing the decision. But at income level only “Influencing decision” and “final decision” stage are positively related and significant. Whereas Education is not related to any of the decision stage.



**Figure-1 Evaluative Criteria**

As per the following figure (Fig - 1), while taking decision of eating out Taste of foods, Popularity among children, Brand name and Availability of entertainment are found to be the important evaluative criteria used by the children.

### Implication and Future Research Agenda :

As per the study, children being the integral part of family decision making in case of eat out, marketing strategist, advertisement agency should develop their strategy to influence children. So that children will be attracted to influence the family decision making. Strategy should be developed to make the restaurant children friendly and arrangement should be done for entertaining children. Different advertisement should be designed featuring children in the initial stages of decision making. Further promotional activities should be taken care regarding children specific product and services. As our study shows children as influencer played a vital role, strategist, advertisers, marketers should take care to expand their business.

Further research can be extended to different geographic locations. Different age group of children can be studied to know the impact of age on the pattern of influence over the parents. Study can be done on the different methods children undertake to influence. As this particular study is silent about the post purchase behaviour of the children, further study in this regard will explore various dimension.

### Limitation and Conclusion :

However this study is not free from limitations like the study is confined to a particular geographic location i.e. Bhubaneswar, sample many not reflects the true population, data collection method is solely dependent on questionnaire.

To conclude the research regarding significant role of children in family decision making for eat-out cannot be avoidable. At the initial stage of decision making process, children involvement is higher and gradually the degree importance reduces towards evaluation of alternatives and purchase decision. Children play different role in family decision making for eat out. Roles like initiator, influencer and consumer children have greater role to play. On correlating demographic variables with decision stages, we found family size is correlated to different decision stages but with varying degree. Whereas in case of income level only "influencing decision" and "purchase decisions" stages are related and significant. But education is not related to any of the decision stages. Finally, features like taste of food, brand name, popularity among children and availability of entertainment

found to be important for children for choosing a restaurant.

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