

The role of parent-child communication styles and gender on family buying decisions: an exploratory study

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ABSTRACT

Over the last two to three decades, the influence of children on family purchasing has been steadily increasing. There is a growing body of marketing literature focusing on the involvement of adolescents in the acquisition of products for both family and personal use. The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceived influence of adolescents on the purchasing of products within different family communication styles. Data were collected through a self-administered survey distributed to 221 adolescents in Pretoria. The findings show that there was little difference in the amount of influence of adolescents from the different family communication styles, and also no significant differences between the influence of male and female adolescents on product purchases. The results confirmed that adolescents had more influence on products for their own use than they did on products for the family's use. Based on the findings, suggestions for future research are discussed.

Key words: adolescents, consumer behaviour, consumer socialisation, family decision-making, family communication patterns, product categories, socialisation agents

INTRODUCTION

The findings of numerous studies indicate that adolescents have a significant influence on family consumer spending (Caruana & Vassallo 2003; Rose, Boush & Shoham 2002). A golden thread in the literature on the involvement and influence of adolescents in family buying is the role and importance of family communication.

Previous studies have measured family decision-making by looking at husband and wife relationships and ignored the influence of children as individual consumers. Those studies that have included children have mostly measured the influence that

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parents have on them, and not the other way around. Valuable studies concerning family decision-making and parental communication styles have been researched by Moore & Moschis (1981: 42–51). Foxman, Tansuhaj and Ekstrom (1989: 482) have conducted relevant studies that focus on the child socialisation process and also measure the family's perception of the perceived influence of adolescents. John (1999) provides a comprehensive overview of the last 25 years of consumer socialisation research.

Scholarly research examining the consumer behaviour of children dates back to the 1950s. Although much has been said and written about the development of children as consumers, not all of this material is based on solid research. The lack of systematic research on the consumer behaviour of children, and specifically the influence or role of consumer socialisation agents (such as parents, retailers and the school), can possibly be ascribed to the fact that marketers may think that it is inappropriate to regard children as a 'market' (McNeal in Stipp 1988).

The effects of advertising on children and the role of the mass media as a socialisation agent have, however, been the subjects of considerable research within the past three decades (Meyer 1987; Cardwell-Gardner & Bennett 1999). The findings of a study by Carlson, Laczniaik & Walsh (2001) indicate that parental styles play a role in determining the manner in which mothers socialise their children about television and television advertising.

Adolescents learn how to perform consumer roles such as going shopping, talking about products to others and weighing up purchase alternatives in order to make the best choice through the process of consumer socialisation (Du Plessis & Rousseau 2003: 372). Parents play a vital role in the children's development as consumers. They exhibit communication style orientations, which in turn affect the way children will attempt to influence their parents (Caruana & Vassallo 2003: 56). Previous studies have measured the influence of children on decision-making across product categories, but no studies could be found that specifically research the difference between male and female influences within these categories.

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND OBJECTIVES

In the 1980s, the influence of children in the marketplace was underestimated, and marketers did not consider this group as an appropriate and worthwhile market to target (Stipp 1988: 28). However, marketers have started to focus on children because they are increasingly influencing family consumer decision-making and purchasing products for the family on their own.

In the South African context, not many studies have been conducted where the influence of adolescents on family consumer decision-making has been measured, especially with regard to different genders and cultures. According to the 2001 Census, approximately 542 102 adolescents live in Gauteng province. Adolescents

comprise the most numerous age group category in the population and thus comprise South Africa's largest group of future consumers. Adolescents in South Africa consume products worth an estimated R6 billion a year and furthermore have an influence of more than R20 billion over their parents' money (Healing 2005: 1).

The purpose of this study is to focus on the extent to which adolescents influence their parents in family consumer decision-making. The communication styles of parents and the strategies used by children to influence product purchases will be examined. The influence of adolescents within the context of gender and product categories will also be considered. This study could benefit marketers by assisting them to understand the product items and categories over which adolescents have substantial influence and point out the products on which they should focus their marketing communication efforts.

In the sections that follow, a brief overview of the consumer socialisation of children is given, with the emphasis on parents as socialisation agents. Family communication styles are examined, as well as how these affect the influence of children on family decision-making, preceded by a brief explanation of the various influence strategies that are used by adolescents across four product categories. The method and findings of the study are discussed, and suggestions for future research are made.

Consumer socialisation of children

Children move through various cognitive and social phases on their journey from birth to adolescence and adulthood. Consumer socialisation (which forms part of a child's general socialisation) is described as "the processes by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace" (Ward 1974: 2). John (1999) views consumer socialisation as a process that occurs in the context of social and cognitive development as children move through three stages of consumer socialisation, namely the perceptual stage (3–7 years), the analytical stage (7–11 years) and the reflective stage (11–16 years). This latter stage, which is particularly relevant for this study, is characterised by the development of information-processing skills (such as interpreting advertising messages) and social skills. In this stage, adolescents pay more attention to the social aspects of being a consumer (John 1999), and their knowledge of branding becomes extremely important. Acceptance by the peer group is often guaranteed when a teenager wears the 'right' brand of T-shirt or jeans. According to Acuff (1997: 106), peers play an enormous role when teenagers have to make buying decisions in this early stage of adolescence. These early teenagers are also very activity oriented, for example, taking part in organised sport, playing computer games, television viewing, engaging in various school activities and shopping (Acuff 1997: 107, 110).

Blackwell, Miniard & Engel (2001: 387) believe that children learn their consumer skills primarily from shopping with parents, a phenomenon that these authors call “co-shopping”. Co-shoppers tend to be more concerned with their children’s development as consumers and they “explain more to their children why they don’t buy products”, which to some extent “may mediate the role of advertising”. McNeal (1993) states that children pass through the following five-stage shopping learning process in their consumer development:

Stage 1: Observing. This first stage is the child’s initial interaction with the marketplace. Mothers usually take their infants to shopping malls and stores where they make sensory contact with the shopping environment.

Stage 2: Making requests. During this phase (which corresponds partly with John’s perceptual stage), children make requests (by pointing, gesturing and even making statements) to parents when they see something they want in the store.

Stage 3: Making selections. When children start walking (3–4 years of age – partly in John’s perceptual stage), they experience their first physical contact as consumers by choosing an article and taking it from the shelf.

Stage 4: Assisted purchases. During this stage (the latter part of John’s perceptual stage and the early part of the analytical stage, 7–11 years), children start spending money on their own. This contributes to the child’s understanding that the store owns the goods, and money is the medium of exchange.

Stage 5: Making independent purchases. The fifth and final step in the development of consumer behaviour is performing independent purchases without parental assistance (John’s reflective stage, 11–16 years).

According to Sheth, Mittal & Newman (1999: 587), consumer socialisation occurs when one or more of the following are learned or acquired by children: “preferences among alternative brands and products; knowledge about product features and the functioning of the marketplace; and skills in making ‘smart decisions’” The theory and published literature focus largely on consumer socialisation in the childhood phase.

Recent studies by consumer scientists have examined other areas of consumer socialisation, such as the socialisation of consumers in a global marketplace, protecting consumers in the electronic marketplace (McGregor 1999), and consumer complaint behaviour in the children’s wear market (Norum & Scrogin 1996). No attention was given to the role of the media and parents as socialisation agents in these latter studies. McGregor (1999) states that consumer socialisation is a function of, *inter alia*, the age of the child, the content that is learned and the agents of socialisation.

Consumer socialisation agents

The learning of consumer behaviour patterns (consumer socialisation) by children has been of interest to researchers since the end of World War II. In the 1950s and 1960s, pioneers such as Guest, McNeal, Berez and Pollay (John 1999) started to examine factors related to the consumer behaviour of children. The topics investigated include children's understanding of marketing and retail functions, brand loyalty and the influence of children in family decision-making. No specific study on the influence of consumer socialisation agents in children's buying behaviour is reported in these early years of research. Socialisation agents are the persons and organisations involved in the orientation and education of children as consumers, including family members, peers, the mass media, schools and retailers (John 1999).

Research in the field of the consumer socialisation process of children gained momentum in the mid-1970s (John 1999). Ward (1974) argued forcefully for studying children and their socialisation into the consumer role. This gave focus to a new generation of researchers and in particular the role of socialisation agents in children's development as consumers. Of particular importance to this review are the studies that focused on children's knowledge of consumer issues, and the influence of the family and the media (as socialisation agents) on children's development as consumers.

The family can be regarded as the primary source (agent) of consumer socialisation. Extensive research has been conducted on the role of the family as a consumer socialisation agent over the past three decades (John 1999). Hawkins, Best & Coney (2001: 212, 213) state that parents teach their children consumer skills both deliberately and casually through instrumental training, modelling and mediation. Instrumental training occurs, for example, when a parent tries to teach a child to eat a certain snack because it has nutritional value. Modelling occurs when a child learns appropriate (or inappropriate) consumption behaviours by observing others (for example, parents who smoke). Mediation occurs when a parent alters a child's initial interpretation of or response to a marketing stimulus (for example, an advertisement depicting a situation in which a child will be rewarded with a snack for good behaviour).

The role of family communication patterns on children's influence in family buying decisions

Family patterns of communication play a pivotal role in the perceived influence of children on family buying decisions (Carunna & Vasallo 2003). Hawkins et al. (2001: 206) identify six roles that frequently occur in family-decision making. Children can play one or more of these roles by either being the initiator of a specific purchase, the information gatherer, the influencer who shapes the purchase in a certain direction,

the decider of which product is selected, the actual purchaser of the product and/or the ultimate user of the product. The role that children play in influencing family buying decisions is of great importance to marketers. Evidence indicates that during adolescence, children form attitudes and opinions towards brands and labels, and it is highly likely that these attitudes will be carried through into adulthood (Du Plessis & Rousseau 2003: 382).

Caruana & Vassallo (2003: 56, 57) refer to two dominant parental communication styles that are believed to have an effect on the perceived influence that children hold, namely socio-orientated and concept-orientated communication. In the socio-orientated communication dimension, parents closely monitor and control their children’s consumption behaviours, which are intended to produce obedience from the child and create harmonious and pleasant relationships at home. To avoid the risk of offending others, children are taught to be sensitive to other views and not to discuss consumption activities. Children are expected to comply with previously established parental standards (Caruana & Vassallo 2003: 57; Dickerson [S.a.]: 3). In concept-orientated communication, parents encourage children to form their own views and to weigh up all alternatives before making a decision. Children are exposed to controversy by discussing issues openly and are encouraged to make decisions without regard for the opinions of others.

Figure 1 illustrates four levels of family communication patterns that fall under socio- and concept-orientated communication styles, namely *laissez faire*, protective, pluralistic and consensual (Moore & Moschis 1981: 43–44).

	Low Socio-orientation	High Socio-orientation
Low Concept-orientation	<p><i>Laissez faire</i></p> <p>Little communication with children</p> <p>Little parental impact on consumption</p>	<p>Protective</p> <p>Obedience and social harmony</p> <p>Children have limited exposure to outside information</p>
High Concept-orientation	<p>Pluralistic</p> <p>Children are encouraged to explore ideas and express opinions</p>	<p>Consensual</p> <p>Maintain control over children’s consumption</p> <p>Frequent communication with children about consumption</p>

Source: Adapted from Chan & McNeal (2003)

Figure 1: Parent--child communication patterns

The *laissez faire* pattern is characterised by little communication between parents and children. Neither of the two communication dimensions is emphasised at this

level. At the protective level, emphasis is placed on the socio-orientated dimension where obedience and harmony are of importance. Pluralistic parents encourage open communication. Children are encouraged to explore new ideas and not to be afraid of retaliation when expressing these ideas. Parents at the consensual level stress in both dimensions that children can explore new ideas and opinions as long as they are not in conflict with their parents' views.

According to Caruana & Vassallo (2003: 58), pluralistic communication families are expected to exhibit higher levels of influence in family consumer decision-making, whereas protective families, who have limited exposure to the outside world, demonstrate the lowest levels of influence.

Previous research by Carlson, Grossbart & Walsh (1990: 35) established that there is a positive relationship between concept-orientated communication patterns (pluralistic and consensual) and an increased influence of children on consumption. Concept-orientated parents encouraged children to develop their own standards and evaluations of consumption, while socio-orientated parents encouraged their children to accept existing parental standards and norms. Thus socio-orientated (*laissez faire* and protective) communication patterns were found to be related to lower levels of child influence and dependent patterns of consumption (Rose et al. 2002: 869).

Influence across product categories

Family communication is important, as it affects the adolescent's involvement in and influence on family consumer decision-making (Palan 1998: 338). Studies on children's influence indicate that some children play primary roles in decision-making for a wide range of products consumed by the family (Carlson et al. 1990: 31). Despite evidence of children's attempts to influence parents' purchases, a lack of evidence exists on the relationship between gender and the adolescent's perceived influence on certain products.

Influence strategies are used when an attempt is made to get one's way in a conflicting context, with the use of power. As defined by Bao (2001: 89), children's influence strategies are the strategic use of power by children in order to influence outcomes in family buying decisions. Palan & Wilkes (1997: 161) found that adolescents use four main influence strategy categories to influence their parents. These are bargaining, persuasion, emotion and request strategies.

Children can influence their parents on four different product categories, namely minor products for the child, major products for the child, minor products for the family and major products for the family. These product categorisations can be based on two dimensions. The first dimension incorporates the primary user of the product, whereas the second dimension is based on the size of the product purchase expenditure. Past findings have shown that children's relative influence varies by

product user, which suggests that children tend to have greater influence involving products for their own use. When purchasing expenditures are large, there is a greater degree of risk and thus decreased influence by children (Kim & Lee 1997: 309).

Adolescents have been known to use influence strategies in order to influence a parent to buy a certain product or good (Palan & Wilkes 1997: 159). It has also been found that children's choice of influence strategy is related to gender. These findings present evidence that females make use of weak strategies towards their parents such as pleading, begging, crying, displaying anger and persistence (Cowan & Avants 1988: 1307) more frequently than males (Bao 2001: 38). Males simply ask or tell their parents what they want, making them more independent consumers than females (Cowan & Avants 1988: 1307). In view of this and the foregoing we hypothesise:

H₁: Adolescents have a greater influence on family decision-making in pluralistic communication families than in consensual, *laissez faire* and protective communication families, across product categories.

H₂: Female adolescents' influence on family consumer decision-making is greater than male adolescents' influence in family consumer decision-making across product categories.

METHOD

Sample and data collection

The target population for this study consisted of adolescents in grades 8 and 9 attending a high school in the eastern suburbs of Pretoria. A non-probability convenience sampling method was used at a single high school, and adolescents who were willing to participate in the study were given questionnaires to complete. A total of 225 questionnaires were distributed to adolescents at the school, 221 of which were completed and usable. Of the 221 adolescent respondents, 95 were male and 126 female.

A draft questionnaire was pre-tested with 13 male and female respondents from grades 8 and 9. Teachers distributed the questionnaires to adolescents during morning register periods. No incentives were provided to the adolescents for the completion of the questionnaires.

Measurement

In the study by Caruana & Vassallo (2003: 64), the scale used to measure concept-orientated and socio-orientated communication was a five point Likert scale where 1 = Very seldom, 2 = Seldom, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often and 5 = Very often. The scale consisted of nine items measuring concept-orientated communication and five items measuring socio-orientated communication. If respondents scored high on the

concept-orientation communication scale, it indicated that adolescents had a greater influence on family consumer decision-making, whereas if they scored lower on this scale, it indicated that adolescents had less influence on family consumer decision-making.

The opposite is true for the socio-orientated communication scale. If respondents scored high on the socio-orientated communication scale, it indicated that they exerted less influence on family consumer decision-making. However, if respondents scored low on the socio-orientated communication scale, they were more likely to exert a greater influence on family consumer decision-making.

The original scale used by Caruana & Vassallo (2003: 64) was designed to be completed by the parents of adolescents. For this study, the scale was adapted to measure the responses from the adolescents and not the parents, thus making it possible to determine the adolescents' perception of their influence on family consumer decision-making. Of the five items measuring socio-orientated communication, one item was eliminated to avoid confusion among respondents, as it had similar meaning to a previously mentioned item in the same scale.

With regard to children's influence across product categories, Kim & Lee's (1997: 309) seven-point Likert scale was used. Adolescents were asked to indicate who in the family made decisions regarding a list of different products, with 1 = My parents entirely; 4 = My parents and I jointly; 7 = Myself. After pre-testing the draft questionnaire, it was found that pupils often only chose options 1, 4 or 7. Hence, for this study, the scale was adapted to a five-point Likert scale where 1 = My parents entirely; 2 = My parents mostly; 3 = Jointly; 4 = Myself mostly and 5 = Myself entirely. The original scale included 20 measures of children's influence over four product categories, only 18 of which were used, because two of the products seemed outdated and inapplicable to adolescents of today. If the adolescent scored high on this scale, it indicated that they have a greater influence across product categories. If the adolescent scored lower on this scale, it indicated that they have less influence on a range of products. The product categories used to measure adolescents' influence in this scale included minor products for the child, major products for the child, minor products for the family and major products for the family.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics

The Cronbach alphas for the concept-orientation and socio-orientation communication style constructs were .7348 and .6994 respectively. According to Nunnally (1978: 245), this is satisfactory for an exploratory study. These measures of internal consistency reliability suggest that the items within the scale and within each of the

sub-dimensions were fairly correlated, although the items within the socio-orientation communication scale were not as correlated as those in the concept-orientation sub-dimension.

Concept-orientation construct

Nine items measured concept-orientated family communication styles. The highest mean score ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.05$) is associated with the item “My parents ask for my preference when they are buying something for me”, which indicates that parents often ask adolescents for their preference when buying things for the adolescent. The lowest mean score ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 1.24$) was for the item measuring the degree to which parents asked their adolescents about the things they buy for themselves. This mean specifies that parents seldom ask for adolescents’ opinions when buying things for themselves. Interestingly, these two items can be considered as opposites, in that the one measures the influence of adolescents on products for themselves, while the other measures the influence of adolescents on products for their parents.

Socio-orientation construct

Four items were used to measure the socio-orientated communication construct. Scoring low on this scale represented a higher level of adolescent influence, and thus the lowest mean score ($M = 2.11$, $SD = 1.05$) for the item “My parents tell me what things I should buy” suggested that parents seldom tell their children what to buy, indicating less parental control and more influence on family consumer decision-making by the adolescent. The highest mean score ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.32$) indicates that parents only sometimes want to know how adolescents spend their money.

Product categories and gender

Following are the results pertaining to the scale measuring the adolescent’s influence on *minor* products (CDs, shoes, movies, calculator and magazines) and *major* products (sound system, clothes and bicycle) they buy for themselves. On the question “Between you and your parents, who makes the decision to buy these products”, respondents had to make a choice between 1 = My parents entirely and 5 = Myself entirely. Of the five items measuring the adolescent’s influence on minor products for their own consumption, the lowest scoring mean, for both male and female adolescents was for the calculator item ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 1.35$ and $M = 2.78$, $SD = 1.47$) respectively. Thus adolescents’ influence when buying a calculator is less than the influence they exert when purchasing other items such as CDs, shoes, movies and magazines.

When buying major products for themselves, significant differences between the male and female means on two items, namely, a sound system and a bicycle, were

measured. When purchasing more expensive products for the adolescent, such as a sound system, males ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.36$) and females ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.13$) were more likely to make joint decisions with their parents, but males tended to have more influence on this purchasing decision. Males ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.30$) were also inclined to have more influence when purchasing a bicycle than their female counterparts ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.24$). When looking at each of the three items' total means, the mean for the item clothes ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.15$) was vastly different from the other two products (sound system, bicycle), indicating that adolescents in this study had a higher influence in family decision-making when making personal clothing purchases.

The descriptive statistics for the adolescents' influence on minor family products such as toothpaste, shampoo, breakfast cereals and soft drinks indicate that the greatest difference in influence was found between the male and female means for shampoo ($M = 2.10$, $SD = 1.23$ and $M = 2.53$, $SD = 1.17$ respectively). The total means for the different products showed that toothpaste had the lowest overall mean ($M = 1.93$, $SD = 1.07$), indicating the lowest adolescent influence for this product. The highest overall mean, and thus influence on decision-making, for this product category was soft drinks ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 1.14$), which implies that decisions for this product are made jointly.

Table 1 shows that there are no significant differences between the means for males and females with regard to the major products used by the family. However, the overall means consistently indicate that purchase decisions on major products for the family rest mainly with parents, as the means for all these product items are relatively low.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics measuring the influence of adolescents on buying decisions for major family products

	Male			Female			Total		
	Mean	n	Standard deviation	Mean	n	Standard deviation	Mean	n	Standard deviation
A family car	1.67	95	0.82	1.72	126	0.77	1.70	221	0.79
A house for the family	1.83	95	0.92	1.81	126	0.80	1.82	221	0.85
Where to go on family vacation	2.35	95	0.90	2.51	126	0.78	2.44	221	0.83
A TV set for the family	2.42	95	1.09	2.25	126	0.88	2.32	221	0.98

Inferential statistics

Since the sample for this study violated the tests for normality (using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk methods), the non-parametric alternative,

the Kruskal-Wallis test, was used to test the hypothesis that adolescents had a greater influence on family decision-making in pluralistic communication families than they did in consensual, *laissez faire* and protective communication families, across product categories. This hypothesis was tested at a 5% level of significance.

The two constructs, concept-orientation and socio-orientation, are on the polar extremes of the family communication structure (Caruana & Vassallo 2003: 60). These two orientations were split at their medians in order to create the fourfold typology stated in the hypothesis. Respondents were divided and allocated into each of the family communication patterns (see Figure 1).

Total summated scores were calculated for the concept- and socio-orientation communication constructs, thus providing each individual respondent with an average for each of the two constructs. Respondents were then placed into one type of family communication style based on whether their averages were higher or lower than the median for each construct. The resultant categorisation indicated a split that consisted of *laissez faire* 30.3%, protective 26.7%, pluralistic 20.4% and consensual 22.6%.

Once this split was completed, each product item was grouped with the different family communication patterns using the Kruskal-Wallis test. The *p*-values for each product item were computed, and follow-up tests were conducted only on those items that were found to have significant differences among them. Four product items (Table 2) had significant differences (*p*-value < 0.05) in adolescent influence, namely: the restaurant to go to for a family dinner, a family car, where to go on family vacation and a TV set for the family. In order to determine the family communication patterns for which each of these items was significantly different, Mann-Whitney follow-up tests were conducted.

These results show that there were differences in influence only between *laissez faire* and consensual communication styles and protective and consensual communication styles. Although there are differences in four of the product items, these differences in influence do not follow the sequence as suggested in the hypothesis. Thus, the null hypothesis is supported and the alternative hypothesis rejected. These results suggest that when making family decisions regarding an array of product categories, there are no significant differences in the amount of influence respondents in this sample have within these four family communication styles.

The second hypothesis set out to determine whether there is a difference in the amount of influence that male and female adolescents have on family consumer decision-making, across various product categories. This hypothesis was tested at a 5% significance level. In testing this hypothesis, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was used, as the sample failed the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests for normality, and the Independent-Samples T-Test could thus not be used. Table 3 shows the significance values for the various product items.

Table 2: Test statistics for hypothesis 1

Test statistics ^{a,b}			
	Chi-square	df	Significance
CDs	1.270	3	.736
Shoes	.793	3	.851
Movies I watch	6.531	3	.088
Magazines	3.005	3	.391
Calculator	1.781	3	.619
Sound system	6.859	3	.077
Clothes	.877	3	.831
A bicycle	1.224	3	.747
Toothpaste	3.398	3	.334
Shampoo	2.937	3	.401
Breakfast cereals	7.551	3	.056
Soft drinks	3.365	3	.339
What movie the family should go to	2.438	3	.487
Which restaurant to go to for a family dinner	8.077	3	.044
A family car	12.709	3	.005
A house for the family	1.909	3	.592
Where to go on family vacation	11.710	3	.008
A TV set for the family	7.919	3	.048

a. Kruskal Wallis test

b. Grouping variable: Communication style

df. Degrees of freedom

As shown in Table 3, there were four product items that had significant differences in the amount of adolescent influence. These were magazines, a sound system, a bicycle and shampoo.

In order to determine the differences between male and female influence on these four items, the means for each gender were compared. Females had more influence on two items, namely magazines and shampoo. These findings were consistent with the one-tailed directional hypothesis. However, males had a larger influence on sound systems and bicycles, which is thus not in agreement with the stated hypothesis. Since the descriptive statistics indicated results at odds with the formulated hypothesis, a one-tailed p-value had to be calculated for both items. The one-tailed p-values for a sound system ($p = 0.9995$) and for a bicycle ($p = 0.99995$)

Table 3: Test statistics for hypothesis 2

	Test statistics ^a			
	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Significance (2-tailed)
CDs	5764.000	13765.000	-.515	.606
Shoes	5677.000	13552.000	-.583	.560
Movies I watch	5299.500	13049.500	-1.364	.172
Magazines	5013.500	9573.500	-2.155	.031
Calculator	911.000	10471.000	-.058	.954
Sound system	4426.000	12427.000	-3.460	.001
Clothes	242.000	13243.000	-1.650	0.99
A bicycle	4125.000	12126.000	-4.081	.000
Toothpaste	5540.000	10005.000	-.875	.381
Shampoo	4482.500	8947.500	-3.030	.002
Breakfast cereals	5784.000	10249.000	-.204	.838
Soft drinks	5185.000	12935.000	-1.489	.137
What movie the family should go to	5417.500	13418.500	-1.221	.222
Which restaurant to go to for a family dinner	5882.000	13883.000	-.100	.920
A family car	5690.500	10250.500	-.682	.495
A house for the family	5941.000	10501.000	-.100	.920
Where to go on family vacation	5435.000	9995.000	-1.316	.186
A TV set for the family	5566.000	13567.000	-.938	.348

a. Grouping variable: Gender

were both larger than the 5% significance level. The alternative hypothesis was thus rejected and the null hypothesis supported, as results did not show sufficient evidence that females had a greater influence than males on family consumer decision-making across the four major product categories.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed to investigate the perceived influence of parental communication styles on adolescents' influence on family purchase decisions as well as to measure the perceived influence of adolescents on family decision-making within the context of gender and product categories.

In South Africa, few studies have been conducted that measure the influence of adolescents in family consumer decision-making, more specifically the relationship between family communication and adolescent influence on family consumer decision-making. Not many South African studies have focused on cultural differences (North & Kotzé 2001: 98) and although cultures were not addressed in this study, the sample included a wide range of cultural diversity that was representative of the population of Pretoria. Taking South Africa's diverse culture into account, more attention should have been given to measuring the impact that culture has on a certain adolescent's influence on family decision-making. This aspect should be researched in the future.

Children from the different family communication environments display varying degrees of involvement and influence on family consumption decisions. As mentioned previously, in socio-oriented communication families, children generally tend to exert less influence on decision-making than children from concept-orientated communication families. Thus, this family socialisation process can provide a useful explanation of children's attempts to influence family decision-making.

For both hypotheses, the results suggest that within the Pretoria region, there are no significant differences in the amount of influence that adolescents exert on family consumer decision-making within the different communication style families, and in relation to product choices. The findings of Caruana & Vassallo (2003: 62) established that there was a greater influence in concept-orientation families, with pluralistic families exhibiting the highest influence and protective families the lowest influence. The results of this study reveal a significant relationship between *laissez faire* and consensual families, as well as protective and consensual families. Pluralistic families did not feature in these results, and the assumption can therefore be made that within the context of this study, adolescents from pluralistic families did not have greater influence than adolescents in the other communication style families.

In South Africa, these family communication styles do not accurately describe the level of influence each communication group will have on a range of different product items. This inability to determine the differences in adolescents' influence between concept-orientated and socio-orientated families could be due to the assumption that parents no longer question their adolescents' choices. Children today are not monitored and controlled by their parents as closely as children of a decade or two ago, and the socio-orientation communication dimension could thus be completely irrelevant in South Africa. Future studies with larger samples including children from other provinces could provide answers to this assumption.

In a study by Kim & Lee (1997: 309), it was mentioned that children have a greater influence on products for their own use, whereas they have less influence on products with a higher expenditure. The findings of this study were consistent with this argument by Kim & Lee (1997: 309), as the results suggested that product items that

involved more risk, namely, which restaurant to go to for a family dinner, a family car, where to go on family vacation and a TV set for the family, had significantly lower adolescent influence than the other 14 product items. The remaining items generally showed the same levels of adolescent influence.

Other studies point out that gender could play an important role in the level of influence by adolescents. More specifically, several authors mention that females display greater influence than males in consumer decision-making (Cowan & Avants 1988: 1307; Bao 2001: 38). However, the results from this study indicate that females had a greater influence on only two product items, namely magazines and shampoo. For the rest of the product items, there were only minimal differences between the means for male and females, thus implying that female adolescents do not exhibit a vast amount of influence in comparison to males in family consumer decision-making.

The findings of this study suggest that strategies should not be based on the type of family orientation of which the adolescent is part. Marketers should rather position marketing strategies on segmentation variables, for instance demographics, psychographics and situational factors such as special holidays, when targeting the adolescent consumer group.

Future research is required to contribute to this field of study in order to determine the amount of influence that adolescents have in the South African context. The role of schools in the socialisation process of adolescents is important. This socialisation agent can be explored further by taking into consideration the degree of adolescent influence in the different school systems, namely private and public schools, as it can be assumed that there will be varied amounts of influence between adolescents at these different institutions. An interesting relationship that could be investigated would be to determine whether more conflict would occur in socio-orientated or concept-orientated families as a result of differences in a child's upbringing, as well in as the circumstances in which conflict in these families occurs. Lastly, further research could be undertaken to compare the differences in adolescents' influence among different age groups, for instance, older teenagers and younger teenagers.

CONCLUSION

While the hypotheses of the study were not supported, the results imply that adolescents had a much higher influence on products for their own use than on those for the use of the family.

Adolescents are an important focus group from a marketing perspective, not only because of their influence on family consumer decision-making but also because they are the consumers of the future. When targeting adolescents, marketers will thus need to continue focusing their advertising efforts on products for the adolescents' own use through mediums such as television, radio, movie theatres and the Internet, as well as

by making use of promotions through retailer outlets. A major reason for marketers' interest in adolescents is that they are at the age where many of them receive an income from allowances or jobs and they have the ability to spend money on purchases, thus making them consumers of an array of different products and services (Shoham & Dalakas 2003: 238).

Despite the effectiveness of marketing directly to adolescents, marketers should not focus only on this group, but should bear in mind that in most cases, parents still have the greatest influence regarding the final decision, especially with respect to family consumer products. It is therefore important for marketers to identify exactly who makes the final decision in the family, either the parent or the adolescent, so that appropriate target marketing strategies can be formulated and implemented with the decision-maker in mind.

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