CHAPTER FIVE

CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

The earlier chapter helps to understand the void in the existing literature pertaining to the studies on ‘Pester Power’ and helps in the process of problem identification and conceptual development.

5.1 Problem Identification

Pester power is a growing phenomenon across the world with children becoming the supreme power in family decision making. While many books and articles pertaining to ‘Pester power’ have been published in the foreign countries, there is a dearth of research work in India, particularly Gujarat with regards to this study. Apart from one study by Panwar and Agnihotri (2006), research in this area is particularly scarce in Gujarat considered to be one of the most affluent and commercially developed regions of India. The role of demographic, social and psychological variables in the growth of pester power is not adequately investigated by earlier studies. Also, the change in the attitudinal and behavioural measures across different age groups and gender is still not duly integrated in the existing literature. Influence strategies employed by children and parents’ response choices are also under-explored. Hence this void in the research arena needs to be filled with an empirical research on influence of children in the purchases made. Hence, there is a need for developing a model based on Indian conditions to explain the growing influence of children in purchase decisions.

5.2 Development of the Model

The present study aims to give an understanding of the impact of pester power on parent’s buying behavior for selected product categories. Several factors lead to the genesis of pester power which is seeing unprecedented growth in the present times.
Based on the literature review, an attempt has been made to develop a conceptual model on the pester power relevant to the current study (see figure 5.1). Past researchers have considered various fragments of the model like the impact of family socialization (Caruana and Vassallo, 2003; Moschis, 1985; Moschis and Churchill, 1978), the influence of media on children (Khatibi, Haque, and Ismail, 2004; Panwar and Agnihotri, 2006), parents’ response strategies to children’s requests (Isler, Popper, and Ward, 1987; Mohankumar, P.K. Sinha, and Krishna, 2003; Verma and Kapoor, 2004; Ward and Wackman, 1972) and the role of demographic and psychographic variables on pester power (Moschis and Moore, 1979; Lee and Beatty, 2002; Panwar and Agnihotri, 2006; Tinson and Nancarrow, 2005).

(Source: Developed by the researcher)

Figure 5-1: Conceptual Model for the study
Empirical evidence indicates that the emergence of pester power is often a result of the amalgam of various factors - demographic, social and psychological factors. These factors also lead to the choice of influence strategies that children employ and parents’ response strategies. Child’s influence in purchase related decision is a function of the influence strategy and the corresponding parent’s response strategy which the child exercises for both child-major and family-major products in varying proportion based on different decision areas.

This model tries to develop relationships between these discrete variables to establish coherence in understanding the aggregate impact of children’s influence in purchase related decisions which further leads to pester power.

5.3 Constructs

Pester power is the major focus of the study and its impact on purchase influences by the child is studied for selected product categories. For the current study, several constructs and relationships have been developed based on the past literature. A brief on these constructs helps to examine various variables in the manner intended by the researcher.

5.3.1 Demographic variables

Past studies have demonstrated that demographic variables play a phenomenal role in the genesis of pester power. Demographics like age, gender, family income, family structure, number of siblings, birth order of the child and number of working parents in the family influence pester power effect. As described in the literature review, these variables contribute towards explaining how different variables affect purchase influence and the child’s role in decision making. Past studies reveal that influential capacity rises with an increase in age (Atkin 1978; Darley and Lim, 1986; Jenkins, 1979; Moschis and Mitchell, 1986; Nelson, 1978; Verma and Kapoor, 2004). Gender based
differences are also found with respect to influential position in the household (Lee and Beatty, 2002; Tinson and Nancarrow, 2005). Though Panwar and Agnihotri (2006) recommend for more sophisticated segmentation bases beyond the demographics to better understand the behavioural differences amongst children with respect to pester power.

5.3.2 Socio-Psychographic Variables

While the demographics are largely the personal factors related to the child, social variables like the degree of family communication, parental style and social status affecting also affect pester power. Family orientation with respect to consumer skills plays an important role in child’s development as a consumer. Psychographic variables related to various attitudinal and behavioural measures help to understand the lifestyle, attitudes and beliefs of the households surveyed. Behavioural measures based on frequency of out-of-home visits help to understand the overall activities of the child like going out for grocery shopping, visits to malls/retail outlets, eating outlets, leisure activities for movies etc or social visits. Other factors affecting pester power are media influence, peer group influence, usage of internet, knowledge of malls/stores, materialistic attitude, influence of promotional stimuli and models in the advertisements. Satisfaction with the pocket money allowance also describes the psychological state of the child. Child’s television watching behavior and the related viewing habits of parents are also seen to affect purchasing habits of the child (Galst and White, 1976; Gorn and Florsheim, 1985; Panwar & Agnihotri, 2006; Reid, 1979; Rossister, 1979; Wiman, 1983).

5.3.3 Child’s Influence Strategy

A child uses various influence strategies as the first step towards shaping of pester power behavior. It has been established in the research review that a child uses various influence strategy to persuade parents to fulfil her demands (Isler, Popper, and Ward,
1987; Verma and Kapoor, 2004). Some of these may be more intense (throwing tantrums in public, threatening) than others (pleading, persuading etc). Also they may be product-oriented (explaining the product’s use and significance, reminding about ads/features of the products), behavior oriented (negotiating, persuading) or psychological games (power, flattery, bullying, manipulation).

5.3.4 Parents’ Response Strategy

Often the final outcome of child’s persuasion is shaped by the parent’s retaliation to the child’s request strategy. Several studies show the relationship between family communication patterns, parenting style and their response strategies to the child’s purchase attempts. Depending on whether the family has open or restricted communication patterns, and whether parents adopt an authoritarian style or participative style, the final behavior may be moderated. A good number of previous studies use parental communication style as a base to explain family communication variables. Some parents use positive approach (compliance, explanation and justification, negotiating through substitute offers) while others choose negative measures (like those of coercion, non-reaction, negations, punishments). This study measures the frequency of occurrence of both the kinds of response strategies.

5.3.5 Child’s Influence in Purchase Decisions

Children’s influence in decision making related to purchases is based upon type of the product and also on various key decision areas.

a.)Product Related Influence

A review of the literature denotes that children not only pester for products of relevance to them but also are key influencers for adult-related products. Thus, children have an important say in both child-major products like stationery items, toys, games, chocolates etc and also in family decisions for holidays or purchase of big ticket items
like electronics and home appliances. Though it is true that children try to influence purchase of all such items, ultimately their decision making right is a function of child’s request strategy and parents’ responses moderated by many other variables. Six product categories have been selected to restrict the scope of study to understand child’s relative decision making influence in purchases.

b.) Key Decision Areas
It has been observed in the study that children play the role of the influencers in the purchase related decisions and their influence level often differs in intensity based on the key decision area. The major decision areas identified for the study are – where to buy from, when to buy and the type of product variant to buy from. With respect to the first, the child influences the decision related to the retail format. This may range from a nearby provision store to a particular mall or a company owned showroom based on the product, information available and accessibility of the store. Another decision area of influence is the timing of the purchase as some children fix the time when the purchases are to be made. The decision of the type of the product variant to buy is also crucial for children as they may have different preference levels for various models of the product.

5.3.6 Pester Power
The strong influential capacity of children to make their parents yield into their demands for various products is defined as ‘pester power’. It has already been concluded by a few researchers that children not only have influence on the products significant to them but also have considerable influence over the family decisions. This leads to large amount of dominance of children in families as they are growing child-led (McNeal, 1999) unlike the adult-led families of the yesteryears.
5.4 Research Questions

The variables denoted in the model pose various questions which need to be answered through empirical testing. While investigating some relationships between the variables is beyond the scope of this study, the following research questions have been proposed for further investigation.

RQ1: How do the demographic variables (age, gender, birth order, number of children in the family, working status of parents and family income) affect Pester Power?

RQ2: How do children of different age groups and gender categories influence parents to yield into their demands?

RQ3: What is parents’ response strategy for such behaviour?

RQ4: How is the pestering of the child affected by different festivals/occasions?

RQ5: What is the role of socialization agents in child’s overall purchase behaviour?

RQ6: Which behavioural and attitudinal dimensions shape child’s purchase behaviour?

5.5 Rationale of the Study

As reviewed in the earlier chapter, there can be no denying in stating that pester power is fast emerging as a mammoth industry in India, especially Gujarat. This state also boasts of a vast population of affluent class and children resulting in a lucrative target market for the marketers. It implies that marketers need to resort to many such insights as given by researchers, psychologists, academicians and sociologists so as to devise children-based strategies. So far various models and researches have tried to explain the fact that pester power exists for a few select categories (which is now quickly expanding). Also other schools of thought have tried to touch on the social environments of children and parental communications. Still further, there has been a study of the impact of TV and other interactive media on children’s preference building and demanding habits. Hence this study intends to relate several of these scattered beliefs and philosophies to give a seamless understanding of the factors leading to the genesis of pester power (mainly the demographic variables like the age, gender, birth
order, family structure, family income etc) by examining them in the light of socio-psychographic variables like the attitude towards media, personality variables like materialism, exposure to out-of-home visits. The research work also studies the impact of the same on the child’s relative influence over the purchase decision of selected product categories and the resultant pester power. In addition, other variables related to child’s request strategies and parents’ response strategies are studied to give a holistic idea of how pestering is mediated.

5.6 Significance of the Study

As mentioned above, the proposed research study is unique and will highlight some new findings that will be useful to many related to children. It will also help them in understanding children’s behavior in the marketplace, and the influence they hold on family consumption decisions. Some of the potential beneficiaries of this study are parents, children, marketers, advertisers and future researchers.

a.)Parents - This study tries to explain the role of demographic and socio-psychological factors that lead to pester power. It also gives useful information to parents as to how to consider their children in purchases so as to evolve them as more responsible future buyers. It seeks to clarify children’s preference for influence strategies based on their age group and gender. It further explains how parents can inculcate productive media habits amongst children and protect them from constant bombarding of intriguing messages.

b.)Children - The study aims to help children gauge their importance as a demographic segment and as a major driver for many marketing initiatives targeting children. It helps children to understand how their influence shapes family purchases for various products. It also discusses how the socialization agents like peers, school and media influence their buying decisions.
c.) **Marketers** - The findings presented by the study will help marketers understand the dynamics of pester power and its implications on developing more creative strategies to appeal to this segment. It also aims to make them realize how various marketing cues affect children’s purchase related decisions.

d.) **Advertisers** - Also the advertisers, having gained the knowledge about the attitudes and lifestyle predictors about this segment and the media that reaches them with more noise, can better do justice to their campaigns by designing them taking in this segment in mind.

e.) **Academic Community** - This study will benefit the academic community in practically understanding the implications of demographic variables with respect to pester power. This will also expand the knowledge area of age based segmentation. Students can be given better insights by discussing various findings and developing supporting case studies for the same.

f.) **Future researchers** - This study directs future researchers into exploring newer areas and developing correlations between various variables identified in the process. The conceptual model developed in the study can be tested empirically in different social, economic, cultural and geographic environments to congregate knowledge related to pester power. The present study limits to understanding the process variables leading to pester power as the final outcome. Future researchers can undertake studies using pester power as the input variable and further observe the results on various psychological, behavioural and social dynamics related to children.

**SUMMARY**

Literature review highlights that though some past studies encompass various discrete variables related to children’s influence, no previous work (atleast in context of Gujarat) tries to impart a coherent understanding to this study of ‘Pester power’. Hence this
chapter presents a conceptual model to link various dynamics related to pester power which were hitherto studied isolated. It clarifies that children’s influence in decision making is affected by the demographics and psychographics and is a function of child’s influence strategy and parents’ response strategy. Conceptually, this model attempts to establish relationships between various factors affecting the influence of children in decision making. Theoretically, it helps to frame research questions relevant for the study. The chapter also provides the rationale behind undertaking this study and highlights how it will help the major beneficiaries like parents, children, marketers, advertisers, academic community and future researchers. Based on this model, the next chapter gives a detailed understanding of the research methodology adopted for conducting the present research work.

**REFERENCES**


