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‘GROW’ ing Up: Tweenagers Involvement in Family Decision Making

Research Paper

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Abstract

Practitioners in particular have noted that kids are growing older younger (KGOY) and academic research has in parallel shown that children are becoming more involved in the final stages of purchase decisions, albeit in a limited number of product categories studied. This quantitative and qualitative study examines the relatively under-researched but increasingly important tweenager market across a number of product categories and the extent to which 10-12 year olds are involved in the final stages of purchase decision making. Further to this, the paper considers whether a liberal versus traditional approach to decisions made within the family (Gender Role Orientation) affects the degree of involvement. The findings suggest that gender role orientation (GRO) is indeed a factor in family decision making but that the relationship is far from a simple one. The authors posit why perceptions of involvement are sometimes inconsistent and why some kids may not be growing older younger (KGOY) in the way previously thought but may simply believe they are more involved in purchase decision making as a consequence of parental strategies as well as the influences of media, school and peers. The authors describe the implications for marketing practitioners and academic researchers.

Key Words: Decision Making, Tweenagers, Involvement, Gender Role Orientation

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Introduction

Typically, authors considering the role of children in decision making have done so by identifying the influence of the child during the three stages of decision making (1. Searching or Information Gathering, 2. Negotiating and 3. Making the Final Decision). Until recently, findings have consistently supported the view that children are influential in the first two stages of decision making and not necessarily as effectual in the final stage. However, recent studies conducted in New Zealand and reported in the *European Journal of Marketing* and the *Journal of Consumer Marketing* indicate that adolescents seem to play a significant role in the final stages of decision-making and suggest that further research ought to re-consider the role of children in family purchases at all stages of decision making (Lee & Beatty, 2002). This is the stimulus for this programme of research. Given the wide age range of 'children', the authors have identified 'tweenagers' (8-12 year olds) as a particularly relevant and yet relatively under-explored segment as many of the previous family decision making studies have focused on adolescents (13 years or more). The term tweenagers is increasingly used by both the media and researchers.

Why do Children Appeal to Marketers?

Children are attractive markets not only because they influence their parents' spending (Martin & Bush, 2000) but because they may have income from allowances or jobs (Mangleburg, 1995). Understanding the household decision-making process is complex because decision makers in a family will change according to product type, attitudes to purchase decision-making roles in the family and particularly family composition (e.g. single parent families, small and large families) [See for example: Holdert & Antonides, 1997]. Undeniably however, children and adolescents are often

involved in family decision-making and at a younger age (Roedder-John, 1999). Kuhn & Eischen (1997) observe that children have experience in decision-making with regard to simple impulse purchases as well as for more planned, longer-term purchases. Indeed, they argue that the child rather than the parent may in many instances be the primary decision maker. This may be a consequence of socio-economic conditions or may be because the consumption of brands even in the case of children has taken on increasing importance as a means of expressing ones' personality to both oneself and to others (Featherstone, 1990).

Are Tweens Becoming More Involved in Purchase Decisions?

Kids growing older younger (KGOY) has been the driving force for much of the debate surrounding the children's marketplace in the last decade (Kurnit, 2004). In effect the youth market has shifted with the implication that tweenagers are new teenagers in terms of mindset (aspirations, values and experience). The target audience for toy brands, for example, is very narrow and becoming narrower (Tutt, 2001) and although Kurnit (2004) very recently questioned the whole concept of KGOY (suggesting children just wanted to be "kids") even he recognised that children are increasingly expressing their opinion about family holidays, cars and technological purchases.

Additionally McNeal (1999) suggests the number of parents who ask their children's opinions about products they are going to buy for the whole family has been steadily increasing over the years. As such this study is designed to establish the foundation for a longitudinal study and to provide clues as to whether tweens' involvement at different stages of purchase decision-making is on the increase at a younger age. This

study was conducted in the UK with both parents and a child as most empirical studies on family decision making and adolescents have been conducted in the US (Chavda et al, 2005) and many of the studies only ask the parents about the role of the child (as opposed to asking the child about their role).

Driving Forces Behind Increased Involvement by Tweenagers

Without the benefit of a longitudinal study, we considered what might be the impetus for the hypothesised greater involvement of children and tweenagers in purchase decisions. There are a number of possible candidates to consider that include: the evolving consumer society and associated consumer socialisation and the emergent shopping ‘savvy’ child. In addition increasing time pressures and the shift to a more democratic or liberal approach to decision making within the family are potentially responsible for changes in involvement in purchase decisions. We briefly explore each of these below.

In many societies consumption has become increasingly important fulfilling symbolic as well as functional needs. As a consequence the media, schools, the family, peers and reference groups increasingly act as socialising agents, helping children to deal with the consumer world and shopping. Children consequently are becoming more knowledgeable and strategically sophisticated in terms of shopping (“shopping savvy”) and so are more likely to be invited to participate in purchase decisions (as suggested by Kuhn & Eischen, 1997) or, failing this, to express unsolicited views more vociferously.

Parent-child interactions take on new importance in time-stressed families (Sabino, 2002). The need and expectation to maximise “quality” time will lead in many situations to conflict avoidance (possibly by greater inclusion at early stages of decision-making if not all stages) and this greater sense of cohesion may lead to the child (ren) making a greater number of decisions about both individual consumption and family activities. On the other hand, if time pressured, some parents might cut out the involvement of children in some decision-making and live with the consequences of dissatisfaction by the child or parent-child once a purchase is made.

In parallel, role expectations and preferences within families are reportedly changing (Engel et al, 1990). Supporting this assertion is the increasing number of women holding full-time, career type jobs and their amount of influence in the decision making process that is said to be significant relative to non-working mothers (Lee & Beatty, 2002). It is possible that families are becoming more liberal or egalitarian in their approach to decision-making not (just) because of time pressures but as a result of a more “modern” or “enlightened” outlook.

Studies that consider this phenomenon (increasing democratisation within the family) often focus on sex role orientation preference (SRO) or “gender role orientation” (GRO). That is, both parents and children can be categorised along a “traditional” to more “modern” (egalitarian) continuum depending on their preferences towards traditional household tasks such as childcare (Tinson & Nancarrow 2005). Lee and Beatty (2002) describe egalitarian parent(s) as being more ‘liberal’ in their attitude towards family decision making. The more egalitarian tend to share responsibilities and decisions in the household. This being the case it is posited where egalitarian

parents are present then it is more likely the egalitarian disposition might extend to children and purchase decisions. This we wish to cover in this research. Thus, if there is a shift in GRO preference towards a liberal approach to decision making amongst parents then children's involvement in purchase decision-making will increase. As such, there is a need to research the assumption underpinning this hypothesis, namely that GRO is related to involvement in decision-making.

Situational Factors Affecting a Child's Involvement in Purchase Decisions

The degree of influence the child consumer has seems likely to be dependent on the age of the child, the stage of decision-making (search, discussion etc.), the type of product or brand (whether for a child's own consumption or family activity/good) and its psychological significance in relation to peers in particular) See **Table I**. Parental yielding increases as the child's age increases (Ward & Wackman, 1972) and more recently mid/late teenagers have been identified as engaging in a "consultancy" role for family holidays (Dunne, 1999). Of course, shopping savviness or marketing literacy is likely to correlate with age.

Take in Table I

Whilst it would also seem to be widely accepted that children participate in the earlier stages of decision-making (information gathering and negotiation stages) and that parents have the final choice [For example see: Shoham & Dalakas 2003], it has been noted that children have greater influence, in some cases, in all stages of decision making, if the product is child-centred (See: Foxman et al, 1989; Shoham & Dalakas, 2003).

Interestingly, Lee and Beatty (2002) indicate that adolescents play a crucial role in family purchase decisions suggesting they have as much power as their parents in the final outcome of the decision. Indeed, the role of adolescents should not be underestimated, with calls for more research to look at variety of products for public (family) and private (individual) consumption. One recognised limitation of the Lee and Beatty study is that it centred on the single observed task the researchers gave the families involved (to decide on where the family were going for a family meal). The vast array of other products and services associated with family decision making have still to be explored in relation to the current changing social environment.

The structure of a family unit may also influence the role of children in decision making (Rindfleisch, Burroughs & Denton, 1997). It is widely recognised that the types of families and households in the West are increasingly disparate, reflecting changes in relationship development and closure (for UK see Social Trends, 2003). As such, children are now increasingly raised in not just traditional families but also step-parent and single parent families (Haskey, 1998). It is also worth noting single parent families, despite being a 'modern phenomenon' seem to be less inclined to shared decision-making within the family (Lee & Beatty, 2002). However, this needs further exploration as previous studies have principally focused on the traditional nuclear family and those that have considered single parent families (See for example Ahuja et al, 1998) tend to consider the views of the mother only.

An Illusion of Influence?

However, caution must be exercised over accepting the perceptions of the child in terms of his/her role in decision-making. Children are known to attribute more

influence to themselves than do their parents (For example see: Foxman et al, 1989 and Erduran, 1999). Corfman (1987) suggests that this could be a self-serving bias or as a result of social norms (that is the expectation that they will have played a role in decision making even if their role was less than they suggest). Belch et al (1985) and Beatty and Talpade (1994) reported that ‘teenage’ children see themselves as exerting more influence on the family decision process (for example regarding both how much to spend and where to purchase) than do their parents. It is of course possible that whilst the decision may appear to be that of the child, it is set within pre-determined boundaries established by the parents (such as the parent deciding on the model of car and the child choosing the colour). Erduran, (1999) supports this theory by suggesting that there is a difference between making a decision and deciding on a brand. That is, whilst the child may appear to make the final decision, the actual “choice” has been limited by the decisions already made by the parent(s). However, interesting to note, is that the ‘teen’ respondents to both Belch et al’s questionnaire and that of Beatty & Talpade were on average 17 years old or more. As such questions regarding the applicability of the findings to younger teens and tweens are raised.

This Study

Research Questions

This study follows on from the authors’ earlier qualitative research on children and experts (teachers, academics and marketing researchers) and a quantitative pilot just on children. The study reported here is the first stage of a longitudinal research programme involving quantitative research on both parents and tweenagers from the same families. The authors recognise the value of qualitative research, ethnography and survey research – each brings different insights and each has limitations. This

study complements the authors' earlier work using a bricolage of methods. What is now required is a more reliable fix on the phenomenon employing research vehicles that have been carefully developed and crafted through the stages already described (expert panels, qualitative research and piloting) to maximise validity.

The primary research objectives for the survey were:

1. Building on Beatty & Lee's (2002) work this study seeks to re-consider the role and involvement of tweentagers at all the different stages of family purchase decision making across a variety of product categories.
2. To explore whether tweentagers in a more liberal family setting are more involved in purchase decisions. If this is the case and we accept there is a shift in attitude to a more liberal orientation, then this would suggest over time tweentagers are becoming more involved in purchase decisions. Given this is a benchmark study for longitudinal research this is the only way of testing this hypothesis at this point in time.
3. To compare more liberal families with less liberal families to establish the degree of disagreement over purchase decisions and the extent to which these are resolved.
4. The extent to which the gender role orientation of the child reflects that of the parent(s).

Method

Sample Definition

We decided to concentrate on 10-12 year olds to represent tweenagers at this stage because of their probable greater influence on purchasing than 8-9 year olds and on the basis of consultations with teachers, the proposed method using self-completion questionnaires. This decision is supported by the meta-analysis on research methods for children (Melzer-Lena and Middelman-Motz, 1998).

Research Approaches

This research involved not just a quantitative study but also follow up qualitative research. The former was to determine how many children were involved in decision-making across various categories, the associated level of disagreement within the family unit relative to purchase decisions and who these children were in terms of GRO. The qualitative research was designed to explore the perceptions of modern versus traditional roles, family strategies, purchase role preferences and ways in which conflict was dealt with and so build on the quantitative findings.

Quantitative Research

For the quantitative research we used a self-completion questionnaire rather than observation (the latter used and favoured by Lee & Beatty 2002). We believe a questionnaire offers the opportunity to examine more easily a number of different types of decisions (level of involvement in the category and whether the purchase is for the family or just for a child). Observation is also a far from perfect tool as it often involves contrived tasks and family “codes” transmitted almost subliminally that may,

therefore, not be noticed by a researcher. For instance, there may be a signal from the mother or father that the child recognises as signifying no more discussion but an observer (ethnographic or laboratory) might easily miss this.

A UK nationally representative sample of mothers with children aged 10-12 was recruited by a major marketing research agency. 350 mothers agreed to participate in a university survey on family purchase decision making which involved the husband/partner, the children and themselves self-completing questionnaires independently (to be returned in separate envelopes to try and encourage confidentiality within the family and so maximise honest assessment and disclosure). 106 families responded with 101 family units being usable – a total of 264 respondents (children, mothers and partners). The reasonably high response rate was achieved by offering a £5 shop voucher and the opportunity to be included in a prize draw. The response rate, including sending out a reminder pack 4 weeks after the first batch was sent, was around 30%.

Measures of GRO

Earlier stages of our research programme involved a fruitless search for ready-made measures of GRO suitable for both children and parents. So with the help of a panel of academic and practitioner experts and a pool of adults and children for testing we developed a new measure for use in a questionnaire and a framework by which we could evaluate this (Rossiter's C-OAR-SE). The findings of the development have been reported by the authors (2005). The GRO battery consists of twelve questions which are summated to calculate a GRO score for each respondent. The following section details the quantitative and qualitative marketing research tools employed to

explore aspects of family decision making and the factors influencing purchases and consumption within a household.

Purchases Covered

The three stages of decision making were examined using two product categories most children could relate to and that on the basis of earlier research we identified as differing in terms of involvement; casual clothes for the child (high involvement – that is greater depth in terms of search, evaluation and post-purchase evaluation) and packed lunch for school (low involvement – less likely to be a time intensive activity). It is acknowledged some children may spend time choosing items for packed lunches and be less interested in clothing. However for most children (typically) the higher involvement item will be clothing because of the greater social risk.

The three stages of the purchase process were “looking around for” products (search), “talking about” (discussion & negotiation) and “having a say” in making the final decision. Another twelve product categories were covered in terms of “having a say” and “having the last say”. These other categories covered products for the family as well as products just for the child in question.

The Qualitative Follow-Up

A qualitative follow up study involving 12 in-depth interviews with parents was used to explore additional themes or issues in greater depth, for example strategies for resolving conflict and parents’ interpretation of family orientation - modern versus traditional. This qualitative approach is endorsed by Beatty & Talpade (1994).

The summated GRO scale from the quantitative study was used to identify whether parents in a household were traditional or egalitarian (modern) or a mix. A sample of 12 respondents was drawn from those who had agreed to be re-interviewed. The sample included males/female whose partners shared their GRO preference and an equal number that did not. Respondents were recruited from a variety of socio-economic groups and from a variety of familial settings (single parent, blended and intact).

Findings from the survey

The quantitative survey findings are presented as follows:

1. The perceived degree of involvement in purchases
 - a) Having a say and having most say (twelve product categories)
 - b) For a high and a low involvement category the degree of involvement in the three stages of purchase decision-making (product search, talking about the purchase and degree of influence on final purchase choice)
2. The influence of GRO on involvement and influence

Before examining the findings in relation to these objectives we need to bear in mind we are considering perceptions of family members. Perceptions within a family may differ for a variety of reasons other than respondents not taking the exercise seriously. Our analysis shows that 74% of the rankings of perceived relative influence within family units do correspond (See Appendix 1 for explanation). However, this also means 26% of the time they do not. The reasons perceptions may not correspond are shown in **Table II**:

Take in Table II

1a. Perceived degree of involvement in purchases

a) To set the findings in context we first of all show findings relating to 12 product categories (and so going beyond the limited focus of many past studies). We examine both *family purchases* (a car for the family, a family holiday, a family trip to the cinema and going out for a family meal) and *purchases for the child* (book/comic, shoes for school, sweets, PC game, soft drink, music CD, and fruit). As we wished to compare and contrast the perceptions of children, mums and partners regarding their own and the involvement of others we confined ourselves to the 61 families where we had full data on all three family members.

There are several noteworthy findings (**Table III**).

Take in Table III

As one might expect children were seen by all to have greater participation in purchases that were for them (“have a say”: 61%-72%) compared to purchases for the family (33-42%).

In the case of purchases for the family both adults are seen more often than the child as “having a say” (adults: 72%-80% versus tweenagers: 33%-42%) and in particular “having the last say” (adults: 49%+ versus tweenagers: 8%-15%).

The child’s perception of his/her participation does differ from the parent’s in a number of respects (see **Table III**). However, the differences are even more marked

when we look at the two categories we examined in terms of the three stages of decision-making. Here we just present the data on “most say on final decision” (**Table IV**). The two categories are casual clothes (high involvement) and packed lunch for school (low involvement):

Take in Table IV

Clearly, some children regard themselves as having an influence that is not recognised by the adults in the household. The perceptions of mothers and male partners also differ slightly.

1b. High involvement versus low involvement and the three stages of decision making

For the three stages of decision-making we examined the high and low involvement categories (casual clothes and packed lunches for school respectively). The main observations are as follows:

a) Mums and partners perceive the child’s involvement to be greater for casual clothes compared to packed lunches in both of the early stages (searching for products and talking about options). The child also sees this is the case in the search stage but not the discussion stage where the child sees him/herself equally involved in discussion for both casual clothes and packed lunches.

b) In the final stage of decision-making and having “most say” the child sees very little difference in his/her involvement between casual clothes and packed lunches.

This again is not the view of the mother who still sees the child has having “most say” to a greater degree for casual clothes than for packed lunches.

c) This difference in perceptions in the same analysis show the complexity of the situation and the potential relevance of some of the DIP effects noted in **Table II**.

2. The Effect of GRO – Liberal versus more Traditional Orientations

Adults and children were scored in terms of their GRO preference or orientation and then, each within each group (children, mothers and their partners), respondents were divided into high and low scorers based on the median score within each respective group. This permits examination of those who are more liberal in outlook and those less so or more traditional. As it seems likely that gender role orientation might be correlated with gender, we examined the gender composition of the GRO preference groups. For both children and adults the GRO preference groups exhibited no statistically significant difference between the sexes. So we can examine the effect of GRO preference on involvement in the decision making process and eliminate gender as a moderator variable.

However, because of the relatively small number of men in the sample (n=61) and the splitting of these into two GRO preference groups our initial examination considers all children and mothers in the sample irrespective of whether a partner completed a questionnaire or the mother was “single”. This gave us an effective sample size of 101 children and the same for mothers. As the nature of this study is essentially exploratory (and given the low sample sizes) we note anything that is indicative and

verging on statistical significance. We also, of course, note anything at the more conventional levels of statistical confidence.

Stage 1: Looking around a lot

In the case of casual clothes and “looking around” at potential purchases the more egalitarian/liberal mother, as one might anticipate, sees her child as more involved than the traditional mother sees her offspring. (egalitarian: 52% versus traditional: 38%). As regards packed lunches for school the above finding was mirrored.

Stage 2: Talking a lot about the purchase/options

As one might expect, compared to the more traditional children, the more egalitarian children see themselves and their mothers being more often involved in talking about purchases.

Stage 3: Say in final purchase decision

Perceptions of who had most say frequently conformed to the expectation that the more liberal children see themselves as having more say than is the case for more traditional children. Traditional mothers see themselves as having more say than egalitarian mothers. Compared to traditional children, the more egalitarian children regarded themselves more often as having the most say in the final purchase decision on casual clothes. In parallel the more traditional children often see their mother as having most say compared to the perception by the more egalitarian children. For packed lunches for school there is no difference between egalitarian and more traditional children. Traditional mothers see themselves as having most/some say more often than do modern mothers.

To conclude there seems to be evidence that the more liberal outlook correlates with greater decision making involvement but this relationship is far from perfect.

In a similar fashion we examined the other twelve product categories to see the effects of GRO preference and this time confined ourselves to the 61 families with a male partner participating in the research. So we traded-off sample size against greater reliability by covering more product categories. This analysis suggests that children with a more liberal preference tend to see themselves more often as having a say in both family purchases and purchases for themselves. As before the picture comparing perceptions of the three family members often *do not correspond* and the DIP factors (See Table II) are likely explanations for this.

Whilst DIP may partly explain the imperfect relationship between GRO preference and involvement in the purchase process, we also examined household compositions in terms of GRO preferences. Does a child's GRO preference match his/her parents? Is it a nurtured family trait? We analysed the correlation coefficients for GRO scores within a household (**Table V**):

Take in Table V

The strongest correlation for GRO preferences is between the adults (the mother and her partner). The weaker correlations are between the adults and the child and therefore greater potential causes for disagreements. As far as GRO preference and children are concerned we should also bear in mind other influences, namely the media, school, peers, and reference groups and the fact that tweenagers are in their

relatively early formative years. Clearly there are different family compositions in terms of GRO preferences and this might also explain the complicated nature of family decision-making and one potential cause of friction in decision-making.

Friction: Degree of Disagreement & its Resolution

Although conflict and conflict resolution have been considered (See Spiro 1983; Qualls & Jaffe, 1992; Lee & Collins, 2000), as far as we know this is the first study to examine the *perceived degree* of disagreement or upset associated with a purchase by various family members. This analysis is based on the total sample (See **Table VI**). As one might expect it shows that Casual Clothes are a category more likely to lead to disagreement or upset between family members. Further analysis shows that across the two categories, on average, 70% of families “agreed” on whether there were disagreements or not. However, this means within 30% of families there were differences in perceptions.

Take in Table VI

Analysis of children’s perception (with a more liberal preference) showed a lower level of upset or disagreement over the purchase of casual clothes than was the case for more traditional children. The same was true for packed lunches for school. This presumably is as a result of their greater perceived involvement as indicated earlier.

In 4 out of 10 cases all upset or disagreement is resolved for both categories which may still leave some resentment.

The findings for the matched mums, partners and children mirrored the above findings.

Findings from the Qualitative Depth Interviews

The survey allowed us to categorise parents in terms of their gender role preference (using the GRO summated scale). We wished to take the opportunity to understand what is meant by being more ‘egalitarian’ or more ‘traditional’ from a parent’s perspective, to establish if families perceive themselves as being ‘egalitarian’ or ‘traditional’ and how this influences the dynamics of purchase decision making within the family.

What it Means to be a Modern or Traditional family

No-one, not even those with very high egalitarian scores, described themselves as being entirely “modern”, although those with egalitarian scores were more likely to be working (Lee & Beatty, 2002). Additionally, those who expressed egalitarian preferences described themselves as “traditional – with a bit of a twist” or “a bit of both really [traditional and modern]”. The respondents suggested that appearing too modern suggests a lack of discipline or a lack of family structure or cohesion. These egalitarian interviewees clearly viewed their family as a unit and as having rules and boundaries.

In terms of decision making, almost all parents were keen to suggest that they took the views of their children into account. The difference between parents with an egalitarian or modern outlook was that they often wanted their children to understand

why a particular decision had been made whereas some traditional parents held the view that they made the final decision which the child simply had to accept.

Parents expressing an egalitarian preference displayed a greater need to illustrate “respect” for what their children would like or dislike. For example, these parents did not want their children to be “laughed at”. That is, the role of peers and the way in which the children were perceived by their friends was more significant for parents with a modern outlook.

Final or Last Say

Interestingly some parents with a liberal GRO preference indicated that although they talked about products that were going to be purchased with their children, they would offer the children two or three choices they had already decided on. In essence the final decision would be that of the parents although it would appear to the child(ren) that the decision had been theirs. This may account for some of children in the survey who believed they had the last say even when the parents indicated that the final decision had been that of the mother or father or both (a variant of subtle persuasion).

Intriguingly, those (modern) parents who tried to fully involve their children in decision making (i.e. providing details of financial implications) found that their children worried about the economics of purchase decision making. As such, this level of involvement was reduced and discussion on merely the pros and cons of purchasing a product or service was restored.

It was noted that children within a household also developed strategies to have a greater say in decision making. On the whole, where the children ‘ganged up’ together to put forward their case for a purchase, the parent (s) was more likely to buy it. This ‘ganging up’ was typically accompanied with arguments that suggested the children would not ask for another product for a long time or that the product would keep all the children occupied (and not ‘under the feet’ of the parents). Simply put a cost-benefit analysis that would buy the parent (s) free time.

Summary

Lee and Beatty (2002) found that adolescents aged 12-19 exerted less influence relative to their parents during search and negotiation stages but that their influence actually increased during the outcome stage to be almost equal to their parents. Building on Lee & Beatty’s (2002) work this study also sought to re-consider the role and involvement of tweenagers at all the different stages of family purchase decision making across a variety of product categories. Interestingly our study on tweenagers did not mirror their findings. Tweenagers were less influential in the final stage of decision-making. It may be that the acronym KGOY (Kid’s Growing Older Younger) is not necessarily true as suggested by Kurnit (2004) and that whilst the aspirations of tweenagers’ involvement may increase, their influence does not in this respect.

Interestingly, Lee and Beatty (2002) observed the father’s influence in the decision making process tended to decrease across most households as the discussion continued. Our study illustrated that for the two categories we examined involvement was low at all stages. There appeared to be disengagement by the male partner or perhaps delegated responsibility relative to these particular products.

In addition to this survey and the qualitative interviews, the authors' work suggests that GRO preference affects involvement. This being the case and if there is a shift towards liberal attitudes and behaviour then this would mean an increasing involvement by kids in decision making. In this way we explored our research objective illustrating that tweenagers in a more liberal family setting are more involved in purchase decisions. However, there is not a perfect relationship between GRO and involvement in purchase decision making within the family. This could partly be because within a household there is often a mix of GRO preference types.

There are likely to be other pressures, for instance other members of the household and social circle to take into account. The DIP phenomena suggested: subtle persuasion (subconsciously influencing the target), out of the loop (not being aware of all the interactions of family members), known preferences (using experience to take other views into consideration without discussion) and posturing/SDB (inflating own importance) may partly explain the different perceptions of each others' involvement in family decision making. These factors would also cause problems for observational research approaches (ethnographic or laboratory).

Of course the relevance of these DIP factors and other variables (some that might have moderating effects such as family compositions: intact, blended/step and single) needs to be taken into account. It was indicative from our qualitative research, for example, that women who were in a full or part time job/career were more likely to have a 'liberal' outlook. Other additional situation factors (see **Table I**) could possibly provide alternative explanations for gender role preference, consumption attitude and family decision making behaviour.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research programme demonstrates the potential relevance of GRO preferences of family members relative to purchase decision making. In light of the sample size, however, it is evident that further research on a larger sample would provide the opportunity to examine the interrelationship of the key variables and in particular to examine the different household GRO compositions. In addition, a larger sample will permit the examination of strategies to avoid potential conflict. However, we do not just advocate quantitative surveys as we believe other methods (qualitative research, ethnographic and laboratory observation) all bring useful insights. Another relevant focus for future research is on the nature and magnitude of the DIP factors in this and other family decision-making arenas.

Managerial Implications and Applications

This research suggests most children claim to have a say in purchases of particular interest to themselves (where they are the consumers) as well as for family purchases. However, these findings also indicate that whilst kids may be growing older younger (as is evidenced by their shrinking toy consumption at an earlier age) this may not be true of other product categories. Indeed, this study illustrates a variety of ways in which decision strategies are employed by parents (an illusion of influence) and potential conflict avoided. Marketers and researchers will be interested in ways in which children appear to be given a choice but in reality the decision has already been thought through by the parents. Marketers need to ensure they get their product on the short list of the mother as well as trying to influence the child.

This research also posits the GRO variable as a possible addition to the number of demographic variables used to understand consumer behaviour. Whilst the picture is not black and white it is clear that many children raised in traditional households believe their mother has the 'final say' in decision making purchases whilst those tweenagers raised in liberal households often believe they have the final say (as do their mothers). It is apparent that marketing communication approaches could be specifically tailored to different GRO family types in order to make campaigns more effective. However, some way of identifying such households needs to be established. For database marketers there is the possibility of adding questions to a database questionnaire though this is likely to be both complex and costly given the needs to collect data from all members of a family. Any benefit accrued might be outweighed by the cost. Alternatively, it is possible that family types might be identifiable by geodemographic profiling and possibly with some more limited database questioning. This seems worthy of investigation.

Interestingly tweenagers raised in liberal family settings have a lower incidence of disagreement and qualitatively the research has demonstrated that liberal parents like to explain to their child why, if the need arises, they cannot have product they request. Communication approaches (e.g. direct mail) that provide a rationale illustrating the pros and cons of products for family and child centred use would be beneficial for these families as the parent (s) would be able to explain to the child why they could or could not have the product. Conversely there is greater disagreement in traditional GRO households and qualitatively we know from this study that traditional parents expect their child to accept their final decision with no explanation. These differences in approach could explain a variety of consumption behaviours which may be

pertinent to a greater understanding of family dynamics, conflict and conflict resolution.

Finally, parents with liberal outlooks do not necessary consider themselves to be egalitarian. Rather they consider themselves to be traditional (with values, boundaries, appropriate discipline practice) having only elements of modernity. It is essential then that communication approaches that appeal to those from a more liberal family setting do not do so in an extreme way but that they reflect the perception the consumers actually have of themselves. More work may need to be conducted on the strategies children employ to influence purchase decision making.

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APPENDIX - Measure of Agreement Symmetry

Objective:

To determine the extent of agreement with each family unit of perceptions of relative influence

The Questions Analysed

We examined the three questions collecting the ratings of three family members on involvement in each of the three stages of decision-making and we conducted the analysis on casual clothes and packed lunches for schools.

For each question for each family there are 9 ratings (the three family members rating each other's participation).

The perceptions of each member of the family are converted to rankings of influence or participation.

The starting point for the analysis is the worst scenario - no agreement amongst the three family members on the relative influence of each family member. In essence this mirrors a Latin Square (Table A). For there to be perfect symmetry and all to agree on the ranking of influence requires 6 of the rankings in Table A to be changed. This MAS analysis examines how many rank scores need to be changed within each family and this is then averaged across the 61 families with three family members and is expressed as a percentage based on the worst scenario of six changes. So one ranking needing to change equals 16.7% (Table B)

Table A - Ranking of influence/participation (rows/horizontal) (1= most)

| Person rated→ Rater ↓ | The Child | The Mother | The Male Partner |
|-----------------------------|-----------|------------|------------------|
| The Child | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| The Mother | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| The Male Partner | 3 | 1 | 2 |

Table B - Percentage of scores needing to change for perfect symmetry

| | Search | Talk about | Say in final decision |
|-------------------------|--------|------------|-----------------------|
| Casual clothes | 23.5% | 26.5% | 27.1% |
| Packed lunch for school | 26.2% | 23.5% | 27.6% |

Average across the six cells = 25.7%

In order to check whether potential DIP problems (as in Table B) were rooted in just a few families an analysis was carried out to see how many families had members who totally agree in terms of relative participation of family members. The analysis in Table C shows most families had at least one difference of opinion about at least one member of the family. Thus DIP effects are widespread but nonetheless there is a lot of accord within families.

Table C Percentage of Families and Pairs with Completely Symmetrical Perceptions

| %s | Casual clothes Search | Casual clothes Talk | Casual clothes Final say | Packed lunch Search | Packed lunch Talk | Packed lunch Final say |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Family unit of 3 (9 rank scores) | 21 | 8 | 3 | 11 | 15 | 7 |
| Child & Mother (6 rank scores) | 33 | 25 | 23 | 30 | 36 | 18 |
| Child & Mother's Male Partner (6 rank scores) | 36 | 26 | 16 | 26 | 31 | 15 |
| Mother and Partner (6 rank scores) | 51 | 34 | 33 | 33 | 34 | 43 |

Table I Driving forces behind increased involvement in purchase decisions

- The Consumer Society
- Consumer Socialisation
- The Shopping Savvy child
- Time Pressures
- The Egalitarian/Modern Family

Table II Situation factors

- Age of child
- Stage of decision-making
- Product for child or family or other
- Extent the product affects perceptions of others

- Family structure

| Table III “Most influence on final decision” as seen by..... | | | |
|---|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Casual Clothes Rating of ... | Child 62 % | Mother 62 % | Father 62 % |
| Child | 36 | 25 | 10 |
| Mother | 59 | 68 | 80 |
| Father | 17 | 10 | 12 |
| Packed lunches Rating of ... | | | |
| Child | 42 | 14 | 14 |
| Mother | 52 | 81 | 72 |
| Father | 10 | 16 | 12 |

| Table IV Involvement during decision making stages | | | | | | | | |
|--|------------------------------|---------------|--------|--------|------------------------|---------------|--------|--------|
| Father | | As see by ... | | | Father | As see by ... | | |
| | | Child | Mother | Father | | Child | Mother | Father |
| % | | % | % | % | FINALLY MOST INFLUENCE | % | % | % |
| | TALKING LOT | | | | Casual clothes | | | |
| 38 | | 31 | 37 | 41 | | 36 | 25 | 10 |
| 87 | | 36 | 40 | 56 | | 59 | 68 | 80 |
| 13 | | 2 | 9 | 12 | | 17 | 10 | 12 |
| | Packed lunches | | | | Packed lunches | | | |
| 20 | | 29 | 17 | 25 | | 42 | 14 | 14 |
| 87 | | 40 | 41 | 49 | | 52 | 81 | 72 |
| 27 | | 8 | 12 | 17 | | 10 | 16 | 18 |
| | TALKING A LOT/ LITTLE | | | | MOST/SOME | | | |
| | Casual clothes | | | | Casual clothes | | | |
| 77 | | 80 | 77 | 77 | | 82 | 83 | 75 |
| 95 | | 80 | 78 | 92 | | 93 | 95 | 98 |
| 43 | | 29 | 36 | 42 | | 43 | 55 | 53 |
| | Packed lunches | | | | Packed lunches | | | |
| 66 | | 66 | 64 | 64 | | 77 | 74 | 71 |
| 93 | | 71 | 79 | 80 | | 87 | 97 | 97 |
| 57 | | 40 | 47 | 47 | | 42 | 56 | 53 |

| | | | | |
|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Key: | p>.01 | p>.05 | p>.10 | p>.20 |
|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|

| Table V “Has a say/last say” (% average across relevant categories) | | | | | | | |
|--|------------|------------|----------------|--------------------------|------------|------------|----------------|
| Has a Say | Kid’s view | Mum’s view | Partner’s view | Has last say | Kid’s view | Mum’s view | Partner’s view |
| % | | | | | | | |
| Family purchase | | | | | | | |
| Kid has <u>a</u> say | 38 | 40 | 32 | Kid has <u>last*</u> say | 15 | 4 | 8 |
| Mum has <u>a</u> say | 72 | 74 | 73 | Mum has <u>last*</u> say | 65 | 46 | 49 |
| Partner has <u>a</u> say | 74 | 76 | 72 | Dad has <u>last*</u> say | 37 | 29 | 36 |
| Purchase for the kid | | | | | | | |
| Kid has a say | 69 | 68 | 60 | Kid has <u>last*</u> say | 39 | 26 | 27 |
| Mum has a say | 74 | 80 | 83 | Mum has <u>last*</u> say | 49 | 62 | 63 |
| Partner has a say | 22 | 34 | 45 | Dad has <u>last*</u> say | 15 | 8 | 16 |

* Some respondents insisted family members had equal “last says”

| Table VI Correlations of GRO scores | |
|--|-----|
| Father and child | 0.3 |
| Mother and partner | 0.5 |
| Mother and child | 0.3 |

Table VII Whether differences between modern and traditional respondents (children, mothers and partners are in the hypothesised direction)
 + signifies the difference is in the hypothesised direction (namely more modern are more involved)

| | Child | Mother | Partner |
|-----------------------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|
| Kid has a say | | | |
| Family | + | | + |
| Kid | + | - | |
| Mum has a say | | | |
| Family | + | + | + |
| Kid | + | | + |
| Partner has a say | | | |
| Family | - | - | - |
| Kid | | + | + |
| Kid has last say | | | |
| Family | + | + | - |
| Kid | - | - | - |
| Mum has last say | | | |
| Family | - | + | + |
| Kid | + | - | + |
| Partner has last say | | | |
| Family | - | - | |
| Kid | | | |

Table VIII Degree of disagreement & its resolution

| | Child | Mother | Partner |
|----------------------------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|
| Casual Clothes | N=101 | 99 | 61 |
| | % | % | % |
| None | 36 | 33 | 38 |
| Very little | 30 | 38 | 38 |
| Some | 28 | 26 | 21 |
| A lot | 5 | 2 | 3 |
| Any disagreement or upset | 64 | 67 | 62 |
| Packed lunches | | | |
| None | 60 | 51 | 63 |
| Very little | 29 | 38 | 29 |
| Some | 13 | 11 | 8 |
| A lot | 1 | 1 | - |
| Any disagreement Or upset | 40 | 49 | 37 |

| Table IX Strategies to avoid potential conflict | |
|---|--|
| Statements from the qualitative data | Family decision making strategy |
| We discuss all the options together until we can all agree on one | Bargaining |
| I narrow down the acceptable options and then allow the child to choose | Bargaining |
| We/I give in if the child strikes a deal (e.g. offers to do something of value in exchange | Bargaining |
| GRO will be compromised or suppressed for the sake of harmony | Bargaining |
| I listen to other points of view but I make the final decision | Legitimate |
| My partner listens to other points of view and my partner makes the final decision | Legitimate |
| My partner and I both listen to other points of view and we jointly make the final decision | Coalition |
| I tend to side with my child/children | Coalition |
| My partner tends to side with my child/children | Coalition |
| We/I give in if the child gets very upset | Emotion |
| I try to foresee areas of disagreement and try to avoid them | Experience |