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INFLUENCE OF CHANGING SOCIO-ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE ON CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION

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Abstract

The consumer decision making process is complex and important in determining purchase behavior. Many researches and marketers study in this field to identify how consumer makes purchasing decision. Consumer behavior is influenced by several factors and social class is also one of these factors. The purpose of this study is explaining how social class affects consumer behavior. The purpose of present study was to find out the gender and social class difference on interpersonal influence susceptibility on buying behavior. It was hypothesized that "Female buyers would be more susceptible on interpersonal influence as compare to male buyers. It was also hypothesized that "there would be significant difference between low, middle and high socioeconomic class buyers on susceptibility to interpersonal influences. Sample consisted of 135 (70 female and 65 male in which 51 from lower socioeconomic class, 47 from middle socioeconomic class and 37 were taken from high socioeconomic). The age range of the sample was between 21 to 40 years and education level was at least graduation. The sample was selected from Karachi. Personal data form was administered to gather the demographic information and to find out socioeconomic class. Then a Scale of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (Beardon, Netemeyer, and Teel, 1989)1 was administered to measure interpersonal influence susceptibility on buying products. After scoring, T-Test and one way ANOVA was applied. The results indicate non significant difference among females and males, but significant difference between low, middle and high socioeconomic class buyers on susceptibility to interpersonal influence and that high socioeconomic class are comparatively more susceptible. Additional findings indicate specific differences in males, females on three socioeconomic classes and overall on different educational level

Keyword: Consumer Behavior; Consumer; Social class; Social; stratification

INTRODUCTION

The consumer socialization theory suggests that as children grow up and become consumers, their processing of cognitive and social stimuli depends on their age and family structure. Parents and peers as socialization agents and constitute the social environment in which children learn to become consumers. In this research accordingly identified several differences in socialization practices according to children's age-related stages of development and socio-economic contexts that is family structures, member and system in an emerging market context. Also, the peer group has considered as socialization agent under the study and identified how the consumer socialization among children impacted by them.

Children are first exposed to socialization when they accompany their parents to stores, malls and the like. Initially, the children only request to buy their favorite products; however, with the passage of time, they become more assertive of their preferred choices. Until the age of five, they mostly need help of their parents and grandparents and by early years they become independent consumers.

The socialization agents for children are family, peers and media, with family sex role orientation, parental style and communication pattern playing significant roles. In this chapter, the researcher presented the suitable tables with both descriptive and inferential statistical tools to give insights into consumer socializations among children by their parents and peer group. The hypotheses were



constructed to provide evidence whether these select family and peer group variables influences on children's consumer socialization process.

An important determinant of an individual's behavior is other individuals' influence (Bearden et al., 1989); social influence is an important determinant of consumer behavior. This is reflected in models of consumer decision-making that incorporate social norms (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) 2 and interpersonal considerations (Miniard and Cohen, 1981) 3 as antecedents of behavioral intentions. Consumer socialization is the process by which people develop consumer-related skills, knowledge, and attitudes (Moschis and Churchill 1978) 4 . Various types of theories (e.g., developmental, social learning, social systems) have been used to explain consumer socialization over an individual's life cycle. Perhaps the most popular theory in communication and advertising research is the social learning model (Moschis and George 1976) 5 , which generally views socialization as an outcome of environmental forces applied to the individual (Bandura 1969) 6 . The individual is viewed as a passive participant in the learning process, and the development of beliefs and attitudes results from the interaction with others. The three main elements of that socialization theory are socialization agents, social structural variables, and outcomes. According to social learning theory, the socialization agents and other social structural variables are instrumental in shaping an individual's attitudes and behaviors (McLeod and O'Keefe 1972) 7 The socialization agents transmit norms, attitudes, and behaviors to the individual and socialization is assumed to take place during the individual's interaction with the agents. Socialization agents may be any person, institution, or organization directly involved with the individual. In the consumer behavior literature they include television advertising parents, school, and peers (Moschis and Churchill 1978) 8 . The social setting within which the interaction of individual and socialization agent takes place is the second important aspect of socialization. The social setting is often defined in terms of social structural variables such as gender, race, and family size (Moschis and Churchill 1978) 8 . The third major element of social learning theory is outcomes. The end result of the socialization process is the acquisition of attitudes and behaviors often referred to as outcomes or consumer skills.

Consumer susceptibility is defined as the need to identify or enhance one's image with significant others through the acquisition and use of products and brands, the willingness to conform to the expectation of the others regarding purchase decision, and services by observing others and /or seek information from others. An important determinant of an individual's behavior is other's influence. Portrayals of products being consumed in social situations and the use of prominent/attractive spokespersons endorsing products is evident of this belief. Models used to explain consumer behaviors frequently include interpersonal influence. These models recognize that consumer behavior cannot be fully understand unless consideration is given to the effect to the interpersonal influence on development of attitudes, norms, values, aspirations and purchase behavior 7 (Stafford and Cohanougher 1977) 12. Early researches (e.g. Allen 1965) 13, which demonstrated that individuals differ in their responses to the social influences. Susceptibility to interpersonal influence appears to be an important individual difference variable for study of consumer behavior, it unfortunately has been neglected as general trait in recent literature. However numerous researches recent articles from psychological and consumer researches have demonstrated the existence of manifest interpersonal influence upon individual differences in decision making process e.g., (Cohen and Golden 1972 14; Kasarjian and Robertson 1981 15; Moscovici 1985 16 ; Sherif 1935 17). In consumer researches these studies include the effort of Ford and Ellis (1980) 18, Moschis (1976) 19 , Stafford (1976) 20, and Witt and Bruce (1972) 21. However, most of these investigated the tendencies to conform to group norms or to modify their judgment based upon on other evaluation and did not address the various dimension to interpersonal influences operate in given situation. Only few studies address the dimension of susceptibility to interpersonal influence and its effect on decision making process. In this regards



Deutsch and Gerard (1955) 22, posited that interpersonal influence is manifested through either normative or informational influences.

Brunkrant and Cousineau (1975) 23 defined normative influence as the tendencies to confirm the expectations of others. A consumer research has separated normative influence into value expressive utilitarian influences (Price, Feick, and Higie 1987)24. Value expressiveness reflects the individual's desire to enhance self-image by association with reference group. Value expressiveness is motivated by the individual's desire to enhance or support his or her self concept through referent identification Value expressive influence operate through the process of identification, which occur when an individual adopts a behavior or opinion of others because the behavior or opinion is associated with satisfying a self defining relationship (Pierce at al, 1987). Value expressive influence was found to very across selection decisions of products that differed in consumption conspicuousness and of services that varied regarding consumer preference heterogeneity and referent co orientation (similarity). Utilitarian influences the other type of normative influences mentioned, is reflected in individuals attempt to comply with the expectation of others to achieve rewards or to avoid punishment, and it operate through process of compliance (Burkrant and Cousneau 1975) 23. Compliance occurs when individuals confirm to the expectation of others to gain rewards or to avoid punishments mediated by the others. Deutsh and Gerard (1955) 25 defined informational influence as the tendency to accept information from others has evidence about reality. Informational influence may occur in two ways, individual may either search for information from knowledgeable others or make inferences based upon the observation of others (Park and Lessig 1977)26. Informational influence operates through the process of internalization, which occurs if information from others increases the individual knowledge about some aspect of environment. Informational influence has been found to effect consumer decision process regarding product evaluations (Burkrant and Cousineau 1975 27; Cohen and Goldmen 1972)28 and products/brand selections (Bearden and Etzel 1982; Park and Lessig 1977) 29 .

This extends into the realm of purchasing decisions, especially when the individuals are highly concerned with how others view their behavior (Bearden & Rose, 1990)30. In a study by Chen-Yu and Seock (2002)31, both males and females were asked to complete a survey by answering questions about how they shop for clothing. For both male and female adolescents, conformity was found to be a significant motivation to purchase certain clothing (Chen-Yu & Seock, 2002)

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the concept of consumer socialization of children in the changing socio-economic scenario;
- To identify the influence of family and peer group on sample children consumer socialization;
- To access the impact of media on children consumer socialization process and shopping behavior pattern;

Method Sample

Sample of 135 consisting 70 female and 65 male in which 51 from lower socioeconomic class (including 25 male and 21 female), 47 from middle socio economic class (including 24 male and 23 female) and 37 were taken from high socioeconomic (including 16 male and 26 female), was selected general population of Bangalore. The education level of the respondents was at least graduation and their age ranged between 21 to 40 years.



TABLE 4.1
CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION OF CHILDREN IN GENERAL

SL. NO.	Statement		Scale (n = 513)					Mean	S.D.
			SA 5	A 4	N 3	D 2	SD 1		
1	Socialization is a phenomenon; primarily it shapes and develops children's cognitive ability and behaviour as consumers.	n	199	177	99	23	15	4.02	0.918
		%	38.8	34.5	19.3	4.5	2.9		
2	Processes by which young people (i.e., children and adolescents) acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace.	n	187	179	81	41	25	4.15	0.982
		%	36.5	34.9	15.8	8.0	4.9		
3	Socialization shapes the development of consumerism among the children	n	218	164	95	23	13	4.07	0.944
		%	42.5	32.0	18.5	4.5	2.5		
4	Children are prime purchase decision makers in they help their parents make various market choices.	n	208	198	73	20	14	4.10	0.962
		%	40.5	38.6	14.2	3.9	2.7		
5	Initially, the children only request to buy their favorite products; however, with the passage of time, they become more assertive of their preferred choices	n	241	153	84	23	12	3.90	0.757
		%	47.0	29.8	16.4	4.5	2.3		

(Source: Field Survey)

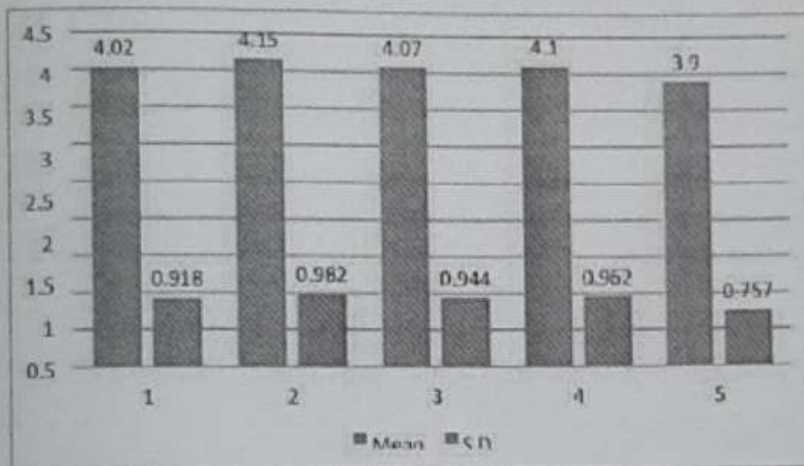
ANALYSIS

The table 4.1 depicts that socialization is a phenomenon and primarily it shapes and develops children's cognitive ability as consumers (Mean=4.02, SD=0.918). Followed by processes by which children and adolescents acquires skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace. (Mean=4.15, SD=0.982). The respondents felt that the socialization shapes the development of consumerism among the children. Eventually, the children only request to buy their favorite products; however, with the passage of time, they



become more assertive of their preferred choices (Mean=3.90, SD=0.757).

FIGURE 4.1



CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION OF CHILDREN IN GENERAL

INFERENCE

Socialization of the consumer is the process in which the individual constantly harmonizes himself or herself with the environment by learning or changing new attitudes, values, and current norms. Socialization of the consumer is only possible through the interaction of individual factors (including age, gender, socioeconomic level, life period), socialization factors (including family, school, mass media tools, cultural variation), and learning mechanisms (cognitive development and social learning theory). Thus, learned characteristics such as knowledge, attitudes, and skills, have influence on various manifestations of child consumers and helps harmonization with the environment.

TABLE 4.2

NATURE OF CHILDREN CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION

SL. NO.	Statement		Scale (n = 513)					Mean	S D
			SA 5	A 4	N 3	D 2	SD 1		
1	Consumer's expectations will increase when they aware of product availability.	n	201	152	78	44	38	3.85	0.867
		%	39.2	29.6	15.2	8.6	7.4		
2	Product quality specification about fast moving consumer goods will be enhanced through socialization	n	222	162	89	22	18	4.07	1.044
		%	43.3	31.6	17.3	4.3	3.5		
	Brands can be identified and	n	207	190	74	23	19		



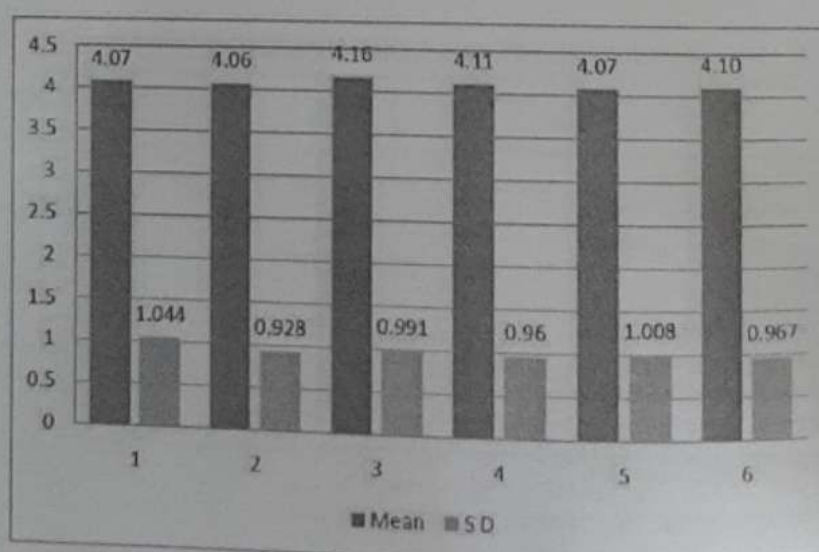
3	preferred by children in their daily life	%	40.4	37.0	14.4	4.5	3.7	4.06	0.928
4	Parent-child relationship enhances the socialization as early as possible.	n	239	165	74	23	12	4.16	0.991
		%	46.6	32.2	14.4	4.5	2.3		
5	Socialization of children boosts up sales of certain fast moving consumer goods.	n	209	195	77	19	13	4.11	0.960
		%	40.7	38.0	15.0	3.7	2.5		
6	It creates huge demand for products and services by children.	n	218	164	95	23	13	4.07	1.008
		%	42.5	32.0	18.5	4.5	2.5		
7	Advertising's persuasive nature increases with the age of the child.	n	208	198	73	20	14	4.10	0.967
		%	40.5	38.6	14.2	3.9	2.7		

(Source: Field Survey)

ANALYSIS

There are five statements that have been given to sample respondents in connection with nature of consumer socialization among children. The above table portrayed that consumer's expectations will increase when they aware of product availability (Mean=3.85, SD=0.867). The parent-child relationship enhances the socialization as early as possible. (Mean=4.16, SD=0.991). The respondents agreed that the Socialization of children boosts up sales of certain fast moving consumer goods and it creates demand for fast moving consumer goods and services by children. The mean scores and standard deviations stood at 4.11, 4.07 and 0.960 and 1.008 respectively.

FIGURE 4.2
NATURE OF CHILDREN CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION





INFERNCE

With change times and globalization through the context and content of information have changed but the cultural shifts among children drastically different compared to earlier scenario. Children currently enjoy a priority role in society, which was not noticed in the previous generations. Children are influencers and they direct the purchase through their parents by "Kidfluence". This phenomenon is globally prevalent, with India including Bengaluru also witnessing the same.

However, with the rise in nuclear families and dual earning couples, increase in divorce rates, increase in single parent households, delayed parenthood, hyper parenting, rise in children TV and Media channels and so on are inducing the children in family decision making to a large extent.

TABLE 4.3

FACTOR INFLUENCING CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION IN CHILDREN

SL. NO.	Statement		Scale (n = 513)					Mea n	S D
			SA 5	A 4	N 3	D 2	SD 1		
1	Children have greater exposure to the global markets	n	205	172	94	28	14	4.03	1.023
		%	40.0	33.5	18.3	5.5	2.7		
2	Rise in disposable income and changing family profile.	n	213	159	91	31	19	4.01	1.081
		%	41.5	31.0	17.7	6.0	3.7		
3	The consumer in India is more modern and urban, with greater buying capacities	n	203	192	96	13	9	4.11	0.915
		%	39.6	37.4	18.7	2.5	1.8		
4	Cultural change in the modern market.	n	199	193	89	21	11	4.07	0.949
		%	38.8	37.6	17.3	4.1	2.1		
5	The Indian consumers have grown to be entirely different in the past two decades (millennial)	n	211	201	67	19	15	4.12	0.969
		%	41.1	39.2	13.1	3.7	2.9		
6	More than 32 percent of the population in India is below	n	189	191	79	39	15	3.97	1.053



	the age of 16 years.	%	36.8	37.2	15.4	7.6	2.9		
7	Rapid growth of technology boosts up socialization of children at the early age.	n	217	157	99	27	13	4.05	1.016
		%	42.3	30.6	19.3	5.3	2.5		
8	Many social and television media available in the modern society for children as well as adolescents.	n	198	172	86	36	21	3.96	1.100
		%	38.6	33.5	16.8	7.0	4.1		

(Source: Field Survey)

ANALYSIS

Now-a-days, children have greater awareness of global market. As people considered as global village everyone can be reached by the marketers. Rise in disposable income and changing family profile from joint to nuclear, physical to virtual it has been changed the entire landscape of consumer socialization of children. The consumers in India is more modern, techno-based, branded and urbanized, with greater buying capacities and economically sound. Cultural transformations in the modern market give route for early socialization among children in the modern market.

One can notice that Indian children have grown and developed entirely unique after becoming a millennial. Even below the age of 16 years children's population is sound in India compared to other countries. Rapid growth of technology boosts up socialization of children at the early age. Many entertainment, communication and social media are available in the modern society for children as well as for adolescents. The mean score for eight statements responses ranged between 3.96 and 4.12. The standard deviation scores for these responses on a five point scale is registered between 0.915 and 1.100 for the eight statements given to them.

INFERENCE

Children are an enormously powerful medium for relationship building in India. They not only influence markets in terms of the parental decision-making to buy certain kinds of products, they are also future consumers with the booming economy. Indian parents are marching forward in the race of acquiring material possessions for their children which is commonly found in the Indian parent sample. Children now-a-days have been recognized as a powerful segment influencing the family decision making process and hence have received a lot of attention from the marketers, advertisers, and others in fast moving consumer goods sector. The demographic and psychographic profiles of Bangaloreans, expose the significant influence of the educated and affluent parents in empowering their children as more active influencers/consumers.

DISCUSSION

The result shown in table 1 indicates that there is no significant difference ($t = 0.48, df = 133, P > 0.05$) between male and female to interpersonal susceptibility. This indicates that males and females are almost equally susceptible to interpersonal influence while buying home appliance products. The reason lying in the fact that both are equally affected by the environmental (i.e. social) forces and gender difference is least important in this interplay. Secondly being high involvement products



both the gender takes equally interest while purchasing and the marketing strategies are made in such a way that they target both the gender. Thirdly as we are family oriented society so most of the time purchasing home appliances is a family decision so again only gender becomes less important in this case. Results of table 2 shows that there is significant difference ($P > 5$) that each group are susceptible to interpersonal influence on buying behavior at different levels. While analyzing the difference, there is a significance difference among lower-high and middle-high socioeconomic group, but there is no significant difference in middle-lower group for susceptibility.

As high socioeconomic class have more resources and are status oriented and they pursue for quality products and thus collect more information or seek guidance from those around them, which makes them vulnerable to susceptibility. Resources and constraints" encompass all the ways in which particular life conditions can be differentiated by social class. Any condition that affects a person's place in society, shapes their opportunities, and colors their view of the world could be construed as a resource or constraint (Mayer and Buckley 1970) 57. Underlying this broad admission is the understanding that all distinctive life conditions can be interpreted (albeit with varying degrees of influence) as resources or constraints, in that they have potential to influence and interact with each other in a holistic way. It will be argued that resources other than money constitute major contributors to the superior quality of life experienced by higher-class groups. Henry (1995) 58 found in higher-class subjects a strong focus on preference for rational logical thinking, and a high value placed on power of the intellect.

These higher-class subjects described themselves as inquisitive and interested in new things, seeking to broaden their minds. Halson and Baron (1994) 59 identified distinctive cognitive styles in problem solving and decision-making, in that higher-class individuals tend to use a more elaborated, rational-analytic style. Ability to pay for goods and services determines the material affluence of one's lifestyle. Modes of thought concentrated within the higher classes, including willingness to take on stressful challenges, achievement motivation, and focus on planning to attain future goals, can be construed as resources that better equip the individual for life's challenges. (Halson and Baron 1994) 59 causes them to pursue and integrate knowledge that can constitute an advantageous tool in the new knowledge economy. Comparatively lower socioeconomic class has tendency not to plan for future (Kohn et al. 1990) 60, and limited social interaction so mainly purchase product on the basis of utility and resources and seek less information which might makes them less susceptible than other socioeconomic class. Table 3 results indicate that females have significant difference among the three socioeconomic classes for the interpersonal influence susceptibility, thus again signifying the contribution of socioeconomic factors among females for interpersonal influence.

Table 4 results indicate that there is only significant difference between males in lower to high socioeconomic class for the interpersonal influence susceptibility, shows that male of low and middle socioeconomic class are almost equally susceptible but difference counts when the gap between the classes increase. Combining both tables 3&4 reflects that gender difference is not playing active role rather socioeconomic status is more significant one. Table 5 results indicate that there is significant difference between respondents having education master-postmaster and bachelor-to postmaster to the interpersonal influence susceptibility, reflects that there is significant difference for susceptibility with increase in education.

Table 4.3 results indicate that there is only significant difference of individuals with graduation education when proceeding from lower-high socioeconomic class. This again depicts the importance of socioeconomic class over education. In addition results indicate that individuals differs with master education in lower-high, and middle-high socioeconomic class for interpersonal influence susceptibility. Individuals with postmaster education in each



socioeconomic class does not differ for the interpersonal influence susceptibility, thus socioeconomic class is less important than education while being at this level of education.

CONCLUSION

The most revealing outcome of this conceptual paper is the identification of theoretical gaps in the existing body of knowledge relating to consumer socialization. Accordingly the researchers attempt to re-visit the prevailing knowledge with regard to socialization of consumers and thereby identified the present findings of the phenomenon. Consequently it is revealed that many studies conducted in the respective field have concerned on the favourable aspect of consumer socialization or in other words they are the desirable outcomes of the socialization process. Another imperative judgment is that the identification of antecedents and the consumer socialization agents being conventional where there are many other significant aspects which are worthwhile to address along with the traditional variables.

With the intention of addressing the above limitations related to the area of consumer socialization, this research paper identifies the significance of studying deviant consumer socialization with special reference to compulsive buying behavior of Sri Lankan consumers. In respect to antecedents of consumer socialization; it is advanced that personality would be an important predictor in the agent – learner interaction process where it is postulated to have significant differences among the socialization agents depending on the personality traits of consumers. Emphasizing on consumer socialization agents, it is proposed that inclusion of social media as an agent in the interaction process will give important insights relating to deviant consumer socialization since social media has become one of the major platforms where many consumer interactions are being taken place. Conclusively this paper contemplates to provide a more cohesive and a holistic view to the phenomenon of deviant consumer socialization via addressing the limitations and gaps in the prevailing body of knowledge.

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