

# Role And Influence Of Children In Buying Children's Apparel

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## INTRODUCTION

*Children are one third of our population and our entire future ~ Select panel for the promotion of child health, 1981*

Some may say that children are just children- laughing, crying, playing, juggling between home, school, classes, tuition etc. I wish the picture was this simple but we all know that it is not. There was a time when children were not spoken of as spenders or customers but as savers and future customers. But today, they are viewed as three markets in one:

- They are current market that spends money on their desires.
  - They are a future market for most goods and services.
  - They are also a market of influentials who cause many billions of dollars of purchases among their parents.
- (Mc Neal 1987).

However, the research done on this market segment in India is very less, especially considering the fact that as per statistics, India's population is more than 1.1 bn and today, population under 18 years of age comprises a major part of our population. In 2005, about 36% of the population was below the age of 15. The broad based age and sex population pyramid by UN clearly shows this youthfulness. (Haub Carl and Sharma O.P, 2006). Also the annual disposable income in India has increased from USD mn 468,998.16 in 2004 to USD mn 754,736.09 in 2008 (Euro Monitor International).

Thus the potential of children's market in India is huge and needs more research. While western authors have categorized products for direct consumption by the child or parents or for the household, Indian researchers have not followed this typology. Researchers in India have generally focused on durable purchases (Singh and Kaur, 2006). Children in India may not have the purchasing power comparable to their western counterparts but are still the centre of the universe in the Indian family system and can pull the parents to visit a place time and again. They not only influence markets in terms of parental decisions (making them to buy a certain kind of product), but they also are future consumers. Hence, more investigation in children's role in family decision making is imperative. (Kaur and Singh, 2006). In view of the above, the aim of this paper is to analyze the role and influence of children in buying children's apparel.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The apparel market in India is estimated at Rs 117,300 cr and kids wear market is estimated at Rs 28,800 cr. This makes it 24.5% of the total apparel market. (Technopak advisors, 2008).

### Children as consumers

Children constitute three different markets: the primary, the influencer and the future market (Mc Neal, 1987)

### Change in roles

The family structure in India has changed considerably in the last two decades. Joint households are making way for nuclear families. There is an increase in the number of working women and a growing awareness among women to carve a career while managing the family. Overridden by guilt over protracted absence, fatigue and work pressure, the parent centered family has changed its orbit and has become child centered. (Rajesh Sud, 2007). Hence the role of children in family decision making is increasing.

As per a research in Denmark, the family communication has become more open and democratic and this openness in family communication creates a possibility for children to achieve influence on family decision making. (Tufte, 1999). Another research says that with parents working many hours away from home, it leaves less time for housework. The housework becomes a matter of distribution and negotiation between husband, wife and children. This results in higher influence of children (Mc Neal, 1992). There is definitely no doubt that changing scenario in India has also brought about changes but the question is to what extent. Are the children the final deciders also?

In western research, children have been reported to have influence in purchase of products like snacks, toys, cereals, holidays/ vacations (Ahuja and Stinson 1993, Jensen, 1995, Williams and Veek 1998). However,

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researches in India with children have focused more on consumer durables (Kaur and Singh, 2006). It is important to understand their influence in articles of their use or the products with which they identify.

### **SOURCES OF INFLUENCE**

One must also understand as to how are the children educated about various products (who is their source of influence). While in earlier times parents definitely had a strong influence in inculcating values and educating children about various products, the advent of technology in the recent times has changed the scenario. Today it is difficult to tell whether parents are influencing children or children are influencing parents.

According to Piaget's theory about childhood development, there are four stages of development of the child. The first level is called the Sensory motor stage and lasts from 0-2 years. The child develops motor skills and explores objects that can be seen, felt and touched. The next is the Pre-operational stage from 2-7 years. A child can now pretend and remember and can now begin to understand symbols more complex than simple words. He picks up these symbols and uses them to communicate and play. Pretending now becomes easy for the child but he/she tends to be extremely self-centered. The child gets away from this self-centered stage and moves to Concrete Operations stage from 7-11 years. The child advances in his/her ability to use symbols in a logical way. Concrete problems can be tackled and successfully understood. Putting things in order and classification abilities are learnt at this stage. From 12/13 years of age through adulthood, we live in Formal Operations stage. The child is able to do abstract thinking and apply to the real world.

Researchers have found that purchase request by children are strongly stimulated by commercials or by friends who have purchased the product (Jensen, 1995). In an Indian study it was also found that in adolescent girls, influence of friends and peers was the main reason for purchasing clothing items. (Kotwal, Gupta, Devi, 2008). The appearance of a spokes character in an appealing or unappealing fashion had no bearing on the participants' ultimate purchase influence/ intention of food product (6-9 years, 10-12 years). Younger kids indicate that they want to purchase the advertised food product more than the elder kids. The younger kids might have also preferred the animation style of commercials with older kids feeling as if they are too mature to watch cartoons. (Anonymous, 2007).

For the purpose of this study, children in the age group of 8-12 years were considered as this is the time when they start realizing the power of their influence and how to use it. It would be interesting to study in the Indian context as to how do they use it and who is their source of influence.

#### **Who is more influential- child or parent?**

One can say with confidence that two decades back in India, parents were more influential (in case of an argument, the chances of the parent winning the argument were more) but today, the children enjoy a different relationship with their parents.

Using social power theory it was found that when children feel entitled and privileged, they resort to negative influence attempts like deception, anger, begging etc. If they think that parents have legitimate power to direct action, they utilize positive influence attempts like asking politely etc. (Williams and Burns, 2000). Daughters were generally more influential than sons. Father and elder daughters and mothers and sons were found to work together to gain influence. Influence of a mother was strongest during negotiation and outcome stage when both the children were male. Mothers in families with two daughters had greater decision power than when the family had an elder daughter and a younger son (Lee and Collins, 1990).

The literature review pointed repeatedly that research done on buying behavior of children in India was very less. Out of the vast gamut of opportunities available, it was decided to concentrate on a few questions.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The present study was conducted in a few schools of Pune. A sample of 110 boys and girls were taken (age group 8-12 years). Out of the total, 61 were boys and 49 were girls. The data was collected over a month in October 2008. The children were personally asked the questions. This was done to make sure that they understand the question completely before answering. To further supplement the results, observation method was also used. Researcher was present in malls/ shopping places to observe the buying behavior of apparel by children and their parents.

To understand the difference of opinion, if any, between children and parents, the same set of questions were also asked to parents (number-61, age group of children-8-12 years).

The data obtained was compiled and tabulated. Analyses of data were done both qualitatively and quantitatively using simple number and percentage.

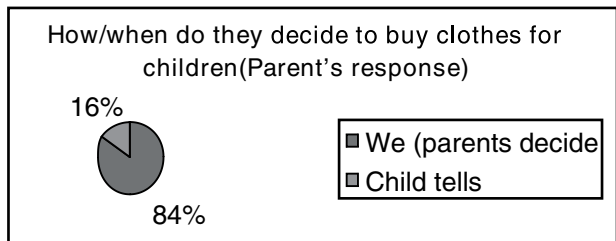
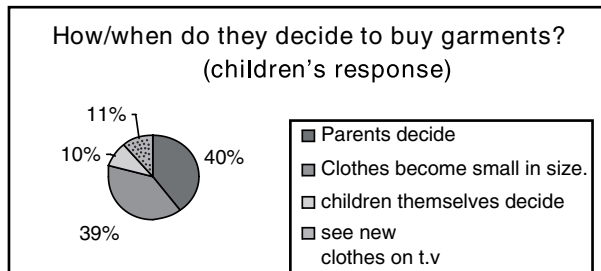
### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Buying is a complex process with various stages.

- 1) Need recognition.
- 2) Pre- purchase search.
- 3) Evaluation of alternatives.
- 4) Purchase.
- 5) Post Purchase evaluation.

### 1) How is the need felt to buy clothes?

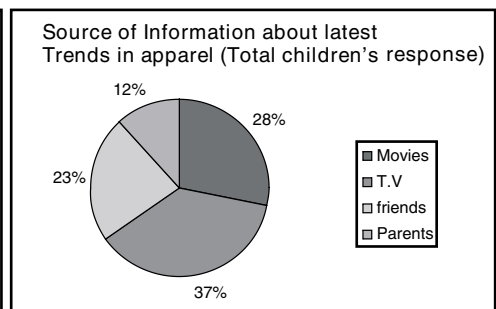
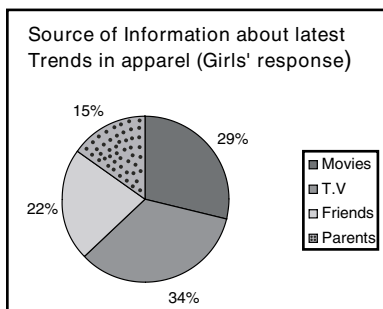
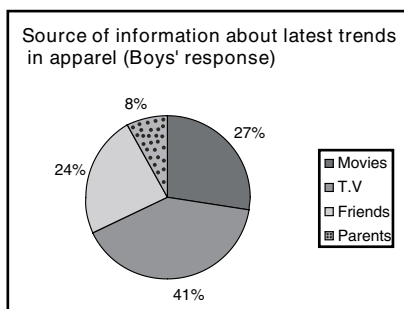
The children were asked about their decision regarding purchase of garments. 40% of the children said that their parents decided when to purchase the garments and 39% said that they bought the garments when they became small. This observation was in conformity with parents' reply of which 87% said they decide when to buy clothes for children.



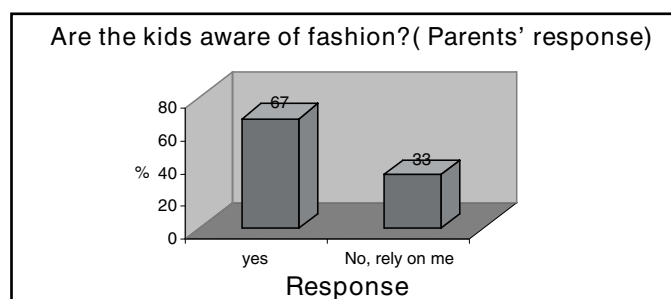
Thus, the decision to buy clothes was based on need and the first step of buying was dominated by parents.

### 2) Are the children aware of fashion trends and what is their source of information?

All the children were of the opinion that they are aware of the latest trends in fashion. T.V was the major source of information for them. 40% of the boys and 33% of the girls identified T.V as the major source of information regarding fashion. Movies and friends followed with 27% boys and 29% girls identifying movies and 24% boys and 22% girls identifying friends as source of information. Parents as source of information about fashion trends figured last.



The same question was also checked with parents. However 32% felt that their children are not aware of fashion trends and that they are the only source of information about fashion for their children. Thus more parents feel that children rely on them for advice, compared to the fact that lesser percentage of children identify them as a source of information regarding fashion trends.



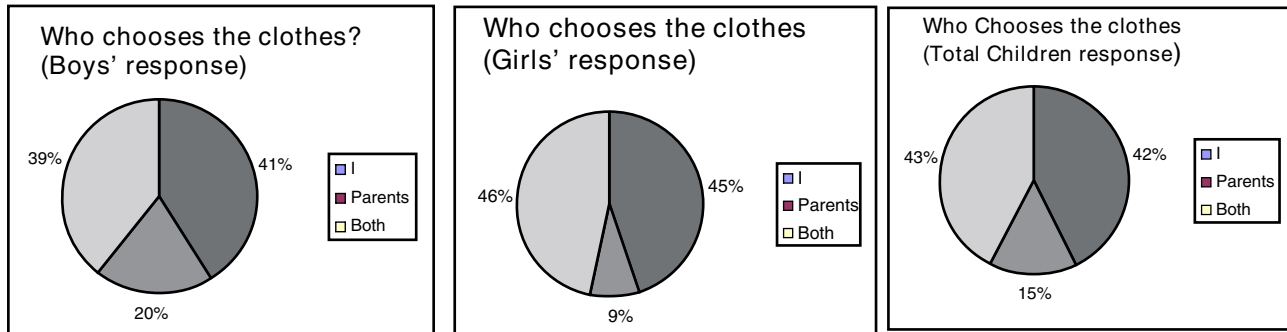
### 3) Who chooses the clothes when they go shopping?

41% of the boys said that they choose their clothes when they go shopping as compared to 44% girls who said that they decide their clothes while shopping. While 39% of the boys said that the decision is taken jointly with

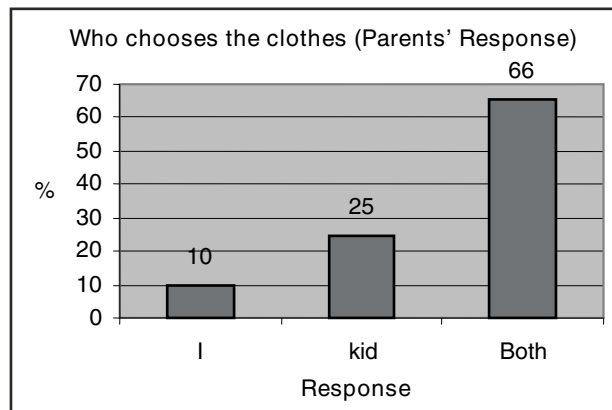
parents, 47% of the girls said that the decision is taken jointly with parents. 20% of the boys allowed the parents to choose clothes for them and only 8% girls allowed the parents to choose their clothes.

Thus, while girls are more involved in decision taking either alone or jointly with parents, comparatively a higher percentage of boys do not mind if parents take the decision and choose their clothes.

This was also in tune with the observation results at various malls. It was observed that girls of that age group take more interest in choosing clothes as compared to boys of the same age group. Invariably, in most malls, the toy section or play box is near the apparel section and boys prefer to spend time at this section.

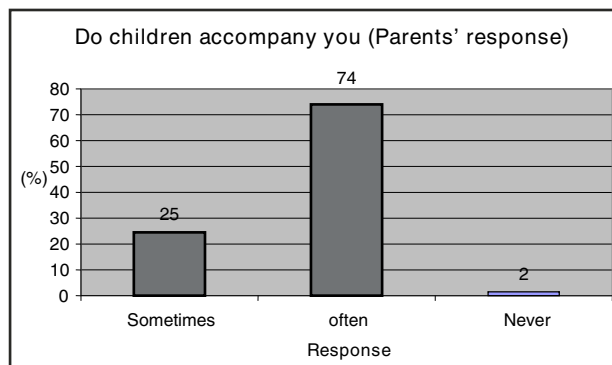


Again there was dissimilarity between the views of the parents and children. 42.5% of the total children said that they are the lone deciders and equally, 42.5% of the total children said that it is a joint decision. In contrast, majority of the parents (66%) said that it was a joint decision and hence they felt that they too have a say in the decision of choosing clothes.



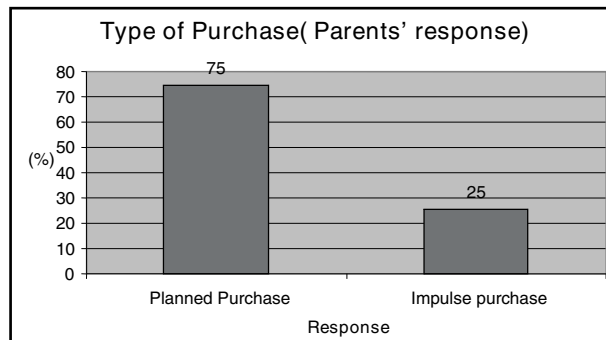
#### 4.a) Do parents take children along with them when they buy clothes for them?

The results quoted in (3) were also relevant because when parents were asked if children accompanied them in shopping, then 74% parents said often and 24% said sometimes. Thus, when a parent is buying apparel, the chances of the children being with them are high.



b) Also 75% of the parents said that buying apparel was a planned purchase. This was relevant because though they may not be the final deciders but the child of that age group is dependent on them for both financial support

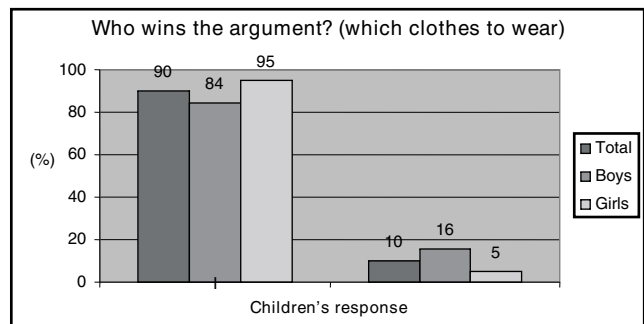
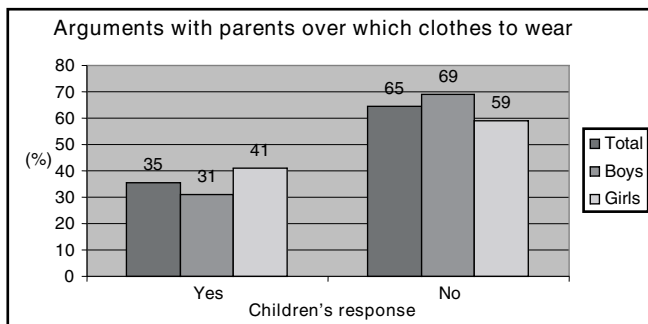
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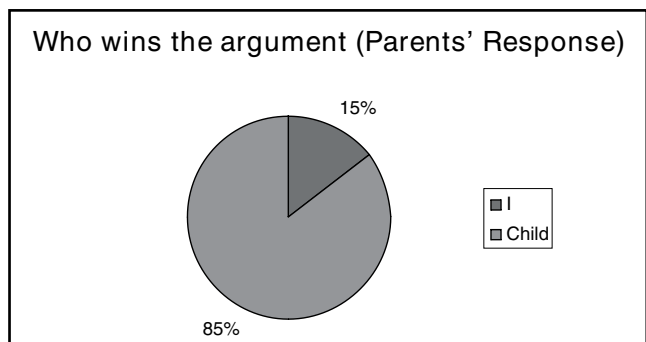
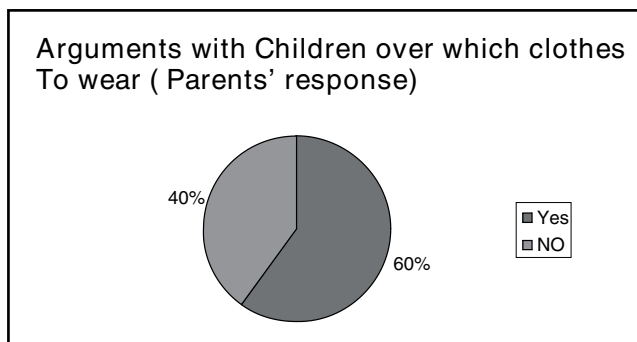
##### 5. Are there arguments between parents and children over what to wear and if yes, who wins the argument?

Attempt was also made to understand if children appreciate when they are allowed to choose their own clothes. The same was done by asking the children if they had arguments with parents over which clothes to wear. 64% of the children said that they did not have any arguments with parents regarding clothes. The others who said that they had arguments with parents over clothes, 90% said that they won the argument.

When compared between boys and girls, it was seen that girls have more arguments as compared to boys. This can be explained by the fact that boys of that age group are less interested in choosing clothes as compared to girls.



Comparatively more parents (60%) said that they have arguments with their children over what to wear. However, even they agreed that ultimately, ( 85%) it was the child whose decision prevailed.



The data shows that while in the configuration stage, the parents dominate but in other stages of the buying process, the decisions of the children dominate.

### CONCLUSIONS

Today, the influence of children in buying apparel has definitely increased. The children today are aware of the fashion and its latest trends. T.V in India has definitely played an important role in acting as a major source of information to them about fashion. From a time when only two channels were available, to a time when the number of T.V channels are available 24 hours a day, the advent of T.V has been a major source in educating children about fashion. The role of movies and friends is also important in educating children about fashion.

*(Cont. on page 63)*

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### *(Cont. from page 46)*

There exists a difference between the views of children and their parents. Parents believe their influence to be much more in decision making process as compared to the importance the children give them.

Though the parents' opinion dominates in deciding when to buy, it is the child's opinion which is important while they choose the apparel. Since they take part in the decision making process, the arguments with parents are less and even when there are arguments, the probability of the child having his way is more. Girls are more active in this decision making process as compared to boys.

The study provides a preliminary investigation to understand the buying behavior of children for apparels. It would be interesting to understand if size of the family or sex of children in family affects the behavior in any way. Also it would be interesting to understand what strategies children use to win the arguments. The study was done for children's apparel-future researches can also examine if the behavior is true for other products also which are important to children like food, toys etc.

Children are an important consumer segment in India and the scope of more research in understanding their buying behavior is imperative.

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