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## Child's Use Of Pester Power In India

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### Abstract:

*Children constitute a major consumer market, they have very strong power to influence purchase decisions, and they have been playing important role in the family buying process with direct purchasing power for snacks and sweets, and indirect purchase influence while shopping for big-ticket items. Children are getting stronger and they use different strategies to persuade their parents. This paper attempts to highlight the different strategies which children today use to influence their parents. A child's demographic factors like age, gender and number of child's siblings have an important role in the usage of different influence tactics by children. The study was conducted through primary survey (questionnaire) on 175 children in the age-group 8-12 years. Collected data was analyzed based on frequency distributions. The collected data were summarized, coded, and manipulated by using Statistical Package for Social Scientists 16.0 (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel. The general findings of the study suggest that demographics play an important role only in few influence strategies like emotional and persuasion. Marketers should understand this and make effort in tapping the right chord to make their product more buyable by families.*

### KEYWORD:

Influence, strategies, children, parents, purchase decision, marketing

### INTRODUCTION

India is the youngest country in the world where a significant population is very young. This makes the discussion about children's influence very fruitful. Children constitute a very critical element to marketers because they have their own purchasing power, they have high influence on their parents' buying decisions and they are the future consumers. A variety of influences and experiences contour the consumer behavior of the young consumer all over the world. During 1940-50s, kids were not considered consumers in their own right but only the extensions of their parents' purchasing power. But with the dawn of extensive media: television, newspaper, magazines, comics and internet, kids has become full-fledged consumers and, consequently, they have become a very important target market for the marketers. Researches shows that today children have the influencing power for almost all product categories (Martensen & Gronholdt, 2008). Whether the product is for child's own use like toys, snacks, clothes, etc or the product for family use like family vacation or the product for household like rice, food, tea / coffee, child is having very strong influencing power (Belch et al., 1985). However most of the previous studies have incorporated the parent's side, very few have actually studied children. The questionnaire is usually filled by the parents and child is neglected or considered as too young to understand and fill. But there is huge difference in the perception of parent's vis-à-vis child. In this study the respondent are children.

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## 2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

### 2.1 Demographic Influences:

Demographics are the population statistics with regard to socioeconomic factors such as age, income, sex, occupation, education, family size, etc. For any research, especially when used to identify consumer markets, these factors play a very important role. Many earlier studies were based on demographics: As the child grows his/her influence in the buying process also increases (Atkin, 1978). With higher family income also the children's role becomes more important for parents. Boys are observed as more knowledgeable and hence more favorable towards consumption. Girls on the other hand are more media focused. Different researchers gave different findings based on gender. The degree of a child's influence varies with age, gender, social class and education (Wimalasiri, 2004). There is not much difference between purchase request frequency for boys and girls (Martensen & Gronholdt, 2008). Few researchers observed males have greater influence than females in the purchase of food for the family (Flurry & Veeck, 2009). On the contrary, one of the researchers found girls had a large influence on family purchase (Thomson et al., 2007). Number of siblings and the birth order of the child may also reflect the extent on child's influence. Later-born / only children have more influence on certain purchases than firstborns (Ronner, Hunt & Mallalieu, 2007). Age factor is also important. Older children have significantly more influence on the family decision making process than younger children (Flurry & Veeck, 2009 ; Thomson et al., 2007).

### 2.2 Product Categories

Children play a very important role in making decisions about the products they use but also decisions concerning the entire family; this prompted researchers, marketers to direct attention to the study of influence of children. According to researchers the products could be categorized in three categories: products for child's own use (toys, snacks, clothes, etc), products for family use (vacation, shampoo, etc) and lastly products for household (rice, food, tea / coffee). Most of the studies in this area are very product or product category based. A major portion of research has been done on products which are directly used / consumed by children like breakfast cereals. Ten out of fifteen studies reviewed here have taken product type as one of the major parameter for study. Children felt they have more influence on purchases that are intended for their use as opposed to purchases that are for family use (Ronner et al., 2007). Children are more influential with regard to products typically aimed at children (e.g., juice, soft drinks, and cereals) than product categories aimed at the family in general (Flurry & Veeck, 2009). A study in Denmark concluded parents perceive children to have moderate impact on decision making, children, on the contrary, think they have quite a high level of impact (Gram, 2007). Family decision-making studies involving children (Belch et al., 1985) investigates family members' influence as a function of product category and stages of the decision making process by questioning husbands, wives and children. The child shows the most influence for decisions regarding cereal and less for other products. The child has greatest influence in the initial stage and less on the final stage of decision-making. The child's influence also increases for sub-decisions, like the color style and brand of products and the child has the least influence on how much money to spend.

### 2.3 Influence Strategies

The terms, influence and persuasion have a very strong and distinctive meaning. Influence is the power to affect a person, thing, or course of events, especially one that operates without any direct or apparent effort. While persuasion is the act of influencing the mind by arguments or reasons offered, or by anything that moves the mind or passions, or inclines the will to a determination. Influence occurs any time, when children attempt to change parent's thoughts, feelings or behaviors. Inducing a change in behavior is called compliance and inducing a change in attitude is called persuasion (Wimalasiri, 2004). Another researcher has very beautifully captured the essence of child's persuasion as . . . persuasion attempts to win "the heart and mind" (Cialdini, 1993). Influence can be defined as changing an individual's behavior, beliefs and attitudes (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 1990). There are many types of resources serve as bases from which family members may derive power. They are normative, economic, affective, personal and cognitive resources (McDonald, 1980). Normative resources are the family's values and norms. Economic resources refer to the monetary control exerted by the income earner. Affective resources encompass interpersonal relationships and belongingness. Personal resources include physical appearance and role competence. Cognitive resources refer to the intelligence of family members. So, husband or wife may use normative

and economic resources in family decision making (Moschis and Churchill, 1978), whereas the child may use affective and cognitive resources in the family interaction to persuade parents.

**Table 1: Scale definitions of influence tactics**

Pressure tactics	The child makes demands, uses threats, or intimidation to persuade you to comply with his/her request
Upward appeal	The child seeks to persuade you, saying that the request was approved or supported by an older member of the family, a teacher or even a family friend
Exchange tactics	The child makes an explicit or implicit promise to give you some sort of service such as washing the car, cleaning the house, or taking care of the baby, in return for a favor
Coalition tactics	The child seeks the aid of others to persuade you to comply with his/her request or uses the support of others as an argument for you to agree with him/her
Ingratiating tactics	The child seeks to get you in a good mood or think favorably of him or her before asking you to comply with a request
Rational persuasion	The child uses logical arguments and factual evidence to persuade you to agree with his/her request
Inspirational appeals	The child makes an emotional appeal or proposal that arouses enthusiasm by appealing to your values and ideals
Consultation tactics	The child seeks your involvement in making a decision

Source: Adapted from Yukl and Falbe (1990) **Error! Bookmark not defined.** by Wimalasiri (2004)**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

The agents (those using the influence tactics) use many strategies to get their way. The inductive research methods were used in categorization of six influence tactics: assertiveness, rationality, ingratiation, exchange, upward appeals and coalitions (Kipnis et al, 1980). Schriesheim & Hinkin (1990) replicated the study by Kipnis et al (1980) and developed new items to measure the same subscales. Yukl & Falbe (1990) and Yukl & Tracey (1992) examined influence tactics from both the agent and target perspective, and also extended Kipnis et al (1980) work by identifying the additional tactics of inspirational appeals, legitimating, consultation, pressure, and personal appeals. The most common influence tactics used by the children include: pressure tactics, upward appeal, exchange tactics, coalition tactics, ingratiating tactic, rational persuasion, inspirational appeals, and consultative tactics (Yukl and Falbe, 1990).

With this extensive literature review and focus groups with the children (aged 8-12 years) and separate focus groups with their parents helped me in identifying different influence tactics which children use today to influence their parents (Table 2). The first one is begging strategy, where children offer some deal (Example: cleaning room in exchange for a chocolate). The second category is of persuasion strategies like convincing parents by quoting "my friends have it", "I have seen this on TV", express opinion, insisting what they want, tell about the brand or they bring any external reason to influence parents. The third category is competition strategies which include any kind of fair play like playing a game of chess to get rewarded if the child wins. Next is the emotional strategy which includes nagging, whining, crying, etc. The fifth category to influence parents is aggressive strategy like not eating. The last one is a fun tactic, where child hide things in the shopping trolley. This helped in the formulation of hypothesis for my study:

- H1:** There is a significant difference in the use of different influence tactics by the two age -groups of children.
- H2:** There is a significant difference in the use of different influence tactics by the gender of the child.
- H3:** There is a significant difference in the use of different influence tactics by the number of sibling a child has.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The empirical data was collected from a sample of 175 children studying in grades 4 and 7 from five different schools located in the National Capital Region (NCR) of India. The age group of the children ranged from 8 to 12 years. The reasons of choosing them as samples were that children of these ages were expected to be mature enough and have been found active and independent shoppers (McNeal, 1992), highly cognitive in consumption choices (Belk et al., 1982) and knowledgeable about products and brands (Ward et al., 1977). A 3-page questionnaire was the research instrument chosen for the survey as it had a number of advantages over other methods. Given that detailed and complicated data was needed for the study and kids being very impulsive, children were asked to complete the questionnaire in their class itself with the absence of the teacher. The questionnaire was tested in a pilot study: problems were identified and the questionnaire revised to ensure that all questions would be understandable to the respondents. The reliability was checked through cronbach alpha. The value of cronbach alpha came to be 0.7 thus the questionnaire was considered reliable for the study. The study was supplemented by secondary data obtained from books, journals, magazines, the internet and other documents. Collected data was analyzed based on frequency distributions. The collected data were summarized, coded, and manipulated by using Statistical Package for Social Scientists 16.0 (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel.

The questionnaire administered to children consists of 40 questions in three parts. In the first part, child demographics were asked like age, gender, number of siblings, birth order, grade, etc. The second part asked questions measuring child's influence in the family buying process for different products and service. A list containing fifteen products and services, namely stationary, food & beverages, clothes, shampoo, toothpaste, grocery, movie tickets, vacation, dining out, computer, video game, mobile phone, car, television and washing machine were presented and children were asked to report their influence level (on a five point Likert's scale: 1 = no influence, 2 = very low influence, 3 = low influence, 4 = high influence and 5 = very high influence) for different products. The third part of the questionnaire is about the different influence techniques used by children to influence parents. The children were asked to report how frequent they use different influence strategies to persuade their parents. Children were reporting on a five point Likert's scale: 1 = never, 2 = at times (rarely), 3 = sometimes, 4 = most of the times and 5 = every time.

### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Demographic factors

This part of the research paper deals with the findings and discussion based on the analysis of the data collected with the instruments of focus groups and questionnaire from the two age groups of Indian children. Of the total 250 questionnaires distributed, 208 were returned but only 175 were found to be usable for study, this gives a return rate of 70 percent. Table 2 summarizes the profile of the children who participated in the survey. Ninety two out of 175 children i.e 52.57% of the children surveyed are in the age-group 8-10 years, while 47.42% are in the age-group 11-12 years. The mean age of the sample population is 10.37 years. Around sixty six percent of the sample population is male and 33.71% is female. The survey is conducted on children with one or more siblings (79.40%) and also those who are single child of their parents (20.57%).

**Table 3: Demographic characteristics of the sample**

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>n (frequency)</i>	<i>percentage</i>
<b>Age-group</b>		
8 - 10	92	52.57
11 - 12	83	47.42
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	116	66.28
Female	59	33.71
<b>No. of siblings</b>		
Single child	36	20.57
With siblings	139	79.40

#### 4.2 Comparison of Various Influencing Strategies across Various Demographic Factors

For testing the hypotheses, T-tests were conducted to see whether demographic factors (gender, age and no. of siblings) have an effect on the type of influence tactics used by children. Table 4, 5 and 6 shows the t values conducted for the sample.

##### 4.2.1 Age

T-test was conducted to examine whether there is a significant difference in the use of influence tactics by the two age-groups of children. From table 3, we can see that the t value is greater than 1.96 for three strategies namely, tell that the brand is famous, bringing an external reason and unnaturally nice to parents. It means that for these three strategies the t value is significant as p is less than 0.05 in all the three cases (p = 0.002, p = 0.040 and p = 0.042 respectively). Children between the age group of 11-12 years have more knowledge about brands, so they use this strategy more often than their other counterparts (as seen from table 3 mean score of 11-12 years of age group  $\mu_2=2.92$  is greater than  $\mu_1=2.29$ ). Similarly this age group also uses any external reason to influence their parents ( $\mu_2=2.16$  is greater than  $\mu_1=1.78$ ). With age, child can understand the complex human emotion system and hence they can use the emotional strategy very well than the younger children of 8-10 years ( $\mu_1=2.39$  is less than  $\mu_2=2.83$ ). So the hypothesis is accepted for the named strategies but for rest of the strategies, H1 is rejected.

**Table 4: T-test for equality of means (age-group)**

Influence Tactics	Mean scores and standard deviation of age-groups			t-test for equality of means (age-group)		
	Age-groups	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	8-10 years 11-12 years	1 2	1 2			
<b>1. Bargaining Strategy</b>						
Offer deals	1 2	2.50 2.69	1.288 1.178	-.997	173	.320
<b>2. Persuasion strategies</b>						
Express opinion on product	1 2	2.90 3.16	1.258 1.076	-1.430	173	.155
Insisting that this is what he/she want	1 2	2.95 3.02	1.337 1.288	-.394	173	.694
Use begging strategies	1 2	2.74 2.96	1.300 1.320	-1.134	173	.259
Tell that all friends have it	1 2	2.45 2.73	1.354 1.221	-1.479	173	.141
Tell about the TV ad he/she saw about product	1 2	2.50 2.70	1.209 1.155	-1.109	173	.269
Tell that the Brand is famous	1 2	2.29 2.92	1.347 1.232	-3.177*	173	.002
Bring an external reason	1 2	1.78 2.16	1.067 1.320	-2.069*	173	.040
<b>3. Competition strategies</b>						
Propose fair competition to win a game	1 2	2.15 2.31	1.342 1.239	-.822	173	.412
<b>4. Emotional strategies</b>						
Nagging & Whining	1 2	2.39 2.37	1.258 1.247	.094	173	.925
Express anger	1 2	2.29 2.63	1.227 1.313	-1.734	173	.085
Be unnaturally nice to parents	1 2	2.39 2.83	1.358 1.480	-2.051*	173	.042
Pretending illness to make parents sympathize	1 2	1.59 1.59	.951 .988	-.023	173	.982
<b>5. Aggressive strategies</b>						
Not eating	1 2	1.98 2.18	1.167 1.407	-1.040	173	.300
Stubbornly acting	1 2	2.18 2.34	1.138 1.242	-.848	173	.398
<b>6. Playing a trick</b>						
Hide things in the shopping trolley	1 2	1.62 1.80	1.015 1.207	-1.045	173	.297

#### 4.2.2 Gender

Another t-test was conducted to examine whether there is a significant difference in the use of influence tactics between boys and girls (table 4). The t value was significant for two strategies: TV ad that child has seen ( $p = 0.030$ ) and emotional strategy of nagging and whining ( $p = 0.048$ ) indicating significant difference between boys and girls in the use these strategies. The girls use emotional strategy of nagging and whining more often than boys ( $\mu_2 = 2.64$  is greater than  $\mu_1 = 2.25$ ). On the other hand, boys use persuasion strategy of telling about the latest TV advertisement more often than girls ( $\mu_1 = 2.73$  is greater than  $\mu_2 = 2.32$ ). So hypothesis H2 is accepted for the two named strategies but for rest of the strategies, H2 is rejected.

**Table 5: T-test for equality of means (gender)**

Influence Tactics	Mean scores and standard deviation of gender 1 = Male (n=116) 2 = Female (n=59)			t-test for equality of means (gender)		
	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
<b>1. Bargaining Strategy</b>						
Offer deals	1	2.58	1.217	-.164	173	.870
	2	2.61	1.287			
<b>2. Persuasion strategies</b>						
Express opinion on product	1	3.02	1.187	-.088	173	.930
	2	3.03	1.174			
Insisting that this is what he/she want	1	3.00	1.383	.242	173	.809
	2	2.95	1.166			
Use begging strategies	1	2.94	1.301	1.333	173	.184
	2	2.66	1.321			
Tell that all friends have it	1	2.72	1.324	1.912	173	.058
	2	2.32	1.210			
Tell about the TV ad he/she saw about product	1	2.73	1.254	2.192*	173	.030
	2	2.32	.990			
Tell that the Brand is famous	1	2.69	1.392	1.417	173	.158
	2	2.39	1.175			
Bring an external reason	1	1.95	1.215	-1.180	173	.857
	2	1.98	1.196			
<b>3. Competition strategies</b>						
Propose fair competition to win a game	1	2.13	1.282	-1.428	173	.155
	2	2.42	1.303			
<b>4. Emotional strategies</b>						
Nagging & Whining	1	2.25	1.257	-1.99*	173	.048
	2	2.64	1.200			
Express anger	1	2.38	1.269	-1.049	173	.296
	2	2.59	1.288			
Be unnaturally nice to parents	1	2.53	1.429	-.961	173	.338
	2	2.75	1.434			
Pretending illness to make parents sympathize	1	1.63	1.009	.781	173	.436
	2	1.51	.878			
<b>5. Aggressive strategies</b>						
Not eating	1	1.96	1.204	-1.702	173	.091
	2	2.31	1.417			
Stubbornly acting	1	2.16	1.184	-1.600	173	.111
	2	2.46	1.179			
<b>6. Playing a trick</b>						
Hide things in the shopping trolley	1	1.66	1.072	-.796	173	.427
	2	1.80	1.186			



#### 4.2.3 Number of Siblings

T-test was also conducted to examine whether there is a significant difference in the use of influence tactics between single child and child with siblings (table 5). The t value was significant for only one strategy: telling that all the friends have it indicating a significant difference between the two groups in the use of this persuasion strategy ( $p = 0.009$ ). This strategy is used more often by those children who are single child of their parents ( $\mu_0=3.08$  is greater than  $\mu_1=2.45$ ). So the hypothesis H3 is accepted for this one strategy and for rest of the strategies, hypothesis H3 is rejected.

**Table 6: T-test for equality of means (number of siblings)**

Influence Tactics	Mean scores and standard deviation of no. of siblings 0 = Single Child (n=36) 1 = With siblings (n=139)			t-test for equality of means (siblings)		
	Siblings	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
<b>1. Bargaining Strategy</b>						
Offer deals	0	2.83	1.298	1.335	173	.184
	1	2.53	1.218			
<b>2. Persuasion strategies</b>						
Express opinion on product	0	3.06	1.264	.186	173	.853
	1	3.01	1.161			
Insisting that this is what he/she want	0	3.17	1.298	.944	173	.347
	1	2.94	1.314			
Use begging strategies	0	2.75	1.296	-.491	173	.624
	1	2.87	1.318			
Tell that all friends have it	0	3.08	1.422	2.643*	173	.009
	1	2.45	1.235			
Tell about the TV ad he/she saw about product	0	2.56	1.054	-.219	173	.827
	1	2.60	1.220			
Tell that the Brand is famous	0	2.31	1.167	-1.44	173	.152
	1	2.66	1.360			
Bring an external reason	0	1.97	1.298	.068	173	.946
	1	1.96	1.185			
<b>3. Competition strategies</b>						
Propose fair competition to win a game	0	2.42	1.317	.979	173	.329
	1	2.18	1.287			
<b>4. Emotional strategies</b>						
Nagging & Whining	0	2.28	1.137	-.565	173	.573
	1	2.41	1.279			
Express anger	0	2.81	1.215	1.882	173	.062
	1	2.36	1.280			
Be unnaturally nice to parents	0	2.42	1.339	-.862	173	.390
	1	2.65	1.454			
Pretending illness to make parents sympathize	0	1.61	.803	.157	173	.876
	1	1.58	1.006			
<b>5. Aggressive strategies</b>						
Not eating	0	2.33	1.373	1.359	173	.176
	1	2.01	1.260			
Stubbornly acting	0	2.42	1.204	.904	173	.367
	1	2.22	1.184			
<b>6. Playing a trick</b>						
Hide things in the shopping trolley	0	1.92	1.381	1.299	173	.196
	1	1.65	1.028			

## 5. CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to assess the extent of influence tactics used by children to fulfill their wants. The study segregates the various types of influence tactics namely: bargaining, persuasion, competition, emotional, aggressive and playing a trick strategies on which the demographic factors related to child play a vital role. But the study shows that persuasion and emotional strategy are more often used by children. Though there is no set legislation which deals specifically with marketing to children, marketers should understand that a child's age, gender and number of siblings have quite a significant role in the influence tactics used by the children. Older children have more knowledge about brands, so they use the persuasion strategy more often than younger children. With age, child can understand the complex human emotion system and hence they can use the emotional strategy very well than the younger children. From the gender point of view, girls use emotional strategy of nagging and whining more often than boys, while on the other hand, boys use persuasion strategy of telling about the latest TV advertisement more often than girls. Single child uses persuasion strategy that "all friends have it" more often than those with one or more siblings.

To tap children's market, marketers should know what kind of influence tactics children use to persuade their parents. The marketers should understand that many strategies which a child use does not depend upon their demographic characteristics like bargaining, competition and aggressive strategies. On the other hand strategies like persuasion and emotional strategies are very much affected by a child's age, gender and number of siblings a child has. The future for children and marketers will be about products, pitches, advertising and other promotions that balance fun with focus on positive, healthy lifestyle choices for kids as they grow to be citizens of tomorrow.

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