



Determinants of Children's Role in Family Buying Decision-Making: The Case of South-South, Nigeria

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Abstract: This study examines the role of children in family buying decision-making and investigates factors that seem to have effect on children's level of involvement in family buying decisions. The study was conducted using two samples (children and parent respondents). The respondents' choice and justification thereof was shown in a detailed manner. Data for the study were collected with the instrument of questionnaire, personal interview and secondary sources. The data collected has been empirically analysed through ANOVA, correlation and regression as well as cross tabulation procedure with SPSS. The findings of the study revealed that family-buying decisions in contemporary times is more of an outcome of a joint effort in which children play significant and multiple roles in relation to a wide variety of products needed by their families, not just to the items that directly relate to their needs. It was also found that there exists a nexus between perceived level of children involvement in buying decision making and some selected demographic, socio-cultural and economic factors. The study recommended that parents should adopt a democratic approach in arriving at family purchase decisions in order to avoid family conflict. It is also imperative that marketers understand the changing dynamics of family buying decision-making process and the elevated power of children's roles and influences in order to design better marketing strategies that can effectively serve and satisfy the needs of emerging market segment for improved marketing performance.

Keywords: HFLVLRPDNLQZCHPRJUDSKLFRVRLRFQWMDODQHFRQPLFIDFWUV

1. Introduction

In 2014, Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics puts the population of children under the age of 18 in Nigeria at 46% of the entire population, which constitute a significant segment for effective marketing practice in the country. Nigerian children have progressively caught the attention of marketers (e.g., with products like Indomie, Toothpaste, Bobo, Gala tinkies, Blue band Margarine, Capisome, Sweets Biscuits etc.). It is also observed across the globe that there have been increased interest in the study of childrens' market segment especially, at the time when there is a shift in the locus of family structures, power as well as roles (Wut and Chou, 2009; Ali A., Mustafa S., Batra D.K, Ravichandran N. and Rehman S.U., 2012; Gbadamosi, 2012). What is more, changing compositions of families and cultures in contemporary times seem to have changed the role of children in family buying decisions.

Traditionally, the views of children and even women are hardly considered in most African cultures when major decisions are taken including family buying decisions. In such situations, the views of adult members of the family dominate and relegates to the feelings and voices of the children in such families. However, with the increasing education, acculturation and globalization of communications, this traditional view seems to be shifting, giving way to a family structure where children can voice their feelings. Despite these changes, business literature fail to report any empirical study on the role of children in family buying decision in Nigerian culture. As a result, both academic community and managers are tempted to rely on findings from other contexts, which arguably cannot describe the situation in Delta culture. With the recent emergence of Delta culture within Nigeria's Niger Delta, the need to study the role of children in family buying decisions becomes urgent and relevant.

The following are the objectives of this study:

1. To find out the role(s) children play during family buying decisions;
2. To determine product categories Delta children exhibit their power during family buying decisions;
3. To examine the nexus between children's demographic, socio-cultural and economic factors in their involvement in family buying decision-making.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1 Family Dynamics and its impact on buying decisions

The family as a consuming and decision-making unit has been identified as fundamental and significant phenomenon in marketing and consumer behavior (Solomon, 2011, Lee and Beatty, 2002; Assael, 1998). As a major buying and consumption unit, the family is believed to have the largest influence and it is a prime target for most marketing organisations in recent years (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2000). Thus, in Nigeria, like many other developing countries, an average household includes a father, a mother and often quite a large number of children. Extended families that consist of various nuclear families are also prevalent, which is a salient cultural configuration of the African system. (Beugre and Offodile, 2000; Gbadamosi, 2012)

It is not secret that a few decades ago, parents controlled their children with sticks (canes) and expected obedience and discipline was a common practice in Nigeria. Also in older generations, children were educated under strict and hard autonomous rules of the parents; i.e. autocratic parental guidance was the order of the day, which by implication inhibits the extent to which children can participate in their families' buying decision-making process (Kagitcibasi, 1996; Siannand, 1988, Gbadamosi 2012). Again, in the past, children had no voices; they just obeyed what was being said, wore what was given and ate what was cooked (Munroe and Munroe, 1972). Children had to sit on their chairs until they finished their food and could not be involved in parents' conversation during eating (Suwardinata, 2011).

In recent times, it is seen that previous family roles in dominant forms are undergoing transformation, giving way to a family structure where children are no longer at the backstage in family buying decisions. Today, there seems some major changes in children's lifestyle as they are treated by video games, TV (films and cartoons) and other media stations that caused them to develop the world of their own fantasy eventually making them enter the grown-up world earlier than they are supposed to (Suwardinata, 2011). This change is giving children to have their own wants and needs. They started to "*think for themselves*" rather than to obey their parents' rules. As noted by Mactensen and Gronholdt (2008), today's children tend to have more freedom to choose what they eat, wear, buy, watch on TV and where to visit (destinations ie., parks).

At changing times, most families spend "quality time" in supermarkets, fast-food restaurants, exhibitions. They are watching the latest movies and sport events together (Maikori, 1997). It is in recognition of this fact that Datta (2008) observed that irrespective of income group, today's parents are breaking the limits to meet the demands of their children; they are providing to their kids whatever they want, even those they didn't have when they were kids themselves.

2.2 Buying roles in family decision-making

In the process of family buying decision-making, several family members are involved. They play a variety of roles in the buying process; each member may take more than one role or no role at all. A family buying decision is composed of a sequence of decisions; different family members may play different roles at different stages (Miniard and Engel, 2006; Lackman and Lanasa, 1993; Wasson, 1978). In general, the roles are likely to vary between families in relation with demographic variables, different product types, time and even individual decisions (Verma and Kapoor, 2003). Again, children's roles may not be permanent or mutually exclusive. There are five roles as identified by Belch (1985); they are initiator, influencer, decider, buyer and user.

- 1) **The Initiator:** The initiator is the family member who proposes a suggestion or an idea related to purchases for the family.
- 2) **The Influencer:** The Influencer establishes the decision criteria by making comparison and tries to persuade other family members during the process of decision-making. The influencer might or might not be the same person as the initiator.
- 3) **The decision maker (Decider):** This refers to the family member with the power to unilaterally or jointly determine whether to purchase a specific brand, product or service or not.
- 4) **The purchasing agent (Buyer):** He/she carries out the decision by purchasing the product for the family. The purchasing agent might or might not be the same person as the decision maker.
- 5) **The final consumer (User):** He/she is the one who uses the product and evaluates it, giving some feedback to other family members regarding the satisfaction with the chosen brand and desirability to purchase the same brand or product again.

2.3 Empirical evidence from previous studies on family buying decisions

A cursory review of research on family consumption and decision-making behaviour shows that the three-factor interaction (father-mother-child) in decision-making is very challenging compared to previous researches, which focused only on the husband and wife. We provide below some previous empirical family buying decision-making studies involving children's roles:

Jensen (1995) studied three categories of products; those that are primarily for children (e.g., toys, candy), products for family consumption (food, shampoo, toothpaste), and parents' products (gasoline, coffee, rice). Similarly, Johnson (1995) selected products as categorized by Sheth (1974) products for individual use, those for family use and finally products for the household.

More so, Kapoor (2001) collected information from families in Delhi in regard to their roles across stages of purchase decision-making for six durables; televisions, refrigerators, washing machines, personal computers, audio systems, and cars. She found that individual members were associated with multiple roles.

Finally, examining shifts in family roles across the ages, Gbadamosi (2012) adopted qualitative methods to address the changing role of children, cultural shifts and the implications for international business. Data collection exercise took place in Ikeja area of Lagos metropolis, which is one of the states in the Southwest of Nigeria. The findings revealed that children use four basic tactics (direct request, persuasion, emotional tactics and reference to others) to influence their family consumption.

2.4 Hypotheses development

The following hypotheses have been developed for this study:

H₀: Children have no significant roles in family buying decision making for a variety of products.

H₁: Children have significant roles in family buying decision making for a variety of products.

H₀: There is no nexus between children's demographic, socio-cultural and economic factors and their involvement in family buying decisions.

H₁: There is a nexus between children's demographic, socio-cultural and economic factors and their involvement in family buying decisions

Below is a hypothesised model (figure 1):

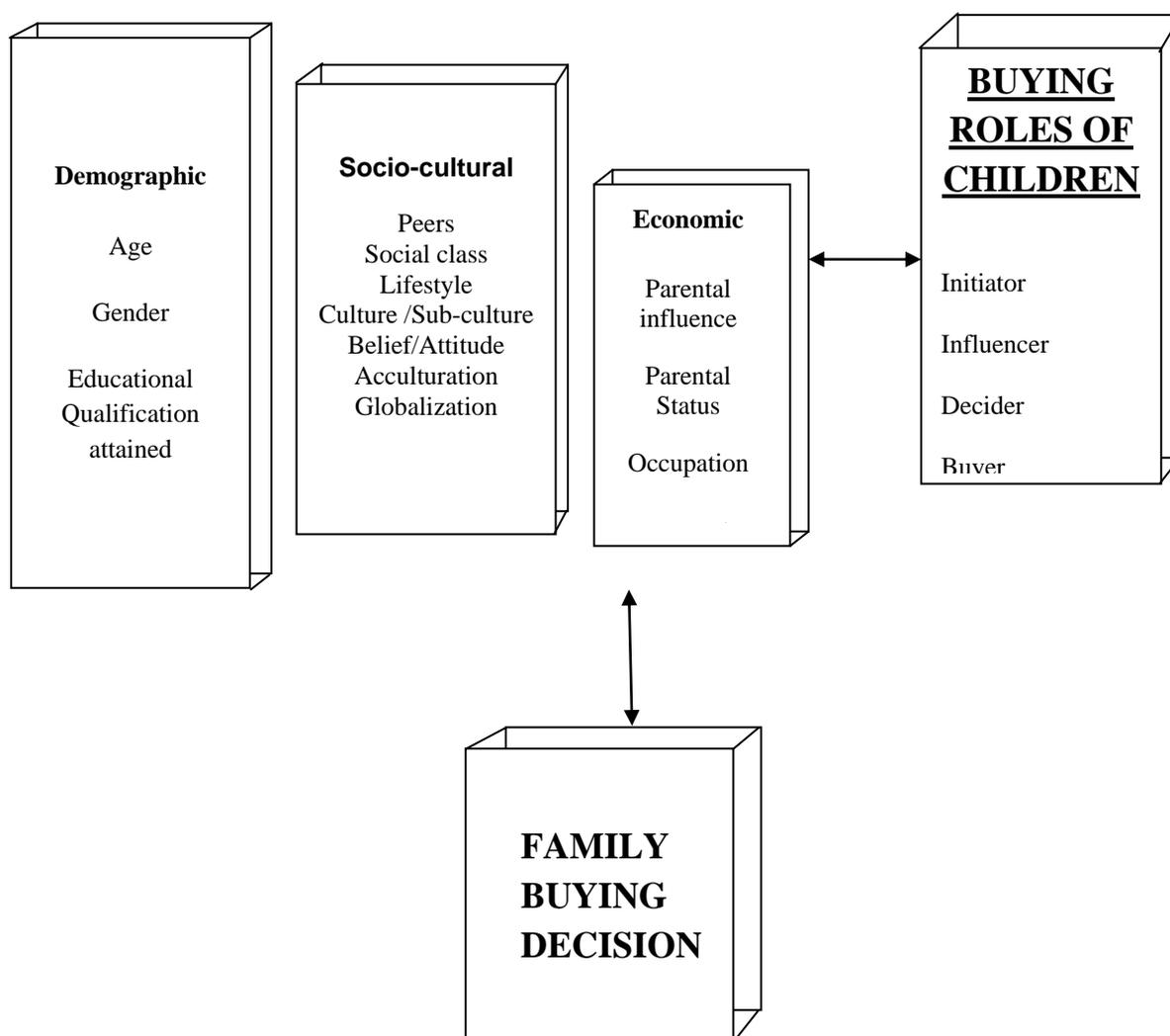


Figure 2-1 Family buying decision-making model

Source: Author's Own Model, 2014.

3. Methodology

This study examined the determinants of children's role in family buying decisions in Nigeria. The contextual base is Asaba metropolis in Delta State, South-south-Nigeria. The study has a population size of children between the ages of 5-16 years. The researcher decided to study this age group because of the following reasons:

- At this age, they command the empathy of people around them, especially, their parents;
- They also gradually learn to interrelate their understanding of fantasy, morality and economics within this age bracket;
- We can begin to deal with some of the most critical questions posed to sustainable consumption behavior - i.e., what would be the needs of future generations.

Furthermore, the researcher's vision of children is all-inclusive in this study; such that the respondents were from the following categories:

- The rich and the poor
- Rural and Urban
- Disabled
- Gender (male/female)
- Public and private schools.

Worthy of note is the fact that children's role in family buying decisions is investigated within the context of products mainly used by both the children and their families.

In this study, the researcher chose to collect both parents' and children's responses in order to capture responses between children and parents and establish whether the parents underestimate their children's influence during family buying decision-making or not. This was done in order to capture the full family experience. In addition, due to limitation of time, the use of sample became pertinent. Against this backdrop, the non-probability sampling technique was adopted and the convenience sampling type was applied in selecting the respondents. The convenience sampling technique is a method whereby respondents are chosen by availability, allowing questionnaires/interviews to be completed quickly and economically.

The questionnaire was used to gather data from children while the parents were interviewed. The researcher distributed a total of two hundred and eighteen (218) copies of questionnaire to the children; out of these, two hundred (200) copies were retrieved and were found useful, representing a response rate of 92%. The high response rate of the questionnaire is owing to the fact the researcher personally administered the questionnaire and made further explanations where necessary. More so, bearing in mind the age brackets of the children's respondents, the researcher designed the questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale with concise/simple questions to avoid inconsistencies and ambiguity. Meanwhile, the sample achieved was slightly skewed in favour of female respondents (56%).

On the other hand, in-depth interview was conducted for 48 parents. Most of the parents participants were mothers, since they are the ones who buy most family products, especially, routine ones. They are also mostly at home and always around the children, understand their needs better and show more sympathy/consideration for the children's needs. From 48 parents, 37 were mothers (77%) and 11 were fathers (23%).

Children's consumption of goods and services is quite significant to the explanation of the roles they play in the family buying decision-making process. Varieties of products were selected for the study; these could be categorized as:

- **Technical Products:** Decision on the purchase of television, household appliances, car, build a house and computer/laptop.
- **Instrumental Products:** Decision on the purchase of bicycles, electrical gadgets, toys, video games, handsets and stationeries.
- **Affective Products:** Decision on the purchase of ice creams, sweets, snacks and food (local or continental), drinks/fruits and eating outside (fast foods).
- **Social Products:** Decision on personal care items, school items, school to attend, satellite stations/channels to watch, children career in future and choice of friends.
- **Economic Products:** Decision on family resources – investments, business, finance, insurance and savings.

4. Data analysis

This section provides a demographic and socio-economic profile of individual male and female children respondents.

Table 4.1: Distribution of respondents based on age

| Age range | No of respondents | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|-------------------|----------------|
| 5-8 years | 80 | 40% |
| 9-12 years | 90 | 45% |
| 13-16 years | 30 | 15% |
| Total | 200 | 100% |

Table 4.2: Distribution based on their educational background

| s/n | Educational level | No of respondents | Percentage (%) |
|-----|----------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Primary education | 78 | 39% |
| 2 | Junior Secondary education | 95 | 47.5% |
| 3 | Senior Secondary education | 27 | 13.5% |
| | Total | 200 | 100% |

Table 4.3: Distribution of respondents based on gender

| Gender | No of respondents | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Male | 88 | 44% |
| Female | 112 | 56% |
| Total | 200 | 100% |

Hypothesis One

The result of the multiple regression analysis using the linear function is shown below:

Table 4.4: Result of Multiple Regression Analysis Using Linear Function

| Explanatory variables | Regression co-efficient | Standard error | T-value | Gross margin elastically |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|----------------|---------|--------------------------|
| b1 (Technical) | -0.4500 | 0.4850 | -42600 | -0.10 |
| b2 (Instrumental) | 0.2400 | 0.3080 | 4.250 | 0.26 |
| b3 (Affective) | 0.3621 | 0.3450 | 1.430 | 0.13 |
| b4 (Social) | 0.4514 | 0.1505 | 0.4204 | 1.40 |
| b5 (Economic) | -0.0850 | 0.1620 | -0.4590 | -0.11 |

Source: SPSS Analysis, 2014

Multiple co-efficient of determination (R^2) = 0.95057

Adjusted R^2 = 0.9488

Standard Error = 10.3536

F – Value = 6.197

* Highly significant at 1% level

* Significant at 5% level.

Table 4.5: Regression ANOVA Table

| Source | DF | Sum of square | Mean square |
|--------------|------------|---------------|-------------|
| Regression | 5 | 29140 | 5828 |
| Residual | 195 | 15153 | 195 |
| Total | 200 | | |

Source: SPSS Analysis, 2014

R^2 obtained is 0.95057, which implies that 95% of the family decision making gross margin (r) for variety of products by children are affected by some explanatory variables. Decisions on technical products (b1) and decisions on economic product (b5) are significant at 5% level; while decisions on instrumental products (b2), decisions on affective products (b3) and decisions on social products (b4) are highly significant at 1% level.

Some of the regressions co-efficient are positively signed while others are negatively signed. The negatively signed ones include b1 and b5 while b2, b3 and b4 are positively signed. The implication of the positively signed is that, the value of the dependent variable (Y) i.e. family decision-making on products and independent variables (Instrumental b1, Affective b2 and Social b4) tend to rise and fall together. That is, they co-move in the same direction. The negative sign, however, signifies that the values of dependent variable (Y) and the independent variables b1 (Technical) and b5 (Economic) co-vary in the opposite direction.

Hypothesis Two

In the estimated regression model, an attempt was made to identify which of the coefficients of the selected demographic, socio-cultural and economic variables provided a statistically significant contribution to the specified model. The significance of the parameter estimate of the model was evaluated by means of T- test at 1%, 5% and 10% level of significance.

The estimated regression equation is presented below:

$$Y_c = -89.67 + 4.20X_1 + 0.005X_2 + 13.88X_3 + 5.33X_4 - 0.57X_5$$

$$(4.41)*** (0.93) (1.99) ** (4.09) * (6.06) ** (3.50)*$$

$$- 0.07X_6 - 16.32X_7 + 14.23X_8 + e$$

$$(11.85) ** (4.70)* (3.98) *$$

$$R^2 = 76\%, R^2(\text{adj}) = 73\%, F = 28.07, DW = 1.84,$$

$$DF = 8,192, e^2 = 358.86$$

Note: The figures in parenthesis immediately below the regression coefficient are the corresponding t-ratio

* = significant at 1%

** = significant at 5%, 1%

*** = significant at 10%, 5%, 1%.

Where: Y_c = Family Buying Decision

X_1 = Nature of the product X_2 = Age of the children

X_3 = Sex of the children X_4 = Educational level

X_5 = Environmental influence X_6 = Culture of the area

X_7 = Peer group influence X_8 = Parents' socio-economic status

e^2 = Mean square error.

Seven of the eight parameters included in the model were significant. These parameters include age of the children (X2), sex of the children (X3), educational level (X4), environmental influence (X5), and culture of the area (X6), peer influence (X7) and parent's socio-economic status (X8).

Table 4.6: Regression ANOVA Table

| Source | DF | Ss | Ms | F-cal | F-tab |
|------------|-----|---------|---------|-------|-------|
| Regression | 8 | 80594.1 | 10074.3 | 28.07 | 2.79 |
| Residual | 192 | 25479.2 | 358.86 | | |
| Total | 200 | 1.061 | | | |

Source: SPSS Analysis, 2014

Using a one – tail test at 1% level of significance, the F- computed is 28.07 and the theoretical $F(Y_1 = 8, Y_2 = 192)$ is equal to 2.79. Since the calculated F is greater than the corresponding table value, we reject the null hypothesis (H_0 , at $P \leq 0.01$, $bs = 0$) which states that the selected demographic, socio-cultural and economic variables have no significant effect on purchase decision in the family and accept the alternate hypothesis.

The correlation matrix showing the relationship between the diagnostic variables in the model is presented in table below:

Table 4.7: Correlation Matrix showing the relationship between the predictor variables (selected demographic, socio-cultural and economic variables)

| | X1 | X2 | X3 | X4 | X5 | X6 | X7 | X8 |
|----|---------|---------|--------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| X1 | 1.0000 | | | | | | | |
| X2 | 0.4007 | 1.0000 | | | | | | |
| X3 | 0.5835 | 0.5721 | 1.0000 | | | | | |
| X4 | 0.4387 | 0.4807 | 0.4542 | 1.0000 | | | | |
| X5 | -0.0281 | -0.0372 | 0.0473 | 0.0764 | 1.0000 | | | |
| X6 | -0.0393 | -0.0553 | 0.0804 | 0.0893 | 0.5966 | 1.0000 | | |
| X7 | -0.1259 | -0.2090 | 0.0569 | -0.3587 | 0.5539 | 0.5659 | 1.0000 | |
| X8 | 0.5465 | 0.4782 | 0.5139 | 0.4877 | 0.2110 | 0.1722 | 0.0209 | 1.0000 |

Source: SPSS Analysis, 2014

The results obtained further indicate that all the explanatory variables enter the model with the expected signs, thus conforming to a priori expectation. The researcher therefore rejects the null hypothesis and accepts the alternative hypothesis.

5. Discussion of findings

The result from this study showed that that decision-making activity involving the purchase of goods and services within a family appears to be more of an outcome of a group or joint decision-making. Today's children play significant roles (initiator, influencer, decider, buyer and user) in family buying. In addition, it was found that, more often children play multiple roles as initiators, influencers, buyers and users during family buying decision-making.

Furthermore, the study findings indicated that the role of children in family decision-making in buying instrumental, affective and social goods is positive. Because, in our opinion, these are goods are bordered more on children's feelings, emotions and interests and most parents corroborate with their children at the centre of their attraction in the family. What their children want or like is the most important criterion they consider when making the final decision to buy.

On the other hand, children's role in family buying decision-making in technical and economic goods is negative. This is to say that technical and economic goods are quite complex for a child to get involved or play a major role as they may not know the exact composition/detailed nature of the particular product/issue in question. Thus, parents are more influential in technical and economic decision-making. This also confirms what the children's responses to the question on "how much to spend decision", in which they affirm that their parents have strong influence on monetary affairs of their families, as they are the providers and ultimate decision-makers.

Also from the study, some demographic, socio-cultural and economic factors that are critical in determining children's roles in family buying decisions were examined. It was found that there exists a nexus between perceived level of children involvement in buying decision-making and some selected demographic, socio-cultural and economic factors. Furthermore, the children varied in the degree to which they considered themselves capable of participating in their families' buying decisions.

Again, most parents confirmed that the role of children in family buying decisions used to be minimal due to socio-cultural and economic factors in three-four decades ago. However, changes due to acculturation, technological advancement, increased education, religious beliefs, digital era, socialization agents (mass media) and globalization, have made children to be more assertive and tend to have freedom to choose what they want unlike previous generations.

Finally, given the rapid transformation in Asaba, from a rural community to a State Capital and then, a Cosmopolitan city, changes such as dietary preferences, accepting the foods from other cultures, language use, media preferences, and changes in relationships, lifestyle, beliefs, values and norms are significant especially at the family level. This has also greatly influenced children's roles and extent of participation in their family buying decision.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

This study has shown that in contemporary times, the role of children in family buying decisions is becoming increasingly significant, as many factors and forces have been identified to influence the role and actions of children. More so, each of the family members' actions and behaviour in today's family system are intricately interconnected and the roles and responsibilities that parents and other caregivers assume are interdependent and continually negotiated. The study therefore, concludes that overcoming the large socio-cultural and economic boundaries of the target market and having a clear understanding of the dynamics of family-oriented buying behaviour by marketers is crucial for organizational growth and sustainability.

Based on the above findings, the following recommendations are made:

- ❖ Parents/caregivers should adopt a democratic approach in arriving at family buying decision to avoid family conflict; i.e. the old super-ordinate/subordinate pattern should be totally abolished and that equity and sharing should grow in both prevalence and incidence among members of a family;
- ❖ Parents/caregivers also should apply a check and balance in controlling the influence of children so that they do not become over-bearing during family buying decisions;
- ❖ Marketers must take environmental factors seriously. Proper knowledge/understanding of the socio-cultural development of the target market is pertinent for business survival and growth in an ever-changing environment;
- ❖ Finally, marketers are to explore emerging present and future market in order to inculcate brand loyalty in young buyers in the quest of continued sales later. This can be achieved by developing an appropriate communication strategy that will present portrayals of the family buying decision-making process thereby, evoking the desired responses of increased patronage and improved marketing performance.

The following limitations of the study provide direction for future investigations:

- The study was carried out on only 5 categories of products;
- The study was limited to Asaba Metropolis in Nigeria.

This study has helped to trigger suggestions for further research in the areas below:

- Further research should look into extending the sample of this study to other states of the country varying with different cultures, norms, values, family composition and family type/structure in order to compare the results accordingly;
- A study on the income levels of families (low-income and affluent families) and its impact on children's roles during family buying decision-making should also be extensively conducted.

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