

REDEFINING THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PURCHASE DECISIONS IN NEW INDIAN URBAN FAMILY: FROM HOUSEWIFE TO HOME-MANAGER

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Abstract

In the modern Concept of Marketing, a number of approaches came into existence, as there is drastic change in consumer/buyer behaviour due to the technological and socio-cultural environmental changes. A decade ago, any detergent advertisement aimed at men would have meant the shortcut to disaster. Now, Ariel runs an ad with a professionally attired young man washing his son's dirty clothes when his wife is out. Pillsbury atta had run an ad portraying a man attempting to make the perfect roti. Whisper had girls urging their mothers against the use of cloth. These ads signify a shift in the consumer profile.

The past few years have changed the Indian market to a great extent. The most important among them is the 'changing consumer'. In most product categories, the customer's need has reached the augmented stage and above. No study of the Indian consumer is complete if it doesn't look at the Indian family. Unlike in the west, we are a society of consensus seekers. We rely a great deal on our family. Even our purchase decisions are jointly made. Why is this? It could be a hangover from the past when everyone stayed in the large extended families and was used to making decisions through consensus. Or it could be because unlike in the west, we do not have social security to fall back on and family is the only social support system we have

In the olden days the father was the unquestioned head. Today, there is recognition that even parents don't have all the answers. Kids prefer to go to their peers or seniors for career advice. However there is greater appreciation of parental advice when it comes to areas like managing interpersonal relationships

The NUF generation has seen the woman graduate from a housewife to a home manager. The man remains the breadwinner but is more adaptable. Marketers have to target the family as a unit, ironically in an increasingly individualized society. The family as a unit is a complex and ever – evolving

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institution. This paper is an attempt to analyse the changing role of women in purchase decision-making.

The study will also tell that despite the individualism of its members, it chooses buys and uses its products together. The consumption behaviour of each of its constituents-the man/husband/father the woman/wife/mother/equal partner and the son/daughter/child/companion- is being redefined in the context of his/her/relationship with the other members of the family.

I

Many people think of marketing as executives taking clients to lunch or playing golf on Friday afternoons. But there is more to marketing than meets the eye. In any type of economy, it is important for companies and non-profit organizations to maintain a visual existence in the public's eye. Marketing is an extremely broad industry with hundreds of departments and areas with each requiring different skills for the overall success of a company. Effective marketing employs a lot of people including promotion analysts, video and commercial writers, directors, designers, art directors, graphic designers, research analysts, survey analysts, marketing specialists and sales positions.

Marketers in India are to face challenging times and situations as Indian consumer has been improving remarkably in terms of socio-economic and cultural dimensions. The beliefs and attitudes of Indian consumers are passing through a *re-socialization* phase. Indian consumer market is a multi-tiered market, with the bicycle and the business class co-existing. It is a market whose potential and desire to consume has perhaps moved ahead of the marketers' mental model of it.

Quantitatively, between 1996-97 and 2000-01, per capita income on an aggregate basis grew by a compounded annual rate of 3.2 per cent. But high-income households grew much faster than by about 20 per cent year after year between 1995-96 and 1998-99 (NCAER, National Council for Applied Economic Research). Falling interest rates, easier consumer credit, increase in variety and quality of products and services at every price point, etc are also contributing in changing the shape of Indian consumers.

Interestingly, the post liberalization generation is grown up. There are about 100 million, 17-21 years olds in India and six out of 10 households have a liberalization child. This is a generation, which has grown up with no guilt about consumption.

Further, Indian economy is shifting its dependence from agriculture to industry and service sector. Marketers have an eye on rural consumers. "Consumer India will always require strategy complexity far greater than its current market worth, because the number of segments it harbours keeps increasing".¹

II

The family is the most important consumer-buying organization in society. Family members constitute the most influential primary reference group. One can distinguish between two families in the buyer's life. The *family of orientation* consists of one's parents and siblings. From parents a person acquires an orientation towards religion, politics, and economics and a sense of personal ambition, self-worth, and love? Even if the buyer no longer interacts very much with his or her parents, their influence on the buyer's behaviour can be significant. In countries where parents live with their grown children, their influence can be substantial. A more direct influence on everyday buying behaviour is one's *family of procreation*-namely, one's spouse and children.

Family decisions provide an excellent training ground for thoughtful decision-making. Parents and children can pose the issue, generate a menu of choices and then apply careful research to compare, contrast and ultimately choose one. By sharing the discussion and review, family members increase the likelihood that the group will build consensus around the final decision. A family is considered to be the basic decision making unit as regards purchases. The decision to purchase a commodity or service is generally combined but every family member is going to influence the decision most. Marketers also acknowledge the fact the consumer behaviour pattern is changing as the influence of the family members among themselves increases

Earlier the family was '**patriarchal**' in which husband/father plays a dominant role or '**matriarchal**' in which wife/mother plays a dominant role or a '**equalitarian**' in which both plays combine equal role in family purchasing decisions. In other words, the children could not influence any decision, but contrary to that in the 'nucleus marketing'² the man, women & child plays equal roles for decision-making process. In this concept one can see that no one person can take any decision in this type of democratic family structure. The media choice too gave a high weightage to the family oriented programming, avoiding overtly male or female-targeted slots. Thus, despite the individualism of its members, it chooses buys and uses its products together. The consumption behaviour of each of its constituents-the man/husband/father the woman/wife/mother/equal partner and the son/daughter/child/companion- is being redefined in the context of his/her/relationship with the other members of the family. "The various factors influence the consumer/purchasing behaviour in the family i.e. parents, child, spouse, sibling. The family communication process has been also changed due to the change in the family structures and patterns. The consumer behaviour and the role perception among the family members is also generally change with the change in the family life cycle at its various

stages i.e. childhood, adolescence, adulthood, late adulthood etc” (George Moschis, 1985)³.

Marketers are interested in identifying the changing roles and relative influence of the husband, wife, and children in the purchase of a large variety of products and services. These roles vary widely in different countries and social classes. For the marketer who wants to seize the future, it is paradoxical, not the individual in India’s increasing individualized society who matters but it is the New Urban Family (NUF)-that strictly city bound bundle of wife/mother, husband/father and son/daughter. People, in other words, who are defined less by their individual characteristics than they are by their positions, roles and relationships in the context of their families.

The family structure in India has moved from that of a joint family to that of an NUF, the Nuclear Urban Family (NUF). The NUF family in all probably shall have different buying behaviour. ***The main Characteristics of a NUF family are:*** The members are highly individualistic; the members have divergent tastes; they have adequate spending power; they have unique needs that require unique solutions. Despite the above characteristics, marketers are discovering that it’s not just the man, woman or kid but the family that makes the purchase decisions. Herein lies the paradox. Though the family members consume separate products, the choice is taken as one. Also more and more products are being purchased for collective consumption. If a family plans for an evening out, each member’s choice is taken into account and a collective decision taken. The family set-up is witnessing a distinct shift from a strict, authoritarian structure to a more democratic set-up.

Table 1: The Changing Family.

	THEN	NOW
Father	Strict, Unemotional, Authoritarian	Caring, Concerned, Sensitive
Mother	Emotional, Caring, Nurturing	Informed, Independent, Enterprising
Children	Self-Indulgent, Irresponsible, Rebellious	Responsible, Disciplined, Career-Minded
Spousal Roles	Strictly, Hierarchical, Rigid	Egalitarian, Flexible
Parental Roles	Controlling, Hierarchical, Distant	Democratic, Companionable, Collegiate

(Source: Business Today, February 22-March 6, 1999, Vol: 8; No.4)

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In the NUF, the role of each family member has been redefined, as the nature of society has been changes to democratic one from the authoritative/hierarchical setup. The new media/communication plays an important role to influence the decision making process. Now NUF works/acts as a single unit as a whole. there is a big change in the knowledge, awareness, preferences, conviction and adoption of product /services/ideas for each member of the family. Now the focus is mainly on the understanding to each other as the children are now can be put in the role of companions along with the woman as equal partner for the man in the family. The marketers use children as communication conduit to their parents. It can also be conceived as that the NUF marketing could be the passport to the growth of a marketer in the present environmental setup.

Table 2: THE NUF & CONSUMER PRODUCTS

	Personal Products	Family Toiletries	Household Durables	Family Automobiles	Consumables	Financial Products	Vacations	Educational Products
FATHER	Passive Users	Passive Users	Decider/ Buyer	Decider/ User	Passive Users	Decider/ Initiator	Initiator	Decider/ Buyer
	Decider/ Buyer	User/Initiator/ Gatekeeper	User	Co decider/ Initiator/ Influencers	Influencer	Co decider/ Buyer/ Gatekeeper	Influencer	Influencer/ Buyers
MOTHER	Buyer	User	User	Passive Users	Decider/ Buyer	Passive Users	Decider/ Buyer	Influencer
	Decider/ Influencer	Influencer/ Decider	Influencers/ Co decider	Influencers/ Co decider	Initiator	Influencers/ Co decider	Co- Deciders	Co- Deciders
CHILDREN		Users	Influencers	Users	Users	Influencer	Influencers	Initiator
	Influencers/ Co decider	Buyers	Initiator/ Gatekeeper	Co Deciders/ Users	Influencer	Co Deciders/ Users	Co- Deciders	Co- Deciders

(Source: Business Today, February 22-March 6,1999, Vol: 8; No.4)

III

The NUF generation has seen the woman graduate from a housewife to a home manager. The man remains the breadwinner but is more adaptable. Marketers have to target the family as a unit, ironically in an increasingly individualized society. The family as a unit is a complex and ever – evolving institution. “The nature of the women decision maker has been described as

more informed decision maker than men, as men mostly make their buying decisions based on price and availability, and while these play an important role in women's purchasing decisions as well, the need to be informed is just as important. The future of the marketing has been told with the women decision makers as presently women buy (or influence the purchase of) 80% of today's consumer goods."⁴ Women are not only becoming more influential in deciding what car to buy, they are also taking over the traditionally male-dominated responsibility of maintenance and repair, according to the National Institute of Automotive Services Excellence (ASE). The research survey data at AutoNetDirect show that women play a major role in any buying or services issues in the family. Women have influential buying power. **Ford Motor** marketing reports that women influence 80% of all purchases and have 95% veto power regarding automotive purchases. **ASE President, Ron Weiner** predicts "It is inevitable; just as we see more women in the showroom and at the service desk, we will see more women behind the service and parts counter talking to customers, and under the hood diagnosing and repairing automobiles".

⁵ The challenging careers now not more are gender specific. Over the past three decades (1970-1998), while men's median income has barely budged (+0.6% after inflation), women's income has soared a dramatic 63%. "In fact, today, 49% of all professional and managerial level workers are women. Even more interesting to the businesses that sell materials to major companies is the fact that 51% of all purchasing managers and agents are women...bringing home on average 68% of household income".⁶

Asian mothers are masters of multitasking, managing to look serene while performing their various roles as wife, mother, career professional and household manager, but these women are simmering within. They maintain a close relationship with their children, while their devotion to others is appreciated. According to researchers, Asian mothers are all too willing to sacrifice their own identity in anticipation of rewards that come in the form of family togetherness, their children's academic and career successes, and their husband's achievements in work. But the women feel that they have little opportunity for their personal fulfillment, and think their accomplishments and their contributions to family and society are unappreciated and not acknowledged enough.

The NUF woman isn't tethered to her mother's territory alone; but also venturing into so-called masculine territory: motoring, banking, and education. The zone of her fulfillment has widened, the NUF Woman is moving closer to the role of decision maker for the purchase even of the products that are not related to their traditional domain. The older view is represented, for instance, in the depiction of the woman as the arbitrator in the disputes over subjects like the brand of toothpaste-HLL commercial for Pepsodent- or the household cleaner-Reckitt & Colman's commercial for Lizol. For the NUF woman, the husband's

approval is not a strong driver any more. The focus is on appreciation and understanding. Realizing how that is being translated into consuming behaviour, Modi-Revlon, for instance, is building its brand through a series of profiles of professionally successful women, who radiate confidence about achievements that have nothing to do with well-cooked meals, well-washed clothes, and well-groomed children. "The mother's role in non-traditional spheres is certainly expanding".⁷ Change is stalking as the customer-as-mother too. "Her relationship with the child is changing. It is less of mothering, and more of companionship now. The mother is opening up, becoming indulgent and giving in to her children's demands".⁸

IV

In India only 16 per cent Indian professionals are women. It is believed that 'men still continue to dominate in India'.⁹ In the Indian scenario, a shift from joint family system to nuclear family is necessitated due to migration of people to the cities for employment. A silent revolution is taking place especially in the urban middle class families in the context of greater role of women and their equality with men. Women employment has become a necessity at least for the middle class to maintain the standard of living expected of them. Hence, the role of women in purchasing decisions is also being strengthened. Even non-working woman is aware of the career, and views house-management as career. Gone are the days when she was just minion. She wants to be seen as central of household management. In the new urban family the women is empowered, possessing a strong voice in the purchase decisions

A survey has been conducted, in the areas of Patiala Municipal Corporation (Punjab) and Chandigarh (U.T), to record the changing role of women in family purchasing decisions. A random sample of 400 households (each man and woman), that is, 800 respondents in total is selected. Out of the total 200 households from Patiala and 200 households from Chandigarh have been taken. The comprehensive study was based on mainly middle class salaried households.

The responses on following statements have been recorded on five-point scale.

- 1) The purchase decision of the family is a collective decision.
- 2) Women do not initiate decisions, but are particular about their responsibility.
- 3) Mother and children are able to finance some of their purchase rejected by the father.

- 4) The women are ambitious for children and consider her daughter as important as her son.
- 5) The increased social interaction of women is determining the purchase decisions.
- 6) The women awareness still passes through traditional home environment.

V

In the Indian scenario, we see a shift from joint family system to nuclear families necessitated due to migration of people to the cities for employment. A number of people still long for the old joint family system though it is not feasible in the present context. As a consequence of this change, a large number of old people are left in the lurch. Hence, we see the arrival of old age homes. A whole lot of people have started preparing for their old age during their prime earning days itself. The social norm that the sons should look after their aged parents is becoming a thing of the past. Of course, we still have people caught in the transition phase who live with the guilt feeling that they are not in a position to look after their parents.

Though the bride burning news continues to occupy the headlines of newspapers, we find that a silent revolution is taking place especially in the urban middle class families. From a husband-dominated family, the shift is towards a greater role from women and their equality with men. Woman employment has become a necessity at least for the middle class to maintain the standard of living expected of them.

With the increase in the number of working women, the use of modern gadgets such as mixers, grinders, pressure cookers, washing machines, vacuum cleaners etc. have also gone up. Our grand mothers spent the best part of their time in cooking and maintaining the household. But the present day women spend lesser and lesser time at home. The grandma knew how to make pickles or various chutneys. But these are now items that are mass marketed. The concept of takeaways from hotels and eating out in restaurants are on the rise. Heat and eat items, and ready to cook mixes are also being used.

In a Nutshell, in the new family, the women are empowered. Personal gratification, without conflicting with the traditional demands made of her, is moving up the wish-list of women. And the guilt factor involved in self-indulgence dissipates, no longer is the women's consumption executed in secrecy. The women has now a stronger voice in the purchase-decision both of products used by the entire family as well of products used only by specific members of the family. Marketing managers must analyze the household decision process separately for each product category within each target market.

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Household member participation in the decision process varies by involvement with the specific product, role specialization, personal characteristics, and one's culture and subculture. Participation also varies by stage in the decision process. Most decisions are reached by consensus. If not, a variety of conflict resolution strategies may be employed.

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