

**INFLUENCE OF CHILDREN AND ADVERTISING ON MOTHER BUYING DECISION –
MODERATING EFFECT OF CHILDREN AGE**

**NGHIÊN CỨU VỀ ẢNH HƯỞNG CỦA TRẺ EM VÀ QUẢNG CÁO ĐẾN QUYẾT ĐỊNH MUA
HÀNG CỦA NGƯỜI MẸ VÀ VAI TRÒ ĐIỀU TIẾT CỦA BIẾN TUỔI TRẺ EM**

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TÓM TẮT

Nghiên cứu này nhằm đánh giá ảnh hưởng của trẻ em và quảng cáo lên quyết định mua hàng của người mẹ khi mua các sản phẩm cho trẻ em tại Việt Nam. Nghiên cứu cũng xem xét tuổi của trẻ em như một biến điều tiết (moderator) trong mối ảnh hưởng giữa trẻ em và quyết định của người mẹ. Chúng tôi tiến hành khảo sát trên 288 bà mẹ có con từ 3 đến 12 tuổi. Kết quả nghiên cứu đã đóng góp thêm cho lý thuyết thông qua việc khẳng định rằng khi tác động một cách hợp lý (có lý lẽ), đứa trẻ sẽ có ảnh hưởng mạnh nhất đến quyết định người mẹ. Quảng cáo cũng có tác động đến quyết định mua hàng của người mẹ thông qua nội dung của quảng cáo chứ không phải ở tần suất xuất hiện. Cách tác động cảm tính (khóc lóc, vòi vĩnh) của đứa trẻ cũng có ảnh hưởng đến quyết định mua hàng của người mẹ nhưng là tác động yếu nhất. Nghiên cứu cũng cho thấy rằng Tuổi của đứa trẻ có tác động điều tiết lên mối quan hệ giữa ảnh hưởng của đứa trẻ và quyết định mua hàng. Khi trẻ càng lớn thì chúng càng có lý lẽ khi thuyết phục người mẹ, do đó có ảnh hưởng mạnh hơn đến quyết định mua hàng.

Từ khoá: Ảnh hưởng của trẻ em, quảng cáo, quyết định của người mẹ, tuổi của trẻ.

ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of children and advertising on mother's decision in buying products for their children in Vietnam. Moreover, children's age and kinds of products were added to test their moderating impacts on mother's decision. The survey was conducted on 288 mothers of children at 3-12 years old. The results contributed to theory by confirming that children's rational influence has the strongest effect on mother's buying decision while content of advertising and children's emotional influence have lower effects. The children's age is a moderator for the influence of children on mother's decision. Children at higher age are more rational and thus have stronger influence on the mother's buying decision.

Key words: children influence, advertising, mother's decision, children's age.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the busy and modern world like today, children are considered the most important part of society in general, and also in business world because of the potential economic

power. According to Sabino (2002), while children's own spending increase from 6 billion USD (1990) to 28 billion USD (2000), family purchase influenced by children's power increased from 50 billion USD (1990) to 286

billion USD (2000); which proved that market related to children has been more and more potential year by year.

In Vietnam, especially Asian countries, mother is the main purchasing person in a family (Kaur and Singh, 2006), especially products for children such as clothes, snack foods, toys, and etc. Therefore, the mother is considered the gate keeper in any purchasing wish of children and the decision maker in purchasing the products for children. In one hand, mother wants to let their children make their own decisions on the products they want because it is one way to teach the children how to live and perceive the normal life, encourage children to develop certain skills in interpreting product information, defining needs, and selecting products carefully (Neetu and Rachna (2014). On the other hand, mother is the final person who gives the decision in buying those products for children or not after the children ask or request for.

The impact of children on mother's decision have been examined in many studies (Caruana & Vassallo, 2003; Lee and Beatty, 2002) but this relationship has not been examined much in Vietnam. The analysis of relationship between children's influence and mother's decision and the most important key to consider before developing a suitable strategy to attract right target customers to win the market. Besides, the marketers and advertisers have observed and analyzed the mother-child bond as a primary market relationship (Cook, 2003). Advertising was also proved to be one of the most tools to influence on consumers' buying decision by the reality of more and more advertising is launched. However, there is not many researches that include both effects of advertising and children on mother's decision. Therefore, this research will contribute to both

theory and practice of buying behaviors of mother in Vietnam.

2. THEORIES RELATED TO THE ROLES OF CHILDREN AND ADVERTISING ON MOTHER'S DECISION

Mother's decision

Mothers are the gate keepers and also the deciders. According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2004), gate keepers are "family member(s) who control the flow of information about the product or service into the family" and the deciders are "family member(s) with the power to determine unilaterally or jointly whether to shop for, purchase, consume, or dispose of a specific product or service". Therefore, as a gate keepers and deciders, mothers give the decision whether to buy the products that children request or not. The mothers who are easy to be influenced by children and advertising will yield to children's request more easily than other mothers by tending to buy the products. Although when children use various kinds of request strategy, and there are different attitudes toward advertising, mothers will be influenced lightly or strongly; the final decision of hers is the key point to conclude the importance of factors influencing on mothers. In this study, the mother's decision was measured by the level that she tends to buy the product for her child. Single measure was used for this construct, which has been used by some previous studies before (Krueger et al., 2000).

Children's influence

Children's influence means "a change in a person's dispositions, as a result of interaction between parents and children" (Geuens, Mast, and Pelsmacker, 2002). Besides, influence may be defined as "children's active and passive attempts to achieve parents' permission to participate in family decision-making thereby achieving specific results" which means that

children try to convince them by using various influence strategies to achieve what they want (John 1999). Previous studies show that children have a huge impact on family buying in various products, especially products related to them (Ekstrom 1987; Lee & Beatty 2002; Caruana and Vassallo 2003).

In family decision making by the mother, except the normal factors affecting on mother's decisions such as 4Ps and other social cultural environment factors, children were proved to be one of the most important part in the "factor pie". (Shoham and Dalakas 2003). Children and advertising were the important factors that should be consider when developing any business strategy for children's products (Geuens, Mast, and Pelsmacker, 2002). Moreover, in their book, Schiffman and Kanuk (2004) wrote a whole chapter to prove that, children and also advertising are very important factors.

Pester power can be defined as "The children's ability to nag their parents into purchasing items they may not otherwise buy" Martino (2004); "repetitive asking/ requesting for a specific item and/or service" Quinn (2002); "A child's ability to pester their parents into buying a certain product or brand" (Goldstein, 1999); "A child's attempt to exert influence over parental purchases in a repetitive and sometimes confrontational way" (Nicholls and Cullen, 2004). All these definitions show that the children's pester power is the children's influence on parents' decision in buying products, especially products for children, by requesting by using many strategies. In this situation, a child will become the influencers on their mother's decision and the users. Schiffman and Kanuk (2004) defined that influencers were "family member(s) who provide information to other members about a product or service", and the

users were "family member (s) who use or consume a particular product or service". According to Roedder (1999), children use many sophisticated strategies including influence and negotiation to become successful influencers on mothers. These strategies include:

+ **Direct strategies:** from a direct request, "Can I have this?" to more demanding requests, "Get this for me". Another direct strategy is 'wants' or 'needs' going with suitable reasons to convince their mother.

+ **Bargaining strategies:** Killgren and Moosa (1999) described that children convince their mother by giving the mutual gains for 2-side participants such as "If you buy this toy for me, I will get the mark of 100 in English tomorrow". Besides, reasoning is another bargaining strategy, involves logical arguments and discussion to reach mutually satisfaction for themselves and their mother.

+ **Persuasion strategies:** Falbo and Peplau (1980) mentioned that children might give their problem, and show the wish of wanting mother to solve it for them following by suggesting some level of manipulation. A popular persuasion strategy used is "everyone else" and relates to peer pressure.

+ **Emotional strategies:** are about the intentional use of emotion, either directly or indirectly including: crying, pouting, withdrawing, or the silent treatment (Falbo and Peplau, 1980; Spiro, 1983), anger (Spiro, 1983); and having a positive affect (such as smiling a lot) (Falbo and Peplau, 1980).

Regardless as which strategies the children use to nag their mother to buy products for them, mothers are influenced by those requests lightly or strongly. There are many previous authors doing researches about children's influence concluding that children's pester

power has very strong impact on mother's decision, especially in buying products for children such as Caruana&Vassallo (2003), Ekstrom (1987), Foxman et al. (1989), Lee and Beatty (2002), etc. This hypothesis is tested in Vietnamese context where the strong influence of Confucianism with strong effect of parent on children (Nguyen Quynh Mai, 2014):

H1: There is a positive effect of children's persuasion on mother's decision to buy products for them

Advertising

According to Kotler, Wong, Saunders, and Armstrong (2001), objectives of advertising are to inform customers, to persuade customers, and to remind customers. Advertising is also considered having the longest lasting impact in the consumer's mind and creating the great power of changing the behavior from awareness to real purchase (Abideen and Saleem, 2011). North and Kotze (2004) mentioned that mothers used advertising as a communicating and educating tools with their children. Advertising is also one of factors that push children to give request to their mother on the products they want.

More importantly, advertising was proved to strongly effect on people's buying decision, including mothers when buying products for their children. Advertising means have strong influence on mother besides the other factors because they also helped the mothers to evaluate the products before deciding to buy (Sabino, 2002). Advertising can be the ones above the line, convincing mothers before going shopping; or below the line, attracting them at the stores by activities. Marketers always consider whether they should target their advertising to mothers or children (Beder, 1998). This study aims to find out how the influence of advertising to mother's decision

besides the children's impact in the context of Vietnamese mother's buying behavior. The hypothesis is:

H2: There is a positive effect of mother's positive perception toward advertising on her decision to buy products for her children

Children's age

Children's age was concluded being an important factor with regard to the child's influence on mother's decision making by John (1999) based on a study on children's consumer socialization process. In addition, most previous foreign studies have found that older children have significantly more influence than younger ones on mother (Rust, 1993; Beatty & Talpade, 1994; Paxton John, 1995; Hansen et al., 2002; Shoham and Dalakas, 2003). John (1999), concluded that this result could be explained by cognitive ability: older children have greater cognitive ability compared to the younger one. Younger children affect mother's decision making by "simply asking" (Isler et al., 1987) while older children have stronger ability to perceive many different perspectives become capable of adapting their argumentation to the situation. Therefore, children have stronger persuasion and negotiation ability age by age (John, 1999). Moreover, John (1999), with 25 years' experience in research about children, analyzed that children could be divided into two groups based on age: perceptual stage (3 – 7 years old), analytical stage (7 – 12 years old). This study will test the relationship between age and mother's influence level by children. In this study, we just chose mother has children from 3 – 12 years old based on John's classification. Respondents filled their child's age, and then divided into 3 groups as above to test if it has the difference in mother's decision among these groups.

H3: Children's age moderate the impacts of children's influence and mother decision

Instruments

The self-administered questionnaires was design to collect data for this study. The measurements of independent variables, dependent variable, and moderators were developed based on previous studies.

Table 1. Measurements

| ITEMS | SOURCE |
|---|--|
| The way of children’s influence | |
| 1. My child always gives her/ his ideas when I buy products for her/him | Martensen and Gronholdt (2008) |
| 2. My child cries, gets angry when wanting me to buy product for her/ him | |
| 3. My child talks about that product everyday | Modified from Nash (2009); |
| 4. My child says that her/ his friend has that product | |
| 5. My child bargains with me (e.g. if you buy it for me, I will get 10 at Math) | |
| 6. My child gives me the product’s benefits that she/he will utilize | |
| 7. My child puts it in the basket at store to show the wish to buy | |
| 8. My child shows her/his interest in when we go shopping together | Developed in this study |
| 9. My child tells me that they love its advertising and often notices to watch that one | |
| Perception toward Advertising | |
| 10. I like watching the advertising of the above chosen product | Shavitt, Lowrey, and Haefner (1998) |
| 11. I feel that the advertising is friendly and close to me | |
| 12. I feel that product transforms information very clearly | |
| 13. The advertising gives me useful information | |
| 14. The advertising gives me enough information about that product | |
| 15. I feel that the advertising tells me the truth about that product | |
| 16. The advertising is repeated many times | |
| 17. I see that advertising everywhere | |
| 18. I think that that advertising is suitable for kids | |
| Mother’s Decision | |
| 19. Possibility of buying product | Interview and Modified from Krueger et al., 2000 |
| Children age: real age (ratio scale) | |

Mothers join in the research will be asked to choose a specific product of 3 product kinds: toy, food and personal items (clothes, shoes)

and all the questions related to how their child behave when he/ she wants you to buy above chosen product; and mother's attitude toward

advertising are related to the chosen product. The questionnaire was tested to make sure that the questions are easy to understand, easy to answer, convenient and attractive to the respondents and no confuse may happen (Canavaand Vassallo, 2003). A pilot was conducted with the sample of 30 respondents at a Language Centre in Phu Nhuan District, where mothers often took their children to study English in weekend to test the feasibility of the questionnaire design. After pilot study, not any significant change was made. The reliability test with 30 samples proved that the scales were consistent.

Data Collection

Surveys were collected both via Webtretho forum (e-questionnaires), and direct distribution at AMA English Language Centers, some primary schools, Coop mart supermarkets in 10 districts (of total 19 districts of Ho Chi Minh City) to generalize a representative sample. There are 303units were collected and 288 were qualified for analyzing data. The sample demographics include mother's income, education, and professional. Income of household in this study was allocation equality among three groups: Low (<370 USD/month) is 36.5%; Medium (370 – 740 USD/month) is 35.7% and High (> 740

USD/ month) is 27.8%. There is 79.5% of mothers have college or university degree, and around half of them work in education or office-staff (55%).

There are three kinds of product that mothers mentioned in their answer, include Toys (30.6%), Food (32.3%) and Personal items (37.2%). Their children's age also divided into three group: 5 – 7 years old (37.2%); 8 – 10 years old (31.6%); and 11-12 years old (31.2%). This sample is good to test the influence of *Children's age* on mother's decision.

3. FINDINGS

Reliability and Validity of Measurements

Internal consistency describes the extent to which all the items in a test measure the same concept or construct and hence it is connected to the inter-relatedness of the items within the test. Internal consistency should be determined before a test can be employed for research or examination purposes to ensure validity (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011). The measure of reliability that ranges from 0 to 1, with values of .60 to .70 deemed the lower limit of acceptability (Hair et al., 2010). In this study, the Cronbach's Alpha of 0.635 for Children and 0.868 for Advertising is acceptable.

Table 2. Exploratory factor analysis

| NEW FACTOR | ITEMS | CODE | COMPONENT | | | |
|--------------------|---|------|-----------|------|---|------|
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Emotional children | Child cries, gets angry when wanting to buy product | CHI2 | | .681 | | |
| | Child talks about that product everyday | CHI3 | | .679 | | .334 |
| | Child says that friend has that product | CHI4 | | .751 | | |
| | Child bargains | CHI5 | | .679 | | |
| Rational children | Child always gives ideas about products | CHI1 | | | | .698 |
| | Child gives product's benefits utilized | CHI6 | | | | .731 |

| | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|-------|------|--|------|--|
| Perception toward Advertising content | I like watching the Ad | ADV1 | .663 | | | |
| | Ad is friendly and close | ADV2 | .761 | | | |
| | Ad transforms information very clearly | ADV3 | .784 | | | |
| | Ad gives useful information | ADV4 | .826 | | | |
| | Ad gives enough Information | ADV5 | .705 | | | |
| | Ad tells the truth about that product | ADV6 | .611 | | | |
| | Ad is suitable for kids | ADV10 | .708 | | .404 | |
| Frequency of ad. appearance | Ad is repeated many times | ADV8 | | | .851 | |
| | I see that ad everywhere | ADV9 | | | .852 | |

The table 2 shows that EFA has extracted 2 factors (independent variables) into 4 factors that were assigned new names, this extraction explained 66.4% variation. The KMO of Sampling Adequacy is 0.791, higher than 0.6, and the Barlett's Test of Sphericity is significant (Sig. < 0.05) (Kaiser, 1974). Therefore the hypotheses were adjusted as in followings:

H1.1: *There is a positive effect of Rational children's persuasion on mother's decision to buy products for them*

H1.2: *There is a positive effect of Emotional children's persuasion on mother's decision to buy products for them*

H2.1: *There is a positive effect of Mother's positive perception toward advertising content on her decision to buy products for her children*

H2.2: *There is a positive effect of Frequency of Advertising on Mother's decision to buy products for her children*

H3: *Children's age moderates the impacts of children's influence and mother decision*

These hypotheses were tested with Regression with three models:

- Model 1: Dependent Variable: Decision to buy (DEC) and Predictors: Rational children (CHR), Emotional children (CHE), Advertising content (ADC) and Advertising appearance (ADA)

- Model 2: Dependent Variable: Decision to buy (DEC) and Predictors: Rational children (CHR), Emotional children (CHE), Advertising content (ADC), Advertising appearance (ADA), Children Age (A), A*CHR, A*CHE

Table 3. Regression results of three models

| | MODEL 1 | | MODEL 2 | |
|-----------------------------|---------|------|---------|------|
| R ² | 0.386 | | .402 | |
| R ² change | -- | -- | 0.016 | .03 |
| ANOVA (Sig. F test) | 0.000 | | 0.000 | |
| Unstandardized Coefficients | b | Sig | b | Sig |
| CHR | .344 | .000 | .320 | .000 |
| CHE | .118 | .035 | .130 | .115 |
| ADC | .164 | .001 | .188 | .000 |

| | | | | |
|-------|------|------|-------|-------------|
| ADF | .037 | .451 | .155 | .134 |
| A | - | - | .278 | .009 |
| A*CHR | - | - | .205 | .035 |
| A*CHE | - | - | -.020 | .182 |

4. DISCUSSION

This result proved that children have the strong influence on mother's decision in buying products for them regardless of the strategies they used to nag their mother. Rational children factor, which means that children use critical and rational strategy to convince their mom by giving ideas, or benefits that they will utilize, has the strongest influence on the final decision. In contrast, emotional children factor, which mean that children use emotion strategy such as crying, getting angry, bargaining, keeping nagging every day, etc., has the lowest influence but it still impacts on mother's decision.

In modern life likes today, especially in Vietnam where parents mostly have 1 or 2 children in a family, mother tends to consider their children when they want to buy a product for them although they are still decision maker. Mothers want to encourage their children or teach them the certain skills of interpreting information needs, and selecting products, so they want their children to have the voice themselves. On the other hand, mothers are still the buyers and gate keepers. Therefore, the way child convinces her/ his mother critically and rationally is certainly more appreciated, and has the stronger influence on mother's decision compared to emotional ways. This result is similar to previous studies. Roedder (1999) stated that children use different strategy to convince their mom to buy the things they want, and the more critically strategy is, the more easily mother will accept. Pilgrim and Lawrence (2001), Proctor and Richards (2002); Brown(2004), Bulmer (2001), all proved that

children have influence on mother's decision, especially in products related to them

Advertising content is the most important thing in the advertising development because it includes the information, trust, transformation, and etc. Therefore, advertising content has strong influence on any people (Kotler and Armstrong, 2001). Mothers in Vietnam do not appreciate the appearance level of the advertising; they are more cared of the advertising content. In this study, advertising is proved to have average influence on mother's decision.

The Model 2 helps to test the moderating effect of children age and kinds pf product on mother' decision. The change in R-squared is to evaluate how much predictive power adding to the model by the addition of another variables. In this model, R^2 change = 0.016, $p = 0.03$, indicating that there is potentially significant moderation of children' age and the way of children influence. The table 3 shows significant relationship of children' age and interaction (A*CHR) and mother decision, it means Children' age (A) is mixed moderator (Sharma et al., 1981, 292). Children's age itself caused influence on mother's decision, enriched the power of ADC (Beta coefficient increased compared to in model 1), and caused elimination for *children emotion* (CHE). In other words, Vietnamese mother's decision is differentiated by her child's age. When her child gets older, she would be easier to buy the products for them (*age* positively influenced on Decision) because mothers respect their mature children, and trust them in giving the right ideas. Moreover, the result also presented that children's age caused influence on children's

rational strategy. When the children are older, the rational strategy they use to nag their mom is different from one they use when they were young, and then this rational strategy affected mother's decision. This finding confirmed previous foreign studies that have found that older children have significantly more influence than younger ones on mother (Shoham and Dalakas, 2003). John (1999) concluded that this result could be explained by cognitive ability: older children have greater cognitive ability compared to the younger one. Younger children affect mother's decision making by "simply asking" (Isler et al., 1987) while older children have stronger ability to perceive many different perspectives become capable of adapting their argumentation to the situation.

Managerial Implications and Limitation and further study

The regression analysis shows that, regardless of that the children use emotional or rational strategy, much or less it affect directly on mother's final buying decision. The result showed the children's age has the positively impact on mother's decision, which means that the older the children are, the more easily the mother will be influenced by them. The reason may be that the older children use rational strategy much more than emotional strategy while rational one works better. Therefore, if the marketers target to the old children (may say 8 years old and above), the advertising should attract children more strongly than it should to the young ones. Despite that, the younger ones use emotional strategy which also influenced on mother as the statistical results above.

The information of advertising has significant influence on mothers – as a gate keepers and decision makers. After being asked by children, mothers considered to buy. The

marketers should take this chance to convince mothers by above the line and also below the line advertising. The advertising content should be good, rich information and attract mothers by it if they think this advertising is cute, friendly and close to the kids and family. The content, theme song, story, and characters should be cute, easy to remember, and can use it to deal with children. Moreover, the information in the advertising needs to be clear, informative, true, and convincing. In the modern life like today, mothers are not innocent. They care about the product quality, distribution, advertising and many factors beside. The advertising is the face of the product. If it's not clear, true, and informative, it will lose mother's belief.

This study has some limitations which are listed below. First, this study was conducted in Ho Chi Minh City – biggest city on Vietnam, so sample includes participants with higher income and education than average. Second, in this study, mothers were only the respondents although the study related to children. Mothers may answer the questions related to children on her perspective; it may not be totally right. Therefore, in the further research with the longer time and more resource, it's better to take children into account, and get the insight and responses from mothers, and also children. Further research can apply Ethnography technique, or paired-interview (mother and children) to see the clearer and more exact influence. Third, the components of children and advertising in the models just explain mostly by 40.8 percent of the variance of the overall mother's decision. There are many other factors that did not mention in this study, such as 4Ps and social-cultural factors (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2004). The further research may include more some factors to increase this percentage. Fifth, according to the insights of respondents' answer in the

questionnaire, the advertising of the products for children should target and focus to children much more than deal with mothers. In this research, we just focused on testing how perception and attitude of mother on advertising influence her decision, therefore in the further research, the influence of advertising on children should be examined deeply. The further research may analyze deeply to the children to see what factors make the children give request, how advertising can affect the children. The same to advertising, the further research can go deeply to the content, the appearance, and other factors related to advertising to give better recommendation.

Finally, this research use the single measurement for “mother decision” that may reduce the reliability of the construct, the future research can expand to multiple-item measurement for better reliability.

In conclusion, the research has contributed to theory by confirming the *influence of children's persuasion and advertising content on Vietnamese mothers' buying decision*. This also explained how the children can influence their mother through the moderating effect of children's age on mother's decision. The children at higher age are more rational causing stronger influence.

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