



Parental strategies for promotion of informed consumption practices amongst young children (4-10 years) in Port Harcourt

Amadi G A*, Anthony I D

Department of Home Science and Management, Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

Abstract

This study examined parental strategies for the promotion of informed consumption practices amongst young children (4-10 years) in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The study adopted a survey design. The population of this study was all parents in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The sample for the study was 100 parents selected through a stratified proportional random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a structured 27-item questionnaire form. The questionnaire was designed on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The researcher administered the questionnaires using the direct contact method with all the 100 questionnaires retrieved. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the data and the decision was based on the cut-off mark of 3.00 mean score. Some of the findings are giving fashion less attention in the budget (\bar{x} 3.22); maintaining a culture of eating at home (\bar{x} 3.34) and teaching children the importance of scale of preference (\bar{x} 3.61). Among the recommendations are that churches, social and cultural organizations must emphasize the role of parents in ensuring that children imbibe informed consumption patterns as they grow into adults by organizing symposiums on these topics for families.

Keywords: Parental strategies, informed consumption, children

Introduction

The institution of the family continues to receive much scholarly attention regarding how children are socialized into the larger society (Dotson, 2005^[8]; Neeley, 2005)^[15]. Also, how parents socialize their children into gender, social, ethnic and consumer roles has produced both popular interest and scholarly investigation. The consumer socialization of children is an aspect of childhood that the family has largely been responsible for in the past, and continues to undertake as an important part of contemporary family life and child development (Dotson, 2005)^[8]. In fact, the role of parents in preparing their children being informed consumers is an aspect of research has become significantly necessary. This socialization process entails how parents socialize and train their children into becoming successful, responsible and independent consumers in the future.

Informed consumption is the consumption that is based on adequate information regarding a product. According to Neeley (2005)^[15], a consumer must treat every purchase as an important Investment. Being an informed consumer is advantageous to the individual, family, economy, market and consumers. An informed consumer is capable of making sensible decisions, gains an insight about a product prior to its purchase. A consumer should become a well-informed consumer to help himself from being exploited by various shopkeepers and producers (Baker, 2014)^[2]. A educated or enlightened consumer buys the good by seeing every single detail about the product which is his/her right to have information under RTI (right to information). As opined by Neeley (2005)^[15], information is a deciding factor for consumers when making their choices and affects both consumer interests and their confidence in the products and services circulating within the market.

Consumer information is the most important element for consumer protection and policy decisions. It is the solution to issues ranging from online transactional threats, behavioural targeting, loss of privacy and other problems (Pugh, 2018)^[17]. An informed consumer is capable of making sensible decisions, gains an insight about a product prior to its purchase. This insight equips the consumer with the data to arrive at an evidence based conclusion. Drawing from research on gendered patterns of consumerism, consumer socialization within the family, and the culture of money, the current study addresses gaps in the research literature that persist due to a lack of a sociological perspective. In other words, past research has ignored how parents reproduce the cultural significance of money and wealth within the family. More so, past literature has scantily addressed child consumption pattern in the society – such as viewing times and pattern of games, phones usage, and other gadgets, and the influence of parental factors. Parents are significant to learning for children. Using educational – formal and informal methods have been found to work for children' learning at home (Carlson, 2008)^[6]. Parents use education to inculcate positive learning processes. Also, adjustment in lifestyles by parents has also been found to be helpful for child upbringing (Baker, 2014)^[2]. However, these processes may be a mirage if parents have low level of awareness on how the processes can function effectively for their children. Parents have significant roles to play in ensuring that children learn consumption behaviours that are beneficial to them, the family and the society at large. However, understanding the specific roles is important in helping children become responsible consumers.

Families are units of consumerism, tasked with purchasing, spending, and the training of new consumers (Lee, 2018)

[13]. Yet, the research literature has concentrated more on the power and position of children as new consumers (Ironico, 2012 [12]; Ekstrom, 2007 [9]; Calvert 2008 [5]; Chitakunye 2012) [7] rather than the specific practices, methods, and strategies that parents use for consumer socialization (Cohen and Xiao 2012; Pugh 2018) [17]. This study is important and necessary in order to not only identify the specific patterns and methods of consumer socialization used in the family, but also to fill gaps in the research literature pertaining to how parents can help society secure responsible consumers. Consumer socialization is an important and necessary function of the family, and has held both popular and scholarly interest as parents continue to be important influences in the consumer socialization of their children. However, the gaps in both popular interest and scholarly research require more exploration into the more specific processes of consumer socialization, as well as the implications for notions of gender, class, and culture that are involved in the consumer socialization process.

The literature surrounding family and consumer research poses the family as both a unit of consumerism and consumption, often using the two terms interchangeably (Geuens, 2003 [11]; Etzioni 2004 [10]; Pugh 2009) [16]. Whereas consumption is linked to the acquisition and use of goods to satisfy basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothing, consumerism is associated with the acquisition and use of these and other items once they are no longer acquired only to meet basic needs, but are instead used as a measure of comfort or social status (Etzioni 2004) [10]. While parents do supply items for their children's survival needs and status desires, the current study uses the term "consumerism" when describing the practices that parents employ to socialize their children as consumers. The use of this term implies that parents are not only simply teaching their children how to purchase necessities needed for survival, but also are teaching them how to spend money in attempts to portray status level as well. Additionally, the current study uses the terms "methods," "tools," and "strategies" to describe the various behaviors parents use in training their children as consumers. Finally, this study uses the terms "mother" and "parent" interchangeably, as gender of the parent was held constant to help make meaningful comparisons across the sample.

Consumerism and the consumer role of individuals have cultural importance within the family. The way parents and families value and define the importance of money, wealth, and consumerism can have significant impacts on the way parents socialize their children into a consumer role. One important part of consumer socialization is imparting the cultural symbols and meanings of aesthetic style and taste to the next generation (Bourdieu, 2004 [3]; Pugh 2009) [16]. Bourdieu and Lareau (2011) [4] states that the often complex nature of social life results in the use of various subtle skills in the transmission of class privilege. Therefore, it is possible that mechanisms or skills involved in the consumer socialization of children might also play a role in not only reinforcing class privilege and class norms, but also in demonstrating perpetuated class inequalities through the different socialization mechanisms used across social class. Observable evidence in Port Harcourt reveals that many children exhibit poor consumption attitudes which could have been prevented from childhood by their parents. For

example, many children are usually found consuming excessive soft drinks which may be harmful to their health. It is common to find young children whose parents feed with alcohol usually with the claim that it will make them sleep quick/rest. Children as young as five are found with money buying candies and biscuits from money either given to them by parents or 'picked up' anywhere. More curious also, is the attitude of consumption of electronic gadgets such as phones, television and games in the home and even beyond the home. While some scholarly research has focused on this specific process of socialization within the family, the research literature has a scattered focus, with a particular lack of attention paid to the specific strategies that parents apply in teaching children how to shop, spend, and save money, and how these methods might differ by gender and socioeconomic status.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine parental strategies for the promotion of informed consumption practices amongst young children in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. Specifically, the study determined:

1. Parental budgeting strategies for the promotion of informed consumption practices amongst young children;
2. Parental decision making strategies for the promotion of informed consumption practices amongst young children; and
3. Parental wise purchases strategies for the promotion of informed consumption practices amongst young children.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the parental budgeting strategies adopted for the promotion of informed consumption practices amongst young children?
2. What are the parental decision making strategies for the promotion of informed consumption practices amongst young children?
3. What are the parental wise purchases strategies for the promotion of informed consumption practices amongst young children?

Materials/Methods

Design of the Study: This study adopted a survey design.

Area of the Study: The area of the study is Port Harcourt, Rivers state. Port Harcourt is the capital and largest city of Rivers State, Nigeria. The main city of Port Harcourt is the Port Harcourt City in the Port Harcourt local government area, consisting of the former European quarters now called Old GRA and New Layout areas. As of 2018, the Port Harcourt urban area has an estimated population of 1,865,000 inhabitants, up from 1,382,592 as of 2006 (*National Bureau of Statistics, 2006*). As one of the most industrialized in the Niger Delta region with high concentration of settlers, Port Harcourt offers a good ground for studying child and family-related issues such as child consumption.

Population of the Study: The population of this study was all parents in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Sample and Sampling Technique: The sample for the study was 100 parents (male and female) selected through a stratified proportional random sampling technique. A total of 10 parents (5 males and 5 females) were randomly selected from ten towns in Port Harcourt namely: Rumuolumeni, Rumuepirikom, Mile III, Abuloma, Okujagu, Rumuokoro, Choba, Marine Base, Ogbunabali and Rumuola.

Instrument for Data Collection: The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire form titled 'Parental strategies for promoting informed consumption amongst young children'. The questionnaire was designed on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with scores 4,3,2 and 1 respectively.

Method of Data Collection: The researcher administered the questionnaires using the direct contact method. Three research assistants were instructed on methods for

administration of the questionnaire, especially with regards to ethical considerations. In the end, all the 100 questionnaires administered were retrieved since the direct contact method was used. The respondents were also assisted to understand some of the items of questionnaire.

Method of Data Analysis: Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the data. The decision was based on the cut-off mark of 3.00 mean score. The implication is that any item with mean score lower than 3.00 was rejected, while items with mean scores of 3.00 and higher were accepted.

Results

The results of the survey were presented in the tables below.

Research question 1: What are the parental budgeting strategies adopted for the promotion of informed consumption practices amongst young children?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation on the parental budgeting strategies adopted for the promotion of informed consumption practices amongst young children

	Budgeting strategies	X	SD	RMK
1	practicing strict family budget principles	3.88	0.99	A
2	prioritizing basics in the budget (such as food, child education	3.78	0.98	A
3	practicing adequate communication among family members on family budget	3.01	0.90	A
4	giving fashion less attention in the budget	3.22	0.93	A
5	prioritizing family shelter	3.05	0.90	A
6	practicing bulk buying when there is adequate resources	3.88	0.99	A
7	including children in budget planning	3.55	0.97	A
8	paying less attention to entertainment in the budget	3.19	0.92	A
9	making provisions for savings in the budget	3.22	0.93	A
10	Grand Mean	3.42	0.94	A

The Table 1 above revealed the mean and standard deviation on the parental budgeting strategies adopted for the promotion of informed consumption practices amongst young children in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The results showed that all the items on budgeting strategies were agreed with because they had average mean scores of 3.00 and above. The highest mean score was 3.88 (items 6),

while the lowest mean score was 3.01 (item 3). Also, the standard deviation ranged between 0.90 and 0.99. The Grand mean score was 3.48.

Research Question 2: What are the parental decision making strategies for the promotion of informed consumption practices amongst young children?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation on the parental decision making strategies for the promotion of informed consumption practices amongst young children

	Budgeting strategies	X	SD	RMK
1	strict maintenance of family meal time	3.18	0.92	A
2	regulation of soft drink consumption in the home	3.61	0.97	A
3	promoting good eating habits in the home	3.44	0.95	A
4	establishing rules on spending	3.01	0.90	A
5	maintaining a culture of eating at home	3.34	0.94	A
6	avoiding the habit of fashion-consciousness	3.98	1.21	A
7	avoiding phone addictions	3.27	0.93	A
8	Not giving children money to pacify them	3.19	0.92	A
	Grand Mean	3.37	0.96	A

The Table 2 above revealed the mean scores and standard deviation on the parental decision making strategies for the promotion of informed consumption practices amongst young children in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The data showed that all the items were agreed with by the respondents because they had mean scores of 3.0 and above which was the cut-off mark. The highest mean score was

3.98 (item 6) while the lowest mean score was 3.01. Also, the standard deviation ranged between 0.90 and 1.21.

Research Question 3: What are the parental wise purchases strategies for the promotion of informed consumption practices amongst young children?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation onthe parental wise purchases strategies for the promotion of informed consumption practices amongst young children

	Wise purchases strategies include	X	SD	RMK
1	avoiding impromptu purchases	3.52	0.96	A
2	preventing children from wanting to buy everything they like	3.61	0.98	A
3	teaching children why all adverts should not be taken serious	3.44	0.94	A
4	insisting on reading food labels	3.34	0.93	A
5	not overspending	3.51	0.96	A
6	emphasizing on buying within limits	3.21	0.92	A
7	teaching children the importance of scale of preference	3.61	0.98	A
8	not buying perishable foods	3.27	0.92	A
9	not buying too expensive phones	3.33	0.93	A
10	not making 'aso-ebi' a priority purchase	3.81	1.11	A
	Grand Mean	3.46	0.96	A

The Table 3 above revealed the mean scores and standard deviation on the parental wise purchases strategies for the promotion of informed consumption practices amongst young children in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The data showed that the respondents agreed with all the items because they have mean scores of 3.0 and above. The highest mean score was 3.81 (item 10) while the lowest mean score was 3.21. The average mean was 3.46. Also, the standard deviation ranged between 0.92 and 1.11.

Discussion of the Findings

From the research questions onthe parental budgeting strategies adopted for the promotion of informed consumption practices amongst young children, the findings revealed the following: practicing strict family budget principles, prioritizing basics in the budget (such as food, child education), practicing adequate communication among family members on family budget, giving fashion less attention in the budget, prioritizing family shelter, practicing bulk buying when there is adequate resources, including children in budget planning, paying less attention to entertainment in the budget and making provisions for savings in the budget. These findings are in agreement with Carlson (2008) [6] who noted that family budget is a tool to inform members of the family that the family is mindful of its consumption patterns. Although not all families religiously follow budgeting, the ones who do indirectly instill these principles into the younger members of who will grow up with informed consumers. Most parents regard the notion of their children as consumers as a natural role to be assumed. According to Alexander (2007) [1], the family is significant in the inculcating lifetime principles into young children.

More so, onthe parental decision making strategies for the promotion of informed consumption practices amongst young children, the findings include: strict maintenance of family meal time, regulation of soft drink consumption in the home, promoting good eating habits in the home, establishing rules on spending, maintaining a culture of eating at home, avoiding the habit of fashion-consciousness, avoiding phone addictions and not giving children money to pacify them. These findings are in agreement with the reports of Pugh (2018) [17] and Calvert (2008) [5] that the decisions parents take in the home are effective on child development. Parents understand the best decisions regarding consumption; the will to implement these decisions will translate to indirectly teaching children the appropriate actions or decisions that can benefit the family. For example, parents who do not have the will to stop

smoking or consuming alcohol may not be able to prevent their children from engaging in harmful acts that will affect their health. Because many parents exhibit poor lifestyles which influence their children’s consumption patterns, they are usually incapacitated when it comes to inculcating their appropriate lifestyle for younger ones. And, because children’s cognitive development are greatly influenced by their immediate environments (Baker, 2014) [2], parents’ display of positive decisions will pass the right information to the children on the best decisions. Parents who insist on good eating habits as a routine in the home, or not eating out, will teach the children to avoid eating out and maintain appropriate food habits which they will cultivate. Finally, the findings from the research onwise purchases strategies for the promotion of informed consumption practices amongst young children include: avoiding impromptu purchases, preventing children from wanting to buy everything they like, teaching children why all adverts should not be taken serious, insisting on reading food labels not overspending, emphasizing on buying within limits, teaching children the importance of scale of preference, not buying perishable foods, not buying too expensive phones and not making ‘aso-ebi’ a priority purchase. These findings are supported by Chitakunye (2012) [7] and Bourdieu and Lareau (2011) [4]. These researchers noted that a vast majority of parents adopt wise spending plans to manage family resources. Today's typical young consumers have several sources of funds, can spend their money on objects of their choice. However, they are encouraged by their parents to become financially responsible as soon as possible (Carlson, 2008) [6]. Theoretically, children do not require money because the products and services that they may purchase are ordinarily provided by parents. However, some parents play out their roles, usually prompted by the children’s inquisitiveness and eagerness to try many things. It seems clear, then, that children are turned into informed consumers at a very early age in theirfamilies through the desires and encouragement of parents, who also provide the youngsters with the necessary knowledge. The net result of this is that the children become a relatively big market segment as they pursue self-gratification and self-sufficiency. A consumer should become a well-informed consumer to help himself from being exploited by various shopkeeper and producers. A informed consumer buys the good by seeing every single detail about the product which is his/her right to have information under right to information. A well informed consumer will not be exploited by shopkeeper by selling defective goods or using defective measures.

Conclusion

This study has revealed that parental strategies adopted for promoting informed consumption amongst young children. The study revealed that many of the parents are actively involved in adopting effective and practical strategies. While some parents can be found to be deficient in using lifestyle changes to inculcate responsible consumption patterns in their children, the findings reveal that there are prospects for achieving actively informed future consumers because parents strongly desire to prepare their children for adulthood or at least for self-sufficiency.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Churches, social and cultural organizations must emphasize the role of parents in ensuring that children imbibe informed consumption patterns as they grow into adults by organizing symposiums on these topics for families.
2. Parents and other caregivers in the home environment should be made to understand the importance of budgeting principles in helping children be informed on the importance of budgeting.
3. Parents should be enlightened on further decision making that will benefit children as they grow.
4. Parents should be exposed to and encourage to be more prudent in spending as children learn from what they do.

References

1. Alexander JC. The Meaningful Construction of Inequality and the Struggles Against it: A 'Strong Program' Approach to how Social Boundaries Change. *Cultural Sociology*,2007:1:23-30.
2. Baker W. The Sociology of Money. *Am Behav Sci*,2014:35(6):678-693.
3. Bourdieu P. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Nice R, translator. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.
4. Bourdieu P, Lareau D. *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011.
5. Calvert L. Children as Consumer: Advertising and Marketing. *Future Child*,2008:18(1):205-234.
6. Carlson L. Parental Style and Consumer Socialization of Children. *J Consum Res*,2008:15(1):77-94.
7. Chitakunye P. Recovering Children's Voices in Consumer Research. *Qual Mark Res*,2012:15(2):206-224.
8. Dotson MJ. Major Influence Factors in Children's Consumer Socialization. *J Consum Mark*,2005:22(1):35-42.
9. Ekstrom B. Children's Influence in Family Decisions and Consumer Socialization: A Reciprocal View. *Adv Consum Res*,2007:14:283-287.
10. Etzioni A. The Post Affluent Society. *Rev Soc Econ*,2004:62(3):407-420.
11. Geuens M. How Family Structure Affects Parent-Child Communication about Consumption. *Young Consum*,2003:4(2):57-62.
12. Ironico S. The Active Role of Children as Consumers. *Young Consum*,2012:13(1):30-44.
13. Lee GR. Comparative Perspectives: in: *Handbook of Marriage and the Family*,2nd ed. Sussman MB, Steinmetz S, Peterson G, editors. New York: Plenum, 2008.
14. National Bureau of Statistics. *Quarterly Reports*. Abuja: NBS, 2006.
15. Neeley S. Influences on Consumer Socialization. *Young Consum*,2005:6(2):63-69.
16. Pugh AJ. *Longing and Belonging: Parents, Children, and Consumer Culture*. Berkeley (CA): University of California Press, 2009.
17. Pugh K. Grounded Theory: Objectivist and Constructivist Methods. In: Denzin NK, Lincoln YS, editors. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*,2nd ed. Thousand Oaks (CA): Sage, 2018, 509-535.