

DUAL CAREER HOUSEHOLDS AND CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study examined differences in consumer socialization by household income type. Personal interviews were conducted with 81 children from fifty single-income, one and one-half income, and two-income households. Discriminant analysis revealed a significant function which distinguished among the three household types on the basis of children's 1) consumer skill behaviors, 2) consumer nonskill behaviors, and 3) related media use and psychographic data. Children from dual career households demonstrate higher levels of brand differentiation, rely more on trusted stores in making purchase decisions and have higher educational goals.

Recent studies of the family consumer decision making process have focused on the increasingly common phenomenon of the working wife in attempts to determine the effects of wife's employment status on purchase influence structure, family expenditure patterns, household management style, and consumption of various time-saving products and services [2,3,4,5,6,8]. The concept of the working wife as working mother, however, has not played a central role in the conceptualization of such studies; thus the effect of wife employment on children's consumer socialization has been studied only as a peripheral issue, viewed largely in terms of household production and the sharing and execution of household chores. The present study is an exploratory study of the effects of second spouse employment status on consumer socialization.

Previous research suggests that the wife's employment status will have an effect on consumer socialization. Ward, Wackman and Wartella [7], for example, propose that children's consumer learning is related to parental behavior in at least two ways: children observe parents' consumer-related behaviors and parents determine the extent and nature of the child's direct consumer experiences. Both of these variables -- parent's consumer experiences and children's direct experience -- have been shown to be related to wife employment status. Nickols and Fox [3], for example, found that employed wives differ in household management and product consumption because they purchase meals and other goods and services away from home and use child care services significantly more often than unemployed wives. In another study, Reilly [4] found that a wife's employment status was related to purchase and ownership of time-saving durables. Given the unique consumption characteristics of working - wife households, children's observations of parent's consumer behavior, children's experiences with products, and, therefore, children's consumer learning will differ with mother's employment status.

Previous research provides little evidence to suggest which consumer learning variables will be

affected, in what way, by mother's employment status. Development of brand differentiation among children was found to be one of the variables affected by a more varied consumption environment [1]; but other variables related to consumer decision-making might be expected to vary as well. The consumer-learning variables included in the present study were chosen to represent three distinct categories: 1) consumer skill behaviors and 2) consumer nonskill behaviors (as identified by Ward, et. al) [7]; and 3) related media, psychographic, and other classification variables.

Previous research helps to clarify the way in which mother's employment should be defined. Past studies of the effects of second spouse employment have resulted in conflicting findings, which may be explained in part by the failure to distinguish between part-time jobs and full-time careers. Many studies which use a dichotomous measure of employment report no relationship between second spouse employment and consumer-related variables [8]; while researchers who adopt more sophisticated measures often find those relationships to be significant [2,4]. The present study, therefore, distinguishes between part-time and full-time employment.

Specifically, the purpose of the present study is twofold:

1. To assess consumer skill behaviors, consumer nonskill behaviors, and related media, psychographic, and other classification characteristics of children from single-income, one and one-half income, and dual income households.
2. To differentiate between children in single income households, children in one and one-half income households, and children in dual income households on the basis of three categories of consumer-learning related variables.

Based on current theoretical perspective and previous research, the following general hypothesis was generated:

- H: A statistically significant function can be derived which will discriminate among children from three types of households: single income, one and one-half income and dual income households.

METHOD

Personal interviews were conducted with children from fifty families, yielding a convenience sample of 81 children between the ages of seven and fifteen. Parents of each child were also interviewed, to develop a measure of independence of children's brand and store preferences. Questionnaires included roughly 75 questions designed to assess consumer skills in decision-making;

consumer nonskill behaviors and preferences; and media use and plans for educational achievement. In addition, demographic data, including number and status of wage earners, were collected for each household.

Consumer Skill Variables

Children rated seven factors for their importance in helping to decide what to buy, on a five point scale, with 1 being "not at all important" and 5 being "very important."

Consumer Nonskill Variables

Parents' responses were used to identify children's independent brand and store preferences. Children were asked to name their favorite brands and retail stores for the purchase of each of 31 different product categories. The product categories included personal items, such as soaps and shampoos, fast food meals, and consumer durables, among others. Responses which differed from the child's parents' responses were identified as independent brand or store preferences and were coded as "1". Responses were summed across the 31 measures to create an independent preference index for brands as well as for stores.

Media Use

Respondents rated frequency of readership of newspapers and magazines, as well as frequency of viewing network news and other television programs, using a five point scale, with 1 being "never (read/watch)" and 5 being "(read/watch) every day it's available."

RESULTS

The results of the study are reported in two parts:

1. Overall results of aggregate responses, and
2. Discriminant analysis of a set of classification variables to differentiate among children from single, one and one-half, and dual income households.

Consumer Skill Variables: Influence Factors

Among the most important factors in a child's decision making was "a store you can trust." Other considerations deemed important included having a well-known brand, having the lowest price, and purchasing from a knowledgeable salesperson. Means are reported in [Table 1](#).

Consumer Nonskill Variables: Brand and Store Preference

Of the 31 product categories tested, children in the sample identified an average of 12.43 brand preferences different from their parents. In addition, children's favorite retail outlets differed from their parents' stated favorites an average of 7.98 times, per child.

TABLE I

Importance of Influence Factors
in Consumer Decision Making

	<u>Group Means*</u>
From a store you can trust	3.80
Having a well-known brand	3.53
Lowest Price	3.43
A knowledgeable salesperson	3.41
Information in ads or commercials	2.71
Being able to charge it	2.12
Being able to have it delivered	1.73

*On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "not at all important" consideration in helping you decide what to buy.

Related Media and Psychographic Variables

Newspapers and television programs were given highest ratings for frequency of use, averaging 3.80 and 3.70 on the five point scale. Network news viewing, at 3.51, and magazine readership, at 3.31, followed. Means are reported in [Table 2](#).

TABLE II

Media Use

	<u>Group Means*</u>
Daily newspaper readership	3.80
Television program viewing	3.70
Network news viewing	3.51
Magazine readership	3.31

*On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "never read/watch" and 5 being "read/watch every day it's available."

Children were asked to indicate the highest level of education they intended to achieve. Intention to graduate from high school was coded as a "1", college, a "2"; and to do post graduate work, a "3". Mean score for the total sample was 1.74.

Household Income Classification: Discriminant Analysis

Depending on parent's employment status, children were categorized as members of single income households, one and one-half income households or dual income households. Results showed that 45% fell into the single income category; 41% the one and one-half income; and 13% the dual income. Membership in one of the three household income categories became the focus for an analysis of which product decision making

variables, media variables, or achievement variables would best predict group membership.

A stepwise discriminant analysis was conducted using the consumer skill variables of ratings of influence factors in consumer decision making; consumer nonskill variables of brand and store preference; media use variables, and plans for education. Seven of the variables were included in the solution. For inclusion in the solution, a variable had to produce a change in the selection criterion (via Wilks' lambda) that was significant at the .05 level.

The results of the canonical discriminant analysis produced one function which was statistically significant beyond the .001 level, thus confirming the general hypothesis. The function is composed of seven predictor variables, each contributing to the function's discriminant ability ($R^2=.399$).

Standardized canonical discriminant coefficients are presented in Table 3. They are listed in order of their relative contribution to the overall solution. By interpreting the sign and magnitude of the coefficients and examining individual group means, one can assess both the relative contribution of the variable and its directionality.

TABLE III

Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function	
Coefficients: Three Household Income Groups	
Variable	Coefficient
Availability of delivery	.889
Independent store preferences	-.781
From a trusted store	.689
Plans for educational achievement	-.475
Network news viewing	-.462
Independent brand preference	.304

Contributing the most to the discriminant function was the rating of the importance of being able to have delivery of the purchased item (.899), favored by children from one and one-half income households. The next variable making the greatest contribution to the function was the independent store preference index (-0.781), highest among children from one income households.

The third most significant contributing variable was the importance of buying from a store you can trust (.689); children from dual income households rated a trusted store more important than children from one and one-half income households, who rated it higher than those from one income households.

Plan for educational achievement was the fourth contributing variable (-0.475), highest for dual income household children (mean score 2.5). Network news viewing (-0.462) and independent brand preferences (.304) made the final contributions to the function, each highest among dual income household children.

When the resulting discriminant function was applied to the data set to test its classification power, the overall figure for correct classification was 76%.

The discriminant analysis thus revealed a series of classification variables which helped to differentiate among the children from three household income categories.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study suggest that differences in consumer socialization are related to the number of household wage earners. Specifically, children from households with two full-time wage earners: 1) rely more on trusted stores in making consumer decisions; 2) have greater brand differentiation and brand preference levels, 3) view network news with greater frequency, and 4) have higher educational goals.

In addition, the study findings distinguish between part-time and full-time wage earners. Children from households with one full-time and one part-time wage earner differ from others in that: 1) availability of delivery is a more important consideration in making consumer decisions, and 2) differentiation between retail outlets is low.

The first implication of this study is that one must distinguish between types of employment in constructing any wage earner typology. Working wives, working mothers, or working spouses should be further defined and more clearly operationalized to enhance the utility of the variable as a predictor of consumer socialization.

The second major implication is that advertisers and those who market goods and services to children might be well-advised to consider the wage earner typology of the household. Number of household wage earners predicts the ways in which differences in information acquisition, consumer decision-making, and achievement orientation will combine to form three distinct consumer market segments. Marketing campaigns must recognize the distinction and employ focused and qualitatively different approaches in appealing to the three separate types of consumers.

Finally, while not conclusive in these data, the study results imply the emergence of a new class of consumers -- brand-wise children from dual-income households who are more affluent, more sophisticated, and more cosmopolitan in orientation. Evidence for this argument can be found in the higher brand differentiation levels, heavier appetite for national news, and higher

personal goals among children of dual-income households. Perhaps given greater latitude in purchase decisions, they develop brand preferences and a purchase decision-making style of their own. A new breed of young consumer may provide interesting challenges for marketers, challenges which become increasingly important as the number of dual-income households grows.

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Proceedings of the 1986 Academy of Marketing Science

(AMS) Annual Conference

Malhotra, N.K.; Hawes, J.M. (Eds.)

2015, XXIX, 497 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-11100-1