

Family Vacation Decision-Making - An Indian Outlook

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Abstract

In the last two decades, Indian families have witness drastic changes in terms of family setup, lifestyle and type of bond and relationship that exists among the members of a family. The families are now becoming more open, receptive and adaptive to the changes all around. Family outings/vacations are one such event, where the perception of Indian people has got change to a larger extent. Now-a-days families do plan to go for vacations and are ready to spend some time to decide what, where and how about it. Thus through this study the author intends to unravel, deeper understanding of the cues of vacation in case of Indian families. The paper also tries to understand the level of involvement of all family members during the decision-making process and how they are able to shape up their expectations and individual interests in the mutual benefit and interest. For the study author has adopted a qualitative approach to get deeper insight of respondent's individual and familial preferences as well as his/her social influences.

Keywords: Family Vacation, Qualitative, Vacations Decisions

1. Background

With the increase in pace of technology, modernization, westernization and urbanization, the lifestyle of people has changed drastically in last two decades. These have resulted in better living standards, better jobs, handsome remunerations, more comfort and luxury for the people living in urban cities. But at the same time, people are facing the crisis of time. As a results people are able to spend less time with their family members. Hence vacations are a trump in such lifestyles. Thus, in last two decades family vacations are becoming an easy escape to all the monotonies and stressful life. Vacations also give an opportunity to strengthen the family bonds by spending a quality time with each other.

In such a scenario, the families in the urban setup prefer to take care of the expectations and interests of all family members. Owing to the "guilt factor", (McNeal 1999), parents who spend more time on their work, and

less with their children, are more tends to provide their children with the gift of vacation.

Studies show that there is a marked shift from an earlier conventional and authoritative culture in Indian families to a more democratic structure. The process of upbringing has become more liberal and now the focus is more on independence, autonomy and participation by all members within the family (du Bois-Reymond et al. 2001). The same holds true even in case of vacation decisions. Children in the family are thus gaining more importance. Children today, to a higher extent are listened to and encouraged to voice their point of view (Gram 2007)¹³.

2. Literature Review

Since ages family has been considered as a unit of consumption with each family member playing the different roles. These roles can be classified as those of

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initiator, influencer, gatekeeper and decision-maker (Berry and Pollay)² were the first to understand child's role in marketing, where children constituted an important, separate market segment for marketers. It is seen that children not only influence family purchase decisions but they also insist their parents to purchase the products they desire.

Holiday decision making has long been considered a joint decision-making process between husband and wife (Davis, H. L., & Rigaux, 1974)³. Several more recent studies recognize that child also plays a part in family decision making (Howard, D. R., & Madrigal, R, 1990)⁵.

Within tourism, pleasing the child is an important motive for parents (Peter J. P. and Olson J. C., 1994)¹⁵. Satisfaction of children is highly rated by parents, and if the child does not wish to go to a site, then the likelihood of getting satisfied children is poor (John, D. R., 1999)⁸. Children's influence on consumption decisions of their parents varies by the nature of the product, stage of decision process, and the nature of the child (Mangleburg 1990)¹².

Studies also suggest that children might initiate the purchase, collect information about alternatives, suggest retail outlets, and have a say in the final decision (Roedder John 1999)⁸. Lindstrom mentioned that children's indirect influence is very important as well (2003). Studies reveal that as children grow the role of members in decision making starts overlapping and then generates the concept of reverse socialization (Belch & Willis-Flurry, 2005)¹.

Consumer socialization theory views children as a socializee and parents as a major socialization agent (among others such as schools, peers, and mass media). Guided by the consumer socialization theory, researchers have found that children's influence is affected by a variety of factors, including family variables (e.g., social class, family size, and family structure), children's characteristics (e.g., gender, birth order, and age), parents' characteristics (e.g., education, occupation, and consumption experiences), parental style, and family communication environment.

3. Methodology

The understanding of literature review has inspired the author to explore and enquire how urban families in India take decisions related to family holidays. In order to get

a nuanced view on the individual roles of each family member, in such decision-making process, the author has adopted a qualitative approach for the study based on in-depth interviews. The perspective behind qualitative approach was to get access to stories, impressions, and feelings of family members who are actually participating in decision making.

3.1 Sampling

Given the exploratory nature of the study, it was difficult to ascertain the number of participants required at the beginning of the data collection process, therefore sampling was done till saturation (Glaser and Straus, 1967⁶; Kvale, 1996)⁹. The participants were selected on the basis of snow ball approach. Through this approach, the participants themselves introduce to others who fit the necessary criteria to participate (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998)¹⁶. However, the author has tried to ensure that the informants chosen belongs to different education backgrounds, working sectors, and economic classes, so as to avoid any bias ness.

3.2 Data Collection In-depth Interview

In-depth interview was carried based on semi-structured questions, in the spring of 2017 with 25 families, having at least one child in the age group of 10 to 17 yrs. The interview was conducted in the presence of both husband and wife, in a comfortable and relaxed environment (their own house), so that they can recall the various activities and cues related to vacation decision making.

Initially, consent was taken from families by mailing them the consent letter so that they are well prepared and aware of the process of study and also permit the interviewer to record their conversation for the purpose of study. Notes were also taken to capture nonverbal aspects of interview. The interview were also allowed to not to answer any question for which they were not comfortable. However, none of the interviewees ever showed his/her discomfort while answering the questions. The interview lasted for approximately 25-30 minutes with each family.

3.3 Data Coding

The conversations were recorded and later transcribed manually for the purpose of further analysis and

study. The transcripts were verified for accuracy of the translation. A descriptive coding scheme was used to examine these themes (Miles and Huberman, 1994)¹⁴, whereby transcripts were organized by topics (based on the research questions), and the key expression or phrases were then identified within each topic. Iterative reviews of the key expression employed by participants for each topic led to the definition of the classes of themes. The goal of the coding process was not to gain consensus or identical interpretations, rather the goal was for coders to supplement and contest each other's statements thereby strengthening the results of the study (Malterud, 2001)¹¹.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis was done through thematic analysis as suggested by (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within a data set. These themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, generating a 'thematic map' of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Table 1. Research Methodology adopted for study

Research Approach	Qualitative approach
Research Type	Phenomenological
Sampling Technique	Snow ball
Data collection Method	In-depth Interview:semi structured questions
Data Collection Tool	Audio Tapes & Textual Information
Data Analysis Method	Thematic Analysis
Validation Tool	Member checking

4. Findings & Thematic map

Figure 1 and 2 depicts the themes identified in this research. The goal of the study was to discover the psychology of Indian parents related to vacations. Thus the study is divided into two parts i.e., firstly to understand the process adopted by Indian families to decide about vacation and the factors including them.

Van Raaij and Francken (1984)¹⁷ assumed that vacation decision making always commences with generic decision of whether to take a vacation or not. Van Raaij and Francken

stated that generic decisions are likely to involve negotiation, bargaining and compromise activities undertaken by members of the household. Following the generic decision, a period of information acquisition occurs. Following the generic decision, a period of information acquisition occurs ((Hyde 2006; Decrop 2009)^{4,7}. Thus the study in the first part aims to find out whether these initial steps are taken in a collaborative manner or in an isolated manner by the parents alone.

4.1 Process adopted for Vacation Decision Making

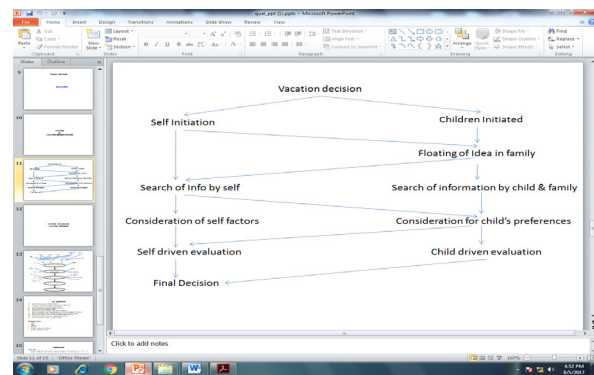


Figure 1. Vacation Decision Process.

Participants in this study recalled and elaborated the process adopted by them for vacation decision. The analysis of the statement revealed that the process adopted is a collaborative process in which all the members of the family have their say and contribution of opinion (*All of us collect info from our own peer, It does not make any sense if they are not happy or do not want to go, where to go is decided mutually*). However, the involvement of children could be very clearly observed as all the parents did considered their children's opinion or wishes in an explicit or implicit manner. Number of examples of this appeared through the interviews, directed the author to interpret that today's Indian parents are readily agree to not only involve their children in such decisions but also encouraging and shaping the vacation decision as per their children's preferences. However, the final decision making is still in the hand of the bread earner (*decision regarding budget when and how to go or hotel etc. are taken by my husband; children try to take a commitment from u and then they keep on reminding you through whatsapp or so; I have that thing very much in my top priority that*

there should be something for the children to enjoy and be happy about). From the study it was evident that in order to take consensus from all the members of the family including children, parents have evolved a mid-way path by floating the idea of vacation to all members so that each member can feel connected and also share their opinion (contribution does come from wife as well but the dominant role is of my elder son; my wife keeps on stimulating some thoughts; Son has his say in almost everything i.e. where to go, how to go, when to go; last year we went to Chennai because he wanted to be at the sea side, then he wanted to go for a forest safari so went to Kanha)

4.2 Factors Influencing Vacation Decisions

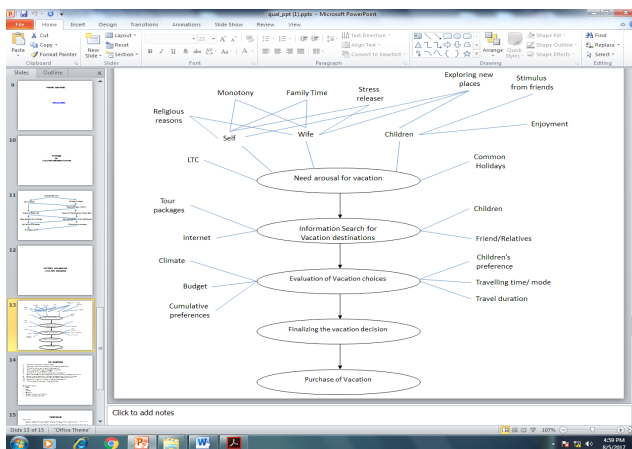


Figure 2. Factors Influencing Vacation Decisions.

The interviewee also shared about the various cues and factors that stimulate them at various stages of vacation decision. The Families accepted the involvement of the entire member in the initial phases of decision making, as studied by Lackman, C., & Lanasa (1993)¹⁰. The most common factor stimulating the decision emerged as monotony and need to spend some quality time together. This cue was observed to be impacting every member at individual level. The second most important cue was the reference groups each member belonged to. The families accepted of having a peer pressure. However, the pressure reflected explicitly on children while implicitly on adults (*Children do come and say as one of my son's friends went to Singapore, Children are growing and in last 1 year then had come up with discussion where they shared that my friends had visited to certain place and so we too would like to go; My wife doesn't force me but creates an environment*).

5. Conclusion

The present study was in complete alignment with the previous studies conducted in western countries that the children have entered the unit of decision making in the family and are, now potentially, involved in family purchasing. However, the level of involvement and acceptance varied significantly. The parents did realized the importance of involving all family members especially children at all stages of decision making but seemed to be silent on questions regarding their involvement in final decision making.

In India the final decision still rests in the hands of male member (mostly the bread earner) while the female and children can be better understood as the influencer and information seeker.

6. Implications

The findings of the study do hold importance for both marketers and social policy makers. The family vacation decision today is not merely taken by adults of the family. The children are equally contributors and influencers in such decisions. Children today are active learners and not just passive recipients of information. Thus marketers shall focus on socialization aspect as well. Marketers may increase their presence on social media since children now days give high importance to learning through word of mouth, and through internet. Adolescents spend much of their time browsing websites for information, rather than with an intention to make an actual purchase. These information searches are motivated by many reasons like school projects and for interaction with friends and referral group via sites like facebook, twitter, youtube etc. Hence it would be wise for businesses to consider these teenage browsers as potential customers, and furnish their websites with information that would be of interest to them about their brands.

7. Scope for Future Study

Despite the fact that there has been considerable research on consumer behavior and family decision making but yet very less focus has been on development of young Children as consumers. Moreover, very less attention has been paid to role of children during purchase of high involvement products like vacation. Moreover, none of the studies were available on role of Indian children in

case family vacations decision making. This shows that till date the Indian markets have not been able to identify any potential in this segment. Hence there is a huge scope for future researchers to identify the role of Indian children in case of various purchase decisions like those related to their personal use and also for those related to common use in the family. At the same time with the advent of digitization it is now imperative for researchers to consider the implications of internet as an active socialization agent for these young consumers.

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