



Who's influencing your shopping?

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In childhood, for those of us born before 1980, we'd experienced our fathers, sometimes mother, doing the family's shopping. Our parents were the influencers, buyers, and among consumers for all home requirement purchases.

We accepted everything without questioning, be it food, clothing or pocket money, for fear of a reprimand. But showing good results in school was license to negotiate hard with mother for extra pocket money. We even managed a small Lakshmi Bhandar (terracotta piggybank) in the hope that the Hindu goddess of wealth will always protect our savings.

Upto 1990, every father's pocket was sealed, but today, it's all become topsy-turvy. Lakshmi Bhandar potters may have lost their jobs because the Zap generation (Digital Zap : born in 1986 onwards: the span can go back to 1980 to all below 30 years, Compromise generation: born after 1965 upto 1980: 30 - 45 years, Retro generation: Born before 1965: 45+ years) does not save, they love to spend. Busy parents compensate guilt at denying quality time to children by becoming indulgent. The buyer, influencer and consumer are not the same person anymore.

People from the age of 5 to 22 years make choices for all types of products for the family. From savings and frugal spending, the trend is to shop, shop and shop to overcome situations like boredom, depression or excitement at festivities.

Different living conditions

Tracking the impact of 1991 economic reforms, we've found India's traditional joint family has broken into 7 living structures, especially in urban areas: 1) Young working boy or girl living independently when far from home. 2) Nuclear family where only the husband works. 3) Nuclear families where both husband and wife work pander to children's demands. 4) Unmarried

boy and girl living together. Acceptance of this relationship is an inverted situation for Compromise and Retro parents. Those who cannot accept pretend not to know anything. 5) Joint family, inside which are self-indulging goodies like expensive chocolates not shared outside the nuclear unit.

According to income or family size, there could be different refrigerators in a joint family where cooking happens in one kitchen only. Let me elaborate on 6) Neo-joint family and 7) Retired couples. It's total frustration for those in the habit of regular change.

The accessories have to be such that they do not disturb the internal master engineering of the vehicle. Remodelling could be done in the bumper, steering wheel, bonnet, wheel cap, side mirror, gear holding, upholstery, among others.

Neo-joint family

All married brothers living under the same roof with separate kitchens adhere to the great SAM principle, "Solpa adjust madi" meaning "just adjust a bit" in Kannada. This reflects the accommodating, tolerant character of Indians. Family members meet periodically for lunch or dinner in the parents' kitchen.

In consumer homes I visited in Ludhiana during research for a real estate company, a neo-joint family member was elucidating the boons and dilemmas of family bonding. He wanted to buy a Mercedes, but his elder brother drove a Maruti. Socially the elder had to own a car of similar or higher status so he felt constrained.

Although his elder brother didn't mind, what would his parents think, or society say? Not to disturb family hierarchy he resorted to family PR and convinced his mother to speak to his elder brother to get everyone's green signal.

Retired couple living alone

In a research trip to Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, I was taken aback talking with retired couples living in B class towns.

Their vocabulary was “buck” driven, about exchange rate fluctuation with the dollar. The fact was that their children working in the IT sector in USA would send them monthly allowances with bonus on Mother’s Day, Father’s Day.

These were not yesteryear’s old fashioned retired couples; bankers were lining up to woo them to get a bit of their “greenback” savings.

Business gains

Why is it necessary to know how people live? For consumer market business, it’s among the most important opportunities to enlarge their offer. This multi-complexity arising from India’s diverse culture, religion, language does not exist anywhere else in the world.

The family size cues product quantity or size, and clarifies different packet sizes to be handled for efficient supply chain management. It indicates the price band, sharpens the inventory and gives an idea of what products to bundle as special offers.

If manufacturers know family living conditions, they can provide high proximity to different family size buyers through retailers. A retail’s neighbourhood catchment also rationalizes the store’s space accordingly. Without addressing this fundamental business source, marketers often bring Western marketing culture, which

undoubtedly is innovative, but only its localized application in India can bring success.

Influencer, buyer and consumer

Purchase behavior has radically changed even 60 kms from metros. A 35-year-old mother with Rs 25,000 per month household income says her 11-year-old daughter decides the lipstick she should wear. Even the father of a 15-year-old bemoans of his child’s interference in his dressing. Clearly, Zappers are influencing every family purchase today. Sometimes they become buyers and consumers too.

Compromise and Retro buy as per commanding Zapper influence. For instance, parents depend on Zapper recommendation for styling, technology and trend in buying a car although the father is the more frequent user.

In contrast, Zappers feel discordant in the corporate world. They cannot influence decision-making as Compromise and Retro do not value their knowledge of society and trend. So they often switch off, and flirt with jobs outside to enrich their CVs.

To win their loyalty, work passion and reduce attrition, industries need to drastically change their traditional outlook and contemporarize corporate culture. Zap influence will more easily connect products and services to the external world because at the end of the day, Zappers are society’s influencers.



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