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ARTICLE

Parental Perception of Alpha Kids' Influence in General Buying Decisions During the COVID-19 Pandemic in India

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Abstract

This paper aims (i) to identify the parental perception of alpha kids' influence on general buying decisions, and (ii) to examine the impact of alpha kids' demographics (age, gender, and sibling) on the influence exerted by them in general buying decisions in families in India during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study is based on a cross-sectional survey approach. Primary data for the study was obtained in February 2021 through a structured questionnaire generated on Google Forms from a sample of mothers of 400 alpha children (aged 8-11 years) from rural and urban areas of Delhi (India). Notable findings emerged from this study revealed that Indian parents perceive their alpha kids to exert significant influence in general buying decisions and this influence is moderated to some extent by the age, gender, and birth order of the children. The results of this study extend interesting theoretical and practical implications for marketers and practitioners to have a better understanding of family consumption behavior in India. Marketers must take note of these observations while designing and implementing marketing mix strategies in respect of various goods and services meant for children/family consumption in India to sustain the impact of the Covid -19 pandemic.

Keywords: Generation Alpha; Influence; General Buying Decisions; Covid-19; India.

1 Introduction

Family is an important decision-making and consumption unit (Assael, 1989) that regularly buys and consumes a large number of goods and services and has attracted the interest of marketers and consumer behavior researchers over the years (Manouchehri and Burns, 2021; Moore et al., 2002) across countries. In these studies, children too are observed to exert considerable influence in family buying decisions for a wide array of goods and services, and this influence is increasing exponentially over time (Tabassum and Nabi, 2021; Ghouse et al., 2020; Madhavi et al., 2004; Chavda et al., 2005). Children's influence on family buying decisions is positively related to various factors such as the age of parents (older), family size (smaller), education facilities (better), socio-economic (slightly wealthier), availability of time to parents for children (lesser), the impact of external socialization variables (higher), life expectancy (higher), media exposure (greater), Internet consumption (greater), cultural mix (more diverse), ownership of mobile phones per member per family (higher), thereby, graduating the children from being mere observers to influencers to deciders in the family purchase decisions (Senevirathna et al., 2022; Manouchehri and Burns, 2021; Tabassum and Nabi, 2021; Rao, 2020; Chaudhary et al., 2018).

"Generation Alpha", a term coined by sociologist McCrindle (2009) for children born/to be born between 2011 and 2025, is a growing and lucrative consumer market (Senevirathna et al., 2022; Rao, 2020; Chaudhary, 2015) across the world irrespective of their place of birth. Alpha kids are not only spending billions of dollars out of their own pocket money but are also having a strong influence on the shopping behavior of their parents who are equally willing to spend a lot of their resources on their children (Castro et al., 2021; Fluxtrends, 2016). Across generations so far, this is the first group that is expected to be huge in numbers (an estimated 2.5 million alphas are born globally every week), the wealthiest, highly-educated, more assertive, well-informed, social media-friendly, and deeply immersed in technology throughout their lives (Manouchehri and Burns, 2021; McCrindle, 2009).

The intensity of spread of Covid-19 with more than 118 million confirmed cases and causing more than 2.63 million deaths as of 10 March 2021 (Worldometers), makes it one of the deadliest pandemics to date. To mitigate the spread of this pandemic, as a preventive measure, most governments worldwide have imposed, re-imposed, and still imposed strict lockdowns with the closure of most of the services, educational institutions, and offices (Vyas and Butakhieo, 2021). The Indian Government too ordered the first complete nationwide lockdown on 24 March 2020 for 21 days followed by second (19 days), third (14 days), and fourth (14 days) lockdowns respectively (Jeffrey and Kai, 2020). To conclude, one year on, the coronavirus still has the upper hand (Koshy, J., 2021).

The Covid-19 pandemic as compared to pre-pandemic time has two major implications in the area of children's participation in family buying behavior: firstly, due to the complete closure of schools and outdoor physical activities (UNICEF, 2021), children's media usage for studies, gathering information, and entertainment has increased manifold (Deka, K. and Anand, S., 2021), thereby children are becoming more informed than parents in respect of many new products, gadgets, apps, websites, and e-commerce platforms; and secondly, children and parents are now spending more time with each other and forming closer bonds with each other (Gupta and Kaur, 2020) resulting in more open and democratic discussions and involvement of children in most of the buying decisions. Though not yet tested empirically, both the implications will only improve the position of the children across all age groups in family buying decisions.

There exists an extensive body of knowledge about the influencing behavior of children in the pre-pandemic era, though these studies are important and provide a framework for further research, essentially there is an emergent need to validate the findings of these studies during the on-going Covid-19 pandemic in an emerging market economy like India mainly for five reasons: firstly, India is the second most populous country in the world after China with the current population of 1389 million (Worldometers); secondly, India is ranked as the sixth biggest economy in the world by the (Centre for Economics and Business Research, 2021); thirdly, India is a culturally distinct country where despite many cultures, languages, religions, and traditions, people live together with peace and harmony resulting in different consumption choices as compared to other countries; fourthly, more than 31.1 percent of current Indian population is under the age of 14 (Worldometers), and finally, very few studies that have been conducted in India so far are extremely restricted in scope and have only partially examined children's involvement in family buying decisions. Against this backdrop, the present study is being undertaken to empirically investigate the following research questions in the Indian context:

Research Question 1 Whether parents perceive their alpha kids to exert influence in general buying decisions in Indian families during the pandemic Covid-19?

Research Question 2 What relationship do the alpha kids' demographics (age, gender, and siblings) have with the influence exerted by these kids in the general buying decisions?

2 Literature Review and Hypothesis Formulation

Literature has revealed that children are no longer passive observers but are important participators who exert considerable influence in their families' buying decisions (Ghouse et al., 2020; Senevirathna et al., 2022; Chaudhary et al., 2018) and are increasingly becoming an important distinct consumer segment for various industries (McNeal, 1992). Therefore, to increase the market share in the segment of consumer goods, companies are increasingly directing their marketing campaigns toward children (Sellers, 1989) along with/without parents. Children's participation in family buying decisions is often supported by parents who want to spend more quality time with their children (Senevirathna et al., 2022; Castro et al., 2021; Tabassum and Nabi, 2021; Pratap, A, 2020; Gram, 2007). Parents are also becoming 'curling parents', who try to do everything possible to please their children, and hence, they let their children decide in most cases (Rao, 2020).

The majority of previous research examined children's influencing role in family buying decisions across the stages of the decision-making process, sub-decisions, and type of products and services (Ghouse et al., 2020). Children, in most of the past studies, have been documented to exert the maximum influence in the initial stages and minimum at the final stage (Wang et al., 2004). Past studies have also examined children's contribution to general buying decisions (Foxman and Tansuhaj, 1989a; Foxman et al., 1989b).

The results of these studies have confirmed the significance of children's participation across all the selected decision aspects. Against this backdrop, it seemed relevant to investigate past findings in the context of the role played by alpha kids in family buying decisions in Indian families from the point of view of their parents during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, it seemed relevant to hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2.1. *Parents perceive their alpha kids to exert influence in general buying decisions in India.*

Hypothesis 2.2. *Alpha kids' influence in general buying decisions varies across the select buying decisions.*

Previous studies have also examined the impact of various child demographics on the influence exerted by children in family buying decisions (Ghouse et al., 2020; Senevirathna et al., 2022; Ali et al., 2013; Chaudhary et al., 2018). The most commonly investigated child demographics are children's age, gender, and siblings. Past research validated that children's age and the extent of influence exerted by them are positively related, i.e., older children are more influential than younger children (Darley, 1986) in family purchase decisions. With increases in children's age, parents' yielding behavior becomes more affirmative (Levy and Lee, 2004), and children's influence attempts also extend to more product categories (McNeal and Yeh, 2003). Hence, it may be hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 2.3. *The influence exerted by alpha kids in the family buying decisions varies across the gender of the child.*

Past studies have considered the gender of children as an important variable (Lee, 2009; Flurry, 2007) in explaining the influence of children on family buying decisions. However, the findings of these studies are mixed, for example, studies by McNeal and Yeh (2003), and Lee and Collins (2000) have reported female children exert more influence in family buying decisions than male children; study by (Halling and Tufte, 2002) found boys to exert more influence than girls in these decisions, and studies by (Wang et al., 2004), and (Williams and Veeck, 1998) and Veeck (1 have concluded that the gender of the child is insignificant in affecting a child's influence in family decisions. These mixed results make it worthy of further examination in a patriarchal Indian society. Based on the above discussion, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2.4. *The influence exerted by alpha kids in the family buying decisions varies across the gender of the child.*

An extremely limited number of past studies have explored the impact of the presence/absence of siblings on the influence exerted by children in family purchase decisions (Wimalasiri, 2004). In psychology, the research has examined the effect of siblings on the development of personality traits of children (Skinner, 1985) and concluded that children without siblings (s) are more intelligent than sibling children (Parker, 1998). Similarly, (Ronner et al., 2007) have proposed a negative impact of siblings' on a child's perception of his/her influence in family purchase decisions. Based on the limited literature available, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 2.5. *The influence exerted by alpha kids in the family buying decisions varies across the birth order of the child.*

3 Research Methodology

Based upon the literature review, a systematic approach is adopted in this study to gain an in-depth understanding of the influence exerted by alpha kids in Indian families' general buying decisions. A cross-sectional survey method was carried out through a structured questionnaire, administered to a convenience sample of mothers of 400 alpha kids' (aged 8 – 11 years) studying in grades III to VI from rural and urban areas of Delhi (India) during February 2021. To maintain the norms for social distancing due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the questionnaire was generated on Google Form. The questionnaire was bilingual (in English and regional language Hindi), pretested on a sample of 25 mothers, and developed based on scales used in similar previous studies after due modifications as per the Indian context. The questionnaire consists of two parts, whereby, Part I covered demographic (age, gender, and birth order) related questions and Part II contained questions on the influence exerted by children in general buying decisions. Initially, principals of 18 schools situated in

Table 1. Sample Profile

Characteristic	Frequency (N = 400)	Percent
Age (years)		
8-9	154	38.5
9-10	178	44.5
10-11	68	17.0
Gender		
Male	226	56.5
Female	174	43.5
Siblings		
No siblings/single child	152	38.0
Siblings	248	62.0

different rural and urban areas of Delhi (India) were approached (via telephone and Google Meet), the research plan and questionnaire were discussed in detail, apprehensions were resolved, and then the request was made for permission to conduct the proposed web survey. After the due discussion 9 schools agreed to participate. The school principals were emailed a copy of a questionnaire and forwarded this questionnaire to the relevant student groups with a direction that the questionnaire must only be filled by the mother keeping in mind (i) only one of her children, (ii) the selected child must

be 8 to 11 years old. The response rate was restricted to one mother-one response. Schools were selected on a purposive sampling basis to allow a reasonable representation of different socio-economic groups. Responses were received from 480 mothers out of which only 400 could finally be used. Collected data was first summarised and tabulated in MS Excel and then analyzed with suitable statistical tools using SPSS.

The demographic profile of the sample population is provided in Table 1. The average age of the children surveyed was 9.3 years spread across 8 – 9 years old (38.5 percent), 9 – 10 years (44.5 percent), and the remaining from 10 – 11 years (17.0 percent). Gender-wise, a slightly higher number of the children were male (56.5 percent), and a comparatively higher number of children had siblings (62 percent).

3.1 Dependent Measures

In this study, the dependent variable, i.e., alpha kids' influence in general buying decisions is conceptualized as the extent to which s/he exerts influence in each of the eleven-items measure specifically developed for this purpose. Similar types of measures have also been used in past studies of identical nature (Foxman and Tansuhaj, 1989a; Foxman et al., 1989b)). Mothers of these children were asked to rate one of their children's influence in general buying decisions across eleven-item measure using a five-point scale (5 = almost every time to 1 = never), and the selected child must be 8 to 11 years old. Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient values were computed for all the 11 scale items which indicated satisfactory internal consistency, with an alpha coefficient value of 0.79 (Nunnally, 1967).

3.2 Independent variables

Based upon the literature review, three of the most prominent children characteristics having a moderating impact on children's participation and contribution in family buying decisions were identified and included in this study for further investigation: children's age (8-9 years, 9-10 years, and 10-11 years), gender (male, female), and siblings (no sibling/single child, one or more siblings.

4 Findings and Discussion

Table 2. Alpha Kids' Influence on General Buying Decisions

Influence Source	Almost every time %	Very often %	Often %	Sometimes %	Never %
In suggesting products to buy	18.6	16.8	45.3	17.5	1.8
In suggesting the timings to buy products	7.9	9.9	31.4	30.1	20.7
In suggesting stores to shop	18.1	14.9	33.0	19.6	14.4
In suggesting brand to buy	33.8	20.2	24.3	14.9	6.8
In suggesting products' sizes/quantities	17.5	16.2	29.6	22.0	14.7
In suggesting type/style of products	37.2	22.8	25.7	9.7	4.6
In suggesting the color of the products	36.4	18.3	26.2	12.3	6.8
Co-shopping with parents to buy products	28.0	17.8	31.9	15.4	6.9
In suggesting price range for the products	13.1	9.9	27.2	24.1	25.7
In noticing new products firstin the family	44.0	22.8	19.9	10.4	2.9
In finding out the best deals about products	28.5	21.5	27.2	11.5	11.3

The Hypothesis 2.1 suggests that parents perceive their alpha kids to exert influence in general buying decisions in India. To test this hypothesis, children's influence across eleven general buying decisions was obtained on a five-point scale (5 = almost every time to 1= never) and the respective responses are summarised in Table 2. The results show that the majority of the parents perceive their children to exert considerable influence in all the general buying decisions. Children's influence is highest in the case of suggesting the products to buy in which except 1.8 percent of children, rest have been involved in influencing this decision to some extent, and the influence was least in suggesting the price range for the products where almost one-fourth (25.7 percent) kids did not exert any influence at all. A deeper look into the results revealed that in a significant number of families (44 percent), the new products were initially noticed by alpha children. The results reveal that although children's influence was limited to indecisive decision areas that include their influence in suggesting the timings to buy a product, and the price range for the product, quite an impressive number of children actively participated in the rest of the decision areas whereby more than 30 percent of the surveyed children almost every time played an active role in suggesting the products' type/style (37.2 percent), color (36.4 percent), and brand (33.8 percent). Another point of importance is that except for about 11.3 percent, the rest of the children do contribute to finding out the best price deals,

Table 3. Alpha Kids' Influence on General Buying Decisions: t-test

Influence Source	Mean(Standard Deviation)	Mean Difference	t-value	Sig.	Never %
In suggesting products to buy	3.33 (1.027)	0.827	15.738	.000***	1.8
In suggesting the timings to buy products	2.54 (1.156)	0.042	10.708	.049*	20.7
In suggesting stores to shop	3.03 (1.284)	0.526	8.012	.000***	14.4
In suggesting brand to buy	3.59 (1.276)	1.092	16.721	.000***	6.8
In suggesting products' sizes/quantities	3.00 (1.294)	0.500	7.552	.000***	14.7
In suggesting type/style of products	3.78 (1.181)	1.280	21.182	.000***	4.6
In suggesting colour of the products	3.65 (1.270)	1.152	17.724	.000***	6.8
Co-shopping with parents to buy products	3.45 (1.236)	0.948	14.980	.000***	6.9
In suggesting price range for the products	2.61 (1.319)	0.107	11.590	.043 *	25.7
In noticing new products	3.95 (1.148)	1.445	24.608	.000***	2.9
In finding out the best deals about products	3.45 (1.315)	0.945	14.051	.000***	11.3

[a]1 = never, 5 = almost every time, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

and excepting 6.9 percent the rest of the children also co-shopped with their parents. The analysis results thus lead to the acceptance of Hypothesis 2.1. These results are similar to the results of past studies (Ghouse et al., 2020; Chaudhary et al., 2018; Foxman and Tansuhaj, 1989a).

The Hypothesis 2.2 states that the alpha kids' influence on general buying decisions varies across the selected decisions. To validate this claim, firstly, children's mean influence scores for eleven general buying decisions were calculated, then the mean differences were obtained from the mid-value (2.5 on a scale of 1-5) to see the extent to which children's influence in these decisions differs from the mid-value, and finally, a one-sample t-test was used to see if these differences are statistically significant or not. The analysis results are presented in Table 3. Alpha children's influence was found to be statistically significant across all the general buying decisions. The analysis results thus lead to the acceptance of the Hypothesis 2.2. The results also indicate that as compared to areas relating to the monetary aspect of the purchase, children exert the most influence in areas relating more to the expressive aspects of the purchase such as in case of noticing the new products, suggesting the style, the color, the brands, and finding out the best deals about the products. These results are similar to the results of past studies by (Martensen and Gronholdt, 2008; Belch et al., 1985; Foxman and Tansuhaj, 1989a).

The Hypothesis 2.3 proposed that alpha kids' influence on general buying decisions varies across the age of these children. To assess the statistical significance of this hypothesis, the ANOVA test was applied by taking alpha kids' influence on general buying decisions as a dependent variable and kids' age as an independent variable (Table 4). Contrary to the expectations, significant differences were observed only across three buying decisions while suggesting: (i) type/style of products ($F = 3.249$, $p < .05$), (ii) color of the products ($F = 8.956$, $p < .001$), and (iii) the best deals about products ($F = 3.241$, $p < .05$), thus leading to the partial acceptance of Hypothesis 2.3. This result is parallel to the findings of existing literature (Ali et al., 2013; Laczniak and Palan, 2004; Jenkins, 1979) to a limited extent only.

Table 4. Impact of Alpha Kids' Age on their Influence in General Buying Decisions: ANOVA

Influence Source	Mean (Standard Deviation)			Type lll Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	Sig.
	8-9 Years	9-10 years	10-11 years					
In suggesting products to buy	3.10 (0.969)	3.51 (1.018)	3.32 (1.105)	0.475	2	.238	.224	.799
In suggesting the timings to buy products	2.42 (1.218)	2.59 (1.097)	2.68 (1.167)	0.554	2	.277	.206	.814
In suggesting stores to shop	2.96 (1.368)	3.05 (1.249)	3.12 (1.181)	5.037	2	2.518	1.533	.217
In suggesting brand to buy	3.35 (1.296)	3.81 (1.195)	3.51 (1.377)	4.193	2	2.097	1.290	.277
In suggesting products' sizes/quantities	2.94 (1.354)	3.01 (1.277)	3.14 (1.202)	4.676	2	2.338	1.399	.248
In suggesting type/style of products	3.88 (1.247)	3.80 (1.106)	3.47 (1.212)	8.960	2	4.480	3.249	.040*
In suggesting colour of the products	3.73 (1.279)	3.60 (1.229)	3.61 (1.386)	27.739	2	13.870	8.956	.000***
Co-shopping with parents to buy products	3.55 (1.237)	3.34 (1.237)	3.54 (1.226)	2.676	2	1.338	.875	.418
In suggesting price range for the products	2.41 (1.246)	2.74 (1.352)	2.68 (1.352)	7.670	2	3.835	2.218	.110
In noticing new products	3.73 (1.257)	4.07 (1.057)	4.09 (1.074)	3.363	2	1.682	1.279	.280
In finding out the best deals about products	3.13 (1.383)	3.64 (1.283)	3.63 (1.080)	11.071	2	5.535	3.241	.040*

The Hypothesis 2.4 claims that alpha kids' influence on general buying decisions varies across the gender of these children. For the statistical assessment of this claim, the ANOVA test was applied by taking kids' influence on general buying decisions as a dependent variable and kids' gender as an independent variable (Table 5). The analysis results

Table 5. Impact of Alpha Kids' Gender on their Influence in General Buying Decisions: ANOVA

Source	Mean (Standard Deviation)		Type lll Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	Sig.	Sig.
	Male	Female						
In suggesting products to buy	3.30 (1.045)	3.37 (1.005)	12.860	2	6.430	6.261	.002**	.799
In suggesting the timings to buy products	2.52 (1.167)	2.58 (1.145)	3.777	2	1.888	1.417	.244	.814
In suggesting stores to shop	2.99 (1.290)	3.09 (1.296)	5.232	2	2.616	0.392	.676	.217
In suggesting brand to buy	3.47 (1.290)	3.68 (1.252)	15.838	2	7.919	5.424	.005**	.277
In suggesting products' sizes/quantities	2.95 (1.358)	3.04 (1.188)	4.636	2	2.318	0.505	.604	.248
In suggesting type/style of products	3.74 (1.209)	3.85 (1.120)	10.752	2	5.376	2.278	.035*	.040*
In suggesting colour of the products	3.38 (1.234)	3.54 (1.241)	1.305	2	0.652	0.403	.669	.000***
Co-shopping with parents to buy products	2.71 (1.330)	2.47 (1.293)	3.979	2	1.989	1.303	.273	.418
In suggesting price range for the products	3.68 (1.290)	3.04 (1.358)	9.446	2	4.723	2.938	.046*	.110
In noticing new products	3.88 (1.053)	4.05 (1.053)	10.849	2	5.425	4.187	.016*	.280
In finding out the best deals about products	3.26 (1.363)	3.54 (1.218)	23.282	2	11.641	6.947	.001***	.040*

[a] 1= never, 5 = almost every time, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

revealed that female children have exerted higher influence in all the eleven general buying decisions than the influence exerted by male children. This result is following the findings of past research (McNeal and Yeh, 2003; Lee and Collins, 2000), however, these differences were found to be significant only across six of the eleven decisions, thus leading to the partial acceptance of Hypothesis 2.4. This result, to a limited extent, is parallel to the findings of a study by (Akinyele, 2010) who also found girls to be slightly more influential on certain decisions involving expressive aspects of the product than boys (Chavda et al., 2005).

The Hypothesis 2.5 states that alpha kids' influence on general buying decisions varies across the presence/absence of children's sibling(s) in their families. To examine this claim, again an ANOVA test was applied by taking children's influence in general buying decisions as a dependent variable and kids' sibling/non-sibling as an independent variable. The respective results are summarised in Table 6.

The mean influence scores of children's influence indicate that single children, as compared to children having siblings, have exerted more influence in all the eleven general buying decisions in their families. However, these differences were found to be statistically significant only in five out of the eleven general buying decisions thus leading to the partial acceptance of Hypothesis 2.5. This result is in line with the past studies that have explored the impact of the presence of siblings on the influence exerted by children in family decisions (Skinner, 1985).

Table 6. Impact of alpha Kids' Sibling(s) on their Influence in General Buying Decisions: ANOVA

Influence Source	Mean (Standard Deviation)		Type lll Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	Sig.	Sig.
	Single child	Sibling (s)						
In suggesting products to buy	3.47 (0.996)	3.02 (1.048)	7.416	2	3.708	3.560	.029*	.799
In suggesting the timings to buy products	2.66 (1.093)	2.42 (1.214)	6.055	2	3.027	2.282	.039*	.814
In suggesting stores to shop	3.05 (1.322)	3.02 (1.241)	4.825	2	2.412	1.468	.232	.217
In suggesting brand to buy	3.79 (1.299)	3.48 (1.225)	16.419	2	8.210	5.152	.006**	.277
In suggesting products' sizes/quantities	3.03 (1.226)	2.98 (1.361)	4.733	2	2.367	1.416	.244	.248
In suggesting type/style of products	3.87 (1.174)	3.72 (1.168)	12.655	2	6.328	4.622	.009**	.040*
In suggesting colour of the products	3.72 (1.233)	3.60 (1.309)	4.010	2	2.005	1.244	.289	.000***
Co-shopping with parents to buy products	3.50 (1.216)	3.39 (1.260)	1.510	2	.755	.492	.612	.418
In suggesting price range for the products	2.67 (1.338)	2.55 (1.302)	2.004	2	1.002	.574	.564	.110
In noticing new products	4.01 (1.193)	3.90 (1.093)	5.418	2	2.709	2.068	.128	.280
In finding out the best deals about products	3.52 (1.313)	3.38 (1.306)	9.448	2	4.724	2.759	.045*	.040*

5 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The notable findings that emerged from this study suggest that (i) Indian parents perceive their alpha kids to exert considerable influence in general buying decisions during the Covid -19 pandemic, (ii) this influence varies across various decision aspects, and (iii) children tend to have more influence in those decision aspects that are comparatively more expressive, less risky in terms of monetary investment, and need information support for participation such as noticing the new products, finding out about the available style, color, brands, etc., and (iv) the impact of child's demographics (age,

gender, and siblings) on the influence exerted by him/her in general family buying decisions is restricted to some of the decision aspects only.

Although most of the results of this study are parallel to the findings of past studies indicating that even in a traditional Indian society children are assuming important positions in family buying decisions from a very young age, some of the results are different from the findings of past studies as well in the area of examination of the impact of child demographics' on the influence exerted by these children in family buying decisions. The possible reasons for the restricted impact of demographics on children's influence are: (i) the existence of cultural differences in Indian society having a bearing on children's upbringing; (ii) the greater number of parents opting for a fewer number of children for various reasons such as late marriages, increased participation of women/mothers in work outside the home, the emergence of nuclear and single-parent families, enhanced exposure to better lifestyles and medical facilities; and (iii) the impact of the Covid – 19 pandemic leading to the digitalization of alpha kids at a very young age. All these factors may have worked jointly in the same direction in increasing the influence of each child in the family buying decisions irrespective of his/her age, gender, and presence/absence of sibling(s).

The findings of this study have important practical implications for the marketers to develop and modify the marketing strategies to include the requirements, liking, disliking, and tastes of young children along with their parents to survive in the post-pandemic period. The pandemic has no doubt amplified the power of children in buying decisions of Indian families, hence, following the study findings, the marketers producing or wishing to produce the goods and services for family/child consumption must take care of these changing paradigms to manage the demand side of the products more effectively.

As the alpha kids are widely exposed to multiple digital platforms from a seemingly very young age, the businesses targeting these children and their families must adopt new ways of interacting and communicating with these children, one of the suggested ways may be the phygitalization (a combination of digital and physical efforts) of the marketing mix. Another important implication for the marketers could be the re-routing of products from specific stores to grocery stores and chemist/medical shops which remains open even in the complete lockdown of all economic activities. The result of this study reiterates the need for the marketers to focus on the use of local resources which will provide them an edge over the global marketers catering to the needs of Indian Families.

6 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Even though this study validates most of the findings of past literature and provides much-needed insights about the emerging roles of alpha children in general buying decisions in Indian families in the times of the Covid-19 pandemic, certain limitations need to be noted. Firstly, the scope of this study is limited to the sample size (400) and urban and rural areas of India (Delhi), hence, the researchers need to extend the findings of this study to newer settings with bigger sample sizes; secondly, the questionnaire method used for primary data collection method in this study may lead to the respondent bias in collected data, accordingly, in future studies an inclusive approach consisting of observation methods, and field interaction methods may be used for required data/information collection; and finally, to get even more comprehensive understanding about the children's influence in family purchase decisions, parents as well children may constitute the survey sample.

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