

## CHILDREN'S INFLUENCE ON PARENTAL FOOD BUYING DECISIONS: A CASE STUDY IN BOGURA, BANGLADESH

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### ABSTRACT

Digital media advancements allow children to discover new food products ahead of their parents which makes them influential decision-makers when it comes to family purchases. The research investigates how children choose their preferred food items according to their social status and their ability to affect their parents' food selection choices. The study conducted 140 interviews with 70 children and 70 parents from a similar household in Bogura through face-to-face interviews with a standardized questionnaire. The research used descriptive methods and econometric techniques including logistic regression to fulfil its objectives. The research shows children play an active role in shaping their parents' food purchases through direct and indirect methods when it comes to their preferred items including ice cream, chocolate, fried chicken, cake and noodles. The degree of child influence on food purchases depends on four main factors which include family size, number of siblings, parental educational attainment and household financial resources. Children who come from smaller families with fewer siblings and parents who have higher educational levels tend to have more influence. The preferences of children tend toward inexpensive products with spicy flavors and foreign brand labels because they see these items in television commercials. The research demonstrates children play a substantial part in determining family food preferences while providing valuable insights for companies that want to reach this specific market segment.



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## I. INTRODUCTION

The most significant family member is the child. Youngsters make an unavoidable partner in their parents' purchasing choices (Wang, 2007). Commercially primarily target the preschool and young age groups in an effort to increase their sales through marketing strategies and other means (Sandra, 2008). Children now make up a sizeable portion of the consumer market that has a significant impact on how different products are bought by families in many different ways. They also are recognized as a key market, an influencing participant, and a future market (Zlatanova-Pazheva, 2019).

Children represent an important target market segment and gain respective attention from the marketing point of view. Today's kids are customers, buyers, spenders, shoppers, consumers (McNeal, 1992). Children play an important role in the consumer market by influencing their parents - purchases either for the product used in the household or for the children themselves (Belch et al., 1985; Foxman et al., 1989). The marketers and advertisers have observed and analyzed the mother-child bond as a primary market relationship (Cook, 2003). The norm, tradition, and rules of parents deciding in the family are thought to be fading. Family communication becomes more open and democratic (Chusna et al., 2021). As a result, children have a greater influence on family decision making (Mikkelsen and Nørgaard, 2006). Children have more freedom to choose what they eat, wear, and buy rather than having it dictated to them by their parents.

Understanding consumer behavior is a complex issue as it is characterized by a decision process (Furst et al., 1996). The decision process includes all activities directly involved in searching for, evaluating, selecting, purchasing, consuming, and disposing of products and services (Solomon et al., 2010). In this case, the factors that influence consumer's behavior can be numerous. For instance, using a qualitative study, Kennedy et al. (2004) find appearance and convenience as the most important factors influencing the purchase of chicken meat.

In the family decision-making process, family members participate and play roles such as initiators, influencers, gatekeepers and as the final decision makers (Lackman et al., 1993; Chaudhary et al., 2012). Despite the fact that children are an important and growing market segment in general, no recent research has focused on them. As a result, this study will seize the opportunity to fill the gap by identifying the role of children in the family purchasing process.

Children often initiate potential purchases, highlighting the significant role children play in family decision-making (Martensen & Grønholdt, 2008). Studies show that daughters generally have more influence than sons, with boys more interested in finding favorite items and helping with grocery shopping (Kaur & Singh, 2006). Atkin (1978) found that female children had a stronger influence on family purchase decisions, using strategies like reasoning and persuasion more frequently than boys. Gender roles for parents refer to the normative behavior of the family members.

In China, children are considered "Little Emperors," with 68.7% influencing parents' purchases (Wimalasiri, 2004). Single-parent households have more independent children, as they require more involvement in family shopping routines. Single parents are time-savvy and limited income earners, requiring more responsibilities at home and family shopping (McNeal & Yeh, 1997). Children would achieve more influence if their mother worked away from home. However, according to the study of children's influence in Jakarta, occupation of the mother did not correlate significantly with the children's influence in the family. The reason was that both

mothers working away from home and those staying at home as housewives were still the ones who had the responsibility for organizing the daily household activities (Lee & Beatty, 2002).

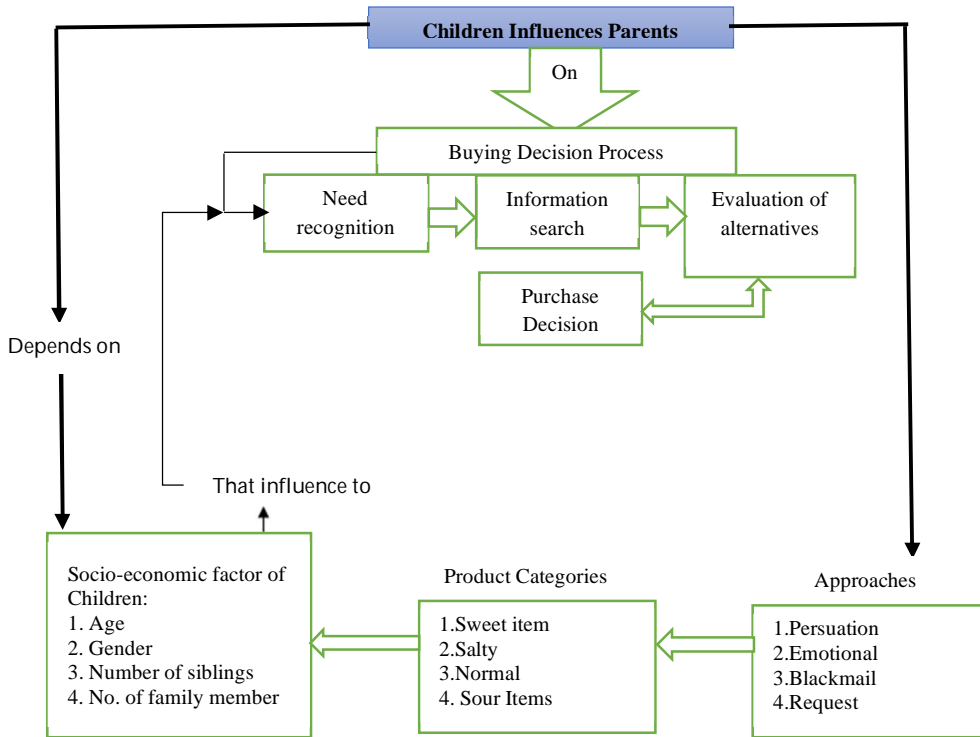
The family size decides on how big the children's involvement in the family is. Children who come from a big family (with more than 5 people in the household) have fewer rights to decide. Family size may have an effect on the degree of children's influence in the family decision-making process (Carina, 2017). Children significantly influence parental buying decisions, making them the center of attraction in families (Palan, 1997). By influencing their parents, children created a plethora of secondary markets. According to a study conducted by cable television executives and cited by Caruana and Vassallo (2003), children influence 43% of total family purchasing, which is an appealing figure for both researchers and marketers. This influence was achieved by honing various communication skills in order to make the request to parents.

The justification of the study is firstly, now a days children act as passive participants in a family's food buying decisions. Children not only choose the products which belong to them, but they also have the upper hand on products which are used by almost every other family member. Secondly, there is not much research on this topic. Finally, by knowing the children's preference we are comparing and analyzing the perception and behavior of the parents and children in the family decision making process.

## **1.2 Conceptual framework of children influences the buying decision process**

Children play influential roles in family buying decision making. This fact is also addressed by Resource Theory. The Resource Theory explains the source of power in which anyone makes anything available to others in the family is to satisfy their needs or attain goals. The resources determine children's power based on different sources, including their education, ages, social levels and family communications which impact on their parents. These powers are divided into five ways: normative, economic, affective, personal, and cognitive resources (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010).

The dependent variable in the conceptual model is the children influence in family purchasing process. The independent variables are the various elements that encourage youngsters to influence their parents and the family purchasing process. Children and parents are both influenced by their socio-economic factors including children's age, gender, no. of siblings, no. of family members, parents' income, profession, size of family etc. Also, the product categories have influenced the children on parents' food buying process. All food items are categorized under four subsections such as sweet items, salty, normal and spicy items. Children have some approaches that have influenced the parents' food buying process such as persuasion, emotion, blackmail, request etc.



**Figure 2: Children influence on the family buying decision process**

Source: Modified from Akter (2017)

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1 Study area

Research investigation usually requires the selection of an area which is particularly suitable for satisfying the overall purpose of the study. The area in which a survey is to be made depends on the particular purpose of the survey and possible cooperation of the study population, women and children. Besides, the mobility which allows easy access to the study area, and time saving are also issues for the researcher in selecting area. Bogura Sadar Upazila of Bogura district has an area of 176 square kilometers and consists of 11 unions. The area of Bogura Sadar Upazila (Bogura district) is 197.75 sq km, located in between 24°41' and 24°59' north latitudes and in between 89°16' and 89°30' east longitudes (Banglapedia, 2021).

### 2.2 Administration of data collection

A quantitative method was to collect data from the selected respondents. The strength of the quantitative method is that results can be generalized to the entire population (Neuman, 2000). In the case of face-to-face interviews, a cross-sectional survey was carried out between December to March 2023. Face-to-face surveys have many advantages. Specifically, they are the most flexible form of data collection methods and are suitable for longer interviews with more complex

tasks (De Leeuw, 2008). They allow for the use of visual and auditory stimuli. Because they are characterized by personal interaction, the interviewer can give direct support to the respondent by explaining questions and tasks in more detail. In addition, the interviewer can probe further information and encourage the respondent to answer every question (De Leeuw, 2008). However, the presence of an interviewer does not only provide some additional advantages but also creates the risks of interviewer bias. A typical example of such bias is social desirability bias, which is the systematic over-reporting of socially approved behaviors and under-reporting of undesirable ones (Groves et al. 2009). In this case, respondents try to please the interviewer by providing answers that align with societal norms (De Leeuw et al., 2008). Other shortcomings include geographical restrictions, high cost per respondent, and time pressure on respondents. Nevertheless, in a developing country context like Bangladesh, face-to-face interviews provide a more practical way to collect quantitative data than mail, phone, or internet surveys, due to limited infrastructure (e.g., limited and unreliable internet and mail services).

The study targeted households with children aged 8 to 18 who are at least partly responsible for buying food or making decisions concerning food purchases in their homes. The surveyed zones were Balua Hata, Multinagar and Nataipara of Bogura Sadar Upazila. Total number of respondents was 140 comprises of 70 children and 70 parents. The primary respondents were the parents but, in few aspects, data was also collected from the children also. Different days and times of the week for the visits were used to increase the chances of contact and to get a complete interview. Follow-ups were made as needed, such that some households were visited twice. Prior to the data collection, informed consent was obtained. A standardized questionnaire is used for face-to-face interviews. The questionnaire was piloted with two parts with four sections such as Section A: Basic information for both children and parents, Section B: Product categories for children preference, Section C: Questionnaire for children, Section D: Questionnaire for parents. After data collection, the data was processed and edited for analysis. The collected data was scrutinized and summarized carefully before the actual tabulation. After collecting, the data was transferred into an Excel data sheet and cleaning was done to ensure the accuracy of the data entry.

### 2.3 Analytical technique

Descriptive statistics like mean, percentage, frequency tables, ranking graphical analyses, etc. were used to examine the different attributes. To determine the factors that affect the parents' buying decision making process, the logistic regression model was used. The utilization of the Logistic Regression model in this study is motivated by the need to separate the variables impacting parents' decision-making processes concerning food buying. The dependent variable in this analysis is the children's influences in the buying process. The independent variables include age, no. of family members, total no. of children, father education level, mother education level, and monthly income. These variables collectively form the basis for a model elucidating parents' behavior regarding their food buying decision-making process. The empirical model is shown below.

$$Y_i = \alpha + \sum_{i=1}^n \beta_i X_i + \mu_i$$

Where,  $Y_i$ = Children influence on parents' buying decision process,  $X_1$ = Age,  $X_2$ = Gender,  $X_3$ = Number of siblings,  $X_4$ = Number of family members,  $X_5$ = Monthly family income,  $\alpha$  is the intercept of the regression model,  $\beta_i$  are the parameters to be estimated and  $\mu_i$  is the error term.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Socio-demographic profile of children and parents

Socio-demographic characteristics of children and parents are shown in Table 1. The majority of parents were within the 36-40 age range. This demographic distribution might influence family dynamics, decision-making processes and financial stability. It was also found that children in a small family can influence parents' food buying decisions more than large families.

The age distribution of children showed a relatively balanced spread across the ages 11 to 17, with the highest frequencies at ages 16 and 17 (both 17.14 percent). This balance is important for understanding the developmental and educational needs of children, as well as their influence on household decisions. The gender distribution was also nearly balanced, with boys (51.43 percent) slightly outnumbering girls (48.57 percent). This near-equal distribution ensured that findings related to child preferences and influences are not skewed by gender. It was also found that no. of siblings also needed to be low to influence more.

The income distribution of households throughout the month appears in Table 1. The majority of surveyed households earn between BDT 20001 and 40000 per month which places them in the lower-middle income category. The majority of fathers in the study sample (85.7 percent) completed their education at the higher secondary level or higher which indicates that the sample contains well-educated fathers. The distribution pattern of fathers' education levels in the surveyed households indicates that most fathers possess advanced educational backgrounds which could lead to better household choices and improved socioeconomic results. The educational background of mothers shows more variety than fathers do because a significant number of mothers have completed their education, but a considerable portion has limited schooling.

#### 3.2 Children's food product preferences

It can be observed that there is a total of 23 food items (Table 2). Among these, children show the highest preference for ice cream, followed by chocolate, fried chicken, cake, noodles, pizza, pasta, burger, meat/fish, candy, chanacur, juice, milk, fruits, chips, cola/soft drinks, eggs, sweet items, breads, apple pie, fresh vegetables, cereals, and rice. It is noteworthy that ice cream and chocolate are the top choices for children, often leading them to exert influence on their parents to purchase these items.

#### 3.3 Sources of getting information about children's foodstuff

Children rely on various sources of information when making decisions about food purchases. Among the children surveyed, 15 children obtained information about food products from their family members, while 2 children believed that their friends could provide them with information. Additionally, 4 children mentioned that they received information from their friends about food products. The majority, 48 children, considered TV advertisements a significant source of information, as these advertisements showcase different food products. One child mentioned that they acquire information about food products from TV programs.

**Table 1: Socio-demographic profile of children and parents**

Category	Details	Frequency	Percent (%)
Respondent age (years)	30-35	8	11.43
	36-40	28	40.00
	41-45	22	31.43
	46-50	8	11.43
	51-55	4	5.71
Family size (no.)	3	6	8.57
	4	25	35.71
	5	15	21.42
	6	2	2.85
	7	5	7.14
	8	10	14.29
	9	4	5.71
	10	3	4.29
Childs' age (years)	11	9	12.86
	12	10	14.29
	13	10	14.29
	14	8	11.43
	15	7	10
	16	12	17.14
	17	12	17.14
Childs' gender	Boys	36	51.43
	Girls	34	48.57
Siblings (no.)	1	11	15.71
	2	44	62.86
	3	13	18.57
	4	1	1.43
	6	1	1.43
Monthly income (BDT/ month)	<20000	16	22.86
	20001-40000	30	42.86
	40001-60000	5	7.14
	>60000	19	27.14
Father's education level	Higher secondary & above	60	85.71
	Secondary	10	14.29
	Primary	0	0.00
Mother's education level	Higher secondary & above	35	50.00
	Secondary	26	37.14
	Primary	9	12.86

**Table 2: Children's most preferable food product items**

<b>Serial no.</b>	<b>Product name</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
1.	Ice-cream	68	97.14
2.	Chocolate	67	95.71
3.	Fried chicken	66	94.29
4.	Cake	66	94.29
5.	Noodles	65	92.86
6.	Pizza	64	91.43
7.	Pasta	63	90.0
8.	Burger	63	90.0
9.	Meat/Fish	62	88.57
10.	Candy	61	87.14
11.	Chanacur	60	85.71
12.	Juice	60	85.71
13.	Milk	59	84.29
14.	Fruits	59	84.29
15.	Chips	59	84.29
16.	Cola/soft drinks	58	82.86
17.	Egg	58	82.86
18.	Sweet items	58	82.86
19.	Breads	57	81.43
20.	Apple pie	57	81.43
21.	Fresh vegetable	57	81.43
22.	Cereals	56	80.0
23.	Rice	56	80.0

**Table 3: Sources of getting information about foodstuff for children**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Family members	15	21.43
Friends	2	2.86
School	4	5.71
TV advertisement	48	68.57
TV program	1	1.43
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>

### 3.4 Parents' opinion on product attributes that affect food buying process

Based on the Table 4, it can be observed that 43 parents believe that mothers are responsible for planning and organizing food buying, while 27 parents think that both parents are involved in the planning process. Additionally, 1 parent attributed the responsibility of food buying to the mother, 47 parents attributed it to the father, and 21 parents believed that both parents share the responsibility. Furthermore, 43 parents think that mothers make the decision for food buying, while 27 parents believe that both parents make the decision together.

**Table 4: Parents' opinion on different product attributes**

Variable	Characteristics	Frequency	Percent (%)
Price	Cheap	45	64.29
	On sale	25	35.71
Package	Pictures	10	14.29
	Colors	14	20
	Forms	46	65.7
	Domestic	4	5.71
Food brand	Foreign	46	65.71
	National level	16	22.86
	Regional	4	5.71
Taste	Salty food	5	7.14
	Normal	15	21.43
	Sweet food	14	20
	Spicy food	36	51.43

### 3.5 Children opinion for planning, deciding and responsible for food buying

According to Table 5, it can be concluded that among the children surveyed, 21 children believe that their mother is responsible for planning or organizing food buying, while 40 children think that their father is responsible. Additionally, 24 children think that both parents are involved in planning for shopping or food buying. Only 1 child believes that their mother alone is responsible for food buying, while 45 children attribute this responsibility to their father, and 24 children believe that both parents share this responsibility. Moreover, 39 children think that their mother makes the decision for food buying, 5 children think that their father makes the decision, and 26 children think that both parents make the decision together.

**Table 5: Children opinion for planning, responsible and decided for food buying process**

Variable	Sub variable	Frequency	Percent
Who usually plan	Mother	21	30
	Father	40	57.14
	Mother & Father	9	12.86
Responsible for food buying	Mother	1	1.43
	Father	45	64.29
	Mother & Father	24	34.29
Take decision for food buying	Mother	39	55.71
	Father	5	7.14
	Mother & Father	26	37.14

### 3.6 Children influence on the buying process

#### 3.7 Summary statistics of the variables

Table 6 shows the summary statistics of independent variables with an average age of approximately 41.5 years. Family sizes average about 5.5 members, while the number of siblings per individual centres around 2.2. Parental education levels show fathers with an average of 13.7

years of schooling and mothers with 10.4 years. Monthly household income, measured in Bangladeshi Taka (BDT), averages roughly 30,000.

**Table 6: Summary statistics**

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. dev.	Min.	Max.
Age	70	41.46	5.11	33	55
Family member (no.)	70	5.51	2.02	3	10
Siblings (no.)	70	2.21	0.92	1	6
Father's education level (years)	70	13.7	3.86	8	20
Mother's education level (years)	70	10.43	3.87	5	19
Monthly income (BDT)	70	30071	18399	12000	100000

### 3.8 Testing multicollinearity

Multicollinearity exists when independent variables are correlated. Correlated independent variables make it difficult to make inferences about individual regression coefficient and their individual effects on the dependent variable. When independent variables are correlated, it indicates that changes in one variable are associated with shifts in another variable. The stronger the correlation, the more difficult it is to estimate the relationship between each independent variable and dependent variable independently because the independent variable tends to change in unison. From the Table 7, the value of independent variable indicates the independent variables are not strongly correlated with each other.

**Table 7: Testing multicollinearity among independent variables**

Variable name	Age	No. of family members	Total no. of children	Father schooling year	Mother schooling year	Monthly income
Age	1.0000					
Family members	.1453	1.0000				
Number of siblings	.1398	.4570	1.0000			
Father's education level	.1493	-.0728	.0553	1.0000		
Mother's education level	.0941	-.1177	-.0304	.8885	1.0000	
Monthly income	-.0156	-.1718	-.0672	.7362	.8030	1.0000

### 3.9 Factors affecting parents' buying process

The dependent variable was the influence of children on the family buying process, with independent variables including parents' age, number of family members, number of siblings, father's education level, mother's education level, and monthly income. The analysis revealed that the number of family members, number of siblings, and mother's education level have

negative coefficients, indicating a reduced likelihood of parents accepting children's opinions in the food buying process as these variables increase (Table 8). The effect of the number of siblings is statistically significant at the 5% level ( $p = 0.019$ ), and mother's education level is significant at the 5% level ( $p = 0.024$ ), while the number of family members is significant at the 10% level ( $p = 0.075$ ).

**Table 8: Children influence on parents' buying process**

Variables	Coefficient	Std. err.	Z	P> Z
Age	0.0199	0.0314	-0.63	0.052
Family member	-0.0269	0.0863	-0.31	0.075
Number of siblings	-0.2812	0.2157	-1.30	0.019
Father's education level	0.1685	0.0973	1.73	0.083
Mother's education level	-0.2339	0.1033	-2.26	0.024
Income	0.5157	0.3549	-1.45	0.014
-cons	-1.5266	6.2748	-0.24	0.808
Number of observations	70			
Wald $\chi^2(6)$	18.54			
Prob > $\chi^2$	0.005			
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.1221			
Log pseudo likelihood	-84.20			

Conversely, parents' age, father's education level, and monthly income have positive coefficients, suggesting an increased likelihood of accepting children's opinions in the food buying process as these variables increase. The effect of father's education level is statistically significant at the 10% level ( $p = 0.083$ ), while parents' age ( $p = 0.052$ ) and monthly income ( $p = 0.014$ ) are statistically significant at 5% levels. The overall model is statistically significant (Wald  $\chi^2(6) = 18.54$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ), with a pseudo R<sup>2</sup> of 0.1221, indicating moderate explanatory power.

### 3.10 DISCUSSION

Research into children's impact on parental food buying choices in Bogura Bangladesh shows that multiple social characteristics together with consumer preferences create complex patterns. The research examined how children impact their parents' food selection choices by studying particular product groups and identifying key elements that determine this effect. The logistic regression results show that children's ability to influence food purchases decreases when families have more members and siblings and when mothers achieve higher educational levels. The study shows that children's influence on food purchases becomes more likely when parents grow older and when fathers achieve higher education and when family income increases. The research shows that parents' age and monthly income and father's education level positively affect child influence in food purchasing decisions.

The research supports previous studies which demonstrate that family size together with family structure patterns determines the extent of child influence (Carina, 2017). Children from smaller families with 4 to 5 members and those with one to two siblings tend to have more influence because they receive more parental resources and attention. The negative relationship between mother's education level and child influence might stem from educated mothers who take charge of decisions thus reducing child participation (Studer-Perez & Musher-Eizenman, 2023). The study shows that higher family income and better-educated fathers create conditions for open family dialogue which enables children to take part in decision-making processes (Chusna et al., 2021).

Children demonstrate a preference for ice cream and chocolate and fried chicken because these products match their taste preferences for sweet and spicy flavors and foreign branding which they discover through television advertisements (68.57% of children). The study confirms previous research which demonstrates how media affects the purchasing behavior of young consumers (Sandra, 2008). Children base their purchasing influence on product features which include price and packaging and taste according to Kásler (2020). Research indicates that female children use more effective persuasive methods to influence their parents which leads to stronger influence (Atkin, 1978). Children believe that fathers lead food planning and purchasing activities (57.14% and 64.29% respectively) but mothers make the final food selection decisions (55.71%). The traditional gender dynamics in Bangladeshi families show that mothers maintain control over deciding what food to buy (Hanny, 2012). The study demonstrates that children from smaller families have more influence on family decisions which matches worldwide patterns of evolving family decision-making (Mikkelsen and Nørgaard, 2006).

The lack of understanding about healthy food options among parents who mistake high-energy foods with nutritious choices demonstrates their limited nutritional knowledge. Educational programs need to establish consumer literacy training for parents and children because they lack essential knowledge about nutrition. Schools working with government programs should lead the way to teach children about product evaluation and provide parents with tools to direct their children's food preferences (Philomena, 2025). The implementation of these programs would help reduce the power of unhealthy food marketing while promoting sustainable dietary choices for the future.

#### **IV. CONCLUSIONS**

The children of Bogura play an essential part in determining which foods their parents will buy because they help decide both their personal food choices and the food that the family will consume. Children base their food preferences on information they receive from television ads and magazines as well as their friends and family members who show interest in foreign food items that are affordable and come in appealing packaging and have spicy flavors. The research demonstrates that children take an active part in family shopping by using price, packaging and taste as their criteria for product assessment. The study reveals children use strategic methods during all stages of decision-making although fathers handle food planning and purchasing while mothers decide what to buy and when to make purchases. Parents should use a democratic system with clear boundaries to handle child influence while teaching children about nutritious food options and setting rules to control their impact on family decisions. The marketing industry should use branded appealing products to attract children because this demographic represents a growing customer base that will drive long-term business expansion.

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