

Hong Kong Baptist University

HKBU Institutional Repository

Department of Communication Studies Journal
Articles

Department of Communication Studies

11-30-2002

Parent-child communications about consumption and advertising in China

Kara Chan

Hong Kong Baptist University, karachan@hkbu.edu.hk

James U. McNeal

Peking University

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.hkbu.edu.hk/coms_ja



Part of the [Communication Commons](#)

This document is the authors' final version of the published article.

Link to published article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/07363760310483685>

APA Citation

Chan, K., & McNeal, J. (2002). Parent-child communications about consumption and advertising in China. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 20 (4), 317-334. <https://doi.org/10.1108/07363760310483685>

This Journal Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Communication Studies at HKBU Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Department of Communication Studies Journal Articles by an authorized administrator of HKBU Institutional Repository. For more information, please contact repository@hkbu.edu.hk.

**PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATIONS ABOUT CONSUMPTION AND
ADVERTISING IN CHINA**

Keywords: China – parent -- child – family communication – consumption -- advertising

Dr. Kara Chan*

Associate Professor

Department of Communication Studies

Hong Kong Baptist University

Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong

Tel: (852) 3411 7836 Fax: (852) 3411 7890

email: karachan@hkbu.edu.hk

Dr. James U McNeal

Visiting Professor

Guanghua School of Management

Peking University

Beijing, China 100871

email: mcnealjimu@yahoo.com

Chan, K. and McNeal, J. (2003) Parent-child communications about consumption and advertising in China, *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 20(4), 317-332.

*Please send all correspondence to this author.

Acknowledgement: The work described in this paper was fully supported by a grant from the Research Grants Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China (Project No. HKBU2022/01H)

Running head: *Parent-child communication*
JCM_famcomm.doc

**PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATIONS ABOUT CONSUMPTION AND
ADVERTISING IN CHINA**

Abstract

The current study examines how Mainland Chinese parents communicate with their children about consumption and advertising. A survey of 1,665 parents of children aged six to fourteen in Beijing, Nanjing and Chengdu was conducted in December 2001 to March 2002. Using Moore and Moschis's (1981) typology of family communication patterns, Chinese parents are classified into four types including laissez-faire, protective, pluralistic, and consensual parents. Results indicated Chinese parents are classified primarily as consensual type with both high socio- as well as concept-oriented communication. Family communication patterns differ among parents of different demographic groups as well as among different dyad relationships. Parents with higher education level and families with higher household income engaged more frequently in concept-oriented communication. Pluralistic and consensual parents discussed with children about television commercials more often than laissez-faire and protective parents. Consensual parents perceived they have higher influence on children's attitude toward advertising than laissez-faire parents. Implication for marketers and advertisers are discussed.

(156 words)

PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATIONS ABOUT CONSUMPTION AND ADVERTISING IN CHINA

INTRODUCTION

China adopted a Single-Child Policy in 1979 and it is the current rule in urban China (Zhang and Yang, 1992). Chinese children have a substantial amount of their own money and have great influence on the daily household purchases ([McNeal and Yeh, 1997](#)). There are 290 million children under the age of 14 in China (The State Statistical Bureau, 2000). It is estimated that in 1999, the approximately 60 million children, ages 4-12, in the largest cities of China spent around US\$6.2 billion of their own money on their own wants, and influenced the spending by parents and grandparents of over US\$61 billion, giving them a market potential of US\$67 billion ([McNeal, 2000](#)). As a result, young consumers are the targets of many international and local advertisers. Parents play a major role in children's consumer socialization (Ward et al., 1977). [Moschis and Moore \(1982\)](#) found that television advertising influences the development of materialism and a traditional view of sex-roles in those adolescents whose parents do not discuss consumption matters with their children. In other words, parental communication about consumption will neutralize the undesirable effect of advertising on children. Previous studies indicate that Chinese parents have a high level of mediation of children's television viewing ([Bin, 1996](#); [Greenberg et al., 1991](#)). Parents serve as gatekeepers and take control over children's viewing time as well as viewing content. Therefore it is important that advertisers and marketers have an understanding of how Chinese parents communicate about consumption with children and how parents mediate children's use of media and advertising. Effective marketing activities targeting children need to obtain the green light of the gatekeepers (their parents) before their television advertising messages can reach the children.

We collected 1,665 survey questionnaires from parents of children aged six to fourteen in three cities in China--Beijing, Nanjing, and Chengdu-- regarding the following research

questions:

1. How do Chinese parents' communicate with children about consumption?
2. How does culture influence the family communication patterns?
3. Do family communication patterns vary with demographic variables of the parents and the children?
4. Are family communication patterns related to parental mediation of television viewing?

Research literature indicates that family communication patterns are related to parental control of consumption and media usage (Carlson and Grossbart, 1988; Carlson et al., 1990). A cross-cultural study of American and Japanese mothers reflected that family communication patterns are culturally specific (Rose et al., 1998). As predicted by the difference in general patterns of parent-child interactions in the United States and Japan (Power et al., 1992), American mothers who emphasize independence and individualism more frequently engaged in concept-oriented communication. Japanese mothers who emphasize respect for authority and family harmony more frequently engaged in socio-oriented communication (Rose et al., 1998). Based on previous studies, we develop a theoretical framework to predict family communication patterns and parental mediation of children's use of media and advertising (see below).

External variable:

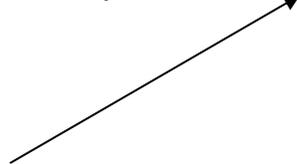
Culture



Family communication pattern → Parental mediation of TV viewing

Internal variables:

Demographics of parents
and children



We first review the literature about family communication patterns and the impact of culture on family communication. After discussing the hypotheses, we report the method and

the results of this study. The implications and applications of the findings are discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Family communication patterns

The process by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace is defined as consumer socialization ([Ward, 1974](#)). Obviously, parents play an important role in children's consumer socialization through parent-child communication, training, and modeling ([Ward et al., 1977](#)). Parental concern about children's use of media reflects both personal and cultural differences in the perceived desirability of controlling outside influences on their children such as the mass media ([Rose et al., 1998](#)). Family communication patterns provide a way of assessing the interaction between parents, children, and their media and consumption environment. Previous research has related family communication patterns to parental styles ([Carlson et al., 1992](#)) and advertising practices ([Carlson et al., 1990](#)).

Family communication has been conceptualized to compose of two dimensions (see [Moschis, 1987](#) for a review). The first dimension, socio-orientation, measures vertical or relationship-oriented patterns of communication. The emphasis is on parental control and children's deference to authority. The second, concept-orientation, measures issue-oriented communication. The emphasis is on the establishment of an independent evaluation of an issue by the children. The two dimensions give rise to a four-category typology: laissez-faire, protective, pluralistic, and consensual (Figure 1). Laissez-faire parents are neither concept- nor socio-oriented. They seldom communicate with their children and hence have the least influence on their children's consumption behaviors. Protective parents have high level of socio-oriented and low level of concept-oriented communication. They emphasize obedience and social harmony, and do not encourage children to develop independent preferences. Pluralistic parents have low level of socio-oriented and high level of concept-oriented communication. They maintain a relatively horizontal parent-child relationship and encourage

children to express ideas. Finally, consensual parents have high level of both socio-oriented and concept-oriented communication. They encourage expression of ideas but at the same time maintain parental control.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Culture and family communication patterns

Empirical study indicates that there are cultural differences in family communication patterns. American mothers, as a group, emphasize independence and individualism more than Japanese mothers, which emphasize social harmony and respect for authority ([Power et al., 1992](#); [Itoh and Taylor, 1981](#)). [Rose et al. \(1998\)](#) found that American mothers more often engaged in concept-oriented communication about consumption than Japanese mothers and Japanese mothers more frequently employed socio-oriented communication patterns. As a result, Japanese mothers were classified primarily as either laissez-faire or protective. American mothers were distributed relatively equally across the four groups.

When referring to Chinese perspectives towards parental styles, Confucianism is one Chinese ideology that has been widely investigated by Chinese and Western researchers. Some major concepts of Confucianism include: supreme moral person ([Lei, 1993](#); [Metzger, 1992](#)); filial piety ([Hsu, 1981](#); [Kelly and Tseng, 1992](#)); social harmony ([Domino, 1992](#)); collective decision making ([Stander and Jensen, 1993](#)); good manners, and the importance of education ([Ekblad, 1986](#); [Ho, 1989](#)). The implications of all these studies suggests that Chinese parents tend to be more concerned about the moral behaviors of their children, and they will exert much control over their children's behaviors. Chan's (2001) study of Chinese children in Hong Kong reported that parents use television commercials to teach children about restrictive consumption behaviors (what products they should not buy) and desirable moral behaviors (such as protecting the environment). Mainland Chinese parents are unique in two ways. Firstly, they can only have one child in the family and they therefore have high expectations of their children. Secondly, the current generation of the singletons' parents, men

and women born in the late 1960s and 70s, have been defined by severe material shortages and by political suffering ([Davis and Sensenbrenner, 2000](#)). As the new era of economic reform has instituted a reward system based on formal education and qualifications, these parents want their lost past to be compensated for by a better future of their second generation ([Bin, 1996](#)). They were the lag-behinds in the consumer revolution in China introduced in the 1990s. A survey of 460 children in Beijing found that Chinese children consider television to be the most important information source to learn about new products, but not parents ([McNeal and Ji, 1999](#)).

In Greenberg *et al.*'s (1991) study of 529 grades 6 to grade 10 students in Beijing, 74 percent of young children said there were rules at home regarding how long they could watch TV. The most common forms of media mediation for television were familiarization with types of programs children watch and co-viewing with children. Parents of younger children were more likely to tell them not to watch certain programs and to recommend programs for them to watch. Children have reported that parents sometimes use television time as a potential reward or punishment. In a survey of 176 parents in Beijing and Jiaozhu, over 85 percent demonstrated control over viewing time as well as contents. The reported purpose of parental control over viewing time was to minimize the chance of children being distracted from study by television. One typical rule was that viewing was allowed only after children finished their homework. Most parents mentioned that they encouraged their children to watch intellectual and morally uplifting television programs while prohibiting children from viewing programs with love and sexual contents. This tight parental control reflects Chinese parents' concern with the breakdown of conventional moral standards and norms under the challenge of an increasingly commercialized mass media culture ([Bin, 1996](#)).

Hofstede's cultural dimension and development of hypotheses

Culture is the "collective mental programming" that distinguishes one society from another (Hofstede, 1983, p.76). Values -- judgments of good or bad, right or wrong -- are an

important element of culture. In the past two decades, one of the major frameworks for understanding culture has been [Hofstede's \(1980; 1983\)](#) typology of cultural dimensions. Hofstede's (1980) original work mainly described four cultural dimensions: individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity/femininity and later included long-term/short-term orientation (Hofstede, 1991).

Individualism/collectivism refers to a country's cultural position with respect to the importance of the individual or the group. Power distance captures the desire within a society for hierarchy versus egalitarianism. Uncertainty avoidance is a society's tolerance for ambiguity. While masculinity stands for a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness, and material success, femininity refers to a preference for relationships, modesty, caring for the weak, and the quality of life ([Hofstede 1983; 1998](#)). It seems that uncertainty avoidance and masculinity/femininity dimensions are not directly related to family communication patterns, therefore, the objective is to investigate if the difference in the power distance and the individualism/collectivism dimensions will differentially affect the family communication patterns.

Power distance refers to the extent to which less powerful members accept that power is distributed unequally ([Hofstede, 1980](#)). China has a long history of being an authoritarian society that emphasizes Confucius's five cardinal relations between sovereign and minister, father and son, husband and wife, old and young, and friends ([Yang, 1959](#)). Chinese people have a strong respect for authority ([Bond, 1991](#)). In the traditional Chinese family, children should show absolute obedience to parents and should not express conflicting ideas openly. Americans on the other hand have low power distance. Therefore, we hypothesized that:

H1: Chinese parents will engage in a high level of socio-oriented communication.

As the current study is a single-country study, we are not able to compare the results with other cultures. We select the mid point of the 5-point scale to be the mean value for the null hypothesis. In other words, we hypothesized that the mean of social-oriented

communication will be greater than 3.0.

The individualism dimension refers to the degree to which individual decision making and actions are encouraged by a society. In an individualistic society, everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion ([Hofstede, 1980](#)). Therefore, self-sufficiency and independence will be related with the individualism dimension. The implication in the family communication setting is that parents will treat children as individuals and are willing to involve them in family purchase decisions. However, collectivism deals with group ties and stress on social harmony. As Chinese parents put emphasis on collectivistic values, we hypothesized that:

H2: Chinese parents will engage in a low level of concept-oriented communication.

With a similar argument for the social-oriented communication, we hypothesized that the mean of concept-oriented communication will be lower than 3.0.

The combination of a higher level of socio-oriented and a lower level of concept-oriented family communication results in the following hypothesis:

H3: Chinese parents will more likely be classified as protective parents.

According to Rose et al.'s (1998) study, high levels of education were associated with concept-oriented patterns of communication. Thus, we hypothesized that:

H4: Parents with higher education level will more likely to be pluralistic and consensual parents.

Family communication patterns are related with parental mediation of television viewing ([Moschis, 1985](#)). Following [Carlson et al.'s \(1990\)](#) and [Rose et al.'s \(1998\)](#) arguments, we hypothesized that concept-oriented parents will be more likely to foster open discussion and encourage children to develop an independent perspective. We also hypothesized that socio-oriented parents will be more likely to restrict children's access to outside influences. As the objective of socio-oriented family communication is for parents to gain control, we therefore expect that parents using socio-oriented communication will perceive that they have greater influence on their children's attitude toward advertising. In

other words, we hypothesized that:

H5: Consensual and pluralistic parents will be more likely to watch television with children than protective and laissez-faire parents.

H6: Consensual and pluralistic parents will be more likely to discuss with children about television commercials than protective and laissez-faire parents.

H7: Consensual and protective parents will be more likely to perceive that they have greater influence on children's attitude toward advertising than laissez-faire and pluralistic parents.

H8: Consensual and protective parents will exercise more control over children's television viewing than laissez-faire and pluralistic parents.

RESEARCH METHOD

The data analyzed in this study were collected from surveys conducted in three large cities in China – Beijing, Nanjing and Chengdu -- during the period December 2001 to March 2002. The study is basically a replication of Rose *et al.*'s (1998) study, but in a single-country setting. One of the authors translated the questionnaire from English to Chinese and a research assistant then back-translated it into English in order to enhance translated equivalence. The questionnaire was pretested in Beijing by personal interviewing eight parents about its clarity. The questionnaire then was revised and tested in Nanjing by personal interviewing another eight parents. The final questionnaires were distributed in six elementary schools to children in grade one to six who were instructed to take them home to either their parents for completion. Questionnaires were then returned to the schools. Altogether, 1700 questionnaires were collected (437 from Beijing, 525 from Nanjing, and 738 from Chengdu). Several questionnaires were not usable because most of the questions were left blank or checked with two or more answers, leaving a total of 1665 usable questionnaires. The sample profile is summarized in Table 1.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Measures

The questionnaire consisted of thirteen statements about family communication regarding consumption and four questions about parental mediation of children's television viewing. The questionnaire closed by requesting various demographic information.

Family Communication Patterns. Two dimensions of family communication were examined. The first dimension, socio-orientation (Moschis et al., 1984), consisted of five items measuring the degree to which parents request children to conform to parental standards of consumption. The second dimension, concept-orientation, measured the extent to which parents encourage their children to develop their own consumption preferences. It consisted of five items from Moschis et al.'s (1984) concept-orientation scale and three items from Ward et al.'s (1977) family communication scale. Those scales had loaded on a single dimension in previous research (Carlson and Grossbart, 1988) and are conceptually similar. Both dimensions were measured on a 5-point scale (very seldom to very often). Inter-item reliability (Cronbach's alpha) was 0.71 for socio-oriented communication and 0.66 for concept-oriented communication respectively. The means formed the measure of concept-oriented communication and social-oriented communication.

Parental mediation of television viewing. Four advertising-related parental mediation dimensions were examined: (1) co-viewing, (2) discuss about TV commercials, (3) perceived parental influence, and (4) control of TV viewing. Co-viewing was measured by asking how frequently parents watched TV with their children on weekdays, and on Saturdays and Sundays on a 5-point scale (very seldom to very often). The mean formed the measure of co-viewing. Discussion about commercials was measured by asking how frequently parents talked with their children about the contents of TV commercials on a 5-point scale (very seldom to very often). Perceived parental influence on children's attitudes was measured by asking respondents to rate on a 5-point scale (1=disagree strongly, 5=agree strongly) on the

statement 'parents have influence on children's attitudes toward television advertising'.

Control of TV viewing was measured by asking whether parents place restriction on TV viewing. Parents could choose 'no restriction' (coded as 0) or 'yes, there is restriction' (coded as 1).

RESULTS

Chinese parents' adoption of communication patterns is summarized in Table 2. Chinese parents reported a high level of socio-oriented communication (mean=3.59), which is significantly higher than the hypothesized mean of 3.0 ($t= 35.65, p<0.0001$). Therefore, H1 is supported. As we expected, Chinese parents engage in a high level of socio-oriented communication. Parents expressed that they often or very often controlled the type of products children can or cannot buy. The three statements with the highest means (range from 3.66 to 3.79) were all about restrictions on choice of product categories. Besides, parents were eager to know how children spent their allowance (mean=3.41) and they spoke out when children bought things they did not like (mean=3.41).

The level of concept-oriented communication reported by Chinese parents was medium (mean=3.03), which is slightly higher than the hypothesized mean of 3.0 ($t=2.16, p<0.05$). Contrary to what we expected, Chinese parents did not engage in low level of concept-oriented communication. Thus, H2 is not supported.

Our results indicate that Chinese parents very often asked for children's preferences when they bought gifts for them (mean=3.97). Fifty-one percent of parents often or very often allowed children to decide things to buy (mean=3.40). Parents sometimes discussed with children about consumption and places to buy things. Parents reported that they seldom consult children or ask them to help when buying things for the family (mean=2.75, 2.47 respectively). Post-purchase discussion about children's consumption experience was low too (mean=2.69). Pairwise t-test result indicated that the level of socio-oriented communication was significantly higher than the level of concept-oriented communication

(t-value=33.9, $p < 0.0001$).

Family communication patterns are classified into four parental types through median splits on the socio- and concept-oriented dimensions of communication (see Figure 1). One quarter of the sample was classified as protective and another one quarter was classified as laissez-faire. One-sixth of the sample was classified as pluralistic while nearly forty percent was classified as consensual. As the percentage of parents classified as protective was not significantly higher than twenty-five percent, H3 is not supported.

The extent to which Chinese parents' mediate television viewing is summarized in Table 2. Results indicate that level of co-viewing with children was medium (mean=2.80). Co-viewing occurred more frequently during weekends (mean=3.39) than weekdays (mean=2.22). Parents seldom discussed with their children about commercials they saw on television. Despite the medium level of co-viewing and the low level of discussion, parents strongly felt that they have influence on their children's attitudes toward television advertising (mean=3.37). Parental control of television viewing was extremely high, with ninety-eight percent of parents exercising some control on children's television viewing.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Cross-tabulation and Chi-squares tests were conducted to examine whether the four types of parents differed in the demographic characteristics of parents and children. The results are summarized in Table 3. Parents' communication patterns varied among different demographic groups of parents. Laissez-faire parents were more likely to be aged 40 to 49, with low educational level, and with low household income. Laissez-faire parents also contained a higher proportion of fathers and government officials. Protective parents were more likely to be older (aged 50 to 59), with medium level of education, and workers. Pluralistic parents were more likely to be teachers/researchers while consensual parents were more likely to be engaged in professional or administrative positions. Pluralistic and consensual parents were the most educated and with the highest household income level.

Overall speaking, high levels of education and household income were associated with concept-oriented communication. Therefore, H4 is supported. Parents with higher education level were more likely to be pluralistic and consensual parents. Parental pattern of family communication did not vary with age of children. Parental communication pattern with sons and daughters were also not significantly different. However, different dyad relationships employed different communication patterns. Father-son and father-daughter dyads were more likely to engage in laissez-faire communication pattern. Mother-son dyads were more likely to engage in both protective as well as pluralistic communication patterns.

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Pearson correlation coefficients were compiled for parental mediation of children's television viewing and results are summarized in Table 4. Results indicate that discussion with children about television commercials was positively related with co-viewing and perceived parental influence. Parents who watched television more frequently with children were more likely to discuss commercials with them ($r = 0.21$). They also perceived that they have greater influence on children's attitude toward advertising ($r = 0.11$). Discussion with children about TV commercials was negatively related with parental control of television viewing, indicating that parents who discuss less with children about TV commercials were more likely to exert control on children's television viewing ($r = -0.05$).

[TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

One-way MANOVA was conducted with family communication patterns as the independent variable and parental mediations of television viewing being the dependent variable. MANOVA is appropriate when the dependent variables are correlated (Hair et al., 1992). The correlation of the dependent variables in this study was quite strong, ranged from -0.05 to 0.21 as reported above. Therefore, MANOVA analysis was used. Results show that the set of dependent variables was highly related to family communication patterns (Wilks' $\lambda_{12, 3765} = 0.917$, $F=10.50$, $p<0.0001$).

One-way ANOVA and Tukey-HSD paired comparisons were then conducted to examine how the four types of parents differed in the mediation of television viewing. The results are summarized in Table 5 and Table 6. All the four F-values were significant even when parents' and children's demographics were entered as covariates, indicating that parents with different communication patterns were different in mediation of children's television viewing. Consensual and protective parents were more likely to co-view with children than laissez-faire parents. Thus, H5 is partially supported. The largest difference among the four types was the frequency of discussing television commercials with children (F-value=37.0, $p<0.0001$). Consensual and pluralistic parents were more likely to discuss commercials with children than laissez-faire and protective parents. Therefore, H6 is supported. Consensual parents perceived to have greater influence on children's attitude toward advertising than laissez-faire parents. Therefore, H7 is partially supported. Results also show that protective parents exert greater control over children's television viewing than pluralistic parents. Therefore, H8 is partially supported.

[TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE]

[TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE]

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

This current study revealed that Chinese parents have strict control over what kinds of products children can or cannot buy while at the same time allowing children some freedom in choice of brands of the permissible products. The result reflects a compromise of an autocratic approach to parenting and complete freedom for children in purchase decisions. The parental control on product category persisted even when children become older. Although we did not ask what sort of products and services are not acceptable for the children, we infer from Bin's (1996) findings that products distracting children from study will be prohibited while products enhancing and facilitating intellectual growth will be encouraged. Marketers should therefore position products and services target at children in such a way that

they are appealing or at least acceptable to parents. For example, electronic games need to be perceived as creative and educational by parents before they can get access to children and be presented as fun and exciting. Food or snacks need to be perceived as healthy or else parents will not allow children to buy them.

Chinese parents demonstrated a higher level of socio-oriented communication and medium level of concept-oriented communication. As found in Rose et al.'s (1998) study, family communication patterns also depend on parents' trust of the television advertising standard. In the United States, children's television advertising is strictly controlled through government regulations and voluntary restrictions. As a result, American mothers probably place fewer restrictions on children's selection of advertised products and allow children to develop their own preferences. Since Mainland China does not have specific rules and guidelines to protect children from unfair advertising, Chinese consumers, including children, have been exposed to a high level of deceptive advertising. According to Zhou (2001), some advertising to children has been accused of being misleading. So the high level of socio-oriented communication of parents reported in this study may reflect a general mistrust of television advertising in China. Therefore, marketers who target children should present their messages in a credible manner in order to gain trust from parents and children.

In the current study, parents reported that they seldom consult children or ask their help in buying things for the family. The finding is contrary to the high level of children's influence on the daily household purchases reported by McNeal and Yeh (1997). One explanation for the discrepancy lies in the way we ask the question and the type of products to be purchased. In McNeal and Yeh's (1997) study, parents were given a list of 25 items commonly purchased by households and asked to estimate to what extent their children decide the purchase of the items. The list contained mainly foods for the family and foods for the children. In our study, parents were asked how often they invite children to give advice or give help in buying things. Since a product list is not given, parents may think about the

purchase of major household items such as electrical appliances or furniture that seldom involve children.

The medium level of concept-oriented communication about consumption indicates to a certain extent that Chinese parents did not perceive themselves as competent consumers. They seldom discuss with their children about consumption experiences. The demographic segmentation of the family communication patterns sheds light about why parents hesitate to engage in consumption related communication with children. Educational level and household income level are positively related with the amount of concept-oriented communication. We expect that parents with low education or low income are more likely to be price-conscious and less global. They will be less informed about current market environments and less familiar with new products. As a result, their children may perform an opinion leader role in the family. The implication for marketers is that direct advertising to children about new products is desirable for laissez-faire and pluralistic parents since they have less parental influence and control of television advertising.

Compared to Rose et al.'s (1998) study, the Chinese sample contained the highest proportion of consensual and the lowest proportion of pluralistic parents. American mothers were primarily classified as pluralistic (27.3%) or consensual (27.3%) as reported in Rose et al.'s (1998) study. Chinese parents reported high control of type of products children can or cannot buy. Therefore marketers that target children should build a good relationship with parents first. For products acceptable to parents, advertising efforts should put emphasis to establish brand preferences among children by direct advertising to them.

The relationship between family communication patterns and parental mediation of children's television viewing shares some similarities and differences with Rose et al.'s (1998) study. One similarity is that pluralistic and consensual parents discuss commercials more frequently with their children than laissez-faire and protective parents. One difference was in Rose et al.'s (1998) study, consensual and pluralistic mothers watched television more

frequently with their children than laissez-faire mothers. In the current study, consensual and protective parents watched television more frequently with their children than laissez-faire parents. Another difference was that in Rose et al.'s (1998) study, consensual mothers reported higher levels of control over children's television viewing than laissez-faire and pluralistic mothers, and protective mothers maintained greater control than laissez-faire mothers. In the current study, protective parents were found to exert greater control of television viewing than pluralistic parents.

Future research could study differences in family communication patterns and parental mediation of media usage across several countries. The current study revealed that Chinese parents have great restrictions on children about what to buy and not to buy. Future study should investigate what sort of products and services parents are allowed or not allowed for purchase by their children and why. When marketing to children in China, advertisers must pay attention to the influence of the parents. Products that parents may not like should consider an advertising medium other than television to reach children. Outdoor advertising, point-of-purchase promotion and or event marketing may be more useful tools for direct advertising to children.

(4,700 words body text, exclude tables and figures)

Figure 1. Parent-child communication patterns

		Socio-oriented communication	
		Low (mean≤3.5)	High (mean>3.5)
Concept-oriented communication	Low (mean≤3.0)	<p>Laissez-Faire (24.5%) Little communication with children; Little parental impact on consumption</p>	<p>Protective (24.4%) Stress vertical relationships; Obedience and social harmony; Children have limited exposure to outside information</p>
	High (mean>3.0)	<p>Pluralistic (12.8%) Stress horizontal relationships; Issue-oriented communication; Children are encouraged to explore ideas and express opinions</p>	<p>Consensual (38.3%) Maintain control over children's consumption; frequent communication with children about consumption</p>

Table 1 Sample profile (N=1665)

Demographic	Number	%
Sex		
Male	684	41.8
Female	953	58.2
Age		
20-29	30	1.8
30-39	1337	80.9
40-49	224	13.6
50+	61	3.7
Education		
Junior high or below	324	19.5
High/Technical School	569	34.2
College	360	21.6
University of above	412	24.7
Occupation		
Government officials	182	11.1
Prof / tech / administrative	337	20.5
Teachers/researchers	190	11.5
Clerical/sales	237	14.4
Workers	394	23.9
Self-employed/others	306	18.5
Monthly Household Income		
Low (RMB1000 or below)	489	30.4
Medium (RMB1001—2500)	735	45.6
High (RMB2501 or above)	387	24.0
Dyad Relationship		
Father-son	379	21.6
Father-daughter	298	17.0
Mother-son	440	25.0
Mother-daughter	504	28.7

Cells may not add up to total due to missing cases

Table 2 Parent-child communication patterns and parental mediation of the media

Items	Often/ v. often (%)	Some- times (%)	Seldom/ v. seldom (%)	Overall Mean	S.D.
Socio-oriented communication				3.59	0.67
I tell my child he/she is not allowed to buy certain things.	70.0	23.9	6.1	3.79	0.87
I tell my child what things he/she should buy.	67.3	23.0	9.6	3.69	0.95
I tell my child not to buy certain things.	66.2	25.2	8.6	3.66	0.89
I want to know what my child did with his/her money.	54.6	24.1	21.3	3.41	1.24
I complain when I do not like something that my child bought for him/herself.	50.6	32.2	17.3	3.41	1.09
Concept-orientated communication				3.03	0.59
I ask my child his/her preference when I buy something for him/her.	75.7	17.8	6.6	3.97	0.96
I let my child decide which things he/she should or shouldn't buy.	50.7	34.0	15.3	3.40	1.01
I talk to him/her about where different products can be bought.	43.3	29.8	26.9	3.14	1.15
My children and I talk about buying things.	32.8	38.4	28.7	2.97	1.05
I ask my child about things that I buy for myself.	27.0	37.7	35.3	2.80	1.16
I ask my child for advice about buying things for the family.	25.9	35.3	38.8	2.75	1.15
I ask my child what he/she thinks about things that he/she buys for him/herself.	28.2	29.2	42.7	2.69	1.23
I ask my child to help me buy things for the family.	12.4	44.6	42.9	2.47	1.00
Coviewing				2.80	0.93
I watch television with my children on:					
--Weekdays	17.9	20	62.1	2.22	1.23
--Saturdays and Sundays	50.9	31.5	17.6	3.39	1.07
Discuss about TV commercials					
I talk with my child about the content of TV advertising.	14.8	33.6	51.7	2.40	1.05
	Agree/ strongly agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree/ Strongly disagree(%)	Overall Mean	S.D.
Perceived parental influence					
Parents have influence on children's attitudes toward television advertising.	49.7	34.8	15.5	3.37	0.83
Parental control of TV viewing					
	No=0 (%)	Yes=1 (%)		Overall Mean	S.D.
	2.5	97.5		0.98	0.16

Table 3 Parent-child communication patterns by demographic characteristics of parents and children

Demographics	Laissez-Faire (n=392) 24.5%	Protective (n=389) 24.3%	Pluralistic (n=205) 12.8%	Consensual (n=612) 38.3%	Total (N=1598) 100%
Parent's Sex				$\chi^2 = 9.9, p < 0.05$	
Male	48.1	38.9	36.5	41.1	41.7
Female	51.9	61.1	63.5	58.9	58.3
Parent's Age				$\chi^2 = 19.1, p < 0.05$	
20-29	2.9	2.1	2.0	1.0	1.9
30-39	76.1	80.3	80.7	83.6	80.6
40-49	17.1	12.3	16.3	12.0	13.9
50-59	3.9	5.2	1.0	3.3	3.6
Parent's Education				$\chi^2 = 12.3, p = 0.20$	
Junior high or below	23.2	18.8	19.1	18.4	19.8
High/Technical School	32.4	37.7	33.3	33.3	34.1
College	23.8	20.4	20.1	20.7	21.3
University of above	20.6	23.0	27.5	27.6	24.8
Monthly Household Income				$\chi^2 = 12.8, p = 0.05$	
Low (RMB1000 or below)	34.1	32.5	29.3	26.6	30.2
Medium (RMB1001—2500)	42.6	48.9	46.0	47.2	46.3
High (RMB2501 or above)	23.3	18.5	24.7	26.2	23.4
Parent's Occupation				$\chi^2 = 48.7, p < 0.0001$	
Government officials	14.1	9.5	9.0	10.9	11.1
Prof/tech/administrative	15.7	16.7	20.4	24.9	20.1
Teachers/researchers	7.9	14.0	17.4	11.4	12.0
Clerical/sales	16.2	15.1	14.9	13.6	14.8
Workers	25.1	29.1	18.9	21.7	24.0
Self-employed/others	20.9	15.6	19.4	17.4	18.1
Children's Age				$\chi^2 = 8.4, p = 0.50$	
6-7	15.2	17.6	14.2	16.5	16.2
8-9	28.4	29.2	26.5	31.2	29.4
10-11	36.9	38.8	38.7	36.7	37.5
12-14	19.6	14.5	20.6	15.5	16.9
Children's Sex				$\chi^2 = 1.8, p = 0.61$	
Male	48.7	53.5	50.2	50.9	50.9
Female	51.3	46.5	49.8	49.1	49.1
Dyad Relationship				$\chi^2 = 19.0, p < 0.05$	
Father-son	28.5	22.9	10.1	38.5	23.4
Father-daughter	26.8	22.9	13.2	37.1	18.4
Mother-son	18.0	29.0	15.1	37.9	27.1
Mother-daughter	24.4	22.9	13.1	39.6	31.1

Table 4 Correlations of parental mediation of television viewing

	Co-view	Discuss	Control	Influence
Coview with children	1.0	0.21***	0.02	0.11***
Discuss with children about TV commercials		1.0	-0.05*	0.02
Control of TV viewing			1.0	0.01
Perceived parental influence				1.0

* $p < 0.05$ *** $p < 0.0001$

Table 5 Means, Tukey HSD paired comparisons, and F values for different parent-child communication patterns

	Laissez-Faire (n=392) <i>a</i>	Protective (n=389) <i>b</i>	Pluralistic (n=205) <i>c</i>	Consensual (n=612) <i>d</i>	F-value
Coview with children	2.66 <i>bd</i>	2.85 <i>a</i>	2.80	2.89 <i>a</i>	6.7***
Discuss with children about TV commercials	2.07 <i>cd</i>	2.22 <i>cd</i>	2.57 <i>ab</i>	2.69 <i>ab</i>	31.3***
Perceived parental influence	3.24 <i>d</i>	3.39	3.33	3.44 <i>a</i>	4.0*
Control of TV viewing (0=No, 1=Yes)	0.98	0.99 <i>c</i>	0.95 <i>b</i>	0.97	4.5*

* $p < 0.01$

*** $p < 0.0001$

Note: subscripts indicate differences between groups, Tukey HSD paired comparisons, $p < 0.05$, where a=laissez-faire, b=protective, c=pluralistic, and d=consensual

Table 6 Family communication patterns and parental mediation of TV viewing

	Laissez-Faire (n=392)	Protective (n=389)	Pluralistic (n=205)	Consensual (n=612)
Coview with children	Coview less than protective and consensual parents	Coview more than laissez-faire parents	No significantly different from any group	Coview more than laissez-faire parents
Discuss with children about commercials	Less often than pluralistic and consensual parents	Less often than pluralistic and consensual parents	More often than laissez-faire and protective parents	More often than laissez-faire and protective parents
Perceived parental influence	Perceived to have less influence than consensual parents	Not significantly different from any group	Not significantly different from any group	Perceived to have more influence than laissez-faire parents
Control of TV viewing (0=No, 1=Yes)	Not significantly different from any group	Exert more control over TV viewing than pluralistic parents	Exert less control over TV viewing than protective parents	Not significantly different from any group

REFERENCES

- Bin, Z. (1996), "The little emperors' small screen: parental control and children's television viewing in China", *Media, Culture & Society*, Vol.18, pp. 639-658
- Bond, M. H. (1991), *Beyond Chinese Face: Insights from Psychology*, Oxford University Press, Hong Kong.
- Carlson, L. and Grossbart, S. (1988), "Parental style and consumer socialization of children", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol.15, June, pp. 77-94.
- Carlson, L., Grossbart, S. and Walsh, A. (1990), "Mothers' Communication Orientation and Consumer-Socialization Tendencies", *Journal of Advertising*, Vol.19, no. 3, pp. 27-38.
- Carlson, L., Grossbart, S. and Stuenkel, K.J. (1992), "The role of parental socialization types on differential family communication patterns regarding consumption", *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Vol. 1, no. 1, pp.31-52.
- Chan, K. (2001), "Children's perceived truthfulness of television advertising and parental influence: A Hong Kong study", in *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 28, in M. C. Gilly and J. Meyers-Levy, eds., Association for Consumer Research, Provo, UT, pp. 207-212.
- Davis, D.S. and Sensenbrenner, J.S. (2000), "Commercializing childhood: Parental purchases for Shanghai's only child". In Deborah S. Davis (eds.) *The Consumer Revolution in Urban China*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, pp. 54-79.
- Domino, G. (1992), "Cooperation and competition in Chinese and American children", *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Vol. 23, no. 4, pp. 456-467.
- Ekblad, S. (1986), "Relationships between child-rearing practices and primary school children's functional adjustment in the People's Republic of China", *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 21, pp. 697-715.
- Greenberg, B.S., Li, H., Ku, L. and Wang, J. (1991), "Young people and mass media in China", *Asian Journal of Communication*, Vol.1, no. 2, pp.122-142.
- Hair, J.F., Jr., Anderson, R.E., Tatham, R.L., and William, C.B. (1992), *Multivariate Data Analysis*, 3rd ed., Macmillan, New York.
- Ho, D. (1989), "Continuity and variation in Chinese patterns of socialization", *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 51, pp.149-63.
- Hofstede, G. (1980), *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Sage, Newbury Park, CA.
- Hofstede, G. (1983), "National culture in four dimensions," *International Studies of Management and Organization*, Vol.13, no. 2, pp.46-74.
- Hofstede, G. (1991), *Culture and Organization: Software of the Mind*, McGraw-Hill, London.
- Hofstede, G. (1998) *Masculinity and Femininity: The Taboo Dimension of National Cultures*. Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

- Hsu, F.L.L. (1981), *American and Chinese: Passage to Differences*, 3rd Eds. University Press of Hawaii, Honolulu.
- Itoh, F. and Taylor, C.M. (1981), "A Comparison of childrearing expectations of parents in Japan and the United States", *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, Vol.12, no. 4, pp. 449-460.
- Kelly, J.L. and Tseng, H.M. (1992), "Cultural differences in child rearing: a comparison of immigrant Chinese and Caucasian American mothers", *Journal of Cross-cultural Psychology*, Vol. 23, no. 4, pp. 444-55.
- Lei, T. (1993, November), "Metzger's model for the modern moral man", paper presented at the International Conference on Moral and Civic Education, Hong Kong.
- McNeal, J.U. and Yeh, C.H. (1997), "Development of consumer behavior patterns among Chinese children", *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol.14, no. 1, pp. 45-59.
- McNeal, J.U. (2000), "Chinese children's consumer behaviour: A review", *Advertising & Marketing to Children*, March/April, pp. 31-37.
- McNeal, J.U. and Ji, M.F. (1999), "Chinese children as consumers: an analysis of their new product information sources", *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol.16, no. 4, pp. 345-364.
- Metzger, T. (1992), "The thoughts of Tang Chun-I (1909-1978): A preliminary response", in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Tang's thoughts*, Fa-tzu, Hong Kong, pp. 165-98.
- Moore, R. L. and Moschis, G. P. (1981), "The role of family communication in consumer learning", *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 31, Autumn, pp. 42-51.
- Moschis, G. P. (1985), "The role of family communication in consumer learning", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol.11, March, pp. 898-913.
- Moschis, G. P. (1987), *Consumer socialization: A life-cycle perspective*, Lexington Books, Lexington, MA.
- Moschis, G. P. and Moore, R.L. (1982), "A longitudinal study of television advertising effects", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 9, pp. 279-286.
- Moschis, G. P. , Moore, R.L. and Smith, R.B. (1984), "The impact of family communication on adolescent consumer socialization", in *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 11, in Thomas Kinnear, ed., Association for Consumer Research, Provo, UT, pp. 314-319.
- Power, T. G., Kobayashi-Winata, H. and Kelley, M.L. (1992), "Childrearing patterns in Japan and the United States: A cluster analytic study", *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, Vol.1, no. 2, pp.185-205.
- Rose, G.M., Bush, V.D. and Kahle, L. (1998), "The influence of family communication patterns on parental reactions toward advertising: A cross-national examination", *Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 27, no. 4, pp. 71-85.

Stander, V. and Jensen, L. (1993), "The relationship of value orientation to moral cognition: Gender and cultural differences in the United States and China explored", *Journal of Cross-cultural Psychology*, Vol.24, no. 1, pp. 42-52

Ward, S. (1974), "Consumer socialization", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol.1, September, pp. 1-14

Ward, S., Wackman, D.B. and Wartella, E. (1977), *How children learn to buy*, Sage, Beverly Hills, CA.

Yang, C. K. (1959), *The Chinese Family in the Communist Revolution*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.

Zhang, L. and Yang, X. (1992), "China's population policy", *Beijing Review*, 35, April 13-19, pp. 17.

(In Chinese; translated into English by the authors)

The State Statistical Bureau, PRC (2000), *China Demographic Statistics Yearbook*, China Statistics Publishing House, Beijing.

Zhou, Y. (2001), "Children's advertising causes worries", *Fujian Jibao (Fujian Daily)*, September 25.

Biographies

Dr Kara Chan is Associate Professor at the Department of Communication Studies, Hong Kong Baptist University where she teaches courses in advertising. She worked in the advertising and public relations profession and as a statistician for the Hong Kong Government. She is author of over 15 articles on advertising and consumer behaviour in Hong Kong and China. She was a Fulbright Scholar at Bradley University, Illinois from 1999 to 2000.

Dr James U. McNeal is Visiting Professor at Guanghua School of Management, Peking University, China where he teaches a course in children consumer behaviour. He has studied children's consumer behaviour for over 35 years. He is author of over 50 articles on the subject, and three books: 'Children as Consumers: Insights and Implications' (Lexington, 1987); 'Kids as Customers: A Handbook of Marketing to Children' (Lexington, 1992); and 'The Kids Market: Myths and Realities' (Paramount Market Publishers, 1999). He is a consultant to a wide range of producers and retailers that target children and their families in the US and worldwide, and also advises a number of not-for-profit organizations that are interested in children.

Dr Richard C. Leventhal,
Editor,
Journal of Consumer Marketing
7678 Upham Street,
Arvada,
Colorado 80003,
USA.
Fax: +1 303 727 4038

26 July 2002

Dear Professor Leventhal,

Submission of Manuscript

Please find attached four copies of a manuscript titled **Parent-child communications about consumption and advertising in China** for your consideration to be published in the *Journal of Consumer Marketing*. It is an original research conducted by us and the manuscript is not being considered for publication in other venues. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any inquiries. Please kindly acknowledge by email to karachan@hkbu.edu.hk when you receive it. Thank you for your attention.

Yours sincerely,

Kara Chan

Dr Richard C. Leventhal,
Editor,
Journal of Consumer Marketing
7678 Upham Street,
Arvada,
Colorado 80003,
USA.
Fax: +1 303 727 4038

24 September 2002

Dear Professor Leventhal,

Manuscript in diskette

Please find attached one copy of the final version of the manuscript titled **Parent-child communications about consumption and advertising in China** and the **Journal Article Record Form** for your publication in the *Journal of Consumer Marketing*. It is an original research conducted by us and the manuscript is not being considered for publication in other venues. I have made some minor changes in the tables to make it consistent throughout the paper. A copy of the original tables with changes marked in black is attached. A disk properly marked according to your instruction is also attached for your action. Please kindly acknowledge by email to karachan@hkbu.edu.hk when you receive it. Thank you for your attention.

Yours sincerely,

Kara Chan

Attached. (1) Final version of the manuscript. (2) Tables marked with changes (3) disk
(4) Journal article record form