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ABSTRACT

Questionnaires completed by 301 junior and senior high school students provided data for a study of family influences on the development of various consumer competencies, materialistic values, communication behaviors, and attitudes toward marketing stimuli. Family influences were studied in the context of two dimensions of communication structure--socio-oriented (emphasizing the importance of pleasant family social relationships) and concept-oriented (emphasizing conceptual matters)--that produce four types of family communication patterns: laissez-faire (little parent/child communication), protective (stressing obedience), pluralistic (encouraging open discussion), and consensual (encouraging discussion that does not disturb internal harmony). Analysis of the data indicated that adolescents from pluralistic families knew more than other adolescents about consumer-related matters, were better able to detect puffery in advertising and to manage a family budget, knew more about products, and were more likely to show socially desirable consumer behaviors. The findings further suggested that a socio-oriented family structure may encourage the development of materialistic orientations. Family communication patterns predicted some aspects of adolescents' communication behavior and appeared to affect their perceptions of various marketing stimuli. (GW)

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FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS  
AND CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES  
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# FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION

## INTRODUCTION

A commonly accepted belief among behavioral scientists is that childhood experiences are of great importance in shaping patterns of adult behavior. This contention is reflected in the recently increasing emphasis on the study of socialization, i.e., the process by which people acquire various patterns of cognitions and behaviors (e.g., Campbell, 1968). Socialization explanations of human behavior make the following key assumption: "to understand human behavior we must specify its social origins and the processes by which it is learned and maintained" (McLeod and O'Keefe, 1972, p. 128).

The adaptation of the socialization approach to consumer research was only recently proposed as a vehicle to the study of consumer behavior (Ward, 1974a). The area commonly known as "consumer socialization" has received considerable interest and attention mainly as a result of various contemporary issues related to public and corporate policy formulation (Ward, 1974a). Public-policy makers have developed an interest in the area because of various issues surrounding the effects of marketing activities (advertising in particular) on youths and their families. Marketers are primarily interested in understanding how young people develop consumer-related thoughts and actions as a means of improving their communication campaigns directed at this rather lucrative segment of the market. Consumer educators need to understand consumer socialization in order to design appropriate consumer education materials and prepare young people for efficient and effective interaction with the marketplace. Finally, the area has

become of interest to students of socialization and consumer behavior because it seems to present new directions and opportunities for studying and understanding consumer behavior. As Ward (1974b) put it:

. . . at least some patterns of adult consumer behavior are influenced by childhood and adolescent experiences, and the study of these experiences should help us to understand not only consumer behavior among young people, but the development of adult patterns of behavior as well (p. 49).

Recent research in the area of consumer socialization has focused mainly on the effects of television advertising and cognitive development on children's consumer learning (Faber and Ward, 1976). Considerably less attention has been devoted to the examination of the family's role in the person's consumer socialization. While the family is believed to be an important source of consumer information, the ways in which it influences the child's consumer learning are not known. Engel and his colleagues (1973), for example, after reviewing related literature, concluded that "the family plays an important role in the interpersonal communication in the socialization of children," but the specific ways it may influence consumer learning were not clear (p. 396). More recently, Ward (1974b) summarized much of the consumer socialization literature and concluded:

The studies show that there is a great deal of parental activity, both purposive and non-purposive, which is related to children's experiences with money, attitudes toward consumption, purchase influence attempts and the success of those attempts, and so forth. These studies are far from explicit, however, concerning how family members influence children in ways which affect their present, if limited, behavior as consumers or the patterns of consumer behavior they will adopt in the future (pp. 31-32).

The study reported in this article examines intrafamily communication influences on adolescent consumer learning in terms of mediating socialization processes. It focuses on the learning of the following consumption-related cognitions and behaviors<sup>1</sup>: consumer affairs knowledge; product-attribute knowledge; ability to filter puffery in advertising; ability to manage family finances; propensity to perform socially desirable consumer behaviors; materialistic values; preferences for mass media content, kinds, amount, and sources of consumer information; and attitudes toward advertising, brands, stores, prices, and salespeople. This list of variables does not by any means tap every aspect of consumer behavior; rather, it seems to represent a wide cross-section of consumption-related skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to the various interested groups (public-policy makers, marketers, consumer educators, and students of socialization and consumer behavior). Finally, it is recognized that some of these variables are more relevant to "anticipatory consumer socialization," i.e., behaviors and cognitions that will be assumed at some time in the future. However, as in the area of political socialization, the learning of such orientations would seem to be of equal importance (Ward, 1974b, p. 5).

The study focuses on consumer socialization during adolescence because this period is believed to be a crucial time for socialization (Campbell, 1968), a period during which much consumer learning seems to be taking place (Ward, 1974a; Moore and Stephens, 1975; Moschis, 1976).

## FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

Parent-child relations are usually described as a unidimensional portrayal of the power situation within the family, such as "autocratic-democratic," "controlling-permissive," and "traditional-modern" (McLeod and Chaffee, 1972). The parent-child communication relations present a rather different picture. Studies based on a constraint model of parent-child communication processes constantly find two relatively uncorrelated dimensions of communication structure: the first (which is analogous to the types of social power) is called socio-oriented, the type of communication that is designed to produce deference and to foster harmonious and pleasant social relationships at home. The child in homes characterized by such a communication structure may be taught to avoid controversy and repress his feelings on extrapersonal topics, for example, by not arguing with adults and giving in on arguments rather than risk offending others. The second type of communication is called concept-oriented, a pattern that focuses on positive constraints helping the child to develop his own views about the world. The parents may, for example, encourage the child to weigh all alternatives before making a decision or may expose him to controversy--either by differing openly on an issue or by discussing it with guests at home (McLeod and Chaffee, 1972). The two general dimensions of parent-to-child communication produce a four-fold typology of family communication patterns: laissez-faire, protective, pluralistic, and consensual (McLeod and Chaffee, 1972).

Laissez-faire families lack emphasis on either kind of communication; there is little parent-child communication in these families. Protective families stress obedience and social harmony in their communication with their child; there is little concern over conceptual matters. Pluralistic families encourage open communication and discussion of ideas without insisting on obedience to authority; the child is encouraged to explore new ideas and express them without fear of retaliation. The emphasis in this communication structure appears to be mutuality of respects and interests. Consensual families stress both types of communication; the child is encouraged to take an interest in the world of ideas, yet to do so without disturbing the family's hierarchy of opinion and internal harmony.

Extensive research evidence has led researchers to assume that these communication patterns help guide the child in coping with various situations he encounters outside the immediate family context--for instance, situations in relation to public affairs issues, school activity, and mass media use (e.g., Chaffee et al., 1966 and 1971; McLeod and Chaffee, 1972). The family communication patterns (FCP) typology was identified in the U.S. Surgeon's General Report (1972) on the influence of television violence on children as a possible mediating factor in explaining the causal relationship. In addition, the evidence suggests that "the influence of family communication, as generalized to other situations, persists well into adulthood; it appears to become part of the developing individual's 'personality' that he carries outside the home" (Chaffee et al., 1971, p. 331).



The "FCP" theory has been extensively used in the area of political socialization and has predicted the person's learning in this area rather well (McLeod et al., 1968-1-69; Chaffee et al., 1970; Sheinkopf, 1973). Since the area of political socialization is similar to consumer socialization in many important ways (Ward, 1974b), FCP may also predict consumer learning. The general hypothesis made in this study is that the adolescent's consumer behavior is conditioned by the structure of parent-child communication roles in the home. Specifically, the FCP as a generalized socializing influence would hypothetically lead to (a) different levels of competence of the adolescent's consumer skills, (b) different perception of material goods, (c) different preferences for amount and specific kinds and sources of information, and (d) eventually, rather different responses to stimuli in the marketplace.

#### THE STUDY

The sample for this study consisted of 301 adolescent respondents attending junior and senior high schools of an urban and a semirural city in Wisconsin. Self-administered questionnaires were completed by students in various classes of three different schools.

#### Family Communication Measures

Since the dependent variables were consumption related in nature, some of the traditionally used items to measure the two general parent-child communication structures were revised to reflect communications more directly relevant to the consumer field. Items used to measure socio-orientation were:



(Parent) says the best way to stay out of trouble is to stay away from it.

(Parent) says his ideas are correct and (child) shouldn't question them.

(Parent) answers (child's) arguments with saying something like "You'll know better when you grow up."

(Parent) says (child) should give in when he argues rather than risk making people angry.

(Parent) tells (child) what things he should or shouldn't buy.

(Parent) wants to know what (child) does with his money.

(Parent) complains when he does not like something (child) bought for himself.

Responses to these items were measured on a 5-point "Very often-Never" scale. The concept-orientation relation was measured similarly and included the following items:

(Parent) says (child) should make his own decisions on things that affect him.

(Parent) emphasizes that every member of the family should have some say in family decisions.

(Parent) admits that children know more about some things than adults do.

(Parent) says that getting (child's) ideas across is important even if others don't like them.

(Parent) asks (child) what he thinks about things (parent) buys for himself.

(Parent) tells (child) why he buys some things for himself.

(Parent) tells (child) he should decide about things he should or shouldn't buy.

(Parent) tells (child) what he does with his money.

The reliability coefficient alpha of the two scales were .67 and .71, respectively, above the .50 to .60 reliability coefficients often recommended for constructs in the early stages of research (Nunnally, 1967, p. 226). The high internal consistency among general and specific items further suggests that the general family communication structures also apply to communication structures specifically related to consumption matters; and it provides validity for the revised items.

The sample for this study was divided into relatively "high" and "low" groups on each dimension by splitting each of the two scales at median, which yielded a four-fold typology of family types with approximately equal numbers in each cell.

#### Criterion Variables

Criterion variables were of four kinds: (1) consumer competencies, (2) materialistic values, (3) communication variables, and (4) attitudes toward marketing stimuli.

Consumer competencies includes the following variables believed to be contributing to the person's proficiency and effectiveness, from a societal perspective (cf. McLeod and O'Keefe, 1972; Brim, 1966; Moschis, 1976), as a consumer in the marketplace: Consumer affairs knowledge, product-attribute knowledge, puffery filtering, consumer finance management, and consumer activity.

Consumer affairs knowledge referred to the accuracy of the cognitions held with respect to basic terms used in the marketplace as well as basic consumer-related legislation. This variable was measured

by summing responses representing correct answers to 11 "true-false-don't know" items such as: "The mortgage is the down payment on a house" and "Milk sold in the store must show the last day it can be sold."

Product-attribute knowledge was operationally defined as the ability to identify products that are claimed to be different on specific attributes. This variable was measured by asking respondents to write the names of 12 products or brands selected at random during prime-time programs over a 3-month period and summing up items to form a 0- to 12-point index. A typical item was: "\_\_\_\_\_ camera weighs 16 ounces and costs \$66.00."

Puffery filtering referred to the respondent's ability to discriminate "facts" from exaggeration in advertising. Forty adult judges were presented with a long list of advertising claims containing various amounts of puffery and were asked to determine the degree of puffery in each item. The final list consisted of twelve items. Six of these items were considered (on the basis of the pretest) to contain the greatest amount of puffery; the other six were considered to contain "true" information. Respondents were given scores of 1, 2, and 3 for responses "believe it is completely true," "believe it is partly true," and "believe it is not true at all," respectively, given to those items that were considered to contain the greatest amount of puffery; they were given scores of 3, 2, and 1 for providing similar responses to advertising claims considered to be true. Thus, the accuracy index could range from 12 to 36.

Consumer finance management referred to the ability to correctly price selected expense items of an average family's monthly budget. Respondents were asked to estimate about how much the average American family with two children and a total monthly income of \$1,000 spends on each of the following items: food, clothes, home expenses, automobile expenses, other expenses, and savings. Respondents were assigned a score of 5 for responses falling approximately within plus or minus ten percent of the actual expense item estimates, a 4 for responses falling within plus or minus twenty percent of the actual figures, 3 for responses falling within plus or minus thirty percent, a 2 for responses falling within plus or minus forty percent, and a score of 1 for responses falling approximately within plus or minus fifty or more percent of the actual estimates. The actual estimates for the expense items were obtained from the recent U.S. Department of Labor's Monthly Labor Review. The accuracy index could range from 6 to 30.

Consumer activity referred to the respondent's propensity to buy and use products or services in a socially desirable way. It was measured by summing responses to seven items such as "I carefully read most of the things they write on packages or labels." Responses to these items were measured on a 5-point "Quite a lot-Don't know" scale.

Materialism was operationally defined as "an orientation emphasizing possession and money for personal happiness and social progress" (Ward and Wackman, 1971, p. 426). It was measured by soliciting responses on a 5-point "strongly agree-strongly disagree"

Likert-type scale to six items, many of which were similar to Ward and Wackman (1971).

Variables relevant to the adolescent's communication behavior were: (1) preferences for kinds of information, (2) preferences for specific sources of information, (3) preferences for different types of sources of consumer information, and (4) preferences for consumer news content in the mass media.

Respondent preferences for kinds of information included preferences for (a) "functional" kinds of information and (b) "social" kinds of information. Preferences for functional kinds of information were defined in terms of the adolescent's perceived importance of knowing five objective kinds of information (e.g., "guarantees on various brands") prior to purchasing five different products (bicycle, wrist watch, pocket calculator, camera, and hair dryer). These products were selected on the basis of previous studies (Moore and Stephens, 1975; Gilkison, 1973), relevance to adolescents' consumer behavior, and amount of socioeconomic and performance risk. Measurement was made by summing responses across the five products and the five items of information. Preferences for social kinds of information were similarly measured by summing responses across the five products and four different items such as "What others think of people who use certain brands or products."

Preferences for six sources of consumer information were measured: friends, salespeople, television advertisements, Consumer Reports, newspaper or magazine advertisements, and parents. Respondents were asked to indicate the sources "they would rely on most for information

and advice before buying" the five different products mentioned earlier (for each product they could indicate more than one source). Responses were summed across the five products to form 0- to 5-point indexes of source preference. Preferences for different types of sources were then measured by summing across the six sources to form a 5- to 30-point index. Finally, consumer news media use referred to the frequency of viewing national and local TV news as well as reading the following items in the newspaper; news about the government and politics, news about the economy, and advertisements. A 4- to 20-point index was constructed by summing responses measured on a 5-point "Every day-Never" scale.

Finally, adolescents were asked to respond to statements on a 5-point "strongly agree-strongly disagree" Likert-type scale designed to measure the person's attitudes toward the following marketing stimuli: advertising, salespeople, prices, brands, and stores.

General attitudes toward advertising were operationally defined as a construct of cognitive and affective orientations concerning liking of and believing in advertising; efficacy and purpose of advertising; interest in advertising; and liking of advertising in various media. This variable was measured by summing responses to ten items such as "Most television commercials are fun to watch."

General attitudes toward salespeople were defined as a construct of affective and cognitive orientations concerning the integrity, friendliness, and politeness of salespeople; belief in and helpfulness of salespeople. This variable was measured by summing responses to five items such as "Salespeople are polite."

Attitudes toward prices were defined as a construct of cognitive and affective orientations toward price-product relationships concerning prices as indicators of product quality and performance, and this variable was measured by summing responses to four items such as "Most products sold at reduced price are of poor quality" (reverse score).

Attitudes toward brands were defined as a construct of affective and cognitive orientations toward brand names of products; brand names as indicators of product quality and performance. This variable was measured by summing responses to five items such as "I prefer a certain brand of most products I buy or use."

Attitudes toward stores were defined as affective orientations toward stores and cognitive orientations concerning the name of the store as indicator of product quality and performance. Measurement was made by summing responses to four items such as "Well-known stores never sell poor quality products."

All criterion variables were assessed using reliability coefficient alpha (Nunnally 1967).

## RESULTS

The first phase of data analysis (data not shown here) dealt with the examination of the relationships between selected demographic characteristics of the respondents (age, sex, and social class) and measures of family communication structures and patterns. No significant relationship emerged between the three characteristics and the communication structures and patterns, suggesting that the extent of



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these communication processes among the respondents in the sample was not affected by their demographic characteristics. This finding eliminated the need for including age and other demographics as control variables in conducting further analysis.

#### Consumer Competencies

Research in the related area of political socialization revealed that a family communication environment stressing strong concept-orientations stimulates a greater political competence than other types of environments. Specifically, the pluralistic children tend to be more competent in political affairs than children from consensual homes because of the absence of social constraints in the former category (McLeod and Chaffee, 1972; Sheinkopf, 1973). Similar findings may also apply in the area of consumer socialization.

Table 1 shows mean values of measures of various consumer competencies by family communication pattern. As expected, students from pluralistic homes scored higher on all consumer competence measures ( $p < .05$ ). Children from such a family background seem to know more about consumer matters; they are better able to filter puffery in advertisements and retain product-related information learned from commercials (although pluralistic children did not watch significantly more television than their counterparts); they are more likely to know how to manage a typical family budget; and they tend to perform more socially desirable consumer behaviors than their counterparts. Consensual children, although they seem to be engaging in socially desirable consumer behaviors, appear to lack basic cognitive consumer skills

TABLE 1

## ADOLESCENT'S CONSUMER SKILLS BY FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

Consumer Skill Measures	Family Communication Pattern				Mean Raw Score Overall
	Laissez faire	Pluralistic	Protective	Consensual	
Consumer Affairs	-02	+25	+08	-27	6.30
Puffery Filtering	-14	+28	+11	-17	28.26
Product Knowledge	-01	+28	+03	-27	6.33
Consumer Finances	-07	+23	+01	-14	14.97
Consumer Activity	-25	+27	-16	+16	24.67
(Number of Cases)	(91)	(72)	(59)	(79)	(301)

Note: Entries are standard scores based on weighted means, setting the overall mean at zero and the standard deviation at unity within each row. Scores are calculated to decimal places; decimals are omitted for simplicity. The overall means for each dependent measure are shown at the right of the table.

to a significantly greater extent than children from most of the remaining family backgrounds.

These results parallel findings in the area of political socialization. In both areas the consensual child tends to behave overtly like the pluralistic youngster but lacks knowledge and other cognitive skills on which to base his actions. This might be due to the difficult conflicting situation posed by the two structures of communication (McLeod and Chaffee, 1972).

#### Materialistic Values

Another consideration was to examine the extent to which parent-child communications affect the development of materialistic values. Ward (1974b) speculated that families stressing conformity to others may implicitly encourage children to "learn to purchase and to derive satisfaction from their purchases, on the basis of the perceived effects on others" (p. 40). Thus, it was expected that a socio-oriented communication structure, which encourages the child to develop respect for others and other social orientations, would lead to the development of materialistic orientations.

The data supported this line of reasoning. The correlation between socio-oriented family communication structure and materialism was statistically significant ( $r = .18$ ,  $p < .001$ ), while the relationship between concept-oriented communication structure and materialism was insignificant ( $r = .00$ ).

Because previous studies found materialistic attitudes to be related to social utility motivations for watching television

commercials (e.g., watching commercials to learn how to make good impressions on others) and not necessarily to the amount of television viewing (Ward and Wackman, 1971; Moschis, 1976), our interest was further in examining whether such motivations could be the result of family communication structure at home. Thus, it was further speculated that a socio-oriented family communication structure may implicitly encourage the child to pay attention to the mass media as a means of learning how to behave in various social settings.

To test this proposition the respondents were asked to indicate whether they ever watch television shows and commercials for ten different social reasons such as "to find out what qualities people like in others" and "to learn what things to buy to make good impressions on others." Responses were summed to form two 0- to 10-point scales: one which reflected social utility reasons for watching television commercials and another tapping the respondent's motivations for watching television programs, with alpha reliability coefficients of .64 and .70, respectively.

The resulting correlations between socio-oriented family communication structure and social utility motivations for watching television commercials was .21 ( $p < .001$ ). Similarly, the correlation between the socio-oriented communication structure and the respondent's motivations to watch television programs for social reasons was equally strong ( $r = .17, p < .002$ ). These results suggest that families characterized by socio-orientation communication structure may be encouraging their children to turn to the media to learn

appropriate social orientations or consumption behaviors appropriate to certain roles. This may in turn lead to the learning of materialistic orientations.

#### Communication Behavior

It was also expected that various aspects of the respondent's communication behavior would be conditioned by parent-child communications at home. With respect to the adolescent's preference for kinds of information, previous researchers speculated that the socio-oriented person would be sensitive to "social" kinds of information, while the concept-oriented person would be sensitive to information regarding "functional" aspects of the situation (McLeod and Chaffee, 1972).

The data presented in Table 2 tend to support this line of reasoning. Emphasis on socio-oriented communication at home correlates with the adolescent's preferences for social kinds of information ( $r = .13$ ,  $p < .05$ ); and it apparently hinders the development of preferences for functional or rational types of information ( $r = -.14$ ,  $p < .01$ ). While the correlation between the amount of concept-oriented communication at home and the extent of the adolescent's preference for functional types of information is not strong enough to suggest that this type of parent-child communication may predict the development of such preferences, further analysis showed that pluralistic children had significantly greater preferences for this kind of information than did children from the other three groups ( $p < .001$ , t-test). Thus, it would seem that preferences for functional types of information may develop when the family communication

TABLE 2  
 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN FAMILY COMMUNICATION STRUCTURES  
 AND ADOLESCENTS' PREFERENCES FOR KINDS  
 OF INFORMATION<sup>a</sup>

Kinds of information preferred	Family Communication Structure	
	Socio-oriented	Concept-oriented
Social information	.13*	.03
Functional information	-.14**	.07

<sup>a</sup>Table entries are product-moment correlations

\*Significant at .05 level

\*\*Significant at .01 level



structure is characterized by positive impetus for self-expression and lacks social constraint.

The second consideration concerning the adolescent's communication behavior was the examination of the extent to which adolescent preferences for mass media content, amount of information, and type of information sources, vary by family communication pattern. Previous research suggested that Laissez-faire children, in the absence of any parent-child communication at home, may tend to rely less on parents and more on external sources of consumer information such as peer groups (McLeod and Chaffee, 1972). Pluralistic children, who seem to show relatively higher regard for their parents' opinions, were expected to prefer this source of consumer information more than their counterparts in the other groups, and since they are trained to evaluate several alternatives prior to decision making, they would show relatively higher preferences for sources of consumer information containing a large number of alternative solutions such as Consumer Reports (Chaffee et al., 1966; McLeod and Chaffee, 1972). Pluralistic children were also expected to score high on preferences for number of information sources (Chaffee et al., 1971). Protective children were expected to be more susceptible to (therefore, have greater preferences for) consumer information from both peer groups and persuasive messages in the mass media (Eswara, 1968; Stone and Chaffee, 1970). Consensual children were expected to show high preferences for consumer news in the mass media (Chaffee et al., 1971).

Table 3 shows mean values of various measures of the adolescent communication behavior by family communication pattern. The data show

TABLE 3

ADOLESCENT'S COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOR BY FAMILY  
COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

Communication Variables	Family Communication Pattern				Mean Raw Score Overall
	Laissez faire	Pluralistic	Protective	Consensual	
Preferences for Information Sources:					
--Television Ads	-12	-05	+20	+04	1.18
--Salespersons	+00	-03	+17	-09	1.81
--Consumer Reports	+01	+23	-02	-21	1.86
--Parents	-23	+18	+13	-01	3.21
--Print Ads	-07	+08	+12	-09	.93
--Peers	-23	+09	+25	-08	2.43
Total Number of Sources used	-20	+19	+26	-14	11.43
Consumer News Media Use	-24	+40	-17	+03	11.21
(Number of cases)	(91)	(72)	(59)	(79)	(301)

Note: Entries are standard scores based on weighted means, setting the overall mean at zero and the standard deviation at unity within each row. Scores are calculated to decimal places; decimals are omitted for simplicity. The overall means for each dependent measure are shown at the right of the table.

that Laissez-faire children, as expected, tend to rely relatively less on their parents as a source of consumer information. However, they do not tend to rely necessarily more on peers; rather they are less likely to rely on peer groups ( $p < .01$ ). They are further least likely to have preferences for consumer news in the mass media ( $p < .01$ ). Pluralistic children tend to prefer parental advice to a greater extent than do children from the other three groups ( $p < .07$ ), and they show relatively greater preferences for information contained in Consumer Reports ( $p < .05$ ). Children from pluralistic homes also are more likely to attend to consumer news in the mass media than are their counterparts ( $p < .001$ ) and they tend to prefer information from a variety of communication sources ( $p < .06$ ).

The data also seem to support the reasoning that children from protective homes are highly receptive to (thus, susceptible to influence of) consumer information from external sources such as peers ( $p < .05$ ) and to a lesser extent television advertisements ( $p < .10$ ). This susceptibility to outside influences has been attributed to parental effort to protect the child from controversy within the home (McLeod and Chaffee, 1972). Consensual children are least likely to prefer information from Consumer Reports than are children in the remaining groups ( $p < .05$ ). Another rather unexpected finding was that protective children were found to be the group most likely to prefer information from a variety of sources ( $p < .05$ ).

### Attitudes

The final consideration in this study was to examine the extent to which adolescents from various family communication backgrounds responded differently to marketing stimuli. Since neither theoretical prediction appears to exist with respect to the direction of consumer attitudes toward the various stimuli (cf. Tannenbaum and McLeod, 1967) nor related research to guide speculations and hypotheses in the area, the general hypothesis of the relationship between family communication patterns and responses to marketing stimuli was merely an exploratory one.

Table 4 shows mean values of adolescents' attitudes toward advertising, brands, stores, prices, and salespeople by family communication pattern. Laissez faire children appear to have more negative attitudes toward persuasive marketing stimuli such as advertising ( $p < .001$ ) and salespeople ( $p < .01$ ) than do their counterparts in the other three groups. Protective children show relatively unfavorable attitudes toward brands ( $p < .05$ ), while pluralistic children show relatively more favorable attitudes toward prices ( $p < .01$ ) and salespeople ( $p < .05$ ). Finally, consensual children have relatively more favorable attitudes toward advertising ( $p < .01$ ), brands ( $p < .07$ ), and stores ( $p < .05$ ), but they have the least favorable attitudes toward prices ( $p < .01$ ) of the other three groups. These findings suggest that family communication patterns at home may affect the development of affective and cognitive orientations toward marketing stimuli in children.

TABLE 4

ADOLESCENT'S ATTITUDES TOWARD MARKETING STIMULI  
BY FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

Attitude Measures	Family Communication Pattern				Mean Raw Score Overall
	Laissez faire	Pluralistic	Protective	Consensual	
Advertising	-29	+10	-02	+24	27.77
Brands	01	-02	-23	+17	14.61
Stores	-01	-09	-15	+21	10.70
Prices	-04	+33	-03	-24	10.48
Salespeople	-19	+20	-04	+08	16.77
(Number of Cases)	(91)	(72)	(59)	(79)	(301)

Note: Entries are standard scores based on weighted means, setting the overall mean at zero and the standard deviation at unity within each row. Scores are calculated to decimal places; decimals are omitted for simplicity. The overall means for each dependent measure are shown at the right of the table.

## SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

This study of adolescent consumer socialization examined family influences on the development of various consumer competencies, materialistic values, communication behaviors, and attitudes toward marketing stimuli. Family influences were studied in the context of a two-dimensional constraint model of communication which provides a four-fold typology of family communication patterns.

With respect to the influence of the various family communication patterns of the acquisition of certain consumer competencies, the results of this study were fairly similar to those found in the area of political socialization. Specifically, children from families characterized by insistence on conceptual matters and absence of social constraints in their communications ("pluralistics") were found to have more knowledge about consumer-related matters; they were better able to filter puffery in advertising and to manage a typical family budget; they knew more information about products and their characteristics and were more likely to perform socially desirable consumer behaviors.

The findings further suggest that parents who emphasize the importance of pleasant social relationships in the family (socio-oriented structure) in their communications with their children may implicitly encourage their children to evaluate their actions (including consumption behaviors) on the basis of the perceived effects on others. This may result in the development of materialistic orientations in the child's consumer behavior.

The family communication patterns also predicted some aspects of the adolescent's communication behavior. Parent-child communication structures, which vary greatly from family to family, apparently lead to differentiated patterns of communication behavior by the time youngsters reach adolescence. The results further suggest that such intrafamily influences may affect the child's perception of various marketing stimuli.

These findings appear to have implications for public-policy makers, marketers, consumer educators, and students of socialization and consumer behavior. Public officials concerned with responding to criticisms by various consumer groups regarding the effects of marketing practices on the development of materialistic orientations in youngsters should know that such orientations may be the result of parent-child communication structures at home--not merely the effect of persuasive communications, as critics would argue (Action for Children's Television, 1971).

The FCP typology may also be a useful tool for marketers in designing effective and efficient communication campaigns directed at young consumers, since youths from different family communication backgrounds tend to exhibit different communication behavior. Knowledge of the FCP pattern characterizing a desirable segment of the youth market would suggest to the marketer whether information is relevant to that segment, the kind of information demand, and through what sources of communication the information should be made available to the market. Such knowledge might further assist marketers in allocating marketing effort to the various components of their



marketing mix, since young consumers from different FCP backgrounds appear to respond more or less favorably to various marketing stimuli.

The findings would seem to be of special interest to various groups of people such as consumer educators, public officials, and even marketers who are interested in helping young people become more effective and competent consumers in the marketplace. The information could be used in consumer education materials and practices designed for both adults and youths. Consumer education materials designed for adult consumers should point out the importance of encouraging a concept-oriented family communication structure and avoiding a socio-oriented structure at home. The child, for example, could be encouraged to take an interest in the world of consumer ideas and feel free to discuss consumption matters with older people. Teachers could also use parent-child communication measures such as those used in the present research to identify the FCP existing at homes of their students and, if needed, try to fill in communication gaps at school.

Finally, we would argue for the usefulness of parent-child communication structures in future studies of consumer socialization and consumer behavior. The study results suggest that FCP may be good predictors of consumer learning and consumer behavior in general, as they were in the areas of political behavior and media use. The findings provide stronger support for the "FCP" model in shaping one's behavior since the model seems to predict not only political socialization and media-use habits but also consumer behavior.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Consumer behavior is viewed from the perspective of consumer role enactment; a concept which includes what Ward (1974a) describes as "the set of physical and mental activities specially involved in purchase decisions--shopping, talking to others about products and brands and weighing purchase criteria" (p. 2); it is not confined to purchase decisions but also includes relevant skills that motivate purchase and consumption, as well as socially desirable behaviors that may contribute to efficient utilization of economic resources for the satisfaction of the maximum number of society's members (Brim, 1966).

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