



Children as Influential Actors in Family Restaurant Decision-Making: Evidence from Table-Service Dining Environments in Haryana, India

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Keywords

Children's influence; family dining behaviour; restaurant decision-making; consumer behaviour; hospitality marketing; food-ordering behaviour; family purchasing dynamics; peer influence; advertising exposure; emerging markets.

Abstract

The increasing commercialization of childhood consumption and the transformation of family dining practices have significantly reshaped restaurant-related purchasing behaviour in emerging consumer markets. While previous studies have acknowledged children's growing role in household consumption decisions, empirical evidence examining their influence within family restaurant decision-making in developing economies remains comparatively limited. This study investigates the extent and determinants of children's influence on restaurant food-ordering decisions within table-service restaurant settings in Palwal and Hodal, Haryana, India. Specifically, the study examines the effects of advertising exposure, peer influence, menu-related factors, family structure, and socioeconomic conditions on children's participation in family dining decisions. The study adopts a quantitative cross-sectional research design based on primary data collected from 108 families through structured restaurant intercept surveys. Descriptive statistical techniques, including frequency analysis, measures of central tendency, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis, were employed using IBM SPSS Statistics and Microsoft Excel to evaluate behavioural patterns and family consumption dynamics. The findings reveal that children exert a meaningful and increasingly visible influence on family restaurant decision-making processes. Approximately 82% of parents reported considering children's preferences while placing food orders, while nearly 40% indicated that children demonstrate a moderate level of influence over menu selection. Advertising exposure (61%), peer influence (59%), and menu variety (34%) emerged as significant determinants shaping children's food preferences and restaurant choices. The results additionally indicate the emergence of a collaborative and consultative family consumption model in which parental authority remains central, yet children actively participate in influencing dining-related decisions. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that family dining experiences are increasingly shaped by experiential and social factors, including restaurant atmosphere, entertainment value, and food quality. The study contributes to the literature on consumer behaviour, hospitality management, and family purchasing dynamics by providing empirical evidence from an underexplored emerging-market context. The findings offer important implications for restaurant managers, marketers, hospitality practitioners, and public health policymakers regarding child-oriented menu strategies, responsible advertising practices, and family-centred dining environments. The study also highlights the need for future research employing advanced analytical techniques and longitudinal approaches to further examine the evolving role of children in family consumption behaviour.

Citation

Mittal, R. (2026). Children as Influential Actors in Family Restaurant Decision-Making: Evidence from Table-Service Dining Environments in Haryana, India. *Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems*, 9(8), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.56334/sei/9.8.4>

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Received: December 28, 2025

Accepted: April 19, 2026

Published Online: May 15, 2026

1. INTRODUCTION

The global food service and hospitality industry has undergone substantial transformation over the past two decades as a consequence of changing consumer lifestyles, rapid urbanization, digital media expansion, and evolving family consumption patterns. Within this changing environment, family dining behaviour has emerged as an important area of consumer research due to its direct relationship with purchasing behaviour, lifestyle preferences, and food consumption practices. Contemporary restaurant consumption is no longer exclusively shaped by parental authority; rather, it increasingly reflects collective family interaction processes in which children actively participate in influencing restaurant selection, menu preferences, and food-ordering decisions.

Consumer behaviour literature suggests that purchasing decisions within families are socially constructed processes influenced by interpersonal communication, emotional interaction, socioeconomic conditions, and cultural expectations. Traditional family decision-making models historically positioned parents as the primary economic decision-makers, while children were viewed largely as passive recipients of consumption outcomes. However, contemporary consumer research increasingly recognizes children as influential social actors capable of shaping household purchasing decisions across multiple product categories, including food products, entertainment services, technology, and hospitality consumption. The increasing economic significance of children as consumers has therefore generated growing academic interest in understanding their role within family purchasing dynamics.

The concept of consumer socialization provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding children's participation in family consumption processes. Consumer socialization theory argues that children gradually develop consumption-related knowledge, attitudes, and behavioural competencies through interactions with parents, peers, educational environments, and media systems. As children become increasingly exposed to digital communication technologies, advertising content, and peer-oriented social environments, their ability to influence household consumption decisions has expanded considerably. Consequently, children increasingly function not merely as end-users of products and services but as active negotiators and contributors within family purchasing environments.

Food consumption and restaurant decision-making represent particularly significant contexts in which children's influence becomes visible. Restaurant dining environments involve collaborative consumption experiences in which family members negotiate food preferences, menu choices, and dining expectations. Previous studies demonstrate that children frequently influence food-ordering behaviour through direct requests, emotional persuasion, repeated preference expression, and exposure to external stimuli such as advertising and peer behaviour. In many cases, children's restaurant preferences are shaped by menu attractiveness, brand familiarity, entertainment-oriented dining experiences, and social influence mechanisms operating within peer groups and digital environments.

The increasing commercialization of children's consumption behaviour has also intensified the role of media and marketing communication in shaping restaurant preferences. Television advertising, social media platforms, influencer marketing, online entertainment, and digital food promotions increasingly target younger consumers through emotionally engaging and visually persuasive communication strategies. Such marketing practices contribute significantly to children's brand awareness, fast-food preferences, and restaurant-related consumption attitudes. At the same time, growing concerns regarding unhealthy dietary behaviour, processed food consumption, and childhood obesity have encouraged researchers and policymakers to investigate the broader social and public health implications of children's influence on family food decisions.

Within emerging economies such as India, these transformations have become particularly visible due to rapid economic development, urban expansion, changing family structures, and increased exposure to global consumer culture. The Indian restaurant and food service industry has experienced substantial growth in recent years, especially within tier-2 cities and semi-urban regions where changing lifestyles and rising disposable incomes have expanded family dining practices. Simultaneously, the transition from traditional joint-family structures toward nuclear and consumption-oriented family systems has altered patterns of intra-family communication and purchasing behaviour. These developments have contributed to greater child participation in household decision-making processes, particularly in relation to leisure consumption and dining activities.

Despite the growing importance of children's influence in family restaurant consumption, empirical research within the Indian context remains comparatively limited. Most existing studies examining children's participation in family purchasing decisions have been conducted within Western societies and developed economies, where cultural norms, family structures, and consumption environments differ substantially from those observed in emerging markets such as India. Furthermore, prior research has predominantly focused on fast-food or quick-service restaurant settings, while relatively limited attention has been devoted to table-service restaurants and family-oriented dining environments within smaller urban regions and tier-2 cities.

The present study seeks to address these conceptual and contextual gaps by examining the influence of children on family restaurant food-ordering decisions within table-service restaurants located in Palwal and Hodal, Haryana, India. Specifically, the study investigates the extent of children's participation in restaurant-related decision-making processes and analyses the role of advertising exposure, peer influence, family structure, and socioeconomic conditions in shaping children's food preferences and consumption behaviour. In doing so, the study aims to contribute to the broader literature on consumer behaviour, hospitality management, family purchasing dynamics, and child consumer socialization within emerging market contexts.

The study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it expands existing understanding of collaborative family consumption behaviour by contextualizing children's influence within Indian dining environments. Practically, the findings may assist restaurant managers, marketers, hospitality practitioners, and public health policymakers in developing more effective family-oriented dining strategies, child-responsive menu designs, and responsible marketing approaches aimed at balancing consumer engagement with nutritional and social considerations.

Literature Review

The influence of children on family consumption decisions has become an increasingly important area within consumer behaviour and marketing research. Traditionally, parents were considered the dominant decision-makers in household purchasing processes; however, contemporary studies demonstrate that children actively participate in various stages of family decision-making, particularly in relation to food selection, entertainment, technology, and restaurant preferences. The growing purchasing power of families, increased exposure to digital media, and changing family structures have strengthened children's influence on household consumption behaviour across both developed and developing economies.

Early foundational studies emphasized the role of children as emerging consumers within the family environment. Berey and Pollay (1968) were among the first researchers to examine children's influence in household purchasing decisions, identifying that children could significantly affect family product choices through direct and indirect persuasion strategies. Later, Ward (1974) introduced the concept of consumer socialization, explaining how children acquire consumption-related skills, attitudes, and behaviours through interaction with parents, peers, and media environments. Similarly, Moschis (1987) argued that children gradually develop consumption competencies through continuous social learning processes influenced by family communication patterns and external marketing stimuli.

Theoretical perspectives on family decision-making further suggest that children's influence varies according to family structure, socioeconomic conditions, parental communication styles, and product relevance. Caruana and Vassallo (2003) found that children from concept-oriented families possess greater influence over purchasing decisions than those raised in socio-oriented family environments. Their findings indicate that democratic communication within households encourages children's participation in consumption-related discussions. Flurry (2007) additionally highlighted that children continue to exert substantial influence on family purchases, particularly for products directly associated with their personal preferences and lifestyles. In the Indian context, Nain (2021) observed that children increasingly function as influential participants in family consumption decisions, particularly within urban nuclear families where parent-child interactions are more collaborative and consumption-oriented.

Food consumption and restaurant decision-making represent one of the most visible domains of children's influence within family purchasing behaviour. Castro et al. (2016) identified multiple interpersonal and environmental factors affecting children's food-ordering decisions in restaurant settings, including menu design, parental attitudes, advertising exposure, and peer influence. Similarly, Cohen et al. (2020) found that children frequently determine their preferred meals before visiting quick-service restaurants, often influencing final purchasing outcomes independently of parental recommendations. These findings demonstrate that children are no longer passive recipients of parental decisions but active participants in food-selection processes.

Several studies have also emphasized the role of emotional and psychological strategies in shaping parental purchasing behaviour. Dibie (2021) observed that children commonly employ emotional appeals, repeated requests, and persuasive communication to influence parents' food purchasing decisions. Monalisa et al. (2023) further reported that elementary school children actively attempt to shape maternal food purchases through negotiation and repeated preference expression. Such behavioural patterns reflect the growing bargaining power of children within modern family structures and demonstrate how emotional dynamics contribute to family consumption decisions.

The increasing influence of media, advertising, and digital communication has further transformed children's consumption behaviour. Exposure to television advertisements, online platforms, and social media content significantly affects children's food preferences, restaurant awareness, and brand perceptions. Dinc (2023) concluded that social media influencers positively affect consumers' restaurant choices and dining decisions across multiple stages of the decision-making process. Likewise, Dedeoğlu et al. (2020) emphasized that user-generated social media content shapes consumer attitudes and organizational outcomes within the hospitality

sector. Rounsefell et al. (2020) additionally demonstrated that digital media environments strongly influence food choices and consumption attitudes among younger populations.

Research also indicates that peer influence plays a significant role in shaping children's restaurant and food preferences. As children become increasingly socially connected through schools, online communities, and peer groups, their purchasing preferences are often shaped by social comparison and group acceptance mechanisms. Lakra and Singh (2024) observed that peer interactions and fast-food marketing strategies strongly affect children's dietary habits and family dining preferences. Similar findings were reported by Fatima et al. (2024), who documented multiple mechanisms through which children influence parental fast-food purchasing decisions within family environments.

Restaurant selection behaviour is additionally shaped by service quality, menu variety, dining atmosphere, and entertainment facilities. Arya and Kolapkar (2024) found that social media marketing and restaurant promotional strategies significantly influence casual dining preferences among families. Previous hospitality studies similarly suggest that child-friendly menus, play areas, and family-oriented environments enhance restaurant attractiveness for households with children. Consequently, restaurants increasingly target children not merely as end-users but as influential participants capable of shaping collective family decisions.

Despite the growing international literature on children's influence in family consumption behaviour, important geographical and contextual gaps remain. Most existing studies have primarily focused on Western countries and urban developed economies, while relatively limited research has examined family dining dynamics in emerging markets such as India. Furthermore, previous studies have frequently concentrated on fast-food or quick-service restaurant contexts, with less attention devoted to table-service restaurants and family-oriented dining environments in tier-2 cities and semi-urban regions.

Therefore, the present study seeks to address these gaps by examining the influence of children on family restaurant decision-making in Palwal and Hodal, Haryana. By investigating the role of peer influence, advertising exposure, family structure, and socioeconomic conditions in shaping food-ordering behaviour, the study contributes to the broader literature on consumer behaviour, hospitality management, and family purchasing dynamics within emerging cultural contexts.

Table 1: Summary of existing Previous Literature

Author Name	Year	Title of the Paper	Study Objective	Key Finding of the Study
Berey & Pollay	1968	The Influencing Role of the Child in Family Decision-Making	Focus on mother-child relationship in breakfast cereal purchasing	Maternal purchase behaviour was independent of child's age and number of siblings
Page & Ridgway	2001	Consumer Environments and Consumption Patterns Across Socioeconomic Backgrounds	Examine how consumer environments affect children from different SES	Child's consumer environment profoundly influences his/her consumption patterns
Caruana & Vassallo	2003	Children's Perception of Influence Over Purchases	Focus on perceived influence based on parental communication patterns	Children of concept-oriented parents influence purchases; socio-oriented parents' children do not
Flurry	2007	Children's Influence in Family Decision-Making: Changing American Family	Examine generalisability of early findings on children's purchase influence	Children remain influential in purchase decisions for products consumed by themselves and the family
Martensen & Gronholdt	2008	Children's Influence on Family Decision Making	Examine children's participation across 14 product categories	Children exercise strong influence on family decision-making, particularly for products relevant to them

Jeevananda & Kumar	2012	Degree of Children's Influence on Parents' Buying Decisions	Analyse relative influence of children and methods adopted	Children's influence slightly higher in nuclear families than joint families
Wootan	2012	Children's Meals in Restaurants: Helping Families Make Healthy Choices	Outline ways to make healthy choices easier for families	Many restaurant children's meals remain high in calories, saturated fat, and sodium
Shahrokh & Khosravi	2014	Children's Influence in Family Consumption — Integrative Approach	Examine children's influence on family decision-making in Iran	Children apply expert, referent, reward and coercive social power in influence attempts
Castro et al.	2016	Food Ordering for Children in Restaurants	Identify sources of influence on ordering behaviour for children in restaurants	Identified intra-personal and inter-personal environmental influences, including menu features
Cohen et al.	2020	Role of Parents and Children in Meal Selection in QSRs	Identify how ordering decisions are made and their impact on meal selection	Children predominantly selected foods prior to visiting QSRs, often without parental involvement
Rounsefell et al.	2020	Social Media, Body Image, and Food Choices in Young Adults	Evaluate impact of social media on body image and food choices	Social media is an essential platform for health professionals to engage young adults
Dedeoglu et al.	2020	Importance Consumers Attach to Social Media Sharing	Explain types and importance of consumer-oriented content	Various consumer content types influence organisational outcomes
Nain	2021	Children as Influencers in Family Consumption — Resource Theory	Examine parents' perception of children's influence in India	Indian parents perceive significant children's influence; moderated by family structure, not family size
Dibie	2021	Impact of Children's Emotional Influencing Strategies on Parental Food Purchases	Examine emotional strategies affecting parents in food purchasing	Children's emotional strategies have significant effect on parental purchasing decisions
Dinc	2023	Social Media Influencers on Restaurant Decision-Making	Examine effect of SMI trust on restaurant choice	SMI trust positively influences all stages of the consumer restaurant decision process
Gigliotti et al.	2023	Children in Family Purchase Decision-Making: Healthy vs. Unhealthy Food	Investigate children's behaviour in purchasing healthy and unhealthy foods	Family interaction quality matters; joint food policies involving both children and parents are recommended
Monalisa et al.	2023	Strategies Children Use to Influence Mothers' Food Purchasing	Understand strategies elementary children use to influence mothers	Children can be agents of dietary change if they themselves prefer healthy foods
Fatima et al.	2024	Kids Influencing Parental Decision-Making in Fast Food Purchasing	Examine relationship between children's influence and parental fast food decisions	Various methods documented by which children influence parents' fast food purchases
Lakra & Singh	2024	Parental Influence on Children's Fast-Food Choices	Explore family decision-making and parental influence on fast-food habits	Parental supervision and public health programs can guide children toward healthier eating

Source: Compile by Author

3.1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopted a quantitative descriptive research design employing a cross-sectional survey approach to examine the extent and nature of children's influence on family restaurant decision-making within the context of table-service restaurants in Palwal and Hodal, Haryana, India. The cross-sectional design was considered appropriate due to its effectiveness in capturing behavioural patterns, perceptions, and decision-making dynamics within a defined population at a specific point in time.

Primary data were collected from families dining with children in selected table-service restaurants located across the study area. The research focused specifically on parent-child interactions during restaurant selection and food-ordering processes. To obtain contextually relevant consumer insights, restaurant intercept survey techniques were employed, allowing respondents to participate immediately after or during their dining experiences. This approach enhanced response reliability by capturing real-time behavioural perceptions and consumption-related experiences.

The study utilized a structured questionnaire as the principal data collection instrument. The questionnaire consisted of 26 items designed to measure demographic characteristics, family dining frequency, children's participation in ordering decisions, peer and advertising influence, parental perceptions, and restaurant preference determinants. The instrument incorporated both nominal-scale and Likert-scale measures to ensure a comprehensive assessment of behavioural and attitudinal variables. Prior to final administration, the questionnaire was reviewed to ensure clarity, relevance, and contextual suitability for the target respondents.

A convenience sampling technique was adopted due to the practical accessibility of respondents within restaurant environments and the exploratory nature of the study. A total of 120 questionnaires were distributed, of which 108 valid responses were retained for final analysis, yielding an effective response rate of 90%. Data collection was conducted through both physical questionnaires and digital platforms, including Google Forms, in order to maximize respondent participation and improve data collection efficiency.

The collected data were coded and analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics and Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistical techniques were employed to examine respondent characteristics and behavioural patterns, including frequency distributions, percentages, means, medians, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis. These statistical measures enabled the identification of central tendencies, distributional properties, and variations within respondents' perceptions and dining behaviours. The study used the conceptual framework was developed based on previous literature and it will help to visually represent the key factors influencing children's participation in family restaurant decision-making.

Ethical considerations were carefully maintained throughout the research process. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed about the academic purpose and objectives of the research prior to participation. Informed consent was obtained implicitly through respondents' willingness to complete the questionnaire, and confidentiality of all collected information was strictly preserved. The study adhered to accepted ethical principles concerning anonymity, privacy protection, and responsible data usage in social science research.

3.2 Objectives of the Study

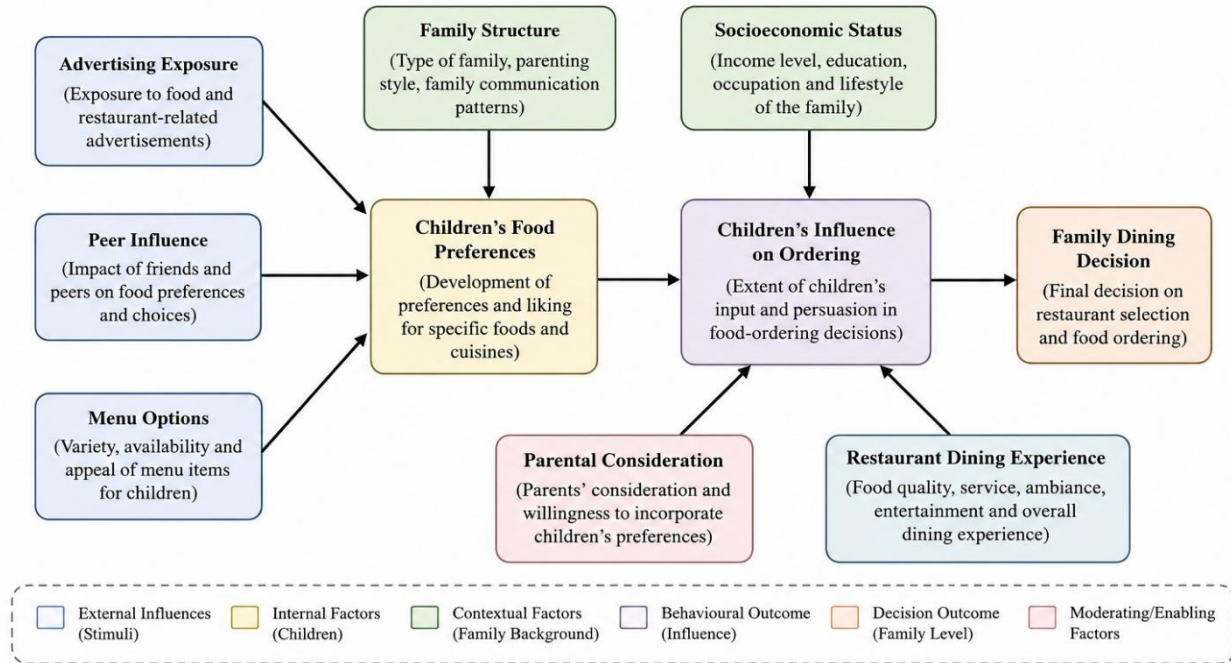
The present study seeks to examine the evolving role of children in shaping family restaurant decision-making within the context of table-service restaurants in Haryana, India. In response to changing family consumption dynamics and increasing child participation in purchasing behaviour, the study aims to provide an empirical understanding of the factors influencing restaurant food-ordering decisions among families.

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To examine the extent of children's influence on restaurant food-ordering decisions within family dining environments.
2. To analyse family dining decision-making patterns and the nature of parent-child interactions during restaurant selection and menu-ordering processes.
3. To investigate the influence of advertising exposure, peer interaction, and social environments on children's restaurant food preferences and purchasing behaviour.
4. To identify the key restaurant-related factors influencing children's preferences, including menu variety, dining atmosphere, pricing, and entertainment facilities.
5. To evaluate the role of family structure and socioeconomic background in moderating children's participation in restaurant-related consumption decisions.
6. To explore parental attitudes toward accommodating children's food preferences during family dining experiences.

- To provide practical implications for restaurant managers, marketers, and hospitality practitioners regarding child-oriented family dining strategies and consumer engagement.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: Children as Influential Actors in Family Restaurant Decision-Making
(Table-Service Dining Environments in Emerging India)



Caption: The figure illustrates the conceptual framework examining the relationships among advertising exposure, peer influence, menu options, children's food preferences, and children's influence on restaurant food-ordering decisions within family dining contexts. The model further incorporates the moderating roles of family structure and socioeconomic status, alongside parental consideration and restaurant dining experience, in shaping overall family dining decisions.

Source: Developed by the author based on empirical literature on family consumer behavior, children's influence, and restaurant decision-making.

4. RESULTS

4. 1. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Descriptive statistical techniques as frequency analysis, mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis were employed to analyse the collected data. IBM SPSS and Microsoft Excel had been employed for the analysis.

Table No. 2 : Demographic Profile of Respondents

Sr no.	Demographic	Categories	Frequency	Percent
1	Age of Respondent	Below 30-40	22	20.37
		30-40	65	60.19
		41-50	11	10.18
		51-60	8	7.41
		Above 60	2	1.85
		Total	108	100
2	Gender	Male	49	45.37

		Female	59	54.63
		Total	108	100
3	Family Type	Nuclear	50	46.3
		Joint	52	48.15
		Extended	6	5.56
		Total	108	100
4	No. of Children in Family	1	28	25.93
		2	45	41.67
		3	25	23.15
		4 or more	10	9.26
		Total	108	100
5	Mothers' employment status	Full time employed	48	44.44
		Part-time employed	60	55.56
		Total	108	100
6	Socio economic status	High socio-economic family	60	55.56
		Lower socio-economic family	48	44.44
		Total	108	100

The demographic profile of the respondents is displayed in Table 2. The majority (60.19%) were in the 30- to 40-year-old age group, revealing a parental group that was mostly young to middle-aged. A small majority of respondents (54.63%) remained female. In respect to family structure, just 5.56% of families expanded, and joint families were relatively bigger (48.15%) than nuclear families (46.30%). The majority of the participants (41.67%) had two children, with one child ranking in second (25.93%). 55.56% of moms were part-time, compared to 44.44% whose work worked full-time. Considering social class, 44.44% belonged to lower socioeconomic families and 55.56% of higher socioeconomic families.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

Sr no.	Demographic Variable	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
1	Age of Respondent	2.10	2	0.87	1.16	1.72
2	Gender	1.45	2	0.50	0.19	-2.00
3	Family Type	1.59	2	0.60	0.44	-0.65
4	No. of Children in Family	2.16	2	0.92	0.42	-0.61
5	Mothers' employment status	1.56	2	0.50	0.23	-1.99
6	Socio economic status	1.44	1	0.50	0.23	-1.99

Source: Primary Data

The descriptive statistics of the demographic profiles of the respondents are shown in Table 3. There is an emphasis of younger families in the study, demonstrated by the positive skew (1.16) and mean age category of 2.10, which refers to the 30–40 years group. There is a minor bias toward female respondents reflected in the gender distribution (mean 1.45). The number of nuclear and combined families

is close to equal (mean 1.59). With an extremely spread range ($SD = 0.92$), the number of children variable (mean 2.16) reveals that a large percentage of households have two children. In consistent with their categorical response categories, mothers' job status and socioeconomic position both reveal negative kurtosis (about -2.00), suggesting flat, bimodal distributions.

Table No. 4: Frequency Distribution of Respondents' General Information

Sr no.	Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
1.	How often does your family dine out in restaurants	Rarely (less than one in a month)	53	49.07
		Occasionally (1-3 times in a month)	36	33.33
		Frequently (4-7 times a month)	16	14.81
		Very Frequently (more than 7 times a month)	3	2.78
		Total	108	100
2.	Which type of restaurants do you typically visit with your family	Fast food	26	24.07
		Casual dining	58	53.70
		Ethnic/international cuisines	17	15.74
		Other	7	6.48
		Total	108	100
3.	How much influence do your children have on the specific food items ordered	No influence	27	25.00
		Minimal influence	25	23.15
		Moderate influence	43	39.81
		Significant Influence	8	7.41
		Complete influence	5	4.63
		Total	108	100
4	Do you find that your children's preferences change your own	Never	31	28.70
		Rarely	22	20.37
		Sometimes	39	36.11
		Often	10	9.26
		Always	6	5.56
		Total	108	100
5	How often do you discuss the menu with your children before ordering	Never	18	16.67
		Rarely	7	6.48
		Sometimes	26	24.07
		Often	17	15.74
		Always	40	37.04

		Total	108	100
6	What factors are most important to your children when choosing a restaurant	Menu options	37	34.26
		Ambiance/atmosphere	21	19.44
		Price	12	11.11
		Proximity to home	11	10.19
		Special promotions/discounts	4	3.70
		Children's menu	9	8.33
		Availability of play area/entertainment	9	8.33
		Other (please specify)	5	4.63
		Total	108	100
7	How often do you order food items specifically to accommodate your children's preference	Never	14	12.96
		Rarely	22	20.37
		Sometimes	33	30.56
		Often	17	15.74
		Always	22	20.37
		Total	108	100
8	What are the children's favorite food or dish	Fast Food	47	43.52
		Casual Dining	37	34.26
		Fine Dining	24	22.22
		Total	108	100
9	Do the children have any dietary restrictions or allergy	Yes	35	32.41
		No	73	67.59
		Total	108	100
10.	Who usually decides where the family will eat	Parents	66	61.11
		Children	42	38.89
		Total	108	100
11	How often do the children express their preference for a specific restaurant or dish	Always	29	26.85
		Never	17	15.74
		Sometime	47	43.52
		Usually,	15	13.89

		Total	108	100
12	When ordering do you consider the children's preference	Yes	89	82.41
		No	19	17.59
		Total	108	100
13	Do you order separate meals for children or do they share with adults	Yes	73	67.59
		No	35	32.41
		Total	108	100
14	How often does the children influence the choice of menu items	Yes	73	67.59
		No	35	32.41
		Total	108	100
15	Have advertisement influenced their food preference	Yes	66	61.11
		No	42	38.89
		Total	108	100
16	Do other children choices impact what your child orders	Yes	61	56.48
		No	47	43.52
		Total	108	100
17	Does peer influence affect family dining decision	Yes	64	59.26
		No	44	40.74
		Total	108	100
18	Do they express any dissatisfaction with specific changes	Yes	66	61.11
		No	42	38.89
		Total	108	100
19	What factors contribute to a positive dining experience for your family	Atmospheric	26	24.07
		Food quality	58	53.70
		Services	15	13.89
		Location	6	5.56
		Other	3	2.78
		Total	108	100
20	How important	Very important	58	53.70

is the children's enjoyment in shaping your restaurant choices	Somewhat Important	20	18.52
	Not Important	6	5.56
	Friends	11	10.19
	TV	5	4.63
	Internet	4	3.70
	Shopping	4	3.70
	Total	108	100

Source: Primary Data

The frequency distribution of the users' food choices and ways of making decisions is shown in Table 4. The reality that almost half of respondents (49.07%) dinner out rarely—less frequently than once a month—indicates that dining out is not routine but rather an occasional, planned family get-together. A highly popular restaurant type is casual dining (53.70%), then followed by fast food (24.07%).

The majority among the respondents (39.81%) stated that children had a moderate influence on food orders, in contrast to 25% who responded that children had no influence and 4.63% who reported that children had a significant influence. The current pattern points to a joint decision-making paradigm as compared with a child-dominant one. Whereas 28.70% of parents indicated that their choices are never changed, children's preferences frequently effect parental decisions (36.11%). Surprisingly, 37.04% of parents always discuss to children about the menu before placing an order, illustrating that families actively participate in food choices.

When choosing a restaurant, children prefer menu options (34.26%), followed by surroundings (19.44%) and price ranges (11.11%). When making an order, a majority of parents (82.41%) take their children's preferences into account, and 67.59% place individual meal orders for Children. Fast food is the most popular food choice (43.52%) among the children. The majority of restaurant decisions are made by parents (61.11%), with children having an impact in 38.89% of situations.

In 61.11% of instances, children's food choices are influenced by advertisement awareness. 59.26% of the respondents stated that social pressure influences family dining decisions, and 56.48% reported that a child's menu is influenced by the choices of their peers. A positive experience when dining is largely influenced by the quality of the food (53.70%), and 53.70% of families place an emphasis on their children's pleasure when visiting restaurants.

4.2 Findings and Discussion

The findings of the present study provide significant insights into the evolving role of children in family restaurant decision-making within the context of table-service restaurants in Haryana, India. The analysis demonstrates that children increasingly function as influential participants in food-ordering processes and restaurant selection behaviour, although parental authority continues to remain central within final decision-making structures. Overall, the findings indicate the emergence of a collaborative or consultative family consumption model rather than a completely child-dominated decision framework.

The demographic analysis revealed that the majority of respondents belonged to the 30–40 years age category, representing relatively young and economically active families. Female respondents constituted a slightly larger proportion of the sample, suggesting that mothers remain highly engaged in family dining and food-related decision-making processes. Furthermore, the near-equal distribution between nuclear and joint families reflects the coexistence of traditional and modern family structures within the study region. These findings are particularly important because previous studies have shown that family structure significantly influences children's participation in household consumption decisions.

The descriptive statistics additionally indicate that most households had two children, reflecting typical urban and semi-urban family compositions in contemporary India. The presence of younger families and moderate family sizes may contribute to more interactive parent–child communication regarding consumption decisions, particularly within leisure-oriented environments such as restaurants. The positive skewness observed within the age variable further confirms the dominance of younger parental groups who are generally more receptive to collaborative consumption behaviour and child participation.

The frequency analysis demonstrates that dining out remains an occasional rather than routine activity for most families, with nearly half of the respondents reporting restaurant visits less than once per month. This suggests that restaurant dining continues to function as a planned family leisure activity rather than an everyday consumption behaviour. Casual dining restaurants emerged as the most preferred category among respondents, indicating that families prioritize comfortable, family-oriented environments over exclusively fast-food-oriented settings.

One of the most significant findings of the study concerns the degree of children's influence on food-ordering decisions. Approximately 40% of respondents reported that children exert a moderate influence on menu selection, while a smaller proportion indicated either complete or no influence. These findings support earlier research suggesting that children actively participate in consumption-related discussions without entirely replacing parental authority. The results therefore reinforce the concept of "shared family decision-making," where parents retain final control while simultaneously accommodating children's preferences and expectations.

The study further reveals that children's preferences substantially affect parental consumption choices. More than one-third of respondents acknowledged that their own restaurant or menu preferences are sometimes modified according to children's wishes. In addition, a considerable proportion of parents reported regularly discussing menu options with their children before ordering food. Such findings indicate that modern family dining experiences increasingly involve negotiation, interaction, and collaborative preference formation between parents and children. This aligns with consumer socialization theories emphasizing that children gradually acquire influence through repeated participation in household decision-making processes.

Menu variety emerged as the most influential factor affecting children's restaurant preferences, followed by restaurant atmosphere and pricing considerations. These findings indicate that children are highly responsive to tangible consumption experiences, particularly food diversity, presentation, and entertainment-oriented dining environments. The growing importance of restaurant ambience suggests that children's preferences extend beyond food itself and increasingly include experiential aspects of dining. Consequently, restaurants targeting family consumers may benefit from designing child-friendly dining environments that combine menu flexibility with engaging atmospheres.

The findings additionally demonstrate that parents strongly accommodate children's food preferences during restaurant visits. More than 80% of respondents reported considering their children's preferences while placing food orders, while approximately two-thirds indicated ordering separate meals specifically for children. These findings confirm that children have become important secondary consumers within family dining contexts and significantly shape restaurant purchasing outcomes. Fast food was identified as the most preferred food category among children, reflecting broader global trends associated with convenience-oriented and highly marketed food products.

External influences such as advertising exposure, peer pressure, and social interaction were also found to significantly shape children's restaurant preferences and ordering behaviour. More than 60% of respondents acknowledged that advertising influences children's food choices, while peer-related influences similarly demonstrated substantial effects on family dining decisions. These findings support previous research highlighting the increasing role of digital media, social comparison, and consumer culture in shaping children's food consumption patterns. Children are increasingly exposed to persuasive marketing messages through television, social media platforms, and online entertainment environments, all of which contribute to preference formation and brand awareness.

Peer influence additionally emerged as an important determinant of children's restaurant choices. The findings indicate that children are affected not only by parental guidance but also by the preferences and behaviours of friends and peer groups. This reflects broader sociological shifts in which children's consumption identities are increasingly shaped through external social environments rather than exclusively through family interactions.

Food quality was identified as the most important factor contributing to positive family dining experiences. This finding suggests that although children influence restaurant choices, parents continue to prioritize quality, hygiene, and overall dining satisfaction when making final decisions. Consequently, family dining decisions appear to involve a balance between children's experiential preferences and parental concerns regarding quality, nutrition, and value.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that children play a meaningful and growing role in shaping family restaurant decision-making within the Indian context. However, unlike certain Western studies suggesting highly child-dominated consumption patterns, the present study identifies a more balanced and culturally moderated decision-making structure in which parents remain the primary authority figures while simultaneously integrating children's preferences into final purchasing decisions. The study therefore contributes to the growing literature on consumer behaviour by highlighting the culturally embedded and collaborative nature of family dining decisions in emerging markets such as India.

5. CONCLUSION

The nature and scope of children's impact on restaurant food ordering decisions in Palwal and Hodal, Haryana, India, were examined in this study. Results show that children have a moderate but significant effect on family eating decisions; about 40% of families report having a moderate influence, and 82% actively take children's preferences consideration when placing orders. Family structure, economic status level, and outside characteristics like peer behavior (59%) and advertising (61%) all have different amounts of influence.

A majority of families (61.11%) still have the option to choose a place, but they virtually always take their children's food habits into account when placing an order. In contrast with the more child-dominant patterns observed in Western studies, this dual-role model,

which the present study indicates as a "consultative but parent-led" decision framework, appear to correspond to a culturally specific pattern in the Indian context (Flurry, 2007; Caruana & Vassallo, 2003).

Based on study findings, family menus ought to focus on food quality, which is the main factor in a satisfying meal experience (53.70%), and familiar food offerings, which are ranked highest rated by children (34.26%). Children should be integrated into marketing initiatives as secondary influencers when it concerns family dining selections. Stricter regulation of food advertisements targeting children, particularly in the fast-food industry, is essential, as evidenced by the strong correlation (61.11%) with children's food choices and public relations exposure.

Being among the first to empirically investigate family restaurant decision-making processes in tier-2 cities in Haryana, India, this study significantly contributes to the knowledge on customer behaviour. Further research ought to employ longitudinal designs to follow changes in children's influence as they grow older, develop multi-item validated standardized scales to enable complex analytical techniques such as a structural equation modelling. Compare cities across Indian regions and include children as direct respondents compared to just their parents.

6. DECLARATIONS

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study.

Ethical Approval

The study was conducted in accordance with accepted ethical standards for social science research. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the academic purpose of the study prior to data collection.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study prior to questionnaire administration.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Author Contribution Statement

The author solely contributed to the conceptualization, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and preparation of the manuscript.

Acknowledgements

The author expresses sincere gratitude to all respondents and participating restaurant establishments for their valuable cooperation and support during the data collection process.

Institutional Review Statement

As the study involved anonymous survey-based consumer behaviour research with voluntary participation and no clinical intervention, formal institutional ethical review was not required under local research guidelines.

Consent for Publication

The author provides full consent for the publication of this manuscript.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Usage Statement

Artificial intelligence-assisted tools were used exclusively for language refinement, grammatical editing, and structural improvement of the manuscript. All interpretations, analyses, and academic conclusions remain the sole responsibility of the author.

Limitations of the Study

There are various limitations in this study. The findings are only dependent on family replies, which might not accurately represent children's opinions and behaviours. Additionally, the study's restricted relevance to QSRs and meal delivery contexts occurred due to its only concentration on table-service restaurants. The outcome cannot be used outside of Palwal and Hodal because of a convenience

sampling and the relatively small sample size of 108 respondents. The study's cross-sectional method examines behaviour at a certain point in time and could underestimate changes over time. The age of children, which could have significant impacts on family dining preferences, was also dropped out of the questionnaire.

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