

## EXAMINATION OF FAMILY PURCHASE DECISION MAKING IN THE CASE OF SOME FOOD PRODUCTS

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### ABSTRACT

*The role of children within the family is increasing in importance due to the proliferation of one parent families, a lower average in the number of children per family, and the increased rate of families where incomes are higher. Today children have greater independence within the family and experience earlier consumer socialization. In the case of some products, they are well informed, and have a wider knowledge than their parents; hence their role in competency decisions is also growing. Relationships within the family have undergone an appreciable change: children are treated as peers, they are involved in decision making. Shopping is an everyday topic within the family and, as children are well informed and open, shopping questions can be discussed with them. In my paper I take a closer look at the role of children within family decision making and I introduce my research result in this topic. I examined the young and adult population of Hungary to see how families behave when buying certain food products. My aim was to highlight how decisions are made and how participants can influence the process during the different steps.*

Keywords: family, decision making, food products

### INTRODUCTION

Greater importance of children within the family is a result of several reasons: there are more and more one parent families but less children, and also the rate of those families where incomes are higher is increasing. Also children have a higher independence within the family and their consumer socialization starts earlier (Lehota, 2001). In case of some products they are better informed and have a wider knowledge than their parents hence their role is growing in competency decisions (Töröcsik, 2003). Family relations also went under a significant change in the last decades: children are treated as equal partners and their parents involve them into decision preparation. Shopping is a topic of conversation within the family, children are well informed, open, purchases can be discussed with them. Parents are also different as previously: they are more liberal and understanding (Töröcsik, 2003). Difference of children is a result of several factors: today's children are highly influenced by computers, they are internet experts and learn much faster. They cooperate with their peers, always creating networks with them, they play different games, deal with much more things, and they are smarter consumers (Coffey et al., 2006). Children become consumers before they learn to write, read or count (Roedder and John-Peracchio, 1993). Hence size of children's market is growing rapidly,

consumer behavior of adults is a direct antecedent of children's consumer behavior (Berey and Pollay, 1968).

Depending on the product children can influence family purchase decisions in different ways (Golombok and Rust, 1993). In the case of products which can be connected to children like toys influence is higher while this influence in the case of food products is usually lower in case of products what is not for children's own usage their influence is lower (Beatty and Talpade, 1994). Not just the product type, but the age of children and the number of their siblings also mean an influencing factor during family purchase decision making (Olson *et al.*, 1999). Also the assertiveness of children and child-centeredness of parents is also determinant (Berey and Pollay, 1968). Though parents influence their children's purchase decision making processes at all levels, but primary this influence can be perceived in the case of consumer goods and not in the case of convenience and special products. Parental influence also depend on social and demographical factors and increase when children get older. The elder the child the more likely the parents give way to the demands of children, because they believe that their child can make appropriate decisions as they are consumers who have independent opinions.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

In this paper I used desk and field research methods. During my desk researches by working up and adapting Hungarian and international literature I based my filed researches.

I made a survey as a field research method in the fourth quarter of 2010 among the population of adults and young people, between the age of 14-18. Sampling was deliberate and a quota sampling, taking into consideration the age and gender of the respondents. In the case of adults it was also a filter condition to have at least one child under the age of 18. Number of respondents was 779 in the case of adults and 544 in the case of young people. Data processing was made with SPSS 14.0, statistical and mathematical methods were used.

Two different surveys were made for the two different examined target groups. Their content were the same but took into consideration the own point of view of the respondents. (ex.: a child influences his mother, a husband influences his wife). Questions were mainly closed-end questions, and in many cases scale-techniques were also used to make questions more sophisticated.

The questionnaires were based on the implementation of two models explaining purchase decision making within the family: Perception of Marital Roles in Decision Processes (Davis and Rigaux, 1976), Model of Children's Purchase Request and Parental Response (Isler *et al.*, 1987). It was also an aim of my research to examine role of different family members in the family Buying Center in the case of different products. Scope of examination was not just the field of food products, but now I just show these results.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

During my research I managed to get a picture how family members influence each other when they buy food products. I also examined how family members perceive their role in different purchase processes. Examined products were the following:

- sweets
- chips
- soft drinks
- fast foods
- vegetables
- fruits
- miscellaneous food products

### **Communication during purchase decision making processes**

Model of Children's Purchase Request and Parental Response (*Isler et al., 1987*) is based on the assumption that different influencing factors leads to different types of requests, like just asking, pleading, bargaining or simply putting the product in the shopping basket. As to the model requests have different natures and mother's responses are also can be different. Pleading defined as repetitive and anxious asking with a single request episode, occurred about 10 percent of all requests. Mothers responses are dependent on the particular good or service requested. When they agree with a given purchase in 80% of the cases they say yes to the given request. When they do not agree with a given purchase mostly they choose to stall (*Isler et al., 1987*). It is also remarkable that when a mother refuses the child's request it does not cause a conflict among the mother and the child.

One of the aims of my research was to reveal the communication strategies of children and their parents' responses.

I grouped parents by their communication characteristics. For that I made ANOVA and cluster analysis, and as a result I created 5 parent clusters: Charismatic people, Harmony oriented, Celebrity identified, Pliables, Independent amazons. Low (0.339) Kendall Tau rank correlation coefficient shows that there are remarkable differences among different opinions (*Table 1*).

F values show that there are some definitely determinative factors in the case of the clusters: like identifying celebrities ( $F=284.15$ ), avoiding confrontation ( $F=163.66$ ) and children's bargaining ( $F=97.23$ ).

Parents think that they approve their children's will moderately, opinion of young people also confirm this fact. 54.6% of parents state that their children simply ask them if he wants to made buy something for himself. 18.1% can be convinced by pure arguments, 14.3% bargain and 8% plead. 53.7% of children simply ask their parents, but a larger part of them thinks, 35.7% that they convince their parents with pure arguments. 7.5% of them usually bargain, but only 1.5% plead. It is interesting that the two parties not always adjudge in the same way their behavior, but we can state that children use variable strategies when they would like to get through their will. Parents also use variable strategies when they react to their children's requests. 73.4% discuss with their children what to do, 12.2% simply buy

what the child asks for, 6.1% say simply no, and 5.6% try to stall the answer. Children also react variously: 71.9% acquiesce to their parent's decision, 24.4% get angry, 3.7% get disillusioned (Table 2).

**Table 1**

**Main characteristics of parent clusters**

<b>Cluster</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
Charismatic people (N=181)	Mainly men who usually get through their will and who usually manage to make their opinion approved by their family members, if it possible they even get confronted. It is hard to influence them, but they are not totally inflexible.
Harmony oriented (N=244)	Both women and men who get through their will, but they do approve their spouses or children will. They usually listen to them. They are usually hard to be influenced.
Celebrity identified (N=62)	They are usually pliable, they like to identify with celebrities. They get through their opinions and they rarely approve their spouses or children's will. In many cases they authorize their will by pleading.
Pliables (N=205)	Mainly women who avoid conflicts, usually listen to their spouses opinion and approve their children's requests. They cannot always fulfill their will within the family.
Independent amazons (N=96)	They do not approve the will of their children or spouse. They are mainly women, who rarely listen to their spouses' opinion, they are hard to be influenced.

**Table 2**

**Characteristic influence strategies of children within different parent clusters**

	<b>Charismatic people (N=181)</b>	<b>Harmony oriented (N=244)</b>	<b>Celebrity identified (N=62)</b>	<b>Pliables (N=205)</b>	<b>Independent amazons (N=96)</b>
simply asks me	53.0%	61.5%	38.7%	50.2%	59.4%
try to convince me	19.9%	16.8%	16.1%	17.6%	20.8%
plead	6.6%	8.6%	16.1%	8.8%	2.1%
bargain	18.8%	7.4%	17.7%	22.4%	4.2%
he doesn't ask anything, he doesn't like conflicts	1.7%	2.9%	3.2%	1.0%	3.1%

Among different parent clusters some differences can be noticed: Harmony oriented are usually asked by their children, but in the case of Pliables bargain strategy is the highest. Children of Independent amazons try to convince their parents. Children of Celebrity identified plead in the highest level.

During my researches I also tried to emphasize to reveal factors influencing consumers. I examined with whom the requested buy different products, how and in which extent they are influenced by their family members. I also examined the effect of companies' marketing communication activity (*Table 3*).

**Table 3**

**With whom you generally buy the products mentioned below?**

	myself	with my husband/ wife	with my children	the whole family together	my husband/ wife buy it alone
sweets	35.70%	18.60%	33.20%	20.40%	9.20%
chips	30.30%	18.40%	34.50%	21.10%	8.90%
soft drinks	38.40%	23.50%	24.40%	22.80%	8.20%
fast foods	32%	20.20%	13.90%	25.90%	7.70%
vegetables	48.40%	25.20%	9.20%	15.50%	16.20%
fruits	48.30%	25.30%	11.40%	16.70%	15.70%
miscellaneous food products	43.40%	32.10%	9.80%	18.60%	14.60%

Vegetables and fruits contribute to healthy nutrition in a positive way, while positive effect of sweets, chips, soft beverages and fast foods is strongly questionable. During my researches it clearly occurred that in the case of latter mentioned products young people decide on their own half of the cases whether to buy the product: in the case of sweets 58.6%, with chips 56.1%, soft beverages 47.1%, with fast foods 55.3% decide on his own. Only 36.8% of the parents said that they buy mostly together with their children, 23.2% of the children go for shopping alone, 33.5% do it together with their friends.

Unfortunately only 9.2% buy vegetables together with their children, this rate is a bit higher in the case of fruits, 16.2%. In general we cannot appoint anyone who influence the requested but 59.4% of young people and 60.5% of adults declared that the person of influencer depend on the product. 47.5% of adults stated that his/her spouse influence him/her the most, but 22% only decide on his own and does not listen to anyone. Only 15.3% listen to experts. 35.1% of young people take into consideration only his own opinion, 30.1% also listen to their parents. It is interesting that for 23.4% of them opinion of their friends is also important. Different parent clusters can be influenced differently in the case of the examined products. In the case of candies Independent amazons can be influenced the least (60.4%) while Pliables influenced by their children in 78.5%. The level of influence is the highest in the case of chips: 76.8% of Charismatic people, 67.2% of

Harmony-oriented, 53.2% of Celebrity identified, 74.6% of Pliables and 39.6% of Independent amazons stated that their children influence them when they buy chips. Children influence their parents the least when they buy vegetables, only in 19% of the cases pressurize children their parents.

My research also covered communication platforms influencing consumers. In total we can state that still classical instruments are the ones that influence young people. Unfortunately this influencing effect is much more discoverable in the case of foods that not contribute positively to healthy nutrition.

In the case of adults the level of influence is mostly similar to young people, but some differences can be discovered as well: adults react stronger to rebates, while young people are more sensitive to point of sales materials (*Table 4*).

**Table 4**

**Which tools influence you the most when buying the products below?**

	sweets	chips	soft drinks	fast foods
television advertisements	31.3%	33.5%	31.8%	25.0%
internet advertisements	0.9%	1.5%	1.1%	2.2%
information on the products' website	1.7%	0.9%	1.3%	2.0%
forum, blog	0.6%	0.7%	1.3%	1.1%
newspaper, magazine advertisements	11.4%	11.8%	2.3%	11.4%
POS materials	17.6%	16.2%	14.7%	16.2%
rebates	9.6%	9.6%	9.4%	6.8%
sweepstakes	1.3%	2.0%	1.5%	0.4%
miscellaneous	25.7%	23.3%	26.5%	33.8%

**Roles in family Buying Center**

Purchase decisions can be divided into two main groups depending on the number of participants: individual and group decisions. In the case of small value, non-problematic, routine products family members make decisions on their own. But in the case of higher value, newly bought products several family members take part in different roles (*Törőcsik, 1996*). It is noticeable that in the case of important purchase decisions families behave like organizations and operate as a Buying Center: different family members can undertake different roles:

- *Influencers*: those members of family who try to influence purchase decisions by giving information or advices.
- *Gatekeepers*: those family members who can control the information flow towards Deciders.
- *Deciders*: those family members who decide when and what to buy
- *Buyers*: those family members who carry out a given purchase
- *Users*: those family members who consume or use the products what were bought or prepared by other family members (*Mowen, 1987*).

Sometimes these roles are undertaken by one family member, but in many cases different family members undertake different roles or influence differently in the case of a given product purchase (*Chisnall, 1985*).

Family Buying Center not always operates physically at a time, sometimes family members sit together in several phases and do not make a decision together at one place. Consensus among family members as to their aims is necessary to make a decision (*Cox, 1975*), but we shouldn't forget that roles within the family also depend on authority-hierarchy relations as well (*Mangleburg et al., 1999*).

During my research it was an aim to examine the role of different family members within the family Buying Center. Parents undertake different roles in the case of examined products: usually they are deciders, buyers or initiatives. It is surprising that in the case of "non-healthy foods" parents are the ones who buy the products to their children (Sweets 34%, chips 33.6%, soft beverages 33.5%, fast foods 26.3%). Hence we can ask whether parents impeach toward external factors like marketing communication tools or media is right. In excuse of them we must mention that in many cases they are also gatekeepers when these products are purchased (sweets 18.1%, chips 18.5%, soft drinks 18.3%, fast foods 18.5%), hence they can control the output of these purchases. It is also remarkable that in some cases parents have no influence during the buying process of these products: in 22% of sweets-, 22.5% of chips-, 15.5% of soft beverages-, 22.7% of fast food purchases have no roles.

In the case of above mentioned foods young people have a more complex and variable role than their parents. They can be influencers (sweets 25%, chips 25.2%, soft beverages 22.6%, fast foods 26.3%), buyers (sweets 14.9%, chips 14.9%, soft beverages 13.1%, fast foods 12.3%), or users (sweets 14.2%, chips 14.9%, soft beverages 12.7%, fast foods 13.1%). We should also notice that young people mostly have a say in the matter what brand the family should buy. It is also interesting that they usually do not take part in the purchase of fruits and vegetables their role in these cases is negligible.

## **CONCLUSION**

During my research it occurred that children have without any doubt a remarkable role in buying particular products, and they have an effect on the purchase decision making process in variable roles. My research unambiguously showed that children have an effect on the purchases of those products that does not contribute positively to healthy lifestyle (sweets, chips, soft beverages, fast foods). They are either buyers, influencers or at least brand choosers. Though many people lay the blame on media and producers, in most of the cases they totally forget about their parental responsibility. My researches showed unambiguously that in many cases exactly the parent is the one who buy these products for the children and children have only a subsidiary role in this process. Children use various strategies to convince their parents: they convince, plead, bargain to what parents react differently. It also occurred unequivocally that role of children within family decision making is not negligible, we must deal with it.

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