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## Role of Children in the Case of Parental Food Store Choice

Pólya Éva-Földi Kata A gyerekek befolyásoló szerepe szülei élelmiszer üzletválasztásában

### Összefoglaló

*A családnak jelentős szerepe van a vásárlási döntési folyamatban, mint a társadalom elsődleges döntéshozatali egysége. Kiemelkedő szerepe van a fogyasztói szocializációban és a gyerekek fogyasztóvá válási folyamatában. A család keret ad, amelyen belül a gyermekek megtanulják hogyan viselkedjenek fogyasztóként, elsajátítják a vásárláshoz és fogyasztáshoz szükséges kompetenciákat. A gyerekek családon belüli szerepének változása rendkívül aktuális az elmúlt időszakban, és hatással van a családon belüli vásárlási döntési folyamatra, talán még az élelmiszer üzletválasztásra is.*

**Kulcsszavak:** *családi vásárlási döntési folyamat, gyerekek szerepe, élelmiszer üzletválasztás, kvalitatív kutatás*

### ABSTRACT

Family as a primary decision making unit of society have a significant role in purchase decision making processes of individuals. It has a significant role in consumer socialization and in the process how children become consumers. It is a frame, within what children learn to behave as consumers, acquire all competencies concerning to purchase and consumption, and hence become competent to other consumers. Change of children's role within the family is in the air in the last period, and this has an effect on purchase decision making processes within the family maybe on food store choice too.

Keywords: family purchase decision making process, children role, food store choice, qualitative research

### INTRODUCTION

Family as a primary decision making unit of society have a significant role in purchase decision making processes of individuals. It has a significant role in consumer socialization and in the process how children become consumers. (Lehota 2001) It is a frame, within

what children learn to behave as consumers, acquire all competencies concerning to purchase and consumption, and hence become competent to other consumers. Change of children's role within the family is in the air in the last period, and this has an effect on purchase decision making processes within the family. Children became more and more equal within the family, and in most of the cases has wider knowledge as their parents do, so their role especially in the case of competency decision has significantly grown. They become consumers-purchasers much earlier as they did a few decades earlier. (Törőcsik 2007) Nevertheless we should not forget that always parents play a primary role in the process how children become and develop to consumers, they facilitate their children to appear in the market as a potential buyer and decision maker by financially funding them. Lowest border of consumption generation is dilated: even kindergarten generation appears as an independent purchaser and self-conscious consumer. Hence the size of children market is growing rapidly; consumer behavior of adults is a direct antecedent of children's consumer behavior. (McNeal 2007) Relations within the

family are changing in point of purchase decision processes: families live in a freer, more liberal spirit, hence role of different family members changed in this process. Children gained a greater voice in purchase processes, but also role of men and women has changed in this process. It is more and more characteristic that spouses make decisions commonly, both party take part in purchase what used to be typically the competence of wives or husbands. Over time close emotional boundaries are evolved among family members and this influences the decision making process and its output. Hence purchase decisions have serious emotional implication, and emotional strategies used by different family members have an effect on other emotional aspects of family life.

Nevertheless purchase decision making processes goes beyond problem solving and can fulfill several other aims. They can be occasion for talking among each other within the family, given questions can be discussed and also family members can do daydreaming. As a result of problem solving a kind of inhesion can develop among family members and this process can fulfill an important role in children's socialization. (Törőcsik 2007)

Why the role of children has changed nowadays? Today children are influenced very much by computer world, they are internet experts and learn much faster; they cooperate with their mates, they constantly network with each other, they play different games, do more things, and they are smarter consumers (Coffey et al., 2006). Children become consumers even before they learn to write, read and count. (Roedder John and Peracchio, 1993). Hence the size of children market is rapidly growing, and the consumer behavior of adults is a direct antecedent children's consumer behavior. (Berey and Pollay, 1968) However we should not forget the fact that parents always play a primary role in their children's development by financing their purchases and foster them to appear on the market as a consumer and decision maker. (McNeal, 2007). Even at kindergarten age they have purchase power and

appear as a consumer. . (Lipi, 2000) Children between the age of 8-12 definitely knows what they need; though for them purchase is more like a hobby , it is the method how they acquire conquest of world, decision making, status and power demonstration. (Müller, 2001). By Yee and Flanagan (1985) active acquirement to decision making happens between the age of 9-13, though decision autonomy (autonomous decision without parents influence) made usually between the age 12-17. (Dornbusch and Carlsmith, 1985) Influence of children on purchases and consumption can betide in two ways: either in a direct form when they actively latch on to process, or in an indirect form (McNeal, 1992), when family makes different decisions just because of their existence. We should not forget the fact that children also mean a future market as time elapses. (Törőcsik, 2003) Hence it is really important for marketers to deal saliently with this age group. We should not forget that they mean themselves a remarkable market, as they do shopping independently. Henceforward they can affect their the decisions of their parents and as they are becoming consumers it is expedient to acquaint the brand and support brand loyalty. (Foxall et al., 2006)

Depending on the product type children can have an influence on family decision making in different ways. (Golombok and Rust, 1993) Influence is at higher level in the case of children related products like toys for example. In general influence level is lower in the case of products they do not use personally. (Beatty and Talpade, 1994) Nevertheless it is not just the product type but also the age of children and the number of siblings what can occur as an influencing factor during purchase decision making. (Peter et al., 1999)

As we could see its role is changing though still family is the primary decision making unit in the society. Several authors deal with the dynamics of family decisions (Arora and Allenby 1999, Su 2003, Ward 2005), but as to the decision making it is examined from several point of views: economical (Becker 1974) and social

conflict views (Sprey, 1979) and by gender roles (Pollay 1968, Scanzoni, 1977, Qualls 1988). Most of the authors (Davis, 1970, 1971, 1976; Davis-Rigaux 1974, Filiatrault and Brent 1980, Spiro 1983, Cosenza 1985, Corfman 1991, Ward 2005) tend to examine family decision making from a gender point of view, hence they try to explain the relative influence of family members in the decision making process. Level of influence depend on several factors: how a spouse contribute to the household (Blood and Wolfe, 1960) or what type of culture (traditional/modern) the parties come from (Qualls, 1987). In spite of these Johnson et al. (1994) examine children's influence on decision making, however other authors concentrate exactly on the process (Hoffman 1977, Howard and Sheth 1969, Blackwell et al. 2006, Sheth 1974). Older studies introduced family purchase decision making as a rational decision by all family members it was not taken into consideration how personal emotions influence the different actors. Nevertheless this type of assumption ignore that people are not totally rational decision makers, but in many cases influenced by their emotions. (Gelles and Straus, 1979) Among family members close emotional bonds emerge over time, that influence the decision making process and its output. Emotions (like love, sympathy, anger, guilt) can connect to different steps of purchase decision making.

## 1. STORE CHOICE

In the stages of the purchasing decision process – mainly in „decision making” and „purchasing” – store choice has become an element due to its importance (Hofmeister-Tóth, 2003 2008; Veres-Szilágyi, 2006; Hawkins et al. 1986; Lantos, 2010).

„Decision making” and „purchasing” includes store-, product- and brand choice. Store choice takes place earlier than the choice of product and brand (Monroe-Guiltinan, 1975, Hofmeister-Tóth- Törőcsik, 1996, Törőcsik 1998, Bauer-Berács 2002, Lehota et al. 2005, Veres-Szilágyi 2006, Blackwell-Miniard-Engel 2006,

Bauer et al. 2007, Lantos 2010). According to many researchers, this process can be related to many factors: Hofmeister-Tóth – Törőcsik (1996) believe it to be the product category, Veres-Szilágyi (2006) to a well known brand, again Hofmeister-Tóth – Törőcsik (1996) to consumer behaviour, then Törőcsik (1998) refers it as from a situative point of view, and also Lehota et al. (2005) and Lantos (2010) suggest the possibility of inversion between store and brand choice. This latter also depends on product category and the situation. Nowadays the typical consumer behaviour is that due to time shortage, when that certain daily consumer product or brand cannot be bought in the chosen retail store, the customer will buy another brand or a substitution product depending on the selection in the store, instead visiting another shop. The customer makes the decision „on the spot” (Törőcsik, 2009).

### 1.1. Factors of store choice

Store choice – according to Lantos (2010) – is like brand choice. Customers evaluate the alternate stores according to their norms of factors. The main difference between store choice and brand choice is the type of assessment factors. According to these, the customer evaluates the type of store and the competitors and then chooses the store. Before the choice of the retail chain, the customer decides which type of stores he/ she can choose from. The characteristics of the store will have to be in accordance with the characteristics and expectations of the customer and the factors of purchase. (Blackwell-Miniard-Engel, 2006).

Most essays agree on that the most important influencing factor is the location of the store (Arnold - Oum-Tigert, 1983. Freymann, 2002) and the price (Bell – Ho – Tang, 2001. Freymann, 2002. Arnold – Oum – Tigert, 1983). According to Briesch, Chintagunata és Fox (2009) while there is a general preference towards low price, the preference towards selection changes from household to household. While Luchs (2008) examined price

image and the role of selection in store choice, Bhatnagar and Ratchfor (2004) examined store choice among all types of stores, and according to their findings, the optimal store for the customer depends on – among others – the costs of stock. The construction of the basket affects the decision as to which retail chain to choose. According to Inman, Shankar and Ferraro (2004), certain product categories will actually be bought in the stores associated with them.

Not all retail unit have the same stock of brands, so brand preference can also have an influence on store choice. According to Luchs (2008), brand (own or manufacturer's) is a dichotomic factor.

### 1.2. Bulk purchase

Bulk purchase has been interpreted by many Hungarian authors (Bauer-Agárdi, 2000; László-Orosdy, 2000; Kenesei, 2002, Lakner et al. 2004). According to Nagy (1997) it is a weekend shopping with a car, Beliczay just says (1998) „car goods”, and while according to Törőcsik (2006) it is „bulk-routin”, and Kovács's concept is (2007) „shopping by car”, Nagy-Nagy (2008) state it to be „combined shopping routes”. Under these denominations further sub-groups have been identified from the point of view of purchasing frequency, using the expressions „weekly”, „weekend”, „bi-weekly” and „monthly” shopping. Weekly (Lukovich, 1997; Bauer-Agárdi, 2000; Kenesei, 2002; Tar, 2002; Lehota et al. 2005; Törőcsik, 2006; Kovács, 2007), weekend shopping (László-Orosdy, 2000; Lehota et al. 2005; Agárdi, 2008), by-weekly (Törőcsik, 2006) and monthly (Lukovich, 1997; László-Orosdy, 2000; Kenesei, 2002; Tar, 2002; Lehota et al. 2005; Törőcsik, 2006; Kovács, 2007). Gauder determines the sub-categories of purchasing as (1997) fast (weekly) and extensive (monthly). Big-shopping is interpreted as the long term stock piling for the household according to Kenesei (2002.)

## 2. METHODS AND RESULTS

### 2.1. Qualitative research (structured interviews)

The main purposes were to understand better the reasons behind the changes in food purchasing behaviour and that in store choice. Also to disclose customers' opinion concerning similarities and differences between store choice in the case of daily and bulk purchase, as well as to get to know the relationship between store choice and Hungarian ownership of the store. Another objective was to examine the participation of family members in daily and big shopping, as well as children's – as the main influencing factors among family members – impacts when it comes to store, product and brand choice.

The subjects for the structured interviews were chosen from families with children still living with them, as we aimed to disclose the opinions from the point of view of parents – as the main food purchasers – and that of children as the potential influencing factors.

These interviews were made with the assistance of the members of the István Bethlen Special College research team (Anita Bajdó, Brigitta Balogh, Judit Halász, László Alex Ecsédi) from 16 March to 30 March 2012. After making an appointment personally, by email or phone, 40 structured interviews were made in the homes of the people questioned. These interviews were recorded with a dictaphone with the interviewees' approval. The processing of the interviews was done with the „word-cloud” method, to which the program on the website <http://wordle.net> gave assistance. This method helped to analyze the contents of the answers, despite the fact that it was used for all the structured questions.

The interview with the main buyer of food involved 30 questions in 3 topics, while with the children it only contained 21 questions in 3 topics. The distribution of the interviews according to topics and questions can be seen in Table 1. The quantity of questions in each topic was not evenly distributed, depending on the complexity of the topic.

Topics	Parents (number of questions)	Children (number of questions)
Warming up	1	1
Customers, purchasing behaviour	10	9
Store choice, Children's influencing role	19	11
<b>Altogether</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>21</b>

Table1 Distribution of Structured Interviews according to Topics and Questions

Source: own research

The changes in customer behaviour, habits and store choice and the children's influencing role cannot totally be described with quantitative methods, hence food purchasers' and children's opinions were disclosed with the help of structured interviews according to the topics below. Because of the extensiveness of the research, we will just focus on 2 questions in the topic of children's influencing effects on store choice.

#### 2.1.1. Children's influence and its extent on store choice relating to daily and bulk purchase

According to most of the interviewees, their children do not affect their store choice concerning daily food shopping. Some of them say, that this is because of the children's small age or the force of habit in store choice. According to their replies, the extent of influence is the following: „not really”, „not definitely”, „partly”, „quite so” and „very”. In the case of bulk purchases, though, children's influence was more significant, depending on the children's age. Influencing power also plays a role. „Their children try to influence her regarding store choice – with more or less success”. (H.K.) The extent of the influence is quite significant in several families among the interviewees, but according to them, the quality of product selection is also an important factor in the decision making.

#### 2.1.2. Children's influence and its extent in store choice in the case of weekend and weekday purchases

Most of the children, asked in the interview, cannot influence their parents' store choice in either cases.

Even with those who have a deeper impact on their parents, it is not consequent which they

can influence more: the location of the weekend or the weekday purchases, as some play a greater role in one than others. In the case of weekday shopping, some parents do their shopping on the way home from school. „He cannot influence them on weekdays, since they rarely do shopping together. But in the case of weekend shopping, he tells them where he would like to go, and in most cases this is where they will go in the end.” (G.G.)

#### 2.2. Qualitative research

The main purposes were a deeper understanding of the reasons behind the changes in food purchasing behaviour and that in store choice. Also, to disclose customers' opinion concerning similarities and differences between store choice in the case of daily and big shopping as well as to get to know the relationship between store choice and Hungarian ownership of the store. Another objective was to examine the participation of family members in daily and big shopping, as well as children's – as a main influencing factor among family members – effects when it comes to store, product and brand choice.

The focus group interviews were made with the assistance of the members of the István Bethlen Special College research team (Bianka Barta, Anna Sebestyén, Henrietta Tóth, Szilvia Oláh, Rita Agócs) in March and April 2013. Each member moderated two focus group interviews: the first one with the parents and the second one with the children. So altogether 5-5 interviews were carried out with the parents and their children.

The subjects for the focus group were chosen from families with children still living with

them, as we aimed to disclose the opinions from the point of view of parents – as the main food purchasers – and children as the potential influencing factors.

After making an appointment personally, by email or phone, 10 focus group interviews were made in the moderators’ homes. These interviews were recorded with a dictaphone

with the interviewees’ approval. The processing of the focus group interview reports was done with the „word-cloud” method, to which the program on the website <http://wordle.net> gave assistance. This method helped analyze the contents of the answers, despite the fact that it was used for all the questions. In this essay only a part of it will be analyzed and demonstrated.

Topics	Parents	Children
Warming up	1	1
Word associating	5	5
Food purchasing behaviour	11	14
Store choice, Children’s influencing role	40	22
<b>Altogether</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>42</b>

Table 2 Distribution of Focus Group Interviews according to Topics and Questions

Source: own construction

**2.2.1. Children’s influence on food store choice in the case of daily purchases according to parents**

According to the majority of parents their children do not influence the location of daily purchases. Only few parents are influenced a little or sometimes, and in one parent’s case, the store choice is influenced in 30 per cent. Other parents take their children to the shop, which their children have chosen, which is usually the effect of some promotion. One person interpreted it in the following: „If there is a product he would like very much and is on sale, he can eventually make her go to that particular shop.” (B.M.)

influence on food store choice in daily shopping are illustrated in Figure 1.

**2.2.2. Children’s influence on food store choice in the case of bulk purchases according to parents**

According to the majority of parents their children do not influence the location of bulk purchases. Some parents admit that they are influenced to a smaller extent, and in this case they spend more time and money too. There was a parent, who can be convinced by her children: „Yes, he does list the reasons why they should go that shop.” (M.K.)

Children’s influence on food store choice in the case of big shopping according to parents is demonstrated in Figure 2.

**2.2.3. Parents’ influence on food store choice in the case of weekday and weekend purchases according to their children**

According to most children, they do not influence their parents’ store choice in either cases. Some kids usually do, some only sometimes and others only to a small extent play a part. Only one child of the interviewees mentioned the extent of her influence according to purchasing frequency: she thought she had an influence in both weekend and



Figure 1 Children’s influence on food store choice in the case of daily shopping according to parents

Source: own research

There are parents who do not take their children with them for the daily purchases. Parents’ opinions relating to children’s

weekday purchases as to the location. Some of them could even name a few arguments which make their parents decide to their favour:  
 „Yes, by saying there is a better sale in that shop and the goods are cheaper.” (Cz.N.)



Figure 2 Children's influence on food store choice in the case of big shopping according to parents

Source: own research

„Yes, by saying that it is the closest to us.” (J.A.)

Parents' influence on food store choice in the case of weekday and weekend shopping according to their children is demonstrated in Figure 3.



Figure 3 Parents' influence on food store choice in the case of weekday and weekend shopping according to their children

Source: own research

### 3. SUMMARY

As it can be seen purchase decision making and food store choice is a quite composed problem. In our paper we tried to highlight the main aspects of the decision making process and some of the influencing factors. Main focus were on children's role and their influencing power. Though we assumed that children

should have a significant role in their parents food store choice, it occurred that in most of the cases this assumption was not valid. Children make efforts to convince their parents and have some general arguments, but most of these proved to be quite weak. Topic itself still has a research potential, in the future we plan to reveal more information and results.

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