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The Influence of Children on the Parents Buying Behavior: Food Purchase in the Czech Republic

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Anotace

Článek zkoumá vliv dítěte na kupní chování rodičů v České republice. Dosavadní výzkumy tvrdí, že jsou čeští zákazníci při nákupu potravin pouze slabě ovlivněni marketingovými nástroji, jakým je i obal produktu. Vzhledem k tomu, že jsou děti stále častěji těmi, kdo ovlivňují nákup a spotřebu, vyvstává otázka, zda rodič podléhá žádosti dítěte a s ní spojenému nátlaku. Cílem článku je zhodnotit vliv dětí při výběru a nákupu potravin v samoobsluze. Dílčím cílem je: identifikovat způsoby nátlaku vyvíjené dětmi; identifikovat reakci rodiče na nákupní tlak dětí v oblasti potravinářských výrobků; identifikovat preference dětí u obalů potravinářských výrobků. Primární data jsou pořízena prostřednictvím elektronického dotazníku určeného rodičům. Komplexní faktory jsou identifikovány s využitím explorativní faktorové analýzy. Faktorová analýza odhalila 4 faktory: (1) "snaha dítěte ovlivnit nákup", (2) "dětské preference designu obalu", (3) "preference nezdravých potravin", (4) „nákup zdravých potravin s dětmi". Výsledky testování odhalily silnou závislost u způsobů, kterými se dítě snaží ovlivnit nákup nátlakem a vyhověním jejich požadavkům a provedením nákupu.

Klíčová slova

Marketing potravin, druhy potravin, potravinové produkty, děti, kupní chování dětí, nátlak, zákaznická socializace.

Abstract

The article examines the influence of a child on the buying behavior of parents in the Czech Republic. Previous studies claim that Czech consumers are only slightly influenced by the marketing tool of the product package when purchasing food. Whereas children are increasingly becoming influencers of consumption, the question arises, whether or not the parent succumbs to their requesting through their pester power. The main goal of this article is to evaluate the influence of children during deciding and purchasing the food in a supermarket. A secondary goal is to identify the techniques of pester power used by children and to identify the reaction of parents to children's food product requesting; to identify children's packaging preferences for food products. The primary data have been collected through an electronic questionnaire for parents. Complex factors are identified using exploratory factor analysis. Factor analysis explored 4 factors: (1) "The effort of the child to influence shopping", (2) "Children's preferences in package design", (3) "Preference of unhealthy foods", (4) "Buying healthy foods with children". Results of hypotheses testing revealed a strong dependence relating to techniques of pester power, accommodating their requests and transact the purchase.

Key words

Food Marketing, Foods, Food products, Children, Children's Purchase Behavior, Pester Power, Customer Socialization.

Introduction

Present shift of consumption trends leads to healthy foods that not ranks among the HFSS category (High Fat, Salt and Sugar foods) (Ogba, Johnson, 2010). This happens due to the general growth of obesity, especially in children (Ogba, Johnson, 2010). Due to changes in the lifestyle of the population, the demand for food, not belonging to HFSS categories, as well as information of the composition displayed on the food packaging increases (Ogba, Johnson,

2010). In the Czech Republic, the consumption of the majority of agricultural products distributed to consumers, which is meant as food products, has not changed too much (Stavkova et al., 2007). Previous studies showed increase in consumption of cereals, dairy products, fruit, mineral water and soft drinks, can indicate positive changes in the lifestyle of Czech population. Buying decision is mostly influenced by product attributes (such as price, quality, brand, discounts and package), habits, advertisement, recommendation of other people, innovations etc. on the one hand and demographic/ economic ones, i.e. income category, settlement size, age, education, and profession on the other (Stavkova et al., 2007).

The role of packaging can be more or less important depending on the type of product, for example, buyig home accessories is not strongly influenced by its packaging (Novotný, Duspiva, 2014). Although study conducted by Stavkova et al. (2007) claims, that Factors "Advertising", "Brand" and "Package" were not important when buying food and the level of their influence was considered as low for Czech customers, question is, to what extend the package influence customer - parents implicitly through purchase preferences of their children? According to previous studies, children are considered to be main influencers of family decision-making, therefore can food marketers target on children as on a specific market segment using both above and below the line techniques to affect the preferences of children and thus mediate the family purchase decisions. (Ogba, Johnson, 2010). Among other promotional tools used at point-of-sale (e.g. trays, woblers, product sampling), product packaging is substantial communicating tool, providing information to consumers about attributes, content and branding. Thus comply with children-oriented marketing due to the use of lettering, iconography and themes of interest to children, and cross-promotions, tie-ins, competitions and premium offers that appeal to children (Silayoi, Speece, 2004; Berry, McMullen; 2008).

In their study, Ogba and Johnson (2010) claim, that marketers purposely target more at children than parents when designing the package of the product as they are maintaining children´s interest to influence parents' buyer behavior. As Ogba, Johnson (2010) stated, there are other studies arguing that due to children's lower abilities to process information, they are likely to assess products and their packaging mainly on a visual level. Marketers, therefore, tries to use the children's visual imagination, the ability to recognize different characteristics, colors and design for enhancing children's interest in products. Such child-targeted marketing includes bright colors, shapes of packages, cartoon or movie characters, desirable box color schemes, free gifts, stickers, etc. (Ogba, Johnson, 2010; Berry, McMullen, 2008). Customer socialization can be defined as a process wherein children acquire knowledge and opinions on products and services, as it can be seen by their parents within their consumer behaviour. Consumer behaviour is determined as a decision-making process of those who purchase items according to their personal consumption (Šrédl, Soukup, 2011; Zámková, Prokop, 2013). Children and young people learn by copying the behavior of their parents (Turner et al., 2006), but also exert pressure in the opposite direction, to influence behavior of parents in making purchases in three fundamental categories – toys, clothes and food (Nicholls, Cullen, 2004). This study aims at parents without gender differences, however Turčínková et al (2012) stated, that women are more likely to buy impulsively various goodies mostly for children.

McNeal (1999) defined 5 stages of children consumer socialization. The first stage is specific in that the child accompanies parents on shopping trips and just observes. In the second phase, the first requests take place through pointing, talking and gesturing (Lee, Colins, 2000). This behavior is known as "pester power", or the "nag factor" (Nash, Basini, 2012). Children enter this phase at approximately 24 months of age. In the third stage, the child accompanies parents on shopping trips, but already participates in the selection of foods, which are subject to parental approval. In the fourth stage, independent purchasing takes place, which is still partially accompanied by parents. In the final, fifth, stage, full independence takes place, where the child shops independently. Nash, Basini (2012) define "pester power" as a child-parent game, where natural interaction takes place. This engenders greater understanding in the parent-child relationship, and involves a positive process, where it is necessary to understand a complex process of a child's behavior, using various tactics with the goal of causing the desired feelings in a child. This study was a reaction to previous research (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2001), which defines pester power as a phenomenon, which has a negative affect on the family. Consumer organizations

and the media in general, benefit from the pester power and believe that promotions stimulate pestering resulting in purchases on the basis of creating indirect pressure through children (Pilgrim, Lawrence, 2001). On the basis of these studies, it can be said that the pester power is not a negative phenomenon, as long as the parent is aware of it and is able to use of the appropriate tools to managethe consumer socialization of a child. Currently, the need of children pester power coping arrises, as the modern concepts of buying goods (shopping trips) give leisure and entertainment value to the whole family (Wanninayake, Chovancová, 2012).

Aim of the study

The main aim of the contribution is to evaluate the influence of children during deciding and purchasing the food in a supermarket assuming the direct children participation. The secondary goal is to: identify techniques of pester power used by children; identify the reaction of parents to children's food product requesting; to identify children's food product packaging preferences. For this purpose, 4 hypotheses are formulated.

Hypotheses

The formulation of following hypotheses is based on the previous studies conducted in the field of food marketing to evaluate the influence of children on buying behavior and the packaging aimed at children:

H1: The ways of product requesting have impact on the parents purchase transaction.

H2: The type of requested food product has impact on the parents purchase transaction.

H3: The level of childrens´s influence of the purchase has impact on the parents purchase transaction.

H4: Packaging has impact on the children´s product preference.

Materials and methods

Primary data are gathered by the surveying using an electronic questionnaire. The electronic questionnaire is intended for parents who at least sometimes shop for groceries with their children. The basic set consists of parents with children from 1 to 18 years old. Due to large base of potential respondents, the questionnaire is circulated through community websites and social networks. The questionnaire is based on the research of Ogba, Johnson (2010), contains 26 core questions and is structured into 4 sections: (1) identification questions, (2) influence of food packaging on child preferences, (3) influence of the child on the buying behavior of parents (4) probability that the parents comply with children´s request. The attitudes of the respondents are recorded on a 5-degree Likert scale in the range of "strongly agree – somewhat agree – half and half – somewhat disagree – strongly disagree". A questionnaire structured in this way enables evaluation of data through factor or correlative analysis. To determine the influence of children on the final purchase and the influence of food packaging on the preferences of children, the Pearson correlation coefficient is used. In terms of the factor analysis suitability, individual variables are tested with the Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin level (KMO). The KMO coefficient ranges in the interval <0.1> and its value should exceed 0,5. In case of this research, the KMO value can be considered good at 0.834. Latent factors are found using the main components method with the Varimax rotation of factors. The number of factors is selected to ensure that the value of Eigen values of the identified latent factors is higher than 1. Exploratory factor analysis was performed in the statistical program SPSS 19. The structure of factors is analyzed in the SPSS AMOS program.

The sample size is 246 respondents. The sample consisted of 80 % women (20 % men), evaluated is the behavior of their child (59 % girls and 41 % boys) in an average age of 6 years and 2 months. The majority of respondents live in cities with populations over 100,000 (46 %), 24 % live in cities with 10,000 – 100,000 thousand residents and 30 % in cities under 10,000 residents. Most frequently, the respondents shop for groceries 2 - 5 x weekly (64 %), 1 x weekly (24 %), 5 - 7 x weekly (12 %), together with children the most often shop 2 - 5 x weekly (40 %), 1 x weekly (36 %), 1 x in 14 days (11 %), 1 x monthly (10 %) and 5 - 7 x weekly (3 %).

Results and discussion

Results of testing the hypothesis focused on identifying the ways product requesting affect the parent's purchase transaction (H1) are evident from table no. 1. For all variables, a strong to medium impact on the parent's purchase transaction is found for the way of product requesting, at a significance level of 0.01.

The strong impact is identified for verbal requests (r = 0.754) and pointing to the product (r = 0.732). A medium impact is found with reaching for items (r = 0.669). The lowest value measured was for placement of the product in the shopping cart / basket (r = 0.531). From graph no. 1 it is evident that it is verbal requests, which are stated by each respondent/parent for all age categories of their children as the most frequent way of influencing purchase, whereas this type of pester power escalates with increasing age. A minimum share is recorded for the youngest category of children, aged 1 to 3 years, and that is 36 %. For the oldest age group, verbal requests are made by 53 %.

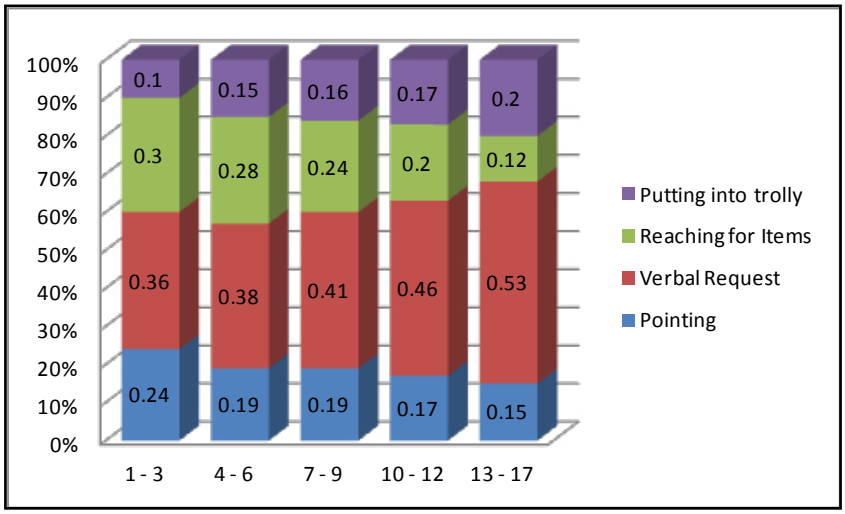
When evaluating the impact between the level of parents purchase transaction in the store and the type of foods requested (H2), a medium impact on buying of sweets (r = 0.617), is identified. A medium level of impact between parents purchase transaction in the store and the type of food required is found in yoghurt (r = 0.433) and Lunch foods (snack foods) (r = 0.416) and at a significance level of 0,01 for all three variables as seen in table no. 2.

In evaluating whether a significant impact can be found resulting from the influence of a child on shopping and whether parents transact a purchase (H3), a medium dependency on the influence of the child is identified for the final purchase of products preferred by children (r = 0.464) at the significance level of 0.01 (table no. 3).

		VAR00004	VAR00005	VAR00006	VAR00007
VAR00003	Pearson Correlation	,732**	,754**	,669**	,531**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	0	0

Source: own calculation, questionnaire survey, 2014

Table 1: The ways of product requesting have impact vs. parents purchase transaction.



Source: own calculation, questionnaire survey, 2014

Graph 1: Types of product Requesting According to Children's age.

		VAR08	VAR09	VAR10	VAR11	VAR12	VAR13	VAR14	VAR15	VAR16
VAR03	Pearson Correlation	,617**	,309**	,302**	,433**	,191**	,146*	0.122	,416**	,270**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	0	0	0.003	0.022	0.055	0	0

Source: own calculation, questionnaire survey, 2014

Table 2: The type of requested food product vs. the parents purchase transaction.

		VAR03	VAR25
VAR03	Pearson Correlation	1	,464**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0

Source: own calculation, questionnaire survey, 2014

Table 3: The level of childrens´ influence of the purchase vs. parents purchase transaction.

		VAR00018	VAR00019	VAR00020	VAR00021	VAR00022	VAR00023
VAR00003	Pearson Correlation	,554**	,428**	,423**	,437**	,516**	,326**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: own calculation, questionnaire survey, 2014

Table 4: Packaging vs. children´s product preference.

The results of testing the impact of packaging on the children's product preferences (H4) show a medium strength impact, especially for the overall influence of the package (r = 0.554), further, by interesting shape of package (r = 0.516). A significant impact is also identified for pictures associated with a specific product (the Nesquick Rabbit, Bebe Brumík, etc.), (r = 0.437), further for bright colors used on packaging (r = 0.428) and for familiar characters displayed on packages (Spiderman, Hello Kitty, etc.) at a value of (r = 0.423). All variables are tested at the significance level of 0,01 and the results are shown in table no. 4.

For the identification of factors determining children's preferences leading to purchase of foods, an exploratory factor analysis is performed. Original 26 variables were reduced to 22 usable. Four factors exceeded the recommended value of the Eigen value. The latent factors include variables with an absolute value of a coefficient of factor weight in an interval of < 0.511; 0.863 > and cumulatively explain 59 % of the total dispersionof monitored variables. The first group of variables represents 20.2 % of the total dispersion, includes a factor weight in the range of 0.679 - 0.802 with an Eigen value of 4.85. The first factor found can be interpreted as (1) "The effort of the child to influence shopping". This group characterize the ways which the child tries to influence purchase, such as reaching for items, pointing at them, or verbal requests. The second group of variables found (2) "Children's preferences in package design" focuses on the characteristic elements of packages attracting a child's interest such as bright colors, package shape or display of familiar characters. This factor represents 16.4 % of the total dispersion, a factor weight in the range of 0.720 - 0.863 and the value of the Eigen valueis 3.94. The third group of variables (3) "Preference of unhealthy foods" includes children's interest in salty foods, sweet drinks, flavoring such as ketchup, etc. (12.8 % of the total dispersion, factor weight 0.511 - 0.688, Eigen value 3.07) or the preferences of free gifts as part of the package. The fourth group of variables (4) "Buying healthy food with children" includes the interest of children in foods such as yoghurts or fruits and vegetables, the pleasure of parents shopping together with children and purchasing the food requested by children (9.50 % of the total dispersion, factor weigh 0.515 - 0.728, Eigen value 2.28).

For analyzing the correlation between latent factors, the structural modeling method is used. The factor structure of individual latent factors is taken from the results of exploratory factor analysis. The highest correlation (0.706) is identified between the factors (1) "The effort of the child to influence shopping" and (2) "Children's preferences in package design". This indicates that package design and all of its determinants (bright colors, display of familiar characters, etc.) has a close relationship to the effort of the child to influence the purchase. The second highest relationship was found between the factors (3) "Preference of unhealthy foods" and (2) "Children's preferences in package design" (0,510). On the other hand, an insignificant relationship was found between the factors (2) "Children's preferences in package design" and (4) "Buying healthy foods with children" (table no. 6).

	F1	F2	F3	F4
VAR01 – happy to take my child shopping with me				0.515
VAR03 – child influences the purchases	0.779			
VAR04 – influence by pointing	0.723			
VAR05 – influence by verbal requests	0.802			
VAR06 – influence by reaching for items	0.8			
VAR07 – putting in my trolly	0.679			
VAR08 – purchase of confectionary	0.682			
VAR09 – purchase of sweet drinks			0.562	
VAR11 – purchase of yoghurts				0.589
VAR12 – purchase of flavoring			0.655	
VAR13 – purchase of fruit and vegetables				0.586
VAR14 – purchase of frozen food			0.511	
VAR15 – purchase of snack food	0.6			
VAR16 – purchase of salty food			0.805	
VAR18 – influenced by the packiging		0.788		
VAR19 – influenced by bright colors		0.863		
VAR20 – influenced by characters licensed		0.803		
VAR21 – influenced by famous characters		0.762		
VAR22 – influenced by shape		0.72		
VAR23 – influenced by free gifts			0.688	
VAR24 – taking my child´s preferences into consideration				0.728
VAR25 – buying products that my child requests				0.66

Source: own calculation, questionnaire survey, 2014

Table 5: Rotated Component Matrix.

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
F1 <--> F2	0.706	0.104	7.929	***
F1 <--> F3	0.467	0.071	5.011	***
F1 <--> F4	0.264	0.026	2.258	0.024
F2 <--> F3	0.51	0.068	5.319	***
F2 <--> F4	0.193	0.02	1.95	0.051
F3 <--> F4	0.496	0.026	2.568	0.01

Source: own calculation, questionnaire survey, 2014

Table 6: Correlation between factors.

The results of statistical significance testing revealed a large dependence, in particular of the ways by which the child attempts to influence the purchase transaction. The study of Ogba, Johnson (2010) is dedicated to the strength of the influence of a child on the buying behavior overall, and the testing reported in this research shows significant differences in individual ways of purchases influencing. The results therefore build on McNeal (1999) stages of consumer socialization. There is a weak impact on the purchase transaction by the level of children influence on the buying behavior revealed from the results of verification of the 4th hypothesis. This assumption can be further expanded by the structure of the ways of influencing parents, where the most significant ways are verbal request and pointing to the product.

The results also confirm previous studies, where the child attempts to influence the purchase, in particular, of sweets, which are among the foods that are not in accordance

with a healthy lifestyle and are among the HFSS foods (Ogba & Johnson, 2010; Marshall et al., 2007). It was also confirmed that the package influences the level of pressure of the child on parents. The results also confirmed theses of Ogba & Johnson (2010) and Berry, McMullen (2008), that children are mostly influenced by the shape of the product, characters associated with a concrete product and weakly, also by colors, and does not agree with the research of Marshall et al. (2007), which states that the color acts as the most significant factor.

Exploratory factor analysis extracted 4 factors determining children's preferences leading to the food purchase transaction. The performed research is based on the work of Ogba, Johnson (2010) as they conducted the research in the UK. In the Czech environment the number and composition of factors arising from the same questionnaire and factor analysis varies. In the case of submitted research, similarity can be found, in particular, within factors (1) "The effort of the child to influence shopping" and (4) "Buying healthy foods with children". A dominant factor of the British researchers is "the influence of packaging on children", which in meaning corresponds to the factor (2) "Children's preferences in package design" and was expanded only by the preference of an interesting package shape. Agreement also occurred in the case of factor (4) "Buying healthy foods with children" and the British third factor "the likelihood the parent is to yield to child influence". In this submitted research, purchasing of foods requested by children is further associated with the willingness to take child shopping and the interest of the child in healthy foods. Contrasting with healthy shopping with children is our factor (3), which is, on the other hand, associated with the interest of the child in unhealthy foods, often supported with a free gift.

According to the results of the structural equation modeling, the effort of a child to influence the purchase of foods is determined by package design. These results are also based on the confirmed hypothesis H3. A child is influenced in decision making by the package, and, in particular, the shape of the package, which builds on the previous studies; however, the results of this research point more to the influence of the shape of the package, over the color scheme, as stated by Marshall et al. (2007). On the basis of other results of structural equation modeling, the package design has more influence in the case of unhealthy foods, which might indicate the effort of manufacturers to sell these foods on the basis of pressure, which they place on parents through the requesting of this product. The results also show, that the significant impact on the buying decision has the actual way of children´s product requesting. In correlation with the development of the child, the structure of pester power techniques changes. While in the youngest category, children point to a product, with increasing age the level of verbal requests also increases. At the same time it applies that with increasing age of the child, pointing to and touching the product decreases and, conversely, the independent placing of products in the cart takes place. The highest impact as well as the greatest level of consent of the parents was measured for verbal requests. The results have a growing character for individual age categories of children, and that from minimum values of 36 % (for the youngest category of children between the ages of 1 to 3 years), up to 53 % (for the eldest category of children between 13 to 17 years). The reaction of parents to a child's request increases with the growth of emphasis in the expression of the request. That is, if the child addresses the parent or points to a product, this could indicate fear of a potential conflict at the shopping location. This is also confirmed by the question of whether or not the parent sometimes buys products, the child wants, in order to avoid conflict. 71.3 % of parents agreed with this statement, where the average value of positive responses was 1,25. In relation to the previous studies (Nash, Basini, 2012; Pilgrim, Lawrence, 2001), pester power cannot be defined as a negative or positive phenomenon, but a phenomenon which, from the perspective of parents, must be understood and which they must learn to direct by certain tactics. Negative consequences may arise if we try to suppress this phenomenon by acceding to the requests of the child because we wish to avoid conflict. This no longer involves interaction, which leads to understanding (Nash, Basini, 2012), but rather behavior with possible negative consequences (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2001).

Conclusion

Exploratory factor analysis extracted 4 latent factors: (1) "The effort of the child to influence shopping", (2) "Children's preferences in package design", (3) "Preference of unhealthy foods"

and (4) "Buying healthy foods with children. On the basis of structural modeling, weak to medium-strong dependencies were found (0.264 - 0.706). The greatest correlation (0.706) was identified between factors (1) "The effort of the child to influence shopping" and (2) "Children's preferences in package design". From the perspective of package attributes, shape can be indicated as the most important element, generating child´s interest.

Submitted research shifts previous studies in view of children´s pester power structure. Previous research indicated the importance of packaging within the marketing mix framework (Ogba, Johnson, 2010). Research points to the high impact of verbal requests of children, but also reaching for food or putting it into the trolly/basket. Influencing parents' shopping by putting food into the trolley/basket escalates with the increasing age of the child. The results of this research have a significance for marketing practicioners in the food area. Not only the importance of a package and its design as a part of the promotion, but also the placement of the product at the point of purchase is a key aspect to be considered. Despite the ethical perspective (Piacentini et al., 2000), results demonstrate the possibility of stimulating pester power through placement of a product at the child's eye level and within reach of the child.

A starting point for further research could be the fact that 71 % of parents purchase foods requested by the child in order to avoid conflict. This fact indicates that the need of appropriate techniques for guiding the pester power of a child has to be managed. In the next phase, the research could be expanded on the observation method of children's buying behavior directly where shopping, and potentially conflict, takes place.

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