

The Effects of the Children Under 8 Years Old on Their Families' Food Purchasing Decision

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Abstract: Family factor, one of the social factors affecting the purchasing behavior, is regarded to be the most important factor giving direction to the purchasing decisions. In every period of the life, the consumption patterns of an individual cannot be isolated from his/her family's consumption patterns.

The reason why the present study is limited to the foods is that children are the direct consumers of foods and foods have an important portion in the consumption expenditures of families. And the reason why an upper age limit (8 years old) is set up for the study is that this age is considered to be transition to having purchasing decisions on their own.

In the field work, food purchasing was divided into sub-categories because the study aims to reveal the extent to which children affect purchasing decisions in each sub-category. Moreover, for each sub-category, other factors that can affect the purchasing decisions and that are not related to children were also investigated, in this way, the real influence of the children is expected to be found.

As purchasing decision is a qualitative data with two possibilities, there can be many independent variables that have the potential for affecting dependent variable; therefore, here "sequenced logit model" will be used to evaluate the findings of the study.

Keywords: Food, Purchasing Decision, Family, Child, Under 8 Years

1. Introduction

Contemporary view of marketing aims to maximize sum of the long-term profits in terms of their current value rather than maximize the immediate profit of an organization (Islamoglu,2002:8). That is, the contemporary

view of marketing aims to have long-term sustainable targets rather than have great profits by selling a lot in a short time. In this respect, one of the major objectives of marketing is to provide organizations with sustainable strategies and competitive advantage.

Basically, the science of marketing is interested in finding ways of meeting consumers' desires and needs in a timely and satisfying manner. Marketing managers should primarily know the target market and consumers of this market, develop proper marketing strategies for the target population and take the correct decisions to design an appropriate ground for production, pricing and distribution activities which are called the components of marketing (Karabulut,1981:4).

For marketers, knowing consumers means determining all the internal and external factors affecting purchasing decisions and clearly understanding consumers' desires and needs. This is only possible by knowing the social and cultural milieu where the consumers grow up and live and determining the factors affecting the decisions taken in this environment. This also makes the subdivision of the market possible. However, during the division of the market, it may not be very easy to know the consumers and locate them according to their desires and needs in the market because there are many factors simultaneously affecting the behaviors of the consumers. This leads to confusion and makes it difficult to predict the behaviors. Hence, there are some models developed to provide managers with explanatory and real information by approaching consumer behaviors through more holistic viewpoint.

The oldest and well-known of these models is the model developed by psychologist Kurt Lewin. The model proposed by Lewin to explain consumer behaviors is important as it served the function of a pioneer for the other models. According to this model, human behavior develops under the influence of both personal and environmental factors and this is called "black box model" or "stimulus-response model" in the literature. The model is illustrated in figure 1 (İslamoğlu and Altunışık,2008:23).



Figure 1: Kurt Lewin's "black box model"

As can be seen in the model, the center where the consumer makes purchasing decision is called "black box". It is not exactly known how the black box functions and decisions are made. As every individual exhibit a unique structure, the function of the black box varies from one person to another because many different factors intervene with the decision making process and they do not have the same impact on everybody (Ünlüönen and Tayfun,2003:4).

In order to make the model clearer, the model developed by Kotler to explain the consumer's decision making process is given below in figure 2:

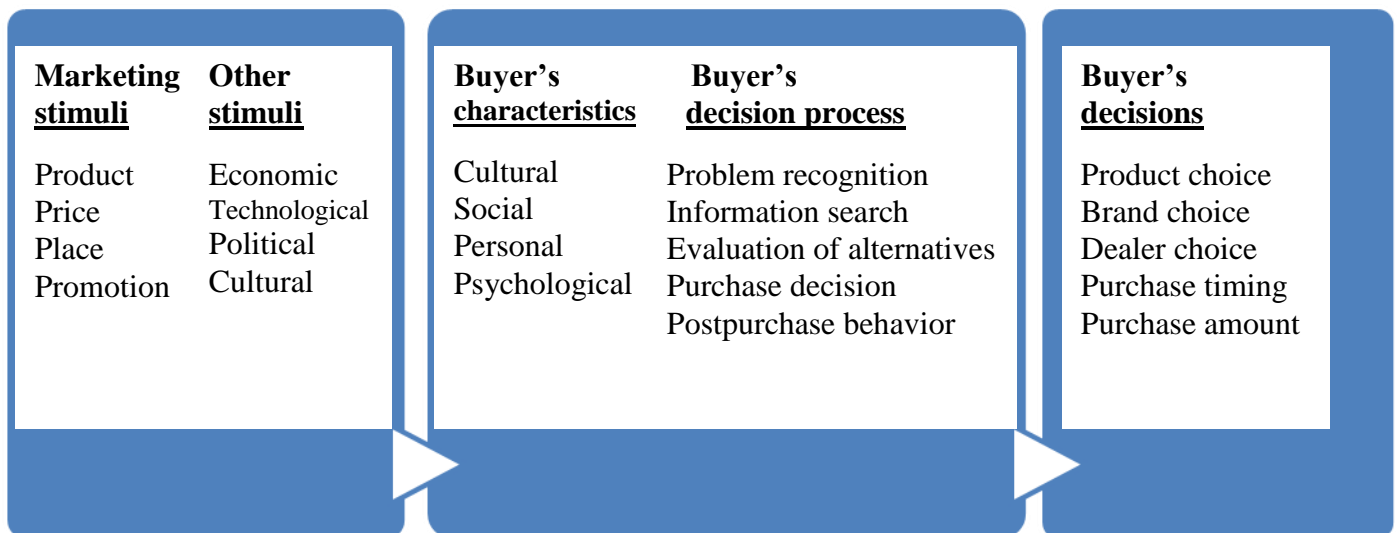


Figure 2: Kotler' Purchasing Decision-making Model

As can be seen in Kotler's model, the factors determining the characteristic of the consumer's purchasing decision are cultural, social, personal, and psychological factors (Kotler,2000:161). And each factor may have a direct influence, either positive or negative, on the consumer's purchasing decision. This makes the consumer behaviors difficult to understand and hence, many studies focused on explanation of the consumer behaviors. The aim of the present study is to investigate the effects of children usually not making their own purchasing decisions on the family's purchasing decisions.

As known, family factor, one of the social factors, is considered to be the most important social factor giving direction to purchasing decisions. Family consisting of mother, father, and children is a unit having functions of money earning and spending and it is the most influential and developed social group. In every period of the life, the consumption patterns of an individual cannot be isolated from his/her family's consumption patterns (Karaosmanoğlu,1995:26).

In this line, during the purchasing decision-making process, family members may assume different roles (starter, imposing, decision maker, and user). A purchaser of a product and its user may be different family members. The roles assumed in this process should be well understood (Çakır, 2006:2) because each family member having different roles in the family affects the purchasing decisions in different ways. In particular, child's effect in family decisions is located among the social factors as a family factor and may affect the purchasing decision of the consumer in different manners.

Children mostly assume the roles of starter and imposer in purchasing of many different goods and services. With the changing living conditions, the weight of children in decision-making process as decision-makers is increasing. With women entering business life, the impacts of children on decisions have increased. The children whose mothers are working assume the greater portion of their mothers' decision-maker role in many purchasing decisions, that is, they assume greater responsibility in decision-making process. Moreover, as children are more open to marketing messages and there is a lack of affection on the part of parents for their children due to their busy business lives, and as parents want to fill in this gap by giving more responsibility and right to say to their children, the relative influence of children on purchasing decisions is getting stronger (Çakır, 2006:132).

Children as consumers represent an important segment of the population in terms of guiding purchasing decisions. Due to its hugeness and power, this segment constitutes an important segment for marketers (Gunter and Furnham, 1998:173). In this respect, the main purpose of the study is to reveal the influence of children on their parents' purchasing decisions.

2. Literature Review

In relation to consumer behaviors, the relation between children and marketing system started to gain importance in late 80s (McNeal and Yeh, 1990:32). With the recognition of the importance of children as consumers, marketing researchers felt greater need to develop more effective methods to reach children. For this purpose, it is seen necessary to understand what children are interested in, what they want and how they behave.

In a normal purchasing process, children and the other members of the family are in a mutual interaction. While, on the one side, children's desires and needs guide the family's purchasing decisions, families, on the other side, play an important role in the socialization of their children as consumers. Children learn to make decision by being affected by their families' consumer identity (Karaca et al.,2007:236). Media, particularly television advertisements, play an important role in the socialization of children (i.e. participating in consumption activities) as consumers by getting them to learn how to make decisions. The reasons which make television advertisements so influential on children are that the children do not know the difference between advertisements and other television programs, and they are not aware of the advertisements' aim of persuasion. Therefore, many children are defenseless against the exploitative purposes of advertisements (Gunter and Furnham, 1998:102). These can also be included among the reasons leading researchers to look for the effects of children on purchasing decisions. The study by Poper and Shah (2007) revealed results supporting these assumptions. The study reported that 9 out of 10 children want to buy when they see something new in television advertisements (Roper and Shah, 2007:723). Another study by AC Nielsen Zet (1999) revealed the effects of children and young people on purchasing decisions and brand selection. The study also reported that when the families go shopping together with their children, consumption of 82% of the families increases. Moreover, the study argued that the effects of children on total consumption and brand selection are great. When the issue is considered in relation to marketing and especially advertisement, children can be called as target population. In many of the advertisements targeting adults, advertisers include factors that may draw the attention of children (Çakır, 2006:133).

According to another study carried out in 2000, the children lack the questioning skills possessed by adults; they have limited information and skill to evaluate causal relations, they focus on *here and now*, they do not have inclination to take others' opinions into consideration and they mostly focus on themselves and they want momentary sense of satisfaction (McNeal, 2000: 40 – 96)

A study carried out in 2008 administered a questionnaire to the mothers with children in Vilnius/Lithuania and found that the children are most influential on their mothers' decisions to buy sweets and chocolate and these are followed by clothes, holiday plans, restaurant, audio and video, drinks, car and house furniture (Dickius and Medeksiene, 2008:109).

There is a similar trend in our country. The findings of a study investigating the effects of advertisements on children seem to support these findings. The findings of the study revealed that majority of the children in 04-13 age group like advertisements, they think that they are believable, and they want to take the places of the children appearing in the advertisements. Among the advertisements, toy and food advertisements are the most influential on children. Most of the parents think that advertisements negatively affect children's imagination, creativity, and consumption patterns; they make children more extravagant and encourage them to adopt bad feeding habits (Karaca et al., 2007:247).

Another study carried out in İstanbul in 2006 revealed that the effects of children in purchasing process are not related to the price of the thing but direct usefulness of it for children. However, when the effects of children on purchasing decisions for similar products were investigated, it was found that the children are more influential on purchasing decisions for cheaper products. Children are more influential on decisions relating the products they themselves use than the one relating the products of common use. When it comes to the products purchased for the common use of the family, again the children have greater impacts on the purchasing of cheaper and lower risk goods (Aygün, 2006:50).

There is a paper presented in 9th International Marketing Trends Congress held in Venedik on 20-23 February 2010 and this paper seems to be summarizing what has been told so far. According to this study, in Italian food industry, children are thought to have effects in four different dimensions and different strategies are followed for each of them. According to this, children may be included in different markets by marketers: 1. Primary Market, 2. Secondary Market, 3. Influence Market and 4. Future Market. In relation to these different target groups; children's characteristics, and typical age groups, and who the target is in the family for marketers and marketing strategies for these groups are presented in the following table (IRONICO, 2010:11):

Children as...	Characteristics	Typical age groups	Target of the marketing strategy	Marketing and communication strategies
Primary Market	Children have acquired the basic knowledge and skills to autonomously conduct a purchase act.	School Children	Children	Gift in pack, transtoying, advergaming, licensing, co-marketing, fantasy testimonials, miniaturization.
Secondary Market	Children are dependent upon adults since they do not possess the cognitive and motor skills to autonomously fulfil their consumer needs or the basic knowledge and skills to autonomously conduct a purchase act.	Newborns; preschool children	Parents	Gatekeeping.
Influence Market	Even though children do not possess the basic knowledge and skills to autonomously conduct a purchase act, they are able to influence the consumer choices of the family by expressing their needs and asserting their preferences.	Preschool and school children	Children and parents	Gift in pack, transtoying, advergaming, licensing, co-marketing, fantasy testimonials, miniaturization, dual messaging.
Future Market	Corporations invest into longterm activities aimed at encouraging the brand loyalty of children as the consumers of tomorrow in a lifetime relationship marketing view.	Preschool and school children	Children and parents	Gift in pack, transtoying, advergaming, licensing, co-marketing, fantasy testimonials, miniaturization, dual messaging.

Source: Ironico, 2010:11

Table 1: Marketing Strategies for Children

The above-mentioned studies help determine the scope, purpose, hypotheses and limitations of the present study.

3. Research Methodology

In the field research, food purchasing was divided into sub-categories such as fresh vegetables and fruit, milk and dairy products, convenience food, liquors and soft drinks etc. and in this way, it was aimed to determine the effects of children on each sub-category. Moreover, for each sub-category, other factors that can affect the purchasing decisions and that are not related to children were also investigated, in this way, the real influence of the children was expected to be found. The reason why the present study was limited to food and drinks are as follows:

- Food and drinks are the products directly consumed by children. Young children have a tendency to meet their immediate needs hence they consume great amount of sweet and chocolate (Gunter and Furnham, 1998:35).
- Food constitutes an important portion of the consumption expenditures of a family. According to the results of Household Consumption Expenditure Survey carried out by DİE in 1994, food expenditures constitute 28.5% of all the consumption expenditures and take the first place among the expenditure categories (Institute of Statistics, 1999: 356-361).

The reason why an upper age limit (8 years old) is set up for the study is that this age is considered to be transition to having purchasing decisions on their own (McNeal, 2000: 17). The reference study for this was carried out in America in 1987. The results of this study empirically show that 100% of the 7 year old children have previously made independent decisions while shopping with their parents and 80% of them have lived independent shopping experience (Lunt and Furnham,1996:35). After children become 8 years old, their independent shopping habits gain continuity hence their participation in consumption gains a different dimension.

In line with the purpose of the present study, a questionnaire form was developed and used to collect data. In the questionnaire, there 7 items related to demographics, 2 items aiming to solicit the children's participation patterns in purchasing, and 2 items where determining factors are defined about child's insistence to his/her parents and parents' considering about child's health. As those 2 factors will supply ordered datum which has 5 possibilities (0: not affecting, 1: a few affecting, 2: affecting, 3: very affecting and 4: totally affecting) and there are many different independent variables that can affect the dependent variable, the findings of the study were evaluated and interpreted through "ordered logit model analysis".

4. Survey Findings and Conclusions

The distribution of the demographic features obtained through face-to-face administration of a questionnaire to 204 participants having children aged 0-8 and making food expenditures is presented in Table 2.

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Number of</u> <u>People</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Variable</u>	<u>Number of</u> <u>People</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Age			Income Level		
22≤x≤27	29	%14.22	x<1000 TL	32	%15.76
28≤x≤33	66	%32.35	1000≤x≤2000	94	%46.31
34≤x≤39	63	%30.88	2001≤x≤3000	57	%28.08
40≤x≤45	38	%18.63	3001≤x≤5000	19	%9.36
46≤x	8	%3.92	5000<x	1	%0.49
Total	204	%100	Total	204	%100
			Educational		
Sexuality			Status		
Male	79	%38.73	Primary School	34	%16.67
Female	125	%61.27	Secondary School	24	%11.76
			High School	75	%36.76
			University	55	%26.96
			Postgraduate	16	%7.84
Total	204	%100	Total	204	%100

Table 2: Demographic Findings

In order to find out the extent to which the families are affected from their children while making their food purchasing decisions, the participants were asked how much they are affected from the following two factors while making their purchasing decisions;

Factor-1: As a result of children's being affected by advertisements and environmental factors, their becoming insistent on buying something,

Factor-2: while making purchasing decisions, paying attention to products' impacts on children's health.

The extent to which the participants attach importance to these two factors while making their food purchasing decisions is presented in table 3;

Factor-1	Number of People	Percentage	Factor-2	Number of People	Percentage
Not Affecting	62	%30.39	Not Affecting	12	%5.88
A Few Affecting	36	%17.65	A Few Affecting	16	%7.84
Affecting	38	%18.63	Affecting	29	%14.22
Very Affecting	35	%17.16	Very Affecting	40	%19.11
Totally Affecting	33	%16.18	Totally Affecting	107	%52.45

Table 3: Frequency Tables for Factor 1 and 2

In order to find out whether the extent to which the participants are affected from these factors varies depending on their demographic features while making their purchasing decisions, dummy variables for ordered variables such as age, gender, marital status, educational status, and the number of the children who are 8 years old or under were formed and then by using ordered logit analysis, the effects of these variables on these two factors were measured.

The ordered logit analysis revealed that there is no significant impact of the independent variables of age of the parents, gender, marital status, and income level on the first factor. However, effects of factor vary depending on the educational level of the parents and the age group of the children possessed.

Factor 1	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P>z	[95% Conf. Interval]
Child between 0-2	-.2314801	.3692538	-0.63	0.531	-.9552043 .492244
Child between 2-4	.6821392	.3856109	1.77	0.077	-.0736443 1.437923
Child between 4-6	1.314124	.3970187	3.31	0.001	.5359813 2.092266
Child between 6-8	1.07787	.3674885	2.93	0.003	.3576059 1.798134
Secondary sc.	.1948002	.5453462	0.36	0.721	-.8740586 1.263659
High sc.	1.118461	.4424027	2.53	0.011	.2513681 1.985555
University	.7050328	.5037245	1.40	0.162	-.2822491 1.692315
Postgraduate	-.7040728	.7050288	-1.00	0.318	-2.085904 .6777582

Table 4: Ordered Logit Analysis for Factor 1

As can be seen in Table 4, except for those having children aged 0-2, the parents having children under 8 years old are affected from the 1st factor which is the insistence of the children in their food purchasing decisions. This finding seems to support the McNeal's argument that age 2 is the stage where children start to make request with signs and words as presented Stages of Consumer Behaviour Development Table (McNeal, 2000: 17).

Moreover, this finding indicates that only participants who are high school or university graduates are significantly affected from factor 1, yet, the participants who have primary school or post-graduate education are not significantly affected. That is, the participants having high school, two-year degree and university education pay greater attention to their children's preferences and demands in their food purchasing decisions.

This may be interpreted as the participants having less than high school education do not give their children right to say in their food purchasing decisions. However, when the results of the ordered logit analysis are examined, a different finding is obtained for those having post-graduate education;

Factor 2	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P>z	[95% Conf.	Interval]
Secondary sc.	.0744801	.5361029	0.14	0.890	-.9762623	1.125223
High sc.	.1562653	.4488761	0.35	0.728	-.7235157	1.036046
University	.4588567	.5088667	0.90	0.367	-.5385037	1.456217
Postgraduate	-1.117541	.7925455	-1.41	0.159	-2.670901	.43582
28≤x≤33	-.295486	.4358705	-0.68	0.498	-1.149777	.5588045
34≤x≤39	.8163078	.5183029	1.57	0.115	-.1995473	1.832163
40≤x≤45	.3062561	.5634005	0.54	0.587	-.7979887	1.410501
46≤x	.9782211	.8863009	1.10	0.270	-.7588966	2.715339
1000≤x≤2000	.3181982	.4288602	0.74	0.458	-.5223524	1.158749
2001≤x≤3000	.3630866	.5199831	0.70	0.485	-.6560616	1.382235
3001≤x≤5000	1.052949	.6979224	1.51	0.131	-.3149542	2.420851
5000 < x	-1.626117	1.941669	-0.84	0.402	-5.431719	2.179485

Table 5: Ordered Logit Analysis for Factor 2

As can be seen in table 5, there is a significant relation between having post-graduate education and the extent to which the participants are affected from factor 2. That is, the participants having post-graduate education pay significantly less attention to the benefits of the food products for the health of their children when compared to the other participants with other educational levels.

This is because the participants having post-graduate education attached lower scores to this factor for the sub-product groups including artificial additives such as processed meat and milk, read-to-eat and frozen foods, chips and drinks than the other participants. When we look at the mean score for this factor, we can see that the participants having post-graduate education seem to attach less importance to this factor but they attach greater importance to factor 2 for food groups considered to be very important for health such as meat and meat products and fresh vegetables and fruit than the other participants.

According to the findings concerning factor 1, the participants having post-graduate education are less affected from their children's insistence and they are more questioning about the benefits and harms of foods for health. Hence, while making food purchasing decisions, these people are less affected from the direct or indirect influences of their children and they make more rational decisions.

As a result of the present study, which was carried out to investigate the affects of the children who are 8 years old or under on their parents' purchasing decisions, it can be argued that, except for the children aged 0-2, the children under 8 years old have direct influences on their parents' purchasing decisions. Moreover, education status of the families, their income levels, and the extent to which children are affected from advertisements have direct influences on purchasing decisions. Though the ability of the children under 8 years old to make decisions is questionable, the present study shows that children have direct influences on the purchasing decisions for the products they like and this influence may appear in different forms.

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