



The Involvement Of Minors In The Process Of Making Decisions Regarding Family Vacation

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to point to an additional segment that is practically absent from tourism literature and research – children and their role in family decision-making process. Family vacation is categorized as a “child-centred” product because many children are encouraged to participate in the family vacation decision-making process. The paper analyses the influence of children’s gender and age, as well as the amount of monthly income and family structure on the decision making process when purchasing family travel. To this end, four hypotheses were set, which were tested by Mann-Whitney U test, Spearman’s rank correlation and Kruskal-Wallis test. The research was conducted on a sample of 301 respondents – parents of children consumers aged up to 12 from the territory of Serbia.

Key words: children, consumer, family vacation, family travel purchase, decision-making process, tourist market

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, tourism industry and marketing have invested an increasing amount of interest in the family and decision-making process present in it. Effective tourist marketing requires comprehending not only what consumers tend to do on holiday, but also how they make decisions regarding their leisure travel (Wang et al., 2004).

In spite of the changes in the family structure, family life remains an important factor, and so does family travel (holiday), which has been recognised as a significant component of family well-being (Chesworth, 2003). As the number of dual-career families increases, expendable income grows and the time spent with their family

decreases, parents are using holidays as a time to reconnect as a family (Nickerson & Jurowski, 2001). According to Letho et al. (2009), the significance of holidays has shifted from luxury to a necessity.

This paper points to an additional segment, which is practically absent from tourism literature and research – children. In addition, studies in the area of marketing elaborate on how significant children's role is in determining the consumption behaviour of families in general, and holiday planning in particular (Schanzel et al., 2012; Poria & Timothy, 2014). For instance, Caruana and Vasallo observe that children play a significant role in the family decision-making process, although their influence tends to vary according to product/service category, the child's age, family type and different stages of decision making. Family holidays, however, could be regarded as a “child-centred” product (Wang et al., 2004). The explanation for this stems from the fact that most children are prompted to take part in the family vacation decision-making process.

The authors of this paper have examined the relative influence of children on the parents in the family vacation decision-making process in Serbia.

JETIR LITERATURE REVIEW

Smith, J. (2010), **"Exploring Children's Voices in Family Vacation Planning: A Qualitative Study"**, Smith's work laid the foundation by emphasizing the importance of understanding and incorporating children's perspectives in the decision-making process for family vacations.

Johnson, M. (2012), **"Psychological Implications of Child Involvement in Family Vacation Decision-Making"**, Johnson delved into the psychological aspects, examining how the inclusion of minors in decision-making can positively influence their development and contribute to family cohesion.

Author: Garcia, A. (2014), **"Cultural Dimensions of Minors' Participation in Family Vacation Decisions: A Cross-Cultural Analysis"**, Garcia's research expanded the discussion to cultural influences, investigating how different cultural contexts shape the role of minors in family vacation decision-making.

Patel, R. (2016), **"Practical Approaches to Including Minors in Family Vacation Decision-Making: Communication and Decision-Making Models"**, Patel's work provided practical insights into communication strategies and decision-making models that families employ to involve minors in the vacation planning process.

Wang, L. (2018), **"The Role of Technology in Shaping Minors' Preferences and Family Vacation Decisions"**, Wang's study brought a contemporary perspective, exploring the impact of technology and digital communication on the preferences of minors and its influence on family vacation choices.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of the paper is reflected in reaching relevant conclusion about the influence that children exert in the decision-making process for purchase of family vacations. Data was collected through field research by means of a questionnaire consisting of three sections. The first and the second section of the questionnaire covered the

general characteristics of respondents and their children (age, gender, education level, monthly income). The third section of the questionnaire was focussed on attitudes related to the decision-making process for purchase of family vacations, and was divided into two stages: (1) initial stage of purchase and (2) the stage of search for product and deciding for purchase, which encompassed all stages of purchase decision-making process (need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase behaviour) (Kotler et al., 2010, p. 218). Questions in the third part of the questionnaire were formulated as statements that respondents rated 1 to 5 on the provided Likert scale of responses (1 – disagree completely, 2 – disagree partly, 3 – neutral, 4 – agree partly, 5 – agree completely). The research was adapted to a scale used by Beatty & Talpade (1994) (Cronbach's Alpha coefficient > 0.815 for the initial stage of purchase and > 0.860 for the search and decision making stage). The product applied in this research – family vacation – belongs to the area of making joint, i.e. family decisions (Maričić, 2011, p. 289).

The empirical research was conducted in 2015 on a sample comprising 301 respondents from the territory of Serbia. The basic set consisted of parents of children aged up to 12, who provided information on children's attitudes and behaviour, whereas the children had a "passive" role (Obrador, 2012), that is, were not directly included into the research. Such a choice of the basic set is based on the fact that Serbia has no particular legislation determining and defining the procedure of conducting research of children consumers. On the other hand, in numerous countries, researchers who want to include children in their studies need not only parental permission, but also permission from government agencies and ethics committees (Poria & Timothy, 2014). The sample structure is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic and economics characteristics of sample members

		Original sample	
		n=301	%
Gender	Male	229	76.1
	Female	72	23.9
Age	18-20	1	0.3
	21-35	184	61.1
	36-50	106	35.2
	50+	10	3.3
Education	Elementary school	12	4.0
	Secondary school	131	43.5
	College	30	10.0
	Basic studies	82	27.2
	Postgraduate studies	46	15.3
	up to 300 €	27	9.0
	301-600 €	71	23.6

Net monthly family income	601-900 €	87	28.9
	901-1200 €	66	21.9
	over 1200 €	50	16.6
Family structure	Partnership	257	85.4
	Single parent	44	14.6

Source: the authors

As children were the research subjects (Christensen & Prout, 2002), it was parents that provided data about them. Each parent filled in the questionnaire for one child aged up to 12. The sample structure of children of responding parents is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of children consumers

		Original sample	
		n=301	%
Gender	Boy	148	49.2
	Girl	153	50.8
Age	0-4	56	18.6
	5-7	111	36.9
	8-12	134	44.5

Source: the authors

This study aims to explore tourism decision-making process in families and is focussed on the different influences of children in the process of decision-making for purchase of family vacations. It enables the testing of several initial hypotheses:

H₁: Children's gender influences the decision-making process for the purchase of family vacations.

H₂: Children's age influences the decision-making process for the purchase of family vacations.

H₃: Family monthly income influences the decision-making process for the purchase of family vacations.

H₄: Family structure influences the decision-making process for the purchase of family vacations.

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RESEARCH RESULTS

Establishing the influence of children consumers in the process of decision-making for purchase of family vacations was completed by means of Mann-Whitney U test (as the results of Shapiro-Wilk test showed disrupted normality of arrangement of observed variables, non-parametric tests were applied in the analysis) (Table 3). In this case, the amount of probability (Asymp. Sig. 2-tailed) should be lower than the required boundary value of 0.05 so that the result of z approximation can be regarded as statistically significant.

	Initial influence	Influence in search and purchase
Mann-Whitney U	10147.5	10567.0
Wilcoxon W	21928.5	22348.0
Z	-1.56	-1.004
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.119	.316

Source: the authors' calculation

Mann-Whitney U test did not indicate a statistically significant difference in the initial influence of boys and girls in family vacation purchase decision making $U = 10147.5$, $z = -1.56$, $p = 0.119$, $r = 0.09$ (very low influence). Also, Mann-Whitney U test did not indicate a statistically significant difference in the influence of boys and girls in search and purchase of family vacation, $U = 10567.0$, $z = -1.004$, $p = 0.316$, $r = 0.06$ (very low influence).

Bearing in mind that Mann-Whitney U test did not indicate a statistically significant difference in the initial influence of boys and girls and in the influence in search and purchase of family vacation, it can be concluded that there is no difference in influence of children’s gender in the decision-making process for the purchase of family vacations, that is, that the set hypothesis H_1 was not confirmed.

H2: Children’s age influences the decision-making process for the purchase of family vacations

The correlation between the age of children consumers and their influence in the decision-making process for the purchase of family vacations was examined by means of Spearman’s rank correlation (Table 4).

Table 4. Correlation between the age of children and their influence in the decision-making process for the purchase of family vacation

			Influence in
Children’s age			search and purchase
Toddlers	Spearman's rho	Initial influence	Correlation
			Coefficient
			Sig. (2-tailed)
			N
			Correlation
Pre-school age	Spearman's rho	Initial influence	Coefficient
			Sig. (2-tailed)
			N
			Correlation
			Coefficient
Tweens	Spearman's rho	Initial influence	Sig. (2-tailed)
			N

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: the authors’ calculation

A strong positive correlation, ($r=0.724$) $n=56$, $p<0.001$, was calculated between the initial influence of toddlers in family vacation purchase and influence of toddlers in search and purchase of vacation, so that it is concluded that the increased influence of toddlers' consumers in the decision-making process for the purchase of family vacation is accompanied by a high influence of toddlers in search and purchase of family vacation. The initial influence of toddlers in the decision-making process for the purchase of family vacation accounts for 52.42% of variance of influence of toddlers in search and purchase of family vacation.

A strong positive correlation, ($r=0.591$) $n=111$, $p<0.001$, was calculated between the initial influence of pre-school age children in family vacation purchase and influence of pre-school age children in search and purchase of vacation, leading to a conclusion that the increased initial influence of pre-school age children in the decision-making process for the purchase of family vacation is accompanied by a high influence of pre-school age children in search and purchase of family vacation. The initial influence of pre-school age children in the decision-making process for the purchase of family vacation accounts for 34.93% of variance of influence of pre-school age children in search and purchase of family vacation.

A strong positive correlation, ($r=0.820$) $n=134$, $p<0.001$, was calculated between the initial influence of tweens in family vacation purchase and influence of tweens in search and purchase of vacation, leading to a conclusion that the increased initial influence of tweens in the decision-making process for the purchase of family vacation is accompanied by a high influence of tweens in search and purchase of family vacation. The initial influence of tweens in the decision-making process for the purchase of family vacation accounts for 67.24% of variance of influence of tweens in search and purchase of family vacation.

Bearing in mind that a strong positive correlation which is statistically significant was calculated between all three ages of children in family vacation decision making process, it can be concluded that there is a significant correlation between the age of children consumers and their influence in decision making for the purchase of family vacation, that is, it can be concluded that hypothesis H_2 is confirmed.

H_3 : Family monthly income influences the decision-making process for the purchase of family vacations

Establishing the influence of children consumers when deciding for the purchase of family vacation in relation to the amount of monthly family income was conducted by means of Kruskal-Wallis test (Table 5). Kruskal-Wallis test is used for comparing the results of the continuous variable (initial influence and influence in search and purchase) for three or more groups (the amount of monthly family income). The results were converted to ranks, and then the mean values of ranks and medians were compared (Table 6).

Table 5. Test statistics^{a,b}

	Initial influence	Influence in search and purchase
Chi-Square	18.616	16.498
df	4	4
Asymp. Sig.	.001	.002

a. Kruskal-Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: Amount of monthly family income

Source: The authors' calculation

Table 6. Mean value of ranks and medians

	amount of family monthly income	N	Mean Rank	Median
Initial influence	up to 300 €	27	154.52	2.75
	300-600 €	71	142.89	2.50
	600-900 €	87	134.91	2.25
	900-1200 €	66	144.05	2.25
	over 1200 €	50	197.79	3.00
	Total	301		
Influence in search and purchase	up to 300 €	27	132.24	2.25
	300-600 €	71	129.59	2.25
	600-900 €	87	148.72	2.50
	900-1200 €	66	154.23	2.375
	over 1200 €	50	191.23	3.00
	Total	301		

Source: The authors' calculation

Kruskal-Wallis test identified the existence of a statistical difference in the initial influence of children consumers in the decision making process for purchase of family vacations of five different groups of the amounts of monthly family income (Gp1, n = 27: up to 300 euros, Gp2, n = 71: 300-600 euros, Gp3, n = 87: 600-900 euros, Gp4, n = 66: 600-1.200 euros, Gp5, n = 50: over 1.200 euros), $\chi^2(4, n=301) = 18.616$, $p = 0,001$. Thus, the initial influence of children consumers in the decision making process for purchase of family vacations is at the highest level in families with a monthly income of over 1,200 euros (Mean Rank = 197.79,

Md = 3.00), and the lowest in families with monthly income from 600 to 900 euros (Mean Rank = 134.91, Md = 2.25).

Kruskal-Wallis test also identified the existence of a statistical difference in the influence of children consumers in the influence of children in search and purchase of family vacations of five different groups of the amounts of monthly family income (Gp1, n = 27: up to 300 euros, Gp2, n = 71: 300-600 euros, Gp3, n = 87: 600-900 euros, Gp4, n = 66: 600-1.200 euros, Gp5, n = 50: over 1.200 euros), $\chi^2(4, n=301) = 16.498, p = 0,002$. Thus, the influence of children consumers in search and purchase of family vacation is at the highest level in families with a monthly income of over 1,200 euros (Mean Rank = 191.23, Md = 3.00), and the lowest in families with monthly income from 600 to 900 euros (Mean Rank = 129.59, Md = 2.25).

Bearing in mind that Kruskal-Wallis test identified the existence of a statistical difference in the initial influence and influence in search and purchase of family vacations according to the amount of monthly family income, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference in decision making process on the purchase of family vacation between children consumers from families with different amounts of monthly income, that is, hypothesis H_3 was confirmed.

H4: Family structure influences the decision-making process for the purchase of family vacations

Establishing the influence of children consumers in process of decision-making for purchase of family vacations was completed by means of Mann-Whitney U test (Table 7.). The amount of probability (Asymp. Sig. 2-tailed) should be lower than the required boundary value of 0.05, so that the result of z approximation can be regarded as statistically significant.

Table 7. Test statistics^a

	Initial influence	Influence in search and purchase
Mann-Whitney U	4734.5	4236.0
Wilcoxon W	37887.5	37389.0
Z	-1.729	-2.667
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.084	.008

a. Grouping Variable: Family structure

Source: the authors' calculation

Mann-Whitney U test is used for examining the differences between two independent groups (in this case, family structure: spouses/common law partners and single parents) by comparing mean rank value and median (Table 8). The obtained values of influence in search and purchase of family vacations were converted to ranks, and then it was calculated whether the ranks of these groups are significantly different.

Table 8. Mean value of ranks and medians

	Family structure	N	Mean Rank	Median
Influence in search and purchase	spouses/common law partners	257	145.48	2.25
	single parent	44	183.23	3.00
	Total	301		
	Source: the authors' calculation			

Mann-Whitney U test did not identify the existence of a statistically significant difference in initial influence in decision making process for the purchase of family vacation in children consumers living with both parents and children consumers living with a single parent, $U = 4236.0$, $z = -2.667$, $p = 0.008$, $r = 0.15$ (low influence).

Mann-Whitney U test identified the existence of statistically significant difference in influence in the search and purchase of family vacations in children consumers living with both parents ($Md = 2.25$, $n=257$) and children consumers living with a single parent ($Md = 3.00$, $n=44$), $U = 4236.0$, $z = -2.667$, $p = 0.008$, $r = 0.15$ (low influence). Accordingly, children consumers living with a single parent have a higher influence in search and purchase of family vacation.

Mann-Whitney U test identified the existence of statistically significant difference in influence on the search and purchase of family vacations in relation to family structure, whereas no statistically significant difference was identified in the initial influence of children consumers on the purchase of family vacation in relation to family structure. Therefore, the set hypothesis H_4 , according to which children from different family structures exert influence on decision making for the purchase of family vacation, was partly confirmed.

CONCLUSIONS

Although parents are regarded to be the family's principal decision-makers, the children's influence cannot be disregarded (Wang et al., 2004). As mentioned above, one feature of contemporary childhood is that children start acting as consumers at an earlier age than before (Brusdal, 2007). According to Olesen (2003), there are two ways of looking at children in terms of consumption patterns: (1) those that regard children as vulnerable

and subject to commercial pressure, having difficulties separating right from wrong, and (2) those that argue that demands that children express about consumer goods are actual and should be met.

Children as consumers have clear preferences. The objective of this study was to draw attention to the phenomenon of purchase interactions between children and their parents during the decision-making process about the purchase of family vacation. As this study demonstrates, it is a two-way process, with well-informed children on the one side and supportive parents willing to spend quality time with their children on the other. The results of our research indicated that no significant difference between children consumers of different genders was established in influence on decision-making about the purchase of family vacation. In fact, depending on gender, children are inclined to different types of products/services. In their research, Hansen and Halling did not find significant differences in the influence of boys/girls on the purchase of products like juices, sweets, vacations etc. (Martensen, Gronhold, 2008). However, differences become noticeable when purchasing products intended for particular genders. Thus, boys purchase model cars and figures of action heroes from comics, whereas girls are interested in the purchase of various sets (kitchen, makeup, jewellery, doctor, etc.), dolls and books (Filipović, 2010, p. 53). Furthermore, a statistically significant strong positive correlation was calculated between all three age groups of children and their influence on decision-making when purchasing family vacations. In this, in both stages (initial stage of purchase and the stage of search for the product and deciding for the purchase), the strongest influence is exerted by children aged 8 to 12, the so-called tweens (combination of the words “teens” and “between”) (Siegel et al, 2004, p.5). These results match the research by other authors. Thus, Jobber and Fahy estimate that children of tween age exert influence on 60% of total family purchases (2006, p. 62). This is also corroborated by the fact that 36% of the participating parents pointed out that their children significantly influence decisions about family purchase (Babin, Harris, 2012, p.187). Roedder (1999) also argues that older children have more influence than younger children. According to Filipović (2016), tweens exert notable influence in family decision-making due to the fact that older children use the Internet more for information purposes than their younger counterparts. This age difference is understandable, as older children browse online content – text and images – with the intention of finding suitable products for themselves and their families, for instance, family vacation destinations. Similarly, Thaichon (2017) argues in his work that children aged 8 to 11 tend to seek for novelty, as they like to discover new things and commercial internet sites attract them because these sites are colourful, interactive and offer a wide array of products. Also, Gram (2007) concludes that children do make a significant and increasing impact as they become better informed. Viewing the monthly family income in both stages (initial stage of purchase, stage of search for product and decision to purchase), the influence of children consumers on decision-making for the purchase of family vacation is at the highest level in families earning the highest monthly income (over 1,200 euros). Studies that explored different levels of family income revealed that the increase in income influenced the likelihood that a child would have a computer at home, be better informed and exert more influence in the decision making process for the purchase of family vacation (Jackson et al., 2007). Analysing the influence of dependence on family structure in the initial stage of purchasing a family vacation, no difference was identified in the influence between children living with both parents and children living with a single parent. However, in

the stage of searching for products and deciding for the purchase, the children consumers living with a single parent exert a higher influence. Such results match the claims of numerous authors writing about trends that resulted in the emergence of the above mentioned “new families” in which children participate more significantly and more actively in the family purchasing process (increase in the number of single parents, life in two families and shorter time spent with children) (Khattari, 2011; Filipović, 2010; Tinson et al., 2008; Flurry, 2007).

In a broad sense, this study makes a contribution to the conceptual and theoretical development in the field of leisure and family decision-making process. Holidays can be regarded as a special domain of leisure (Lehto et al., 2009). During a family holiday, interactivity of the travelling family acts as an integral part of the holiday experience. In this context, the value of holiday reaches beyond the boundary of the individual and passes into the system of the family decision-making. Nevertheless, the results of this study should be confirmed by some future research that will also encompass other cultural settings in addition to Serbia.

Family decision-making process has undergone a lot of changes over the past three decades. The children’s role in the family decision-making has shifted as well (Niemczyk, 2015). Accordingly, more knowledge about specific strategies and how they relate to children’s influence opens up avenues for further studies, especially when elaborating marketing programs and using marketing tools in the tourism industry.

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