

Analysis of the Impact of Family Communication on Shopping Behavior of Young Consumers

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this study was to investigate how the communication within the family influences the shopping behavior of young respondents, i.e., consumers. To achieve this goal, a survey was conducted on a purposive sample of 120 young respondents aged 18 to 28 years. The research results showed that there is a statistically significant correlation between communication about purchasing within the family and young respondents' shopping with their family members, as well as between communication within the family before purchasing and the respect for the opinions of family members during the purchase process of young respondents. Additional analysis of respondents by gender revealed a statistically significant difference in shopping with family members between female and male respondents. Female respondents much more frequently go shopping with their family members.

Key words: family communication, young consumers, shopping behavior, survey research

Introduction

Communication in various forms is a crucial part of every individual's life. Whether verbal, nonverbal, or in any other form, it is constant and omnipresent. We communicate daily, in different ways, and with different people. Much has been written about the importance of interpersonal communication, and it is certain that it has a significant impact on the quantity and quality of relationships in which people are involved. Successful communication always occurs bidirectionally and involves an effort to understand the thoughts and feelings expressed by the person speaking or communicating in other ways. The first communication in a person's life is the gaze into their mother's eyes or her embrace. From early childhood, we most often communicate with members of our immediate family, and then with all other people in our environment.

Communication is primarily learned within the family. Knowledge and experiences of communication are created through the interaction of the child with family members. In developmental stages, a child seeks constant presence of parents and mutual communication on all levels, thus learning and acquiring life skills. Communication is one of the most important experiences adults can provide to

children. Through daily interactions, children and adults can develop a relationship that helps the child learn about the world and themselves. One of the most important skills for building that relationship is communication, and family communication is much more than the spoken words among family members.

The most significant influence on consumer behavior comes from the family as the primary reference group. The family is the fundamental social unit based on the shared life of close relatives, usually parents and their children. In various studies of overall societal consumption, marketing experts primarily focus on household consumption since the household, as a consumer unit, is an important participant in the final consumption market. Today, it is still crucial to investigate the influence of the family on individual consumption considering the role family members play in the life of each consumer. If family is not as significant to a consumer, it will likewise not be able to influence their behavior in final consumption. A survey conducted for the purpose of achieving the goal of this study analyzed the influence that participants' primary families have on their shopping habits and behavior.

Today, the behavior of young consumers is influenced by factors that were not present twenty years ago. These

primarily include the internet and social media. Social media assist companies in market research and better promotion and advertising, creating new ideas, developing new products, and improving customer relations. Social media connect people with common interests, making it easier for consumers to fit into groups according to their preferences and needs, thereby sharing experiences about products and services. Over time, young consumers make decisions in line with their parents' decisions, becoming more equal because they begin to earn their own incomes and make purchasing decisions more independently.

Consumer behavior is stimulated and motivated by numerous economic, demographic, sociological, psychological, political, and other factors that cannot be controlled, highlighting the importance of studying consumer behavior. Researching this behavior is precisely the key way companies learn about consumers by establishing facts about their previous purchases and satisfaction with specific products and services. Many scientists study consumers with the intention of discovering new insights into consumer behavior using knowledge from psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, marketing, and others. This paper presents theoretical considerations from secondary sources on important determinants of consumer behavior and the influence of the family on consumer behavior, while the second part of the paper presents the results of primary research, testing hypotheses, and drawing conclusions with recommendations for future research.

Determinants of consumer behavior

Previšić and Ozretić Došen argue that the greatest influence on consumer behavior will come from reference groups because consumers use their values, beliefs, and norms to form their own behavior patterns. Primary and secondary groups represent those groups that have a direct influence on the individual. The primary group includes family, friends, and individuals with whom the consumer interacts daily, neighbors, and colleagues, while the secondary group consists of certain communities with which the consumer does not interact on a daily basis, such as religious and sports communities, associations, professional associations, and the like.¹

Consumer behavior models, with varying degrees of success, involve the action of different factors on behavior, determining the importance of these factors, and their interconnection. The process of making a purchase decision covers the phases and processes that consumers go through, while the analysis and examination of consumers and their behavior serve for quantitative and qualitative analysis of factors. Predicting behavior is an area that is still relatively underexplored in theory and practice, so it is necessary to focus on predicting and analyzing overall consumer behavior.²

Consumer behavior, in the broadest sense, encompasses several segments. These segments include²:

- Detection (identification) of factors influencing consumer behavior;
- Examination of the effects of factors influencing and shaping consumer behavior;
- Study of consumer behavior models;
- Decision-making processes;
- Analysis and examination of consumer behavior;
- Prediction of behavior

By detecting factors that influence consumer behavior, consumer behavior is diagnosed and predicted². This leads to the creation of new and desired consumer behavior, ultimately resulting in the creation of modified (desirable) consumer behavior. "Consumer behavior models consist of external stimuli and the consumer themselves, or their awareness. External stimuli include marketing stimuli (product, price, distribution, and promotion) and other environmental stimuli (economic, technological, and cultural). On the other hand, internal stimuli, or consumer awareness, are also important, including consumer characteristics, decision-making processes, and reactions².

There are several types of consumer behavior in purchasing. Each type has a specific course and process by which the consumer makes decisions about behavior. Decision-making styles in purchasing include²:

- Routine behavior – a form of everyday shopping and everyday products where consumers typically need little information unless it is a new or modified product, the decision-making process here is short in time with little thought, and the purchase is automated, characterized by low consumer involvement;
- Limited decision-making – involves purchasing a product that is known to the consumer in terms of type and use but the brand of that product is unknown to them, in the decision-making process here, the consumer requires additional information about the brand;
- Very limited decision-making – here, the product and brand are known to the consumer, so the decision-making process for purchasing is short in time, with very few decision-making stages and resembles routine consumer behavior;
- Extended decision-making – potential products are unfamiliar to the consumer and are rarely purchased, so it is crucial for the consumer to have a lot of information before making a final decision;
- Impulsive emotional-oriented buying – characterized by unplanned purchases where the consumer acts mostly without a pre-made plan and feels the need to buy a particular product at that moment;
- Impulsive rational-oriented buying – it does not necessarily have to be emotionally initiated, but many of these types of purchases are rational-oriented;
- Buying to reduce consumer dissonance – the consumer chooses between two or more brands with small or symbolic differences, so the consumer does

not have much time to research but chooses on the spot;

- Buying completely new products – consumers behave differently according to a range of factors;
- Buying modified products – characteristic consumer reactions differ from reactions and behavior towards completely new products, experience with products will usually determine the choice;
- Very rare purchases – once or only a few times in a consumer's life (e.g., a house), and the process by which the consumer decides on the purchase is long and complex, exposed to many pieces of information and strong influence of family, friends, and a series of other factors.²

Milas states that husbands and wives, or spouses, have the greatest influence when it comes to family decision-making³. The extent of the spouse's influence will depend on the type of product, the stage during the decision-making process, and family characteristics. When it comes to the type of individual product, in the past, jobs were categorized into products that only men buy and those that only women buy. Cars, household appliances, and tools are some of the products that men were mostly responsible for purchasing, while cleaning products and groceries were exclusively purchased by women. A joint decision is made when it comes to products with a common purpose, such as furniture. Traditional ways of decision-making and consumer behavior within a family are increasingly being lost today³.

The marketing mix consists of activities that involve the combination of certain marketing variables to meet consumer needs and satisfy their desires. One of these variables is certainly communication, which is manifested through promotion. Promotion, as part of communication with consumers, is a combination of certain activities through which a company communicates with individuals, groups, or the public. These are messages for aligning mutual needs and interests, or it is a form of communication used to inform, persuade, or remind people about certain products, services, and ideas. Thus, promotion is a form of marketing communication and represents a means by which a company communicates with potential customers and consumers. Marketing communication has multiple roles and allows companies to connect with consumers in the best possible ways⁴.

Many modern consumers trust recommendations from other consumers on social media, through comments and messages, so today the influence of social media on consumer behavior is increasingly being observed. They create positive or negative communication related to the brand, product, or service. Informatization and digitalization have affected all segments of offer creation and consumer behavior in the purchasing process because social media and the internet have brought new communication channels and the transmission of the ideal message to the target group. Consumers today find it easier to initiate communication with the desired brand, but also find it

easier to block unwanted advertising, thus creating their own communication preferences. Additionally, they easily access information and exchange opinions about a particular product and services⁵.

The influence of family communication on consumer behavior

According to Antolović and Sviličić⁶, communication "occurs within a relationship, so the quality of communication and the quality of relationships among people, as a result of communication, are always interconnected" and "occur within a context, or external world, which influences both the nature of the relationship and the nature of communication⁶. Nonverbal communication sometimes has a greater impact on making decisions than verbal communication because people often trust more in what they see than what they hear. Parents very often communicate nonverbally with their children and thus strongly influence their thoughts and behaviors. Observing different forms of nonverbal behavior, the authors Antolović and Sviličić explain how "certain components of communication influence the message ultimately conveyed by the speaker⁶:"

- First Contact – "Critical point of interpersonal communication because you never have a second chance for first contact." Establishing a relationship is much easier and faster if someone likes you at first sight, and it consists of three elements: first contact, greeting, and introduction.
- Eye Contact and Smiling – Face-to-face contact establishes communication through the eyes, through which we can learn some information about the interlocutor. Changes in pupil size, such as dilation or contraction, indicate changes in the person's mood. We also distinguish between types of directed gaze, namely: social, intimate, and dominance-directed gaze.
- Posture and Gestures – Body posture and movement nonverbally communicate how someone feels. This communicative power is called kinesics; the science of bodily movements, gestures, and posture. Since blind people use gesturing (gestures, hand, head, and body movements – facial expressions), it proves to us that it is the foundation of all communication.
- Face and Eyes – The face represents a complex channel of expression due to the multitude of expressions it can perform and because of the speed of their change. There are six basic emotions that the human face can express: happiness, sadness, anger, disgust, fear, and surprise. For example, happiness and surprise on a person's face are visible in the eyes and lower part of the face; fear and sadness in the eyes; anger on the eyebrows and forehead and on the lower part of the face; disgust on the lower part of the face. While eyes represent direct contact or communication, looking sideways indicates avoidance of contact.
- Voice and Sounds – Voice is a very important nonverbal characteristic characterized by tone, speed, volume, number of pauses, as well as the length of pauses, with

emphasis and intonation. Indeed, through the voice, communication gains real meaning because just one of the voice features in a sentence can reinforce or contradict the message being conveyed verbally.

- **Touch and Contact** – The sense of touch, whether conscious or unconscious, indicates how a person feels at a given moment. Touch as a biological need has been known since early childhood, the absence of which is visible through severe biological and emotional consequences. Contact contributes to cooperation with others; its strength lies in the multitude of messages it conveys⁶.

Research according to Gable, highlights that the best parent-child relationship is characterized by a lot of positive communication and interaction. Satisfied parents and children communicate daily, not just when a problem or conflict arises. Researchers believe that when a parent stays "in touch" with the child through attention and conversation, the child will less frequently manifest undesirable behaviors, i.e., behaviors that create conflicts or require discipline.⁷

Communication with others is the essence of human existence. Three key psychological needs of every individual, achieved in part through interpersonal communication, are⁸:

- **Competence** – reflected in the need to feel self-confident and efficient in performing certain activities.
- **Relatedness** – reflected in the need to form close relationships and bonds with people in one's environment.
- **Autonomy** – reflected in the need to feel in control of one's own destiny⁸.

Grbac and Lončarić⁹ argue that the family is one of the basic reference groups that will most influence the consumer, and that the majority of decisions about purchasing and consumption are made within it. Likewise, an individual learns about consumption itself from an early age and how to adopt certain needs and desires from other members to continue applying them throughout their lives. Family and household are most often interconnected terms, but they are not the same. For a particular community to be called a household, the members of that community must live together and cover the costs of living with their incomes. Within this framework, the family is the same as the household; however, a household may consist of individuals who are not family members, such as students in a shared apartment. Marketing professionals are most interested in the answer to which family members have the greatest influence in the decision-making process. Dominant influence on the purchase decision lies with the woman or man, and numerous decisions are made jointly or individuals make decisions about purchasing independently in a relatively equal number of cases, so it is about autonomous decision-making. The dominance of one family member in the purchase decision-making process depends on the cultural environment. In some cultures, men or women are dominant, while in others,

both partners are engaged in decision-making, and lately, there is an increasing influence of children⁹.

According to Schiffman and Kanuk¹⁰, consumer socialization is defined as the process through which children acquire knowledge, skills, and certain attitudes to function as consumers. A large number of cases indicate that pre-adolescents regard their own parents or older siblings as role models. A child can see how certain family members behave and what consumer attitudes they have, so they adopt them over time. They can also adopt them if their mother takes them shopping. Adolescents and teenagers observe their own friends in terms of consumer behavior and thus acquire shopping skills¹⁰.

In Croatia, as well as in other European countries, family occupies the first place in the hierarchy of social values. A study conducted in 1999 as part of a European values survey showed how respondents in Croatia value the family in relation to other values such as work, friends and acquaintances, leisure time, politics, and religion. According to the arithmetic mean of the ranks, the family was ranked first among all these values: it had a score of 1.22, work 1.57, friends and acquaintances 1.65, leisure time 1.85, religion 2.03. The result of this research, in which almost 83.4% of respondents were satisfied or mostly satisfied with their families, evokes optimism. Changes affecting the family, such as the reduction in the number of members, increased employment of women, pluralization of family forms, individualization of family members, and the increase in the number of single-person households, have not jeopardized the family as a fundamental value. Among members of the younger generation, perceptions and expectations of the family have changed. Young people have been socialized in the context of economic crisis and narrowed life perspectives. They increasingly rely on institutions and values they consider stronger, such as family, work, and money¹¹.

Štulec, Petljak, and Rakaric, in their research on the influence of consumer demographic characteristics on the decision-making process of purchasing, conclude that family strongly influences personality traits, attitudes, and values, and therefore consumer decisions made in the family environment. Additionally, the family determines the type of purchases made by its members. Therefore, the family is the primary human community from which most forms of future behavior, including consumer behavior, originate. The family community shapes a person in every respect, including as a consumer. What a person acquires as a habit through family relationships remains with them for their entire life, making the family factor a very important influence on consumer behavior¹².

Methodology

The aim of this study was to investigate how communication within the primary family affects the purchasing behavior of young respondents, i.e., consumers. To achieve this goal, a survey was conducted on a purposive sample

of 120 young respondents aged 18 to 28. Young respondents filled out online questionnaires during December 2023, a time when shopping activity was at its peak due to the upcoming holidays. Of the total number of respondents, 66% were female respondents, or 79 of them, and 34% were male respondents, or 41 respondents.

In terms of age structure, 55% of respondents were aged 18 to 22, and 45% were aged 23 to 28. Regarding the educational structure of the respondents, 22% had completed high school as their highest level of education, 66% had completed undergraduate studies, and 12% had completed graduate studies in our research. All 120 respondents have permanent residence in the City of Zagreb. A total of 145 online questionnaires were distributed using Google Forms. We received correctly completed 120 questionnaires, and the results were statistically processed for the purpose of testing the hypotheses. The results were tested using the Chi-square test at a significance level of 1% using IBM SPSS Statistics 25.

Analysis of Results

To achieve the goal of this study, we explored various forms of communication with family members and the influence of this communication on the purchasing habits and behavior of young respondents. Using a questionnaire, we examined the degree of communication with family members before purchasing, the significance of parents' positive opinions on the product purchased by the respondents, loyalty to the same brands of products as their parents, the frequency of shopping with family members, respect for family opinions during actual purchases, factors that have the greatest influence on their purchases, and the influence of family members on the purchasing decision of young respondents. Respondents were asked to indicate their response on a Likert scale. At the beginning of the study, three initial hypotheses were tested, and the results of this testing are presented below. Only the research results crucial for testing the hypotheses are shown in the graphs.

The first stated hypothesis, H1, is: *There is a statistically significant correlation between communication about purchasing within the family and the actual shopping trips of young respondents with family members.* For the purpose of testing hypothesis H1, young respondents were asked: How often do you communicate with your family members before making a purchase? The results are depicted in Figure 1.

The research results show that a high percentage of young respondents, 45%, always communicate with their family members before making a purchase, 30% communicate very often, 17% sometimes, 6% almost never, and the least represented are those respondents who never communicate with their family members before making a purchase, only 2% of them. For the purpose of testing hypothesis H1, young respondents were also asked: How often do you go shopping with your family members? The results are depicted in Figure 2.

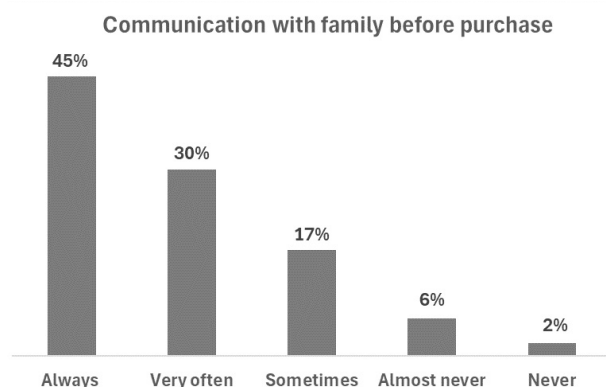


Fig. 1. Likert Scale – Respondents' attitudes about communication within the family before purchase (N=120) (Source: research conducted by the author).



Fig. 2. Likert Scale – Respondents' attitudes about going shopping with family members (N=120) (Source: research conducted by the author).

The research results show that more than half of the young respondents go shopping with their family members only when they have to, 52% of them, 26% do so once a month, 10% of young respondents go shopping with their family members once a week, 8% never, and 4% almost every day. The results of testing hypothesis H1 show that the empirical value of the Chi-square test is 171.359. The empirical significance $\alpha = 0.000$ ($4.509E-28$) = $0.000\% < 1\%$. The tabular value of the Chi-square test with a significance level of 1% is 31.99 and is less than the empirical value, indicating the presence of a statistically significant correlation, with a significance of 1%, between communication about purchasing within the family and the actual shopping trips of young participants with family members, and therefore, hypothesis H1 is confirmed.

The second stated hypothesis, H2, is: *There is a statistically significant correlation between communication within the family before purchasing and the influence of family members' opinions on the purchasing decisions of young respondents.* For the purpose of testing hypothesis H2, young respondents were asked the following question:

How often do you respect the opinions of family members during actual purchases? The results are depicted in Figure 3.

The research results show that the highest percentage of young respondents, 38%, always respect the opinions of family members during their purchases, almost always respect them 27% of them, sometimes this is the case with 17% of respondents, 13% of them almost never respect the opinions of family members, and the least of them, only 5%, never do so.

The results of testing hypothesis H2 show that the empirical value of the Chi-square test is 243.845. The empirical significance $\alpha = 0.000$ ($9.449E-43$) = $0.000\% < 1\%$. The tabular value of the Chi-square test with a significance level of 1% is 31.99 and is less than the empirical value, indicating the presence of a statistically significant correlation, with a significance of 1%, between communication within the family before purchasing and the influence of family members' opinions on the purchasing decisions of young respondents, and therefore, hypothesis H2 is also confirmed. For the purpose of our research, we examined which family member has the greatest influence on purchasing decisions among young respondents. The results are depicted in Figure 4.

The results mostly indicated expected responses, showing that among young respondents, mothers have the greatest influence on purchasing decisions (43%), followed by fathers (28%), then spouses (16%), siblings (11%), and least influential are their children (2%). The most probable reason for this is that the sample consisted of young respondents who mostly do not yet have their own children. It has been repeatedly confirmed that children are significant "consumers" who daily influence the purchasing decisions of their parents.

The third stated hypothesis, H3, is: *There is no statistically significant difference between female and male respondents in communication within the family regarding their shopping trips with family members.* First, we investigated the difference in the influence of family members

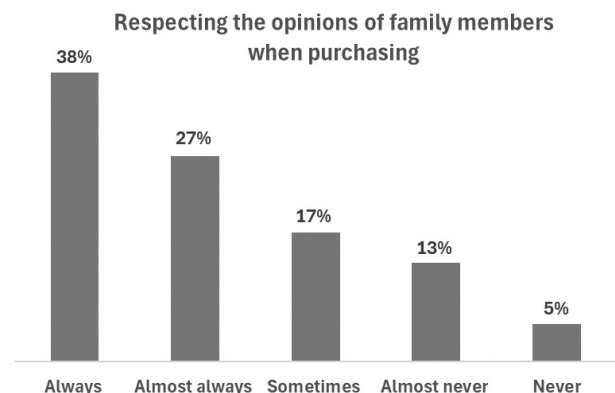


Fig. 3. Likert Scale – Respondents' attitudes about respecting the opinions of family members when purchasing (N=120) (Source: research conducted by the author).

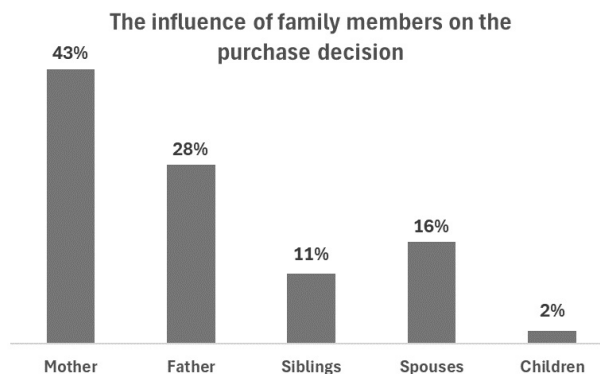


Fig. 4. Respondents' attitudes about the influence of family members on the purchase decision (N=120) (Source: research conducted by the author).

on actual purchases between female and male respondents. According to the test results, the empirical value of the Chi-square test is 3.690. The tabular value of the Chi-square test with a significance level of 1% is 13.277 and is greater than the empirical value, which means that there is no statistically significant difference between female and male respondents. Therefore, the results showed that the influence of family members on purchases is equal for male and female respondents.

Then, we investigated the influence of communication with family members before purchasing between female and male respondents. According to the test results, the empirical value of the Chi-square test is 20.260. The tabular value of the Chi-square test with a significance level of 1% is 13.277 and is less than the empirical value, indicating that there is a statistically significant difference in communication with family members before purchasing between female and male respondents.

Finally, we explored the differences in shopping trips with family members between female and male respondents. According to the test results, the empirical value of the Chi-square test is 35.028. The tabular value of the Chi-square test with a significance level of 1% is 13.277 and is greater than the empirical value, indicating that there is a statistically significant difference in shopping trips with family members between female and male respondents. Hypothesis H3 is not confirmed because there is a statistically significant difference between female and male young respondents in both communication within the family and shopping trips with family members. Young female respondents communicate more within the family before purchasing and significantly more often go shopping with their family members compared to male respondents.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of our survey research have confirmed a strong association between communication within the family before purchasing and the shopping decisions of

young consumers, as well as their desire to shop with family members. These results are highly valuable given that today's young consumers are heavily influenced by various challenges from the internet and social media, enticing promotional messages from well-known global companies, recommendations from friends, or the need to keep up with fashion trends. Even amidst all the challenges of the modern digital age, the influence of communication within the primary family still significantly impacts the shopping behavior of young consumers.

Family communication not only influences the shopping behavior of young consumers but can also deeply impact the formation of values, attitudes, and consumption habits among young people. Open and positive communication within the family can act as a platform for imparting knowledge about financial literacy, developing critical thinking about consumer decisions, and adopting responsible consumer habits. The lack of communication or negative dynamics within the family can result in unhealthy consumer habits, impulsive spending, and a lack of awareness of financial risks among young consumers.

The results of this research are important because they confirm a strong correlation between communication about purchases within the family and going shopping with family members, as well as the influence of family members' opinions on the purchasing decisions of young respondents. The results also highlight that young female respondents communicate more within the family before making purchases and significantly more often go shopping with family members compared to male respondents. The reason likely lies in the fact that young women tend to respect the opinions of their parents or other family members more when making important life decisions and communicate more within the family before going shopping. The reason may also be that young female respondents rely more on the financial support or advice of their parents, and therefore, they consult with them more often

before making purchases to ensure they make the right decisions. Going shopping with family members can be very enjoyable; it is an opportunity for spending time together and bonding within the family. Shopping can sometimes be very stressful, and the presence of family can provide a sense of security and support.

The research results have shown that parents (mothers 43% and fathers 28%) have the greatest influence on the purchasing decisions of young consumers. This result was expected given that children often make important life decisions by following their parents' lead. Parents often provide advice to their children on financial responsibility, money management, and making smart consumer decisions. They have a strong emotional bond with their children, which can further enhance their influence on consumer decisions. When making purchases, young consumers consider not only rational factors but also emotional aspects and often have a desire to please or follow the example of their parents.

This survey research also has some limitations, such as a small sample size of only 120 respondents. The gender structure of the respondents is also one of the limitations, as the sample consisted of 66% female and 34% male respondents. All respondents reside in the city of Zagreb. The results would likely be different if there were more male than female respondents in the sample and if the respondents lived in rural areas rather than in the city of Zagreb. In future research, it could be investigated which are the most effective methods of communication within the family and what are the specific mechanisms through which family communication shapes the consumer attitudes and shopping behavior of young consumers. A new survey could expand to different demographic groups of respondents from various cultures and neighboring countries to better understand the global shaping of the consumer habits of young consumers.

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ANALIZA UTJECAJA OBITELJSKE KOMUNIKACIJE NA PONAŠANJE PRI KUPNJI MLADIH POTROŠAČA

SAŽETAK

Cilj ovog rada bio je istražiti na koji način komunikacija unutar primarne obitelji utječe na ponašanje pri kupnji kod mladih ispitanika tj. potrošača. Za potrebe ostvarivanja cilja, obavljeno je anketno istraživanje na namjernom uzorku od 120 mladih ispitanika od 18 do 28 godina. Rezultati istraživanja su pokazali da postoji statistički značajna korelacija između komunikacije o kupnji unutar obitelji i odlasku mladih ispitanika u kupnju s članovima svoje obitelji te između komunikacije unutar obitelji prije kupnje i poštivanja mišljenja članova obitelji prilikom kupnje mladih ispitanika. Dodatna analiza ispitanika prema spolu pokazala je kako postoji statistički značajna razlika u odlasku u kupnju s članovima obitelji između ženskih i muških ispitanika. Ženske ispitanice puno češće odlaze u kupovinu s članovima svoje obitelji.