

# The Influence of Adult Children from “Generation Y” on the Shopping Decisions of their Parents

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## ABSTRACT

Family is one of the most important socio-cultural factors which reflects on a man's behavior. Contemporarily, young people demonstrate much more market activity. Except for doing shopping, they also play roles of advisors who influence choices of individual members of households. Most often, in spite of coming of age and leaving family home, they still have an impact on the behavior of family members. The aim of this paper is to examine the influence of children over 18 (generation “Y”) on parents' consumer decisions (generation “X” and Baby-Boomers). As a research method a quantitative survey analysis was applied which showed that children have a relevant influence on shopping decisions of adults. Moreover, there are differences in the assessment of this influence between children and parents. The degree of young people's impact on the shopping process of their parents is, among others, determined by age and sex of a child and a parent, the category of the product and its purpose. The limitation of the conducted analysis is the unrepresentative sample of respondents. The achieved results may be used by marketing specialists to deepen their understanding of consumer behavior of adult children and their parents and to properly address promotion messages.

**JEL classification:** M00, D10, D70

**Keywords:** family, generation Y, consumer behaviour, young consumers, pester power

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The topic of this article is the influence of children over 18 years old on consumer behavior of their parents. Nowadays, young people, except for being active on the primary market, where they do autonomous shopping, also function on the secondary market. This market is characterized by the influence of children on consumer behavior of their parents who, as a result of their children's pressure, fulfill their wishes.

Children are characterized by a quality called ‘a syndrome of an easy prey’. As a consequence of possessing it, they are more prone to the influence of promotion activities because they are not fully aware of the ways advertisements function. The level of their psychological development makes them prone to manipulations as their process of decision making is less rational than in case of adults (Acuff and Reiher, 2005). As a result, it is easier to influence parents' consumer behavior through the advertisements addressed to their children who later will use their pester power vis-à-vis them.

According to Ipsos research (2010), an average allowance of Polish children aged from 4 to 18 was PLN 56 a month, which is PLN 18 more than in 2004. Children used to receive money in a form of gifts from parents, grandparents or other relatives (56%), regular payments made by a father or a mother in order to fulfill their children's everyday needs (53%) or as a prize for receiving positive marks at school (13%). The oldest children aged 15–18 received higher allowance than younger ones. The results of the cited research show that children usually spend their money on sweets, while the least interest was shown in buying tickets to theatres, philharmonic halls and other cultural events.

The reason why the influence of adult children on their parents' shopping activities was chosen as the topic of this research is the fact that, so far, only the impact of children under 18 has been examined. In spite of the fact that grown up children have their own sources of income, they notoriously influence their parents' consumer behavior. That is why, it is not enough to consider their influence only in their early years of life. Besides, the decision making process of households is one of the most important topics analyzed in the consumer behavior science. The previous research concerns, among others, administering monetary means in households, the amount and the purpose of the allowance or the influence of young children on their parents' shopping decisions.

The main research problem of this paper is how and to what extent adult children influence the shopping process of their parents. In order to find an answer to this question, quantitative research on the sample of 100 children (over 18) and 100 parents was conducted. Both children and parents were included into the research sample to investigate the differences in the assessment of the level children's influence on consumer decisions of their parents between both groups.

## 2. THE INFLUENCE OF CHILDREN ON THEIR PARENTS' SHOPPING DECISIONS

The influence on parents takes place in a situation when at the request and under pressure of a child parents indulge their whims by purchasing the goods the child indicates. Marketers are aware of the importance of the influence of children when parents choose a product, so in many cases they address their promotion messages directly to them. As a result, children who are more prone to their manipulations than parents start to demand certain goods (Solomon, 2015).

Children have a significant influence on their parents' consumer decisions. Their role is noticeable while proposing certain products or services to buy, doing shopping or using the acquired products. The main factor indicating why children reach their goals does not depend on their persistence and pressure but on the type of the proposal, parents' characteristics, age of children and the course of the decision making process. The influence of children is not limited to the products meant directly for them such as sweets, snacks or cereals. They participate in choosing holidays, cars or electronic appliances (Hoyer and MacInnis, 2001, p. 382).

Attention should be paid to the fact that children often overestimate their impact on parents' decisions. In a situation when a mother or a father is particularly involved in the decision making process or is characterized by conservatism and traditionalism, the influence of the young is limited to incidental cases. The opposite situation is common among overworked or single parents who, under the pressure of time, are more prone to give in the pester power of their children. Moreover, when parents introduce a limitation on the time spent by their children on watching television, children's influence on parents gets lower (Hoyer and MacInnis, 2001, p. 382).

Blythe (2013, p. 250) distinguished eight methods in which children influence their parents: the pressure method (making threats by children); the reference to the Mighty (statement that others agreed to the request); the exchange method (a promise to do something in exchange for getting some benefits); the coalition method (looking for support among the closest people); the flattering method (making a parent happy); the rational suggestion (using logical arguments and

real evidence); the inspiring references (making references to parents' values and standards); the consultation method (a child's participation in a discussion).

According to the research conducted by Polish Program of the Service Quality (2013), 96% of Poles confirm that their children have an essential influence on their shopping decisions. Nearly one-third of them (31.2%) describe this impact as "large" and 43,6% as "average". This research shows that children's influence is dependent on their age. The older the children are, the larger the influence they have on their parents' shopping decisions. It may be caused by the fact of getting more knowledge during the years concerning available goods on the market, mainly telephones and domestic electronics. Children have an influence not only on purchasing toys but also on the choice of goods for the household, such as cars or holidays. Sixty percent of Poles declare that the choice of holidays is always consulted with their children. Children have also a great influence on the type of recreation of the whole family. They play a role in the decision process concerning such goods as furniture or clothes for parents. Besides, over 20% of the interviewees admitted that their children's suggestions have an impact on choosing a flat and 16.7% on buying a car. The reason why parents are prone to their children's suggestions is the happiness of their children. However, it may lead to making rash decisions.

The young systematically participate in making consumer decisions concerning everyday goods that may be used by the whole family. It is especially true for groceries that are often purchased a few times a week. According to the research conducted by Olejniczuk-Merta (2001, pp. 70–71), the participation of children in the decision process is not limited to the goods they will use, but their opinions are taken into consideration and they are allowed to make a final decision in many other product categories. Children's gender has an essential importance while investigating the impact they have on their parents decisions. Girls more often suggest, advise and purchase apparel, cosmetics and magazines by themselves. Boys, however, more often participate in buying sports and electronic products.

Investor Watch (2016) published a report concerning the ways in which the family and finances are seen by Generation Y and Baby Boomers. The results show the differences between the two generations' attitudes towards these topics. The Baby Boomers generation treats parents as an authority, while Generation Y regards them as friends or even peers. The representatives of Generation Y may count on financial support from their parents in many ways: health insurance (29%), buying or renting some property (29%), car insurance (26%), media (23%), holidays (19%) and funds (21%). Moreover, Generation Y is twice as much prone to come back to their family home after finishing studies. The main reason why it happens is the desire to save money. In the case of Generation Y, 73% of its representatives tend to fulfill short-term needs. They are more prone to invest in a house or buy holidays than care about their retirement and pension.

Based on the conducted review of literature, the following research hypotheses have been stated:

- H1: There are differences in the assessment of the influence on the shopping decisions in a family between parents and children.
- H2: The strength of the child's impact is age-related: the older the child is, the less influence she/he has.
- H3: Parents from Generation X are more prone to their children's influence than parents from the Baby Boomers generation.
- H4: The better the relation the parent and the child have, the bigger the child's influence on the parent's shopping decisions is.
- H5: The intensity of children's influence is connected with parents' gender: children have a bigger influence on mothers than fathers.
- H6: Children have an essential influence on the purchase of products destined for them and for the whole family, but they have a little impact on buying products designed only for their mothers or fathers.

### 3. DATA AND METHODS

In order to verify the above research hypotheses, a quantitative study was conducted. The invitations to the survey were sent to potentially defined respondents by e-mail. In order to gather the data effectively, the social networking sites, e-mails and Internet message boards were used. The first part of the questionnaire was directed to children aged from 19 to 39 (generation Y representatives) and consisted of 9 indices concerning the issues regarding: their general influence on parents' shopping decisions and their influence on purchasing certain categories of products. The second part of the questionnaire was directed to parents (aged from 40 to 70) and consisted of 11 indices concerning the same issues which were in the questionnaire for children.

The age of parents was intentionally adjusted to the aims of the research to include parents of Generation X and the Baby Boomers generation. In both samples (children and parents), 100 respondents were found. The characteristics of them in terms of gender and age are shown in Table 1. In order to analyze the collected data, the test of Pearson's chi-squared statistic and t-student test were used.

**Table 1**  
Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Children				Parents			
Gender		Age		Gender		Age (generation)	
Women	Men			Women	Men	Generation X	Baby Boom Generation
		19–21 years old	33%				
57%	43%	22–24 years old	37%	55%	45%	62%	38%
		25–32 years old	30%				

Source: own research, N = 200

### 4. RESEARCH RESULTS

Beginning with the **differences in the assessment of the influence** on shopping decisions **between children and parents**, the results show that children evaluate their own influence higher than their parents. Nearly half of the children assess their influence as “high” (31%) or “very high” (15%). Moreover, only a small number of children regard their influence as minor (1%). In the case of parents, only a few assess children's influence as “very high” (2%). Most of them chose the answer “low” (30%) or “average” (28%) (see: Table 2).

**Table 2**  
The differences in impact assessment between children and parents

	Children	Parents	Pearson's chi-squared test
Very high	15%	2%	X <sup>2</sup> = 46.165 df = 4 p = 0.0001
High	31%	27%	
Average	48%	28%	
Low	5%	30%	
Very low	1%	13%	

Source: own research, N = 200

Comparing the results of children and parents, a significant asymmetry in their assessment can be noticed. Children evaluate their influence much higher than it is assessed by their parents. This confirms the first research hypothesis (H1), which stated that there are differences in the assessment of influence between children and parents.

The analysis of the **relation between intensity of a child's influence and his/her age** shows that the percentage (30%) of children describing their influence as “very high” is the largest in the youngest age group (19 to 21 years old). The shares of older children belonging to the age groups 22–24 and 25–32 who described their influence as “very high” are only 8% and 7% respectively (see: Table 3). It means that younger children much more often than older ones regard their influence as a significant one. It is a very interesting result because in the case of younger children (aged from 9 to 19) quite an opposite phenomenon is observed, where the influence increases the older the child is (Hoyer and MacInnis, 2001, p. 383).

**Table 3**

Age of children and their influence on parents' consumer decisions (assessment of children)

The overall impact of children	Age			Pearson's chi-squared test
	19–21 years old	22–24 years old	25–32 years old	
Very low	0%	2,7%	13%	X <sup>2</sup> = 22.034 df = 8 p = 0.005
Low	3%	0%	0%	
Average	33.33%	48.65%	63%	
High	33.33%	40.54%	17%	
Very high	30.3%	8.11%	7%	

Source: own research, N = 200

The conducted analyses confirmed the second research hypothesis (H2) indicating the influence of a child's age on parents' consumer decisions. The age of a child is negatively correlated with the child's influence, which means that the older the child is, the less influence he or she has. The cause of the obtained result might be the fact that older children from Generation Y are independent and live outside the family home. They often have their own families to which they devote more their free time than to parents. The contact between children and parents weakens with the child's age, which causes an incidental influence of older children on consumer shopping decisions of their parents.

The analysis of the data concerning **the differences in estimating the influence of children on the shopping decision making between parents from generation X and Baby Boomers** shows that the highest percentage of the respondents from the Baby Boom generation described the influence of a child as “low” (34%) or even “very low” (32%), while the responders from Generation X assessed it as “average” (34%) or “high” (34%). A small percentage of younger parents (2%) describe the influence of a child as “very low”. Yet, none of the parents from the Baby Boom generation regarded the children's influence as “very high” (see: Table 4).



**Table 4**

The relation between parent's generation and children's impact assessment

The overall impact of children	Generation		Pearson's chi-squared test
	Generation X	Generation Baby Boom	
Very low	2%	32%	$\chi^2 = 22.723$ df = 4 p = 0.0001
Low	27%	34%	
Average	34%	18%	
High	34%	16%	
Very high	3%	0%	

Source: own research, N = 200

The conducted analysis confirmed the third research hypothesis (H3), concerning the existence of differences in the assessment of the influence of children made by parents from Generation X and the Baby Boom generation. Children whose parents belong to Generation X have more influence on their shopping decisions than children whose parents belong to the Baby Boom generation.

Regarding **the impact of the quality of child-parent relation on a child's influence on parents' shopping decision**, the average quality of family relations was 3.45 (on the 1 to 5 scale) for parents from Generation X and 2.82 for parents from the Baby Boom generation. The research results show a positive correlation between this index and the intensity of a child's influence (see: Table 5).

**Table 5**

Generation of parents and the index of family relations

	t	df	P
Generation/ index of the quality of family relations	4.663	98	0.0001

Source: own research, N = 200

It appears that more liberal relations between a child and a parent cause a bigger child's influence on the parent's shopping decision making process. Nowadays, the distance between parents and children is narrowing. A child is more often treated by parents as a friend than a child who has to be brought up. The consequence is that a child has more autonomy in making shopping decisions. The reason for this phenomenon might be that parents continuously want to make their child happy even at the expense of a financial loss. The conducted analyses showed that relations in a family where a parent belongs to Generation X are friendlier than in the case of the Baby Boom generation. Parents of Generation X represent a much liberal and democratic model of the family, while parents of the Baby Boom generation are more autocratic. Comparing the characteristics of the generations, it can be clearly stated that the quality of family relations affects children's influence on parents' consumer behavior. Based on the presented data, it may be stated that the fourth research hypothesis (H4) was confirmed.

Another hypothesis (H5) concerned **the relations between a parent's gender and the intensity of a child's influence**. The analysis of the gathered data showed that the highest percentage of mothers estimated a child's influence as average (40%) and another 29% of women admitted that children have a high influence on their shopping decisions. Contrary to this, the biggest percentage of men declared that a child's influence is "low" (42%) and only 24% of fathers estimated it as "high". What is interesting, none of the women indicate that a child has a "very high" impact on her shopping decisions, while this option was chosen by 4% of men (see: Table 6).

**Table 6**

The relation between parent's gender and the impact of a child on shopping decisions

	Women	Men	Pearson chi square test
Very high	0%	4.4%	X <sup>2</sup> = 13.413 df = 4 p = 0.009
High	29.1%	24.4%	
Average	40.0%	13.3%	
Low	20.0%	42.2%	
Very low	10.9%	15.6%	

Source: own research, N = 200

The fifth research hypothesis (H5) was confirmed as the existence of statistically significant differences in the assessment of a general child's influence by mother and father was proved.

The last hypothesis (H6) concerned **the relation between the intensity of a child's influence and the type of a purchased product**. Four product categories were analyzed: destined for children, mother, father and the whole family. Over half of the young people indicated that they have a "very high" influence on the choice of a product addressed to them (52%) and about one-third described it as "high" (30%). It means that a significant majority of young people are convinced that their influence on the choice of the product addressed to them is significant (see: Table 7).

**Table 7**

Product categories and the impact of children on the shopping decision

	Product category			
	For children	For mother	For father	For family
Very high	52%	11%	8%	20%
High	30%	29%	25%	37%
Average	10%	40%	32%	37%
Low	6%	11%	26%	4%
Very low	2%	9%	9%	2%

Source: own research, N = 200

As far as products designed for mothers are concerned, a significant majority of young people described their influence as "average" (40%) or "high" (29%), and in the case of the products for fathers, the biggest percentage of young people estimated their influence as "average" (32%) or "low" (26%). The last product category is the one intended for the whole family. In this case, children estimated their influence as "average" (37%) or "high" (37%). Summing up all the above results, the last research hypothesis (H6) was confirmed. Children have the biggest influence on buying products addressed to them or the whole family and the child's influence on purchasing products for mothers is bigger than on purchasing products for fathers.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The aim of the conducted research was to examine the influence of children from Generation Y on the consumer decision making process of their parents.

The research hypothesis about the existence of differences in the assessment of the influence made by parents and children was confirmed. Children consider their influence as more

considerable than parents. On the one hand, a lot of parents make their children believe that they have a large influence on their shopping decisions because they do not want the child to feel rejected (Hoyer and MacInnis, 2001, p. 382). That may be a reason why children overestimate their real influence. On the other hand, parents may underestimate their children's influence for fear of losing authority in a child's eyes.

Another hypothesis concerned the relation between a child's age and his or her influence. It was confirmed that the influence of a child under 19 is negatively correlated with age. The reason why this phenomenon appears is that older children are more independent and live outside the family home. Thus, their contact with parents weakens and only occasionally do they have a chance to influence their parents' consumer decisions.

The hypothesis stating that parents representing Generation X are more prone to the influence of their children than parents from the Baby Boom generation was confirmed. It should be noticed that children of the representatives of the Baby Boom generation are older and exert less influence on parents than it happens in the case of children of parents from Generation X. The older a child is, the more occasional influence he or she exerts on parents. The differences in the assessment of children's influence may also derive from the characteristics of these two generations. The representatives of the Baby Boom generation are traditionalists. According to them, the family household is based on the traditional splitting of roles where a woman is a mother and a wife. Similarly interpreted is the role of a child, whose main duty is the execution of orders imposed by parents. Therefore, parents do not let children make individual decisions and often ignore their opinions (Dziewanowska and Kacprzak, 2013, p. 54). It is quite opposite in the case of parents from Generation X. The representatives of this cohort experienced a certain revolution, which made them give up the conservatism and the traditionalism of the previous generation. That is why, their relations with children have become friendlier. Those parents regard their children as the most important members of the family and allow children to decide in many aspects concerning not only their own lives but also the ones of their parents (Van Den Bergh and Behrer, 2011, pp. 22–24).

The analysis of the research results also shows that the better the quality of the relations between children and parents is, the bigger influence on parents' shopping decision a child has. Nowadays, the distance between an adult and a child is reduced, which is why children have more autonomy and the happiness of their child is the most important to parents (Tapscott, 2008).

The hypothesis regarding the influence of a parent's gender on the assessment of the influence of a child was confirmed. Mothers declared higher children's impact on their shopping decisions than fathers. The reason may be that mothers are more submissive to the instigation of children. Children also more often accompany their mothers than fathers during the shopping and thanks to that they have more opportunity to influence them.

The analysis of the respondents' answers also confirmed the last hypothesis stating that children have the biggest influence on purchasing products designed for them and for the whole family. Their limited knowledge restricts their influence on purchasing products for other members of family.

## 6. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The first limitations of the study that should be taken under consideration is undoubtedly the unrepresentative sample of respondents. The research was conducted on a relatively small and not randomly chosen sample of 100 parents and 100 children, which is why it should be treated as exploratory and repeated on a larger and representative group of respondents. Another limitation of the study is of psychological nature. Parents unwillingly admit that their children are brought up in a liberal way and they co-decide in all aspects of the family life. The children might also



have inaccurately defined the level of their influence. It is the parent who finally makes consumer decisions and it is hard to estimate the real influence of a child.

The subject of a child's influence on parents' consumer decisions was mostly researched on the group of children up to 18 years old. Yet, it must be remembered that nowadays children leave their family home later than before and still even after leaving home they affect their parents' decisions. Currently, young people make up a meaningful market activity group. Not only do they administer their own funds, purchase goods for themselves but also influence the family shopping. Deepening the knowledge about these phenomena may contribute to more accurate advertising.

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