

Varazdin Development and Entrepreneurship Agency and University North  
in cooperation with  
Polytechnic "Nikola Tesla" in Gospić  
Faculty of Management University of Warsaw  
Faculty of Law, Economics and Social Sciences Sale - Mohammed V University in Rabat  
Polytechnic of Medimurje in Cakovec



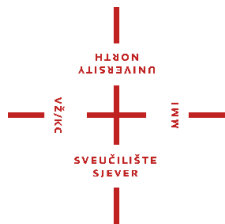
# Economic and Social Development

84<sup>th</sup> International Scientific Conference on Economic and Social Development

## Book of Proceedings

Editors:

Vlatka Ruzic, Branislav Sutic, Dean Uckar



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## REPRESENTATION OF SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE MARKETING TOWARDS CHILDREN IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The challenge of the economy depends on continuously attracting new customers, and attracting new customers starts from an early age. Children are an important factor in attracting new customers because their explicit requirements can influence parents to buy more expensive goods and decide with parents when buying products. That is why consumerism has become a cultural and social ideology of seducing children and youth. Consumers are manipulated to the point of buying and accumulating unnecessary things. By creating marketing campaigns for children, in addressing families, marketing professionals use emotions, especially parental love. That's why marketers are aware that kids will get products by constantly repeating requests, so they expose them to numerous ads to encourage purchase. They want to position themselves in children's consciousness, knowing that children significantly influence their parents through their influence. From the above we come to the key problem of modern society, which is also a problem of this research and that is the impact of marketing advertising on the consciousness of children, which encourages pressure of buying by parents and guardians. The aim of the research in this paper is to prove that socially responsible marketing to children is not sufficiently represented in the Republic of Croatia and children have a great influence on the decision to buy their parents. Empirical research on a representative sample, consisting of parents, surveys and the application of statistical methods, will try to scientifically prove the extent to which socially responsible marketing is represented in the Republic of Croatia; then to what extent children, with their parents, influence the purchase of toys and branded clothing; and whether parents spend more on home budget to buy toys and luxury products.*

**Keywords:** *socially responsible marketing, consumerism, children consumers, marketing advertising, buying incentives*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The future success of a company depends on how successfully it will motivate its consumers and create new markets. Given today's environment, companies strive to attract their customers from an early age. Children constitute a particularly interesting market segment given that children are estimated to participate in consumption totaling 2 trillion dollars (Buckingham, Miliša i Spasenovski, 2017). Children get money from adults who can spend as much as they want and significantly influence their family when making a purchase decision. Children will become independent consumers in the future, so it is important for marketing professionals to create their loyalty. Today, advertisers directly target the youngest population and use sophisticated technologies and techniques that are beyond the scope of conventional marketing. In such conditions, children learn from an early age how to become a consumer given that they are exposed to the market and consumption. Advertisers justify such actions by claiming that children are increasingly empowered through children's rights and claim that they actually respond only to the wishes and needs of consumers that have been neglected for years

(Buckingham, Miliša i Spasenovski, 2017). The subject of this paper is the influence of children on the purchase of parents. We will also point out the extent to which socially responsible marketing is represented in the Republic of Croatia. This is proven by empirical research on a sample of 241 respondents, parents. As an instrument research uses a questionnaire with a Likert scale of intensity from one to five.

## 2. THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

The future of the economy and consumer style depends on the continuous attraction of new customers, and attracting new customers starts at an early age. Parents are in a situation where they have to accept materialism as an integral part of life, given that they spend less and less time with their children because of work and therefore buy them desirable things to make up for lost time with them. They leave children to the influence of the media, which is used by marketing experts to please children (Bašić, 2018). It can be said that children learn about consumption from infancy, given that most parents already take their children to supermarkets where they are exposed to numerous stimuli. Already at the age of 2 to 3, parents determine ways to meet their children's needs. At the age of 3 to 4, children under the influence of the media as well as mental and awareness development, begin to ask their parents to buy them certain things. At the age of 5 to 6, children already often influence decisions of buying by their parents, aunts, grandparents. Children up to the age of 9, and even later, do not develop the ability to think critically about their purchasing decisions and are exclusively guided by their desires (Bašić, 2018). Deborah Roedder states the following stages of consumer socialization: (1. Perceptive - covers the period from 3 to 7 years of a child's life and is characterized by a focus on currently available products, a preference for well-known brands and stores that he knows superficially; 2. Analytical - covers the period from 7 to 11 years. During this period, children go through a number of cognitive and social changes. Children begin to understand the motives of advertisers and perceive several different dimensions of products and services. Decisions are made after deliberation; 3. Reflective - covers the period from 11 to 16 years. Young people at that age are aware of the social aspect of the market. Through the consumption of brands, they try to stay integrated into their environment. Children are interesting to producers and the marketing industry because although children do not earn their own money, they come to meet it through gifts, pocket money and occasional household chores that they do for them, family or neighbors in agreement with their parents. Children are also an important factor because their influence can encourage parents to buy more expensive goods and co-decide with parents when buying goods (Miliša & Spasenovski, 2017). Consumerism has become a cultural and social ideology of seducing children and youth. In the most developed countries, consumers are manipulated to the point of buying and accumulating unnecessary things. The marketing industry has done everything to make children consumers. The role of the child in America has changed significantly and they have become pillars of the consumer economy with economic power equal to that of their parents. The influence of consumerism is also felt in schools in the United States as they have become a place where many commercial companies that use school space for their own benefit are publicly advertised. The school has thus ceased to be exclusively educational - the educational institution has already become a place where companies directly address children as consumers (Miliša & Spasenovski, 2017). Children are faced with media manipulation on a daily basis while watching a cartoon in a situation where in the most exciting part of the cartoon, the cartoon is interrupted and an advertisement for new toys, sneakers or food is shown. Media manipulation is defined as a designed process in which the manipulator transmits through various media symbolic means that affect consciousness and behavior. The manipulator replaces real needs with fake ones and does so by various symbolic means such as advertisements, commercials, creating an image of idols, etc.

How powerful advertisements are can be seen in the example of Coca Cola which has become a global phenomenon promoting consumer culture. For decades, it has been synonymous of entertainment with accompanying cool messages: refreshing, youthful, delicious (Miliša & Tolić, 2009). Socially responsible marketing and socially responsible business policy of the company is not only a passing trend but as such has an impact on the implementation of responsible corporate strategy. Corporate social responsibility has become an important reflection and identity of every successful manager and the company as a whole (Vinšalek Stipić, 2017). Today, there are a large number of shows, especially cartoons, in which the main characters are available in stores. In addition to toys, it is possible to find a large number of accompanying products on the market with printed characters from cartoons. In this way, children create a connection with familiar characters, and will require their parents to buy products that have these characters. Before the age of two, as many as 74% of children start watching television, and about half of these children watch television every day. Children between the ages of eight and eighteen use the media daily or even several at a time for six and a half hours a day. Advertisements during and between cartoons and children's shows blur the line between programming and marketing. The same technique is used in video games with disguised advertising (Oroz Štancl, 2014). With the sharp increase in the involvement of children and adolescents in consumer culture, the question arises whether the rapid expansion is sufficient to form new approaches to childhood that include a revised relationship between parents and children (Dadić, 2013). Contemporary sociological theoretical considerations of family relations are focused on the analysis of broader structural and social changes and on determining their impact on the functioning of the family. As a consequence of post-industrialization and postmodernism, there has been a change in the relationships of modern families (Bašić, 2018). Important features of postmodern families are the following (Zeitli, 1995); 1. Indifference of adolescents towards family; 2. Instability of marital union; 3. Liberalization of women. Postmodern families are numerically smaller, less dependent on blood ties, communicate more often through electronic devices, have a high level of privacy and choice, participate in many symbolic, psychological and social contexts, and develop different identities. However, regardless of the contemporary changes that have affected it, the family still remains a group of two or more persons connected by birth, marriage or adoption, and living together. All families adopt certain patterns of communication in mutual understanding, functioning and socialization of its minor members (Bašić, 2018). Today's children as consumers are unique compared to all generations before them in that their purchasing decisions are significantly influenced by social networks that have become a global communication phenomenon. Their main feature is that they are universal means of communication and techniques, and their common interest is to keep groups of people together. The Internet and social networks have significantly changed the understanding of communication. The Internet used to be used for information purposes, and today it is becoming a means of communication. During 2019, of the total population, about 67% of people used mobile phones, and 57% of the population used the Internet. There are 45% of active users of social networks. Saudi Arabia has the highest social network penetration in 2019, at 99%, while the global average is 45%. Social networks reach a large number of people and occupy an important position in the promotion of products and services. Social media marketing involves the use of social networking platforms that connect with the audience in order to build a brand, increase sales or drive online traffic (Mesarić, 2019). Children belong to a vulnerable consumer group and it is important to assess the ways in which marketing managers can implement CSR-related activities to generate value for their various stakeholders (Sanclemente-Téllez, 2017). In the long run, modern capitalism not only requires companies to profit as much as possible, but also pays more and more attention to the social and environmental problems of business.



It refers to meeting the social and environmental needs of the wider community (Vinšalek Stipić, 2019). Linking the concept of CSR with the concept of marketing seeks to develop a meaningful relationship with customers and other stakeholders (Podnar & Golob, 2007).

### **3. PREVIOUS RESEARCH**

In the middle of the twentieth century, research into the behavior of children as consumers began. The first studies published investigated children's loyalty to a particular brand, the influence of children on the Research of Children's Consumerism appears in the 90s of the 20th century as part of the discipline of media studies or as part of research for commercial purposes. Child Development (1997) finds a link between increased materialism and anxiety, feelings of fear, lack of satisfaction, withdrawal, sadness in children. A high degree of involvement in consumerism leads to bad relationships with parents that lead to depression, anxiety as well as increased levels of family stress. Consumerism is associated with reduced self-confidence of children in the field of peer relationships and the possibility of extreme violence (Dadić, 2013). Psychologists in their research point to the negative consequences for children's mental and physical health caused by commercial activities. Miliša and Spasenovski (2017) therefore point out that the youngest population becomes a victim of aggressive manipulative marketing industry and that consumerism is an important pedagogical issue and that it is necessary to find an answer how to empower children in modern consumerist environment. According to research conducted in the United States, children between the ages of 8 and 14 spend 150-160 billion dollars on their pocket money in one year, and their decisions contribute to spending 600 billion dollars a year. Globally, children participate in spending a total of 2 trillion dollars. Children under the age of 12 directly affect spending of 700 billion dollars. This amount is equivalent to the cumulative sum of 115 poorest economies in the world. During the 1960s, children aged 4 to 14 influenced their parents' spending 5 billion dollars, during the 1970s that amount jumped to 20 billion dollars, while in 1984 that amount was 50 billion dollars. Research conducted in the UK shows that children aged 7 to 16 spend around 80 million pounds, an increase of 600% over 20 years (Miliša & Spasenovski, 2017). Surreptitious advertising is a fast-growing industry worth several million dollars. According to a 2012 study made by P. Media (2012), the value of surreptitious advertising was 8.25 billion dollars. In 2006, television advertising was the first choice of marketing experts, and 71% of advertising was related in this way. By covert advertising, products and services are placed within the store of educational, informative or entertaining content and subtly impose on the viewer ads that are perceived subconsciously (Oroz Štancl, 2014). Marketing experts are aware that children will receive products by constantly repeating requests so they expose them to numerous advertisements to encourage purchase. Psychologists, sociologists, child behavior experts and marketing experts work together to find ways to develop children's interest in brands. They want to position themselves in children's consciousness, knowing that children significantly influence their parents through their influence. For example, neuromarketing scientists calculate the number of blinks that children make when watching a particular commercial. If the number of blinks is large then they change the ad to achieve a greater hypnotic effect. The average American child was exposed to over 3,000 commercials by the mid-1990s, while today the average American child under 12 watches between 25,000 and 40,000 television commercials a year, while the average British child of the same age sees 10,000. A study conducted in 2003 proved that children whose parents turn off the TV for 48 hours significantly reduced their requests to buy new toys (Miliša & Spasenovski, 2017). Neuromarketing, as a scientific discipline in the field of marketing research, represents an application of neuroscientific methods, for the purpose of better understanding human behavior. As a sublimation of two scientific disciplines – consumer behavior and Neuroscience - Neuromarketing replaces traditional types of marketing research (Šola, 2013).

A GfK study conducted in Croatia showed that children aged 11 to 13 have an average allowance of HRK 200. Also, it was noticed that among them there is a high world about brands among which the most significant are Nike and Adidas. Of the total number of respondents, 84% watch television commercials, and 58% pay attention to large advertising posters. In the Republic of Croatia, watching television is the second leisure activity of children aged 11 to 15. Research indicates that children from families belonging to social minorities or of lower socioeconomic status have a higher risk of advertising influence. Likewise, active advertising of food products leads to higher levels of obesity in children (Dadić, 2013).

#### **4. METHODOLOGY AND MODEL SPECIFICATION**

In accordance with the theoretical approach, the aim of this paper is to prove that socially responsible marketing to children is not sufficiently represented in the Republic of Croatia and that children have a great influence on the decision of buying by their parents. Based on the above, the following research hypotheses were set:

- *H1 – Socially responsible marketing towards children is not sufficiently represented in the Republic of Croatia*
- *H2 – Children largely driven by marketing tricks have a significant impact on their parents' decision to buy toys and branded clothing*
- *H3 – To buy toys and luxury products for children, parents spend more than the possibilities of the household budget*
- *H4 – The purchase of luxury products for children is significantly statistically related to the amount of the parents' household budget*

The empirical research was conducted by a survey on a sample of 241 respondents in the period from March 1 to April 30, 2022. The survey questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part consists of a group of questions about the age, gender of the respondents, the number of children and the amount of the household budget. The second part of the questionnaire consists of a group of questions about the preferences for the consumption of necessities and luxury products for children, where the answers are offered by Likert's scale of intensity: 1 - I absolutely disagree; 2 - I do not agree; 3 - I neither agree nor disagree; 4 - I agree; 5 - I absolutely agree. The third part consists of questions about personal opinion for buying toys, sweets and branded clothes. In research participated 81.7% of women and 18.3% of men. According to the age group, there are at least those aged 56 and over, 1.2% of them and then those aged 18 to 25, is 2.5%. It is followed by respondents aged 46 to 55 years 14.5%, 32.8% of respondents aged 26 to 35 years. The largest number of respondents belongs to the age group of 36 to 45 years, 49% or absolutely 118 respondents. Respondents by number of children are shown in Graph 1, which shows that most of those are with two children, 112 respondents, and Graph 2 shows the amount of income of household respondents.

*Graph following on the next page*

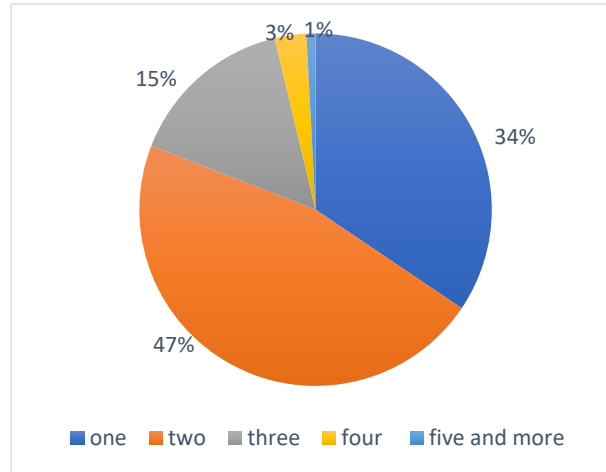
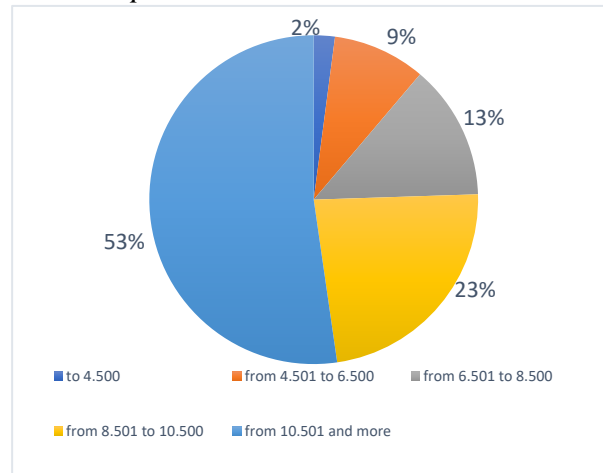
*Graph 1: Presentation of the number of children from the respondents**Source: Author's work**Graph 2: Household income in HRK**Source: Author's work*

Table 1 shows the structure of the second part of the questionnaire for obtaining perceptions of household budget spending, the impact of children on the purchase, as well as socially responsible marketing in the Republic of Croatia. Based on the hypotheses, it was necessary to calculate the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.830, which tells us about the reliability of the measuring instrument.

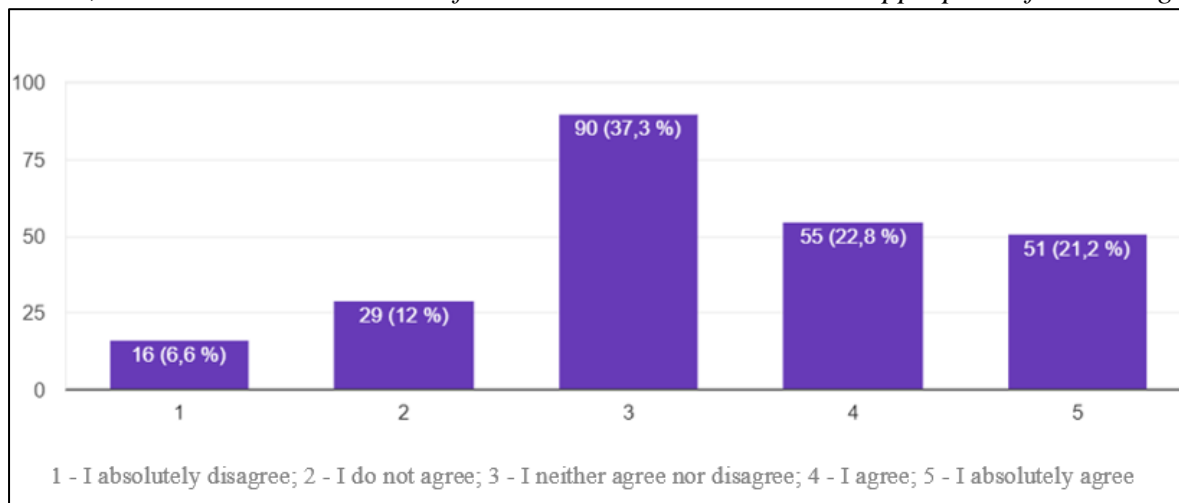
*Table 1: Questionnaire questions for measuring the reliability of a measuring instrument*

Number of questions	Question
1.	You spend most of your household budget on food, utilities and hygiene supplies
2.	To a large extent, your child influences the decision to buy food on a daily basis
3.	Extremely often, once a week or more you buy toys
4.	When watching advertisements, your child is extremely persistent in asking you to buy the advertised product
5.	Almost always meet the demands of the child caused by advertisements from the public media
6.	To buy toys and luxury products for children, spend more than the possibilities of the home budget
7.	You buy your child branded products more than yourself
8.	Socially responsible marketing in the Republic of Croatia is not at a satisfactory level, advertisements intended for children are not ethical and appropriate for their age

*Source: Author's work*

As children are a socially vulnerable group, the question of implementing socially responsible marketing towards children is often asked, so the H<sub>1</sub> hypothesis has been proven. The data obtained from the survey conducted on a sample of 241 respondents show: 44% of respondents agree that socially responsible marketing to children is not at a satisfactory level; while 18.7% of respondents do not agree with this statement while a significant part of undecided are undecided, as shown in Graph 3. From the above it can be concluded that hypothesis H1 – Socially responsible marketing in Croatia is not satisfactory, ie advertisements for children are not ethical and age-appropriate is confirmed.

*Graph 3: Socially responsible marketing in the Republic of Croatia is not at a satisfactory level, ie advertisements intended for children are not ethical and appropriate for their age*



*Source: Author's work*

By processing the survey data shown in Table 2, it can be seen that 146 respondents spend most of their household budget on food and hygiene items, while in 44 respondents children have a great influence on the decision to buy food, in 26 respondents children have no influence to buy food and 79 respondents neither agree nor disagree with the stated statement. For frequent toy purchases (once a week) 7.5% of respondents said yes and when we add respondents who answered (nor agree/nor disagree) we come to the fact that 21.5% of respondents often buy toys (once a week). When watching advertisements, a very persistent child asks to be bought an advertised product, 64.3% disagree with this statement and 22% of respondents agree with this statement. Twenty respondents almost always meet the demands of the child caused by advertisements from the public media, while 173 respondents disagree with this statement. Eighteen respondents, or 7.5% of respondents, spend more than they can afford to buy toys and luxury products for children, and 197 or 81.7% of them disagree, while 10.8% of respondents are undecided with this statement. For the purchase of branded products more for themselves than for the child, the following results were obtained: 120 respondents disagree, 68 agree with the statement and 53 respondents are undecided.

*Table following on the next page*

*Table 2: Display of the degree of agreement with individual statements from the survey questionnaire*

Q	Absolutely disagree	Disagree	Nor agree/nor disagree	Agree	Absolutely agree
1.	1,7	2,9	12,9	22	60,5
2.	10,8	14,1	32,7	24,1	18,3
3.	52,4	26,1	14,1	4,1	3,3
4.	39	25,3	13,7	13,7	8,3
5.	43,2	28,6	19,9	5	3,3
6.	65,5	16,2	10,8	5,8	1,7
7.	33,1	16,6	22	18,3	10

*Source: Author's work*

From the above, it can be concluded that the hypothesis H<sub>2</sub> – Children are largely driven by marketing tricks have a significant impact on the decision to buy toys and branded clothing from their parents has not been confirmed. Hypothesis H<sub>3</sub> – To buy toys and luxury products for children, parents spend more than the possibilities of the household budget has not been confirmed. Demonstration of hypothesis H<sub>4</sub> was performed by linear correlation analysis and simple regression model of variables Household income (H\_income) and buying branded products for children (Buy\_brend).

*Table 3: Simple regression model of the variables H\_income and Buy\_brand*

Model Summary <sup>b</sup>										
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			Sig. F Change	Durbin-Watson
						F	df1	df2		
1	,162 <sup>a</sup>	,026	,022	1,07308	,026	6,439	1	239	,012	2,229

a. Predictors: (Constant), H\_income

b. Dependent Variable: Buy\_brend

*Source: Author's work*

The analysis of linear correlation shows that there is no linear connection between the variables of household budgets and the purchase of branded products for children. The regression model shows a positive but weak statistical correlation (0.162) coefficient of determination closer to zero than one and we can not talk about good representativeness of the model, in fact variations of the dependent variable Buy\_brand are not a significant result of variations of the independent variable H\_income, and Durbin-Watson is 2,229, which means that no autocorrelation of relation errors was found in the sample. The indicator of independent variations with the number of degrees of freedom (1,239) and the level of significance 0.05 concludes that the independent variable height of the household budget statistically significantly predicts variations of the dependent variable buying branded clothing for children ( $F_{1, 239} = 6,439$ ; Sig. <0.001). Based on statistical testing of hypothesis H<sub>4</sub>, it can be said that it has not been confirmed, the purchase of luxury products for children is not significantly statistically related to the amount of household budget of parents. By analyzing the third part of the survey questionnaire on spending on sweets, toys and branded clothing the following results were obtained. The largest number of surveyed parents stated that 53.9% spend the most on sweets, 25.7% spend on toys and 20.3% spend the most on branded clothes. When asked which purchase of products they consider a mistake, 47.7% of them consider the purchase of branded clothing to be a mistake, 27.8% consider the purchase of toys to be a mistake and 24.1% consider the purchase of sweets to be a mistake.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Numerous authors in their scientific research point to the fact that consumer culture is the period with which today's generations grow up. Consumption becomes everyday and consumerism begins to affect all segments of life. Marketing professionals strive to recognize the needs and desires of consumers and strive to create the affection of their consumers from an early age. The media have become intermediaries between marketers and end consumers in a way that combines information with the entertainment and commercial aspects and is often subject to its power. Today, advertisers are directly targeting the youngest populations by teaching them how to become consumers of their products. The implementation of empirical research on a sample of 241 respondents in the Republic of Croatia found that socially responsible marketing in the Republic of Croatia is not at a satisfactory level, in fact advertisements intended for children are not ethical and appropriate for their age. Furthermore, children largely driven by marketing gimmicks do not have a significant impact on their parents' decision to buy toys and branded clothing, while to buy toys and luxury products for children, parents spend no more than the household budget options. Also, the purchase of luxury products for children is not significantly statistically related to the amount of household budget of parents. Today, there are legal restrictions on child-centered communication, and a number of provisions have been developed to protect children from lack of life experience, gullibility, and violation of parental authority. However, advertisers are interested in children because of their high purchasing power and abuse of their naivety, and seek to position themselves in their consciousness in the long run.

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