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The impact of family forms on interpersonal influence between single parent and full families¹

1. Introduction

The relationship between individual thoughts and the social environment has been widely studied in sociology (Weber, 1968), psychology (Lewin, 1951) and social psychology. The influence of reference groups on individual behaviour is often manifested in the decisions made by consumers. Members of these reference groups are often the individual's friends and acquaintances. Their decisions, their values and norms serve as an example for the individual. Two clear types of social influence have been identified in the associated literature. In 1955, Deutsch and Gerard made a clear distinction between normative and informational influences. Where informational influence is the individuals' acceptance of information from others and their perception that this is true and valid. Normative influence is the positive expectation from the social environment on individuals' conformity. In this study the influences of reference groups are examined within the context of the family form in Hungary. Within the EU, Hungary represents a strong example of the Central Eastern Region based on GDP per inhabitant (Eurostat 2009) or the trends of changing of family form (Eurostat 2010). Furthermore, the countries of Central Eastern Europe are moving to a more developed status, which means that a review of reference group influences and family communication patterns across different family settings in Hungary may offer a useful tool for comparative study in a broader context. This paper focuses on the nature of peer influence in single parent households and full families, to analyse the normative and informational dimensions of peer pressure and communication patterns within the family.

2. Theoretical background

2. 1. Group influence on the consumer behaviour of individuals

The influence of groups on the consumer behaviour of the individuals has been identified through early marketing academic research (Moschis 1976; Witt 1969; Stafford 1966). Additionally, the normative and informational nature of peer influence is widely analysed in marketing and management studies (e.g. Burnkrant and Cousineau 1975, Bearden et al. 1989, LaTour and Manrai 1989, Lascu et al. 1995, Clark and Goldsmith 2006, Hoffmann and Broekhuizen 2009, Goodrich and Mangleburg 2010, Shukla 2011), however, the understanding of the relationship between the influence of family form and the influence of peer groups is less developed.

In their study in the 70s, Burnkrant and Cousineau (1975) concluded that people use others' recommendations as a source of information about products. LaTour and Manrai's study on forms of donation (1989) identified a relationship between donation behaviour and both normative and informational influences. Clark and Goldsmith (2006) studied susceptibility to interpersonal influence in the field of global innovativeness and concluded that innovativeness is negatively associated with normative interpersonal influences and positively associated with susceptibility to informational influences. Bearden et al. (1989) have developed and tested a two-dimensional scale as a general measure of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence. Their scale or part of the scale is widely used to assess the impact of peer groups on individual's behaviour (e.g. Boush et al. 1994, Day and Stafford 1997, Lastovicka 1999).

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Family communication research includes two branches of communication styles: socio oriented and concept oriented approaches (Bristol and Mangleburg 2005). Prior studies have found that socio-oriented family environments are more affected by normative peer influences (Bristol and Mangleburg 2005), however when we consider a concept-oriented environment we can see a much higher rate of parental influence (Aribarg et al. 2002). Goodrich and Mangleburg (2010) evaluated both parental and peer influence on teen purchasing behaviour and confirmed that the family communication environment has an effect on the normative influence for teens.

2.2. Change of family form and its impact on consumption

Family as a living entity and social institution is changing continuously. Changes concern, among others, the structure and the functions of the family, the roles within the family and the decision-making process. In addition, it influences household consumption patterns and economics. Over the past several decades there have been considerable changes in single-person households, single parents, pre-marital birth, divorces and age of first marriage, which has generated significant changes in the form of families. This holds true also for the Hungarian society, according to the data of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO 2010) where we can see, that since 2000 the ratio of unmarried people has increased from 26.4% to 31.7%. While at the same time the ratio of those divorced has risen from 9.3% to 10.5% and nearly 40% of new-born babies were born out of wedlock during 2008. The study of consumer behaviour should be adapted to include these changes. As Belch – Willis (2001) empirically documented, the changes in the family affects decision-making within the household. Among others, gender roles altered and women gained more influence on purchasing. Current research study aims to understand the influence of family form on the impact of peer groups.

3. Empirical study

3.1. Methodology

The empirical study was conducted in Hungary during summer 2010. Online data collection was carried out, which was able to provide reliable data due to the 55% Internet penetration rate in Hungary. However, the results are valid only on Internet users. Data collection involved targeting a representative sample of Hungarian Internet users between the ages of 18 and 69. In total 1250 questionnaires were carried out part of a more extended study. The family form was evaluated by the registration of co-living family members like partner/spouse, children (own- and stepchildren), parents, and other relatives. Peer influence was measured by the Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel scale (1989) with eight statements for the normative dimension and four statements for the informational dimension. Family communication patterns were evaluated using the Ritchie and Fitzpatrick (1990) scale which includes ten statements of socio-orientation and thirteen statements of concept orientation attributes. Both scales were translated into Hungarian using the back-translation procedure and they use a five-point response format. The research questions were the following: (1) Measuring the informational and normative nature of interpersonal influences, (2) Measuring the relationship between communication patterns and peer influence, (3) Evaluating the effects of family form on interpersonal influences.

3.2. Primary results and future analysis

The Bearden, Netemeyer, Teel (1989) interpersonal susceptibility scale proved to be reliable in the Hungarian sample. In our study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was 0.79 for the informational sub-dimension, and was 0.89 for the normative sub-dimension. The family

communication pattern scale showed an alpha score of 0.78 for socio orientation and 0.85 for concept orientation. According to Nunally (1978) the most widely accepted alpha reading should fall between 0.7 and 0.9. And as such, our subscales can be accepted. The mean scores, standard deviations and reliability estimates for the total sample and for both scales are summarized in Table 1. The data was analysed in two distinct stages. The first stage of the evaluation involved an investigation into the relationship between family communication style (with four distinct patterns combined from the two aforementioned dimensions, see Table 2) and susceptibility for interpersonal influences. The second part of the data analysis studied the impact of family form (single-parent families and full families) both on the family communication patterns and on the susceptibility for interpersonal influence. These relationships were evaluated through the analysis of variance (ANOVA), while the statistical significance at $p < 0.5$ was assessed for all tests.

Based on the results (see Table 3) we can see that the protective (34.1%) and the consensual (33.8%) communication patterns are the most popular among the total sample. Pluralistic families (17.4%) achieve the third position, while the laissez-faire style is the least popular (14.7%). These findings are not too dissimilar to Shearman and Dumlao's (2008) US results, where the consensual (34.9%) family type was the most common, followed by the protective (27.5%) and the pluralistic (23.7%) family types. Cross-table statistics suggest a weak significant relationship between family form (single-parent or full families) and family communication style ($\chi^2=0.096$, $p<0.5$). This result indicates that consensual and pluralistic communication styles describe full families more than both single-parent households and the total sample (see Table 3). These two styles relate to high concept orientation, which means that full families lay more emphasis on the encouragement of childrens' own views. This is noteworthy, because prior studies concluded that in single-parent families the children are more involved in the decision-making process (Tinson et al. 2008) and shop more often both with their parent and alone (Ahuja et al. 1998). When gender was controlled during the analysis, that was no significant difference measured.

The susceptibility to peer influence varies significantly by family communication patterns in both dimensions (informational influence: $F=6.6$, $p<0.5$, $\eta^2 = 0.02$ and normative influence: $F=15.9$, $p<0.5$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$). The susceptibility to normative influence is higher in protective and consensual families (where parental authority is more important) than in laissez-faire and pluralistic families. These findings are in line with the results of Bristol and Mangleburg (2005), despite the fact that they used a teen sample in the US. Among single parents ($N=94$), similar results are found, although the relationship is statistically significant only in the normative dimension ($F=4.76$, $p<0.5$, $\eta^2 = 0.14$). The original conclusion relating to family communication patterns remains valid within this group, as the normative influence better describes the protective and consensual families. In full families (married or cohabiting couples with children) the results are similar suggesting that only the normative peer influence is significant ($F=5.56$, $p<0.5$, $\eta^2 = 0.04$). Interestingly, in this group the susceptibility to normative influence differs to a lesser extent across family communication patterns than in single-parent families. The results from laissez-faire families are more closely linked to the first two groups (protective and consensual families) which implies that in full families despite the lack of parent-child communication, the tendency towards conformity is higher.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the latent and manifest factors of interpersonal influence and its relationship to family forms, further studies would be required. The present study is limited as a consequence of not being able to generalize the results. The external validity of the findings is restricted by the fact that the data was collected through the Internet. Nevertheless, due to the main objective being the study and testing of the scales, the online sample can be considered appropriate. Additional limitations could include the measurement tool itself, which is a survey while an experimental setting would support the

analyses of casual relationships. Future research should focus on the differential effects of the normative and informational interpersonal influences with other consumer constructs and other family forms. In addition, studies of international comparison would assist the external validity of the study and help boost the international recognition of the study.

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APPENDIX

Table 1
Scale Items and Properties (N=1250)

<i>Construct</i>	<i>No. of items</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Alpha</i>
Informational peer influence	4	4-20	10.27	3.86	0.79
Normative peer influence	8	8-40	13.88	6.53	0.89
Socio orientation family communication	10	31.85	10-50	7.42	0.78
Concept orientation family communication	13	57.05	21-65	6.77	0.85

Table 2
Types of Family Communication Environments

		Concept Orientation	
		High (Range 59-65)	Low (Range 21-58)
Socio Orientation	High (Range 29-50)	CONSENSUAL Parental authority but also encouraged childrens' own views	PROTECTIVE Parents stress obedience, childrens' problem solving ability is less developed
	Low (Range 10-28)	PLURALIST Encouraged childrens' own views without parental constraints	LASSEZ-FAIRE Only little communication between parents and children

Table 3
Family Communication Patterns between Single-Parent Families and Full Families

	N	Consensual	Protective	Pluralistic	Laissez-faire	Total
Single parent families	94	35.10%	23.40%	23.40%	18.10%	100.00%
Full families	496	37.50%	30.40%	19.60%	12.50%	100.00%
Total	1242	33.80%	34.10%	17.40%	14.70%	100.00%

Table 4
 Susceptibility to Peer Influence and Family Communication Patterns in Single-Parent Families and Full Families

		<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES	Normative	Consensual	33	1.76	0.93
		Protective	22	2.08	0.88
		Pluralistic	22	1.9	0.52
		Laissez-faire	17	1.43	0.48
		Total	94	1.67	0.81
	Informational	Consensual	33	2.75	0.96
		Protective	22	2.72	0.93
		Pluralistic	22	2.39	0.92
		Laissez-faire	17	2.21	0.67
		Total	94	2.56	0.91
		<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
FULL FAMILIES	Normative	Consensual	185	1.66	0.81
		Protective	151	1.82	0.82
		Pluralistic	97	1.37	0.57
		Laissez-faire	62	1.56	0.65
		Total	496	1.64	0.77
	Informational	Consensual	186	2.58	1.04
		Protective	151	2.61	0.91
		Pluralistic	97	2.42	1.02
		Laissez-faire	62	2.28	0.84
		Total	496	2.52	0.98