

## **SUMMARY OF THESES**

**Kásler Tina Timea**

**The first steps to becoming consumers**

**How preschool children's surroundings impact on their food consumption  
behaviour.**

of doctoral (PhD) dissertation

**Supervisor:**

**Dr. Hofmeister - Tóth Ágnes**  
Professor

Budapest, 2020

**Institute of Marketing and Media  
Department of Marketing Research and Consumer Behaviour**

## **SUMMARY OF THESES**

**Kásler Tina Timea**

**The first steps to becoming consumers**

**How preschool children's surroundings impact on their food consumption  
behaviour.**

of doctoral (PhD) dissertation

**Supervisor:**

**Dr. Hofmeister - Tóth Ágnes**  
Professor

## Table of content

<b>1. BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH AND REASONING BEHIND THE THESIS.....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES.....	4
1.2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND.....	6
<b>2. METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	8
<b>3. RESULTS .....</b>	<b>10</b>
3.1 THE MEDIA'S INFLUENCE ON PRESCHOOL CHILDREN AS CONSUMERS.....	10
3.2 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDIA CONSUMPTION AND BRAND AWARENESS.....	11
3.3 MEDIA CONSUMPTION'S INFLUENCE ON BRAND PREFERENCE.....	12
3.4 FAMILY INFLUENCE ON CHILD FOOD CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR.....	13
3.5 PEER INFLUENCE ON CHILD FOOD CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR.....	15
3.6 OTHER FACTORS INFLUENCING CHILDREN'S BRAND AWARENESS AND PREFERENCE.....	16
3.7 PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESULTS.....	17
3.8 SCIENTIFIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESULTS.....	17
3.9 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES.....	18
<b>4. REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>5. LIST OF PUBLICATIONS.....</b>	<b>22</b>

## 1. BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH AND REASONING BEHIND THE THESIS

Today's Alpha generation is raised in a drastically different way than a couple of decades ago. With the growth of smart phones and tablets, a completely new generation arises, whose entire life is completely interlinked with technology and the media, allowing them to grow up in a completely different world than we did. In this new, exciting world, children almost instinctively know how to use these innovative devices, however with numerous new beneficial changes, come various new risks and difficulties.

Not only has the way we use different sources of media shifted in the past decade, conservative family structures are also loosened continuously. Divorce rates and the number of patchwork families are steadily increasing, so are the number of working mothers. Which ultimately means, children spend more time in preschool with their peers and various other caregivers than their parents, allowing newer forms of influence to have an effect on them. While the increased presence of brand names in our society has led to intensified brand awareness and preference among children at earlier ages (Dotson and Hyatt, 2005). Finally, the way families purchase and consume has also shifted over time, allowing children, even as small as preschool level to be taken more and more serious as consumers. Children add value to companies in the present as consumers who make purchases of their own, as influencers of their parents and as future loyal customers (Hofmeister-Tóth, 2003). McNeal (2007) underlined that in recent years the number of parents who consulted with their children prior to purchasing products for the whole family steadily increased. Hence, the media increasingly addresses children as independent consumers, creating a viscous cycle. The degree to which a child becomes brand loyal derives of the interaction of familiarity and marketing stimuli. Loyalty results from recurrent visibility of a product, which often comes from the observation of parents, exposure to brands in various forms of media and exposure to other children's environments (Paul, 2002).

Simultaneously, it is important to highlight, that although children's media consumption has been studied in the past, the specific focus on preschool aged children has been rather rare, leaving room for various new academic results in this specific field. Furthermore, linking food consumption behaviours with consumer socialization is a novelty for this specific age group. Especially peer influence on preschool children is a topic that is vastly understudied in the field of academia so far, even though the changes mentioned above in the past decades resulted in a great shift from a solely family dominated influence regarding children consumer behaviour. The main reason for aiming to focus largely on the influence of food consumption and therefore eating behaviours of children derives from the assumption, that this is the major field, where even preschool aged children have a say in what types of products their

family should select. Furthermore, there is currently a growing child obesity epidemic in Europe, which is strongly catalysed by the unhealthy foods marketed to them. According to Vidra (2019) Europe has been hit hard by this epidemic, as it is currently the region with the second-highest obesity prevalence worldwide. Obesity is considered one of the major public health challenges of the 21st century due to its severe health effects (Vidra, 2019). Therefore, action is needed to counteract the growing trends.

The current study has several practical implications. It is important to understand what factors have the greatest influence on preschool aged children today, as this can be great aid in developing policies to protect children in the future. Additionally, understanding how advertisers market foods to children is crucial in order to focus on beneficial outcomes, such as how to favourably influence dietary choices (Boyland et al., 2011). It lies in the responsibility of the advertising companies and decision-makers to protect the future generations and to ensure that they develop in an adequate and healthy manner. The current study aims to help find ways to decline the current child obesity epidemic and help children feel less overwhelmed in great array of marketing efforts aimed at them currently. Schools as well as preschools for that matter, are currently the best possibilities to reach children and their families for nutrition education, preschools should provide a supportive environment, aiding children to make healthy food choices (French, Story and Fulkerson, 2002).

## 1.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Taking the factors above into consideration, the present study aims to explore in which ways the environmental and social surroundings of children influence them in their current food consumption patterns, in what ways their brand awareness and brand preferences evolve on the road to becoming individual consumers. In connection with my research, I defined four objectives, the first two are related to the literature review, while the second two are related to empirical research. These research objectives form the basis of the research questions and later the novel scientific results.

The first objective related to the literature review is to examine the literature regarding the role environmental and social surroundings have on the individual consumer and buyer behavior of children. I consider consumer socialization as predominantly important as it allows us to understand the way a child acquires the behavior deemed appropriate by society, amongst others the learning process of how to become a consumer in our society. Ultimately, understanding these processes by which children acquire consumption related-skills is important not only the field of marketing but also in public policy

formation (Ward, 1974). Linked to the first objective, is the second objective to present and cluster all the factors and their relating models influencing food consumption behaviour of children. The importance of this is that while the literature regarding consumer socialization is extensive, there are major gaps when it comes to analysing this specific age group. What is more, the aspect of peer influence as well as the internet on this age segment is completely understudied too. In order to fill these gaps, the presentation and systematization of models examining how consumer socialization influences the purchase and decision-making processes are an important goal of the literature part of my dissertation.

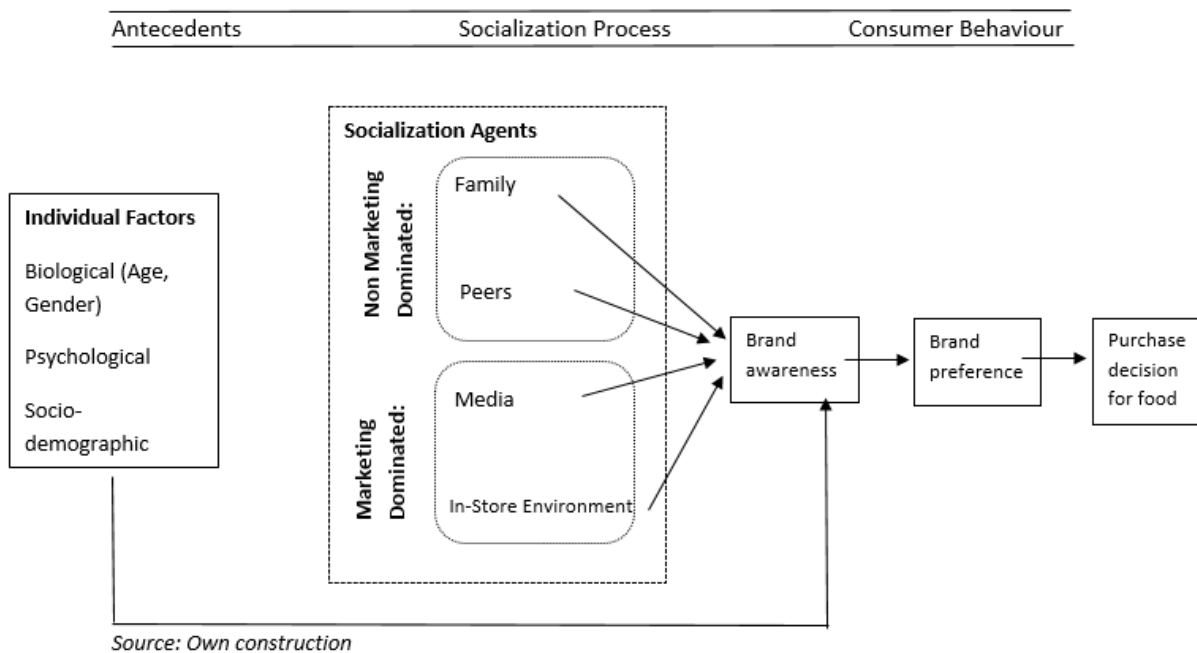
Two further objectives are related to the empirical research. The third objective is to create a conceptual framework that presents the factors influencing the food consumer behaviour of preschool children and to test these with qualitative and quantitative data. My aim is to create the basic structure of the framework based on the relevant information of the models known from the literature, especially focusing on the influencing factors of the socialization agents. My goal is not to create a total model, as an aspect of human behaviour and decision making is looked into. Therefore, the complexity of this makes it practically impossible. Rather, I would like to construct a framework that is novel in this field and can be used as a starting point to build more theory in this matter. According to Colquitt and Zapata-Phelan (2007) theory testing is principally important because some of the most intuitive theories introduced in the literature end up being unsupported by empirical research. The current dissertation aims to building theory by examining the effects of consumer socialization that have been the subject of prior theorizing but have not been thoroughly tested in the form of a prior empirical study. Ideally, by doing this, the dissertation will be able introduce new factors that add to existing theory in order to describe how the influencing process unfolds. In my research, I examined each part of the framework separately, in both my qualitative and quantitative research, the results lead to a modified more precise theoretical model that is presented in the final chapters of the dissertation.

Finally based on the findings of the empirical research and the novel scientific results, the paper also aims to suggest ways to modify and enhance policies currently applied in Hungary. Aiding policymakers as well as parents can help fight against numerous important factors such as childhood obesity and limiting the amount and type of marketing efforts children are exposed to on a daily basis. Being a mother of two this is something I have always been very passionate about. As I believe, the children of today are exposed to a great amount of harmful media as well as other marketing efforts that can vastly influence the way they consume food products reaching all the way to their adulthood.

## 1.2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In order to support the outlined research objectives, the main theoretical approaches are described regarding consumer socialization as well as consumer behaviour in preschool children in the theoretical section of the dissertation. The presentation of the consumer socialization literature is particularly important because it allows the reader to understand how consumers evolve in society, enabling them to be effective members of society (Ward, 1974). The dissertation also aims to include Hungarian literature regarding the current topic, however it has to be noted that the current range of Hungarian literature in his field is rather narrow, consequently the current dissertation also aims to contribute to this. The empirical section also focuses on children in consumer society, their eating behaviour as well as all environmental influences they might encounter altering their food consumer behaviour. The empirical section is rounded off by the initial conceptual framework, as seen in Figure 1. below.

**Figure 1: Conceptual framework: Factors affecting the food consumer behaviour of children.**



## 2. METHODOLOGY

The dissertation incorporates both qualitative and quantitative research techniques, as the examined subject are children, thus qualitative studies are vital for an overall understanding of the issue. A qualitative and quantitative pilot study was conducted in order to pre-test certain questions and to understand which issues need to be investigated in greater detail. The qualitative pilot study consisted

of the so called brand awareness test, where following a short interview about consumer and media consumption habits, children were shown thirteen different logos and asked to name them. While the quantitative pilot study consisted of an adaptation of Wardle et al.'s (2001) Child Eating Behaviour Questionnaire, it further explored the media consumption habits of Hungarian preschool aged children.

Next, in order to find out, what other factors affect the children's consumer behaviour besides the media and family. A qualitative test for measuring social relationships was applied on a specific group of children in a selected public Hungarian preschool after conducting a similar brand awareness assessment as in the pilot study. Once, deeper insights were gained through the pilot studies and the brand awareness logo test, the final questions were assembled for the interviews with the parents as well as the children. As in many cases, the consumer himself does not know why he or she makes certain decisions (Szűcs, 2016), thus in-depth interviews helped understand the complex decision-making process families face in their everyday lives, these were followed by an in-store observation of the participants.

Finally, the Hungarian Brand Awareness Instrument (HBAI) was conducted amongst Hungarian children. The HBAI aimed to develop a tool for measuring food/drink brand awareness in Hungarian children, aged 3–7 years, as a representation for their prior food marketing exposure, based on the existing International Brand Awareness Instrument (Forman et al., 2009). Children were presented a total of 30 brand logos, and asked to pair them with one of four possible food images. Simultaneously, a brand preference test was conducted asking children to pick between a branded and a non-branded product. The results were compared to variables such a television consumption, internet consumption, age and food consumption of the 'big 5'. Due to the smaller sample size and the fact that this a novel instrument conducted within Hungary, the study was rather an exploratory research at this point. Table 1. below, summarizes the methodology applied as well as the year conducted, sample size, participants, the literature the methodology was based on as well as the main topics covered. One of the main insights from the brand awareness pilot studies conducted was, that not only television, but also internet consumption of children needs to be looked at in more detail, furthermore, peer and family influence need to be tested too. Due to this the second round of the brand awareness assessment not only included the internet consumption of children, but also a sociometry allowing to results to reflect peer influence too. This was then repeated once more in the final Hungarian Brand Awareness Instrument to increase sample size and validity.



**Table 1: Summary of methodology applied throughout the dissertation**

	YEAR	SAMPLE	PARTICIPANTS	BASED ON	TOPICS COVERED
<b>PILOT BRAND AWARENESS ASSESSMENT</b>	2015	N=20	Children ages 4-6	Forman et al. (2009) (Pine and Nash (2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brand awareness</li> <li>• Television consumption</li> <li>• Shopping habits</li> <li>• Brand request</li> </ul>
<b>PILOT EATING BEHAVIOUR SURVEY</b>	2016	N=365	Parents of children age 3-7	Wardle et al. (2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eating behaviours</li> <li>• Allergies</li> <li>• Media consumption</li> </ul>
<b>BRAND AWARENESS ASSESSMENT AND SOCIOMERTY DEEP INTERVIEWS</b>	2018	N=23	Children ages 6-7	Forman et al. (2009) Moreno, Jennings and Stockton (1943)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brand awareness</li> <li>• Media consumption</li> <li>• Shopping habits</li> <li>• Sociometry</li> </ul>
	2019	N=15	Parents of children age 3-7		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eating behaviours</li> <li>• Media consumption</li> <li>• Shopping habits</li> <li>• Brand preference</li> </ul>
<b>STORE OBSERVATION</b>	2020	N=9	Parents of children age 3-7	Buijzen and Valkenburg, 2008; Gram, 2015; Page et al., 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shopping habits</li> <li>• Brand preference</li> <li>• Pester power</li> </ul>
<b>HUNGARIAN BRAND AWARENESS INSTRUMENT AND SOCIOMETRY</b>	2020	N=60	Children ages 3-7	Forman et al. (2009) Turner et al. (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brand awareness</li> <li>• Brand preference</li> <li>• Media Consumption</li> <li>• Sociometry</li> </ul>

Source: Own construction

## 2.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The objective of my dissertation is to analyse in what steps pre-school children become consumers of their own and to evaluate what influences them the most out of the environmental factors discussed within the dissertation. Due to the fact, that the current dissertation primarily relies on qualitative methods, research questions were formulated instead of hypotheses. In order to clarify the research objective, the following research questions were formulated:

**[Q1]: In what ways does the media influence preschool children as consumer?**

**[Q1.1]: What is the relationship between media consumption of pre-school aged children and their brand awareness?**

**[Q1.2]: Does media consumption influence the brand preferences of pre-school aged children?**

There is plenty of evidence that children notice food promotion. However, establishing whether this actually influences them is a complex problem (Hastings et al., 2003). Hastings et al., (2003) reported

that these effects operate at both brand and category level. Themes of fun and fantasy are commonly used to promote certain foods to children, pushing back the health and nutrition aspect. Several studies outlined that food brand recognition is strongly affected by the media (Derscheid, Kwon and Fang, 1996; Borzekowski and Robinson, 2001; Harrison, 2005; Connor, 2006). However, these studies often focused on elder age groups, and the novel internet consumption of children has often not been taken into account, therefore the research questions aim to clarify the ways the media might impact the children's brand awareness and preference. Especially as research regarding brand preference and the impact of the media are still rather scarce. Subsequently Wang et al. (2010) found children 5 and older, have a preference for products of which they have high brand awareness, however the younger children did not (Wang et al., .2010).

**[Q2]: To what extent does the family influence the child's food consumer behaviour?**

Valkenburg and Buijzen (2005) claim parents influence their children's consumer behaviour through modelling, reinforcement, and social interaction, as families often visit supermarkets together. According to Pólya (2008), children learn how to evaluate advertisements from their parents. They also shape the child's brand and shop preferences. Although parents influence their child's purchase decision-making processes at all levels, this primarily affects their attitudes towards consumer goods, rather than convenience and special products. Parental brand awareness is also found to be an important predictor of children's brand awareness (Valkenburg and Buijzen, 2005). Parents can further influence their children's consumer behaviour by passing their own brand relationships to their children (Moore, Wilkie, and Lutz, 2002). According to Ji (2008) various factors play an important role in the way children learn information about brands from their parents. These factors include parental style and how important certain brands are to parents. Overall, past findings underline, that family plays a great role influencing children as consumers, the second research question aims to investigate the depth of the influence and the factors that can strengthen or weaken this influence within a family.

**[Q3]: To what extent do social surroundings such as peers influence the child's food consumer behaviour?"**

Until today, literature on how peers influence children's consumer behaviour has been extremely scarce, while findings in this field often contradict each other. Drenten, Peters and Thomas (2008) were one of

the few who examined the consumer socialization of preschool age children in a peer-to-peer context. The findings support the proposition that social (i.e. peers) and environmental (i.e. preschool) factors do in fact influence a child's consumer socialization, even at a very young age. These findings are not inline with earlier findings of John (1999), who argued that peers only influence children at later stages of child development. Findings of a previous study by John indicated that peer group purchase influence emerges slowly through the years (Bachmann, John and Rao, 1993). Due to this, the final research question addresses this issue, aiming to further elaborate if preschool children influence each others consumer behaviour at all, and if so, to what extent.

### **3. RESULTS**

#### **3.1 THE MEDIA'S INFLUENCE ON PRESCHOOL CHILDREN AS CONSUMERS**

The results of both qualitative brand awareness studies were analysed in terms of media influence. First, the television habits and internet consumption habits of the children were investigated to then be able to compare these with the logos recognized. Children were classified into three categories based on their television consumption. In terms of advertising awareness, none of the children could answer the question „How people and cartoons are placed in the TV set?“. As for the question „What is an advertisement?“, half of the children answered that they did not know what an advertisement was. The remaining answers revealed that they were not really aware of the concept or could not adequately define advertising. This theory is also in line with Piaget's (1970) Theory of Cognitive Development, since the child is still merely in the pre-operational stage (at 2 to 7 years) and is therefore only capable of one-dimensional thinking.

The Child Eating Behaviour survey investigated the link between eating behaviour and the media, which ultimately affects consumer behaviour. A one-way ANOVA test was run to investigate the relationship between the children's eating behaviour and their television consumption. All in all, increased emotional eating was linked to an increase in television consumption. The findings also reveal that an increase in television consumption leads to an increase in the pace of food intake of children. Furthermore, an increase in television consumption influences the way children dislike certain types of foods and also narrows a child's food intake variety. An increase in television consumption led to a decrease in the enjoyment of food. Interestingly, other areas tested within the survey, such as drinking habits, were not affected by television consumption.

Furthermore, the results of the deep interview conducted with the parents outlined, those parents who named the most brands in connotation with their child also claimed that their child watches television on a daily basis. This was further underlined using NVivo. All brands mentioned by the participants were coded into one Node, and a Matrix Coding Query was run according to the media consumption of the child (see Table 2. below).

**Table 2. Matrix Coding comparing brand names mentioned and media consumption**

	Media consumption = high	Media consumption = average	Media consumption = low
Brands	149	62	63

*Source: Own construction using NVivo*

It can be stated, there is no link between the amount of television watched and children's knowledge about the sales intent of advertising. Moreover, media consumption does in fact impact the extent to which brands are present on a daily basis within the lives of families. Food is the most frequently advertised product category on children's television program (Fiates, Amboni and Teixeira, 2008), thus television advertisements mainly impact the food consumer behaviour of children. Results further suggest that media consumption influences various aspects of eating behaviour, this suggests that the brand selection of children might be narrowed down through the media as their picky eating increases with increased media consumption.

### 3.2 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDIA CONSUMPTION AND BRAND AWARENESS

Regarding the pilot qualitative brand awareness test, it can be said, there was a pattern between children who hardly guessed any logos correctly and the lack of media consumption. The children's logo recognitions were also categorized into television consumption and internet consumption separately, to find possible patterns. The findings outlined logo recognition was linked to the volume of television consumption. On the contrary, hardly any pattern could be noticed regarding the internet consumption frequency and the logo recognition of the children. The current results suggest that while children are influenced by advertisements on television, this is not necessarily the case with advertisement on the internet and applications.

Finally, the Hungarian Brand Awareness Instrument brought some interesting insights on the way the media is linked to brand awareness as well. Pearson's correlation coefficients were used to examine the relationship between brand awareness, brand recall, brand recognition and the continuous variables of age, minutes of TV viewing/week and internet usage. There was a medium strength, positive correlation between brand awareness and TV viewing/week, which was statistically significant ( $r(57) = .483$ ,  $p = .000$ ). This was also the case with internet viewing/week in correlation with brand awareness which was statistically significant ( $r(57) = .473$ ,  $p = .000$ ).

To conclude, both quantitative and qualitative measures underline that increased media consumption affects children's brand awareness, only to a different extent. The qualitative measures showed that the knowledge of logos and brands was much higher amongst those children, who viewed television on a daily basis, however this was not the case with internet consumption. Similarly, while the quantitative study found a positive correlation between brand awareness and media consumption, this was only of medium strength. Indicating, that there is a link between some form of media consumption and brand awareness, however it might not be the most important influencing factor in the children's lives, thus the research question is only partially verified.

### 3.3 MEDIA CONSUMPTION'S INFLUENCE ON BRAND PREFERENCE

Firstly, in order to explore brand preference at such as young age, the deep interview discussions with the parents were coded using NVivo. A Node called Brands was created, where every single sentence that incorporated a brand name of any sort was marked. From this node, the most frequently used brand names were found using word frequency. Out of the 23 brand names on the list, nine were cartoon characters or names associated with toys, six were dairy brands (including one cheese), three were for sweet snacks, two were washing powders. Especially cartoon names are vital as often food items marketed to children are depicted on the packaging of the products. The children were also grouped into three media consumption categories, of which seven children were grouped into the frequent consumer category. Out of these seven, six parents could name at least one incident, where the child had asked for a product due to a commercial. Four respondents remembered that their child saw an advertisement on television and then asked for the product, in three cases these were toys and once it was cereal and dairy. 3 children were grouped into the non-frequent media consumption category. One out of the 3, none could name any incident where the child asked for a particular item due to the influence of commercials.

Within the qualitative brand awareness study, children were also asked what they would like from Santa. These results were also compared to their media consumption in order to see how this might affect their brand preference. Interestingly, very few children mentioned branded toys. Only three branded toys were mentioned by the children, however, all these children belonged to the „frequent media user” category. Only 3 children in the sample had very little or no media consumption at all, from these children, 2 did not know what they wanted from Santa and one child asked for a non-branded toy (a doll). These results are in line with Pine and Nash’s (2002) research, which concluded that children who spend more time watching television ask for more gifts, and those who request gifts are more likely to ask for branded of toys.

The Hungarian Brand Awareness Instrument was also used to assess any differences in the mean of brand preference of branded vs. non branded products with television and internet consumption using the independent sample t-tests. The t-test revealed there was only one significant difference in the means of the brand preference differences, of branded chips and television consumption  $t(25,834)=2.399$ ,  $p=0.024$ . The internet consumption frequency had no impact on brand preference. There were no other statistically significant cases.

Overall, the main pattern, that was witnessed from the data, was that the media mainly influences the children’s request for food items (mainly dairy products within this sample) and toys. As far as brand preference, several brands that are highly advertised currently appeared numerous times, such as LEGO and the Paula pudding. Whilst the findings from the Hungarian Brand Awareness Instrument suggest found that brand preferences are only partially influenced by television consumption, internet consumption does not influence brand preference. Due to this once again the research question is only partially verified.

### 3.4 FAMILY INFLUENCE ON CHILD FOOD CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

The deep interview conducted with parents made clear, that one of the main influencing factors primarily was, whether or not, the child is included in the food shopping routine of the family, this was also the reason, that in-store observations were conducted with the families post the deep interviews. Numerous different themes arouse whilst discussing the question whether the children’s presence influence their shopping behaviour in any way. Those parents who always took their children shopping emphasized how their shopping efficiency was influenced by the presence of the children. Interestingly, the same group of parents also kept highlighting the purchase intentions they had towards their child, even in their absence. When asked if there are any products, where the child is allowed to make the purchase decision,

interestingly all parents named several products. Whilst the majority of the parents named certain food categories as candy, dairy products or even bakery items. Food replacements mainly took place due to special medical conditions or allergies of the children. Furthermore, the only parent who claims to have completely replaced the items purchased due to their child was the only single mother in the study. Interestingly mainly those parents who hardly took their children with them to the store discussed how their child often requests certain products, but it was the same group of parents who could hardly name any preferred brands of their children. Finally, a part of the sample reported that to their knowledge, their children do not influence their purchasing habits; these were mainly parents who did not, or very rarely took their children shopping. These findings were also partially underlined previously within the qualitative brand awareness test with the children. When children were asked about their purchasing habits with their parents, from the 20 children who participated in the pilot study, only two did not accompany their parents to the store. From the remaining 18, only five claimed not to ask for anything at the store from their parents. The rest regularly ask for certain goods. In general, the majority of the children mentioned sweets (9), but some children also mentioned toys (3).

The interviews with the participants made clear, that availability of brands within the household has a great impact on children. The wording and phrases used, often hinted which products are the ones, that are selected primarily by the parents for their children. Another reoccurring factor was not only the influence of parents, but also their extended families influence on children's brand awareness. Grandparents were mentioned the most during the interviews. Besides grandparents and siblings, cousins and godparents were mentioned too. Even the neighbours were mentioned as a popular source of influence.

Furthermore, when comparing the income levels of the parents and their answers regarding their child's brand preferences, those parents who mentioned the most brands in connotation with their child had a higher average income in comparison to the entire sample. It also has to be noted, that according to the deep interviews, food allergies influence the brand choices of children and their entire families consumption behaviour. During the interviews several parents reported, that their child had some sort of food intolerance and how this affected their consumption. Furthermore, all three parents who claimed to have children with some sort of food allergies belonged to those who could hardly recall named brand preferences of their children.

Finally, the in-store observations of the deep interview respondents were able to bring numerous interesting insights on the way parents might influence their children in a store setting. In thirteen cases

a child initiated the food request. In 62.5% of the time, the adult agreed to a child's request for a food item. In addition to adults granting requests, 11 observations were made where parents asked their child if they would like a food item or asking them to pick between various flavours. 70.83% of the total negotiated selections resulted in a yes. Taking all children's requests together (i.e., those receiving "yes" and "no" responses), 24% were for dairy products and 20.83% for sweets.

All in all, it can be said that numerous factors within the family environment deeply influence the food consumer behaviour of preschool children. Especially the deep interviews made clear that availability of brands within the household, extended families influence, the income level of the family as well as possible food allergies influence the brand choices of children and their entire family's consumption behaviour. The deep interviews as well as the in-store observations further reflected, that the presence of the children during shopping visits influences both the parents as well as the children's consumption habits vastly, highlighting especially the influence on the selection of dairy products.

### 3.5 PEER INFLUENCE ON CHILD FOOD CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Within the deep interviews out of the fifteen respondents, only one mother claimed, that her child was not affected by their friends or peers in any way. All other respondents mentioned mainly food and toys, a few mentioned clothes. Besides preschool friends, parents mentioned their children being influenced on the playground, in the grocery store by other children and extended family. In addition, multiple respondents mentioned the fact, that when children ask for specific toys their reasoning behind it often is that a specific friend of theirs also owns that toy.

Sociometries were conducted in two different preschool classes in order to compare how logo recognition is linked to friendship groups. From the 7 children with high logo recognition, all had either three or two mutual friend relationships. The Kubu product needs to be highlighted, as four children recalled they know the product from a commercial, four claimed to know it through a girl in the class, indicating a relationship between the number of friendships a child has and their logo recognition.

In order to validate these results, the sociometry was conducted during the Hungarian Brand Awareness Instrument study as well. In terms of logo recognition, this sample had no clear patterns as to the number of mutual friendships influencing logo recognition. When looking at media consumption and logo recognition, a few patterns do arise, such as the fact that the top three media consumers of the class all belonged to the high logo recognition group. Looking at particular brands and links between peers



relationships, two particular products (Dörmi and Kinder) were both mentioned in a group of friends that all had mutual relationships. Finally when looking at the brand preference of children in comparison to peers relationships, out of the two girls with no mutual relationships, one had by far the lowest preference for branded products.

The interview respondents underlined, that peers have an effect on the consumer behaviour of children, especially regarding snacks and toys. A slight gender difference was also noticed, that girls are also influenced regarding clothes, while none of the parents of boys mentioned this. The sociometry studies also brought numerous interesting insights. In the first sociometry test, a link between high logo recognition and vast mutual friendships arose, while in the second sociometry a link between low brand preference and low mutual friendships could be witnessed. Yet, as the results are rather different, further studies in this specific section would be necessary.

### 3.6 OTHER FACTORS INFLUENCING CHILDREN'S BRAND AWARENESS AND PREFERENCE

Individual factors influencing the food consumer behaviour of children besides the socialization agents discussed in the research questions were also found to influence children. A reoccurring theme regarding other factors influencing children's brand preference and purchasing behaviours was the in-store environment, especially the packaging of products within stores that target children. Several parents recalled, that children often spontaneously ask for certain products, they never asked for before primarily in a store setting. Packaging; from the colours, forms, shapes, accompanying toys and cartoon characters printed on to the package itself, all these topics were brought up by more than half of the participants. Especially the Disney's cartoon „Cars“ was mentioned on a dairy product by several mothers with boys, while the Disney cartoon „Frozen“ was mentioned of mothers with girls. The in-store observations with the respondents also highlighted, that the placement of products within the store influenced children too. From the requested products by the children, four could be found right on the eye level of the children, three were below eye level, and one over eye level, while one product was placed at the cashiers desk.

The Hungarian Brand Awareness Instrument brought some insights in terms of age and gender compared with brand awareness. The Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationship between brand awareness and age, there was a medium strength, positive correlation between brand awareness and age, which was statistically significant ( $r(57) = .301$ ,  $p = .021$ ). Independent sample t-tests were performed to assess any differences in the mean of gender and brand awareness, brand

preference, brand recall and brand recognition. The t-test revealed that there were no statistically significant differences in the means of gender and the other variables tested.

### 3.7 PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESULTS

Finally, based on the results, suggestions were made on how to modify and enhance policies currently applied in Hungary aiding policymakers as well as parents. The results of the study aim to give practical advice to decision makers regarding policies regulating the media usage of preschool aged children, as well as the types of products, advertisements and packaging targeted at preschool aged children. In light of the findings above, it is important for policy makers to ensure that the consumer socialization of children takes place in correct and ethical manner. The current study also gives ethical managerial implications to retailers and manufacturers. Sadly, current marketing practice mainly promotes low nutrition foods and beverages. Rebalancing this food marketing landscape is key. A systematic review on the issue highlighted, that little progress towards policy aims has been achieved in the past decade (Cairns et al., 2013). Moreover, previous studies, focused on measuring one form of influence, while this study aimed to gather all influential factors within the environment of children in their preschool age. Thus, the results from this study give the first overview on food buying and consumption influencing factors on children in Hungary.

### 3.7 SCIENTIFIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESULTS

As far as is known, this research is the first attempt to identify all the influencing factors of food consumer behaviour in children, and introduce them in a conceptual framework, thus is vital to highlight the new and novel results of the dissertation. The dissertation was able to systematize the models explaining the factors affecting the consumer behaviour of children. Secondly, using the knowledge gained through analysing past literature, a **novel research model was presented that explains the factors affecting the food consumer behaviour of children**. The dissertation was further able to develop the country specific Brand Awareness Instrument for preschool children. The **Hungarian Brand Awareness Instrument or any similar instrument have not been performed in Hungary so far and are therefore novel scientific results** on its own. This tool gives an indicator of the awareness of major food brands of children. Additionally, the tool can be useful in experimental trials that expose groups of children to advertising conditions, as a measure of baseline brand awareness, to explore the

impact of episodic exposure to promotions on food-related attitudes and choice. Developing instruments specific to each country, is important for studying the changes in our food environment, and helping to understand the potential role that unhealthy food marketing has had in the recent rise of childhood obesity (Turner et al, 2015). Furthermore, the **sociometry to test brand awareness together with its results is a completely novel methodological approach**, that has great potential for future research within this specific field thus. Finally, the current dissertation explored the main connections between the various types of socialization agents and their influence on children's food consumer behaviour within various samples. The results indicate, that all socialization agents influence children's food consumption behaviour, however the extent of the influence is diverse within each type of agent. The fact that increased media consumption influences brand awareness was no surprise, however, the **internet consumption of preschool aged children does not seem to add to this influence** which is a novelty in this specific research area too. Finally, the results suggest, that **peer influence to contributes to the increased brand awareness of children aged 3-7**. As mentioned previously, this specific aspect was highly understudied especially within preschool children. The findings contradict elder studies such as John (1999), who argued that peers only influence children at later stages of child development namely the analytical stage, thus this result is also a novelty within this field.

### 3.8 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES

Unfortunately, the current dissertation not without limitations. Firstly, the literature was not systematically searched using a pre-defined protocol, and therefore there is no guarantee that all relevant studies on the topic were identified. Secondly, there are a number of issues regarding the methods of analysis in particular which must be addressed. One of the most important internal validity threats lies within the in-depth interview itself. As the interview was semi-structured, the interviewer sometimes phrased certain questions differently, which might have affected the answers of the participants slightly. Reactivity is a validity threat, as one cannot avoid either influencing or being influenced when being in such a surrounding. Bias also needs to be discussed, as it influences the validity and reliability of study findings, while misinterpretation of data can have important consequences for practice (Smith and Noble, 2014). The possible power asymmetry between the interviewer and the interviewee can also lead to bias, as the interview is not an open everyday conversation between equal partners. It is the role of the researcher to make the participant feel comfortable to open up about the questions discussed. This can especially be the case in the media usage topic, as parents often do not want to admit openly how much media their children consume on a daily basis.

Regarding the pilot brand awareness study and the sociometry study it can be argued, that certain children were excluded due to theory validity, however this is not the case. The parents were questioned about the children's media consumption in order to compare these with the child's answers and to filter out children, who for some reason choose to make up answers completely during the interviews. These children were not excluded, because they did not suit the theory, they were excluded to keep only accurate and true answers for further analysis. The process of selecting preschools for both the pilot brand awareness study occurred partially through convenience sampling. As preschools were selected, where some form of prior relationship existed with the researcher, however the main logic behind the sampling was to build a sample that incorporates extreme or deviant cases (Horváth and Mitev, 2015) of media consumption. Due to this, more than one preschool was sampled, however the region where the sampling took place could have been more diverse, as this could have possibly lead to different results. Another issue with the sociometries but also the brand awareness tests were, that the logos tested on the children differed in the two tests, this was mainly for the reason that the second study also looked into online consumption, thus, it made sense to test for logos that can be found in online advertisements too. However using the same set of logos would have made possible comparisons between the two samples a lot more logical.

The same can be said about the preschool sample for the brand awareness study. As mentioned, due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, it became merely impossible to conduct the study while being physically present. Due to this, the decision was made to select a preschool, where all parents of a given class would be willing to fill out the questionnaire online. It was crucial to receive answers from the entire class in order conduct the sociometry analysis later on. Due to this, the preschool was selected through convenience sampling and all parents received detailed instructions on how to fill out the questionnaire together with their children online. The selection of brands for the Brand Awareness Instrument also raises concern, as there is no definitive list of brands heavily marketed to children in the Hungarian context. Due to the nature of the online questionnaire, the data relies on the self-reporting of parents about their children's media usage, this could be potentially inaccurate at times. Due to smaller sample size the results are also limited in a statistical sense.

Based on the findings of the current dissertation, there is still room for future studies especially in the section of peer influence. While according to my opinion, applying the sociometries in this context was an innovative solution. Especially due to the fact, that according to my knowledge no other paper to date has used a sociometry to compare the peer influence of food consumption on children. It has to be noted, two sociometries were not enough, especially as the results of the two sociometries were in fact not fully

consistent regarding the results. The sociometries of the two current classes could also be redone over time, comparing them to previous answers. Another point that worth further research is the internet consumption of children and the influence of this on brand preference and brand awareness. Nearly all studies conducted within the dissertation found no relationship between internet consumption quantity and the level of brand awareness and brand preference. However, as the recent trends are shifting towards an increased internet consumption in preschool children, it would definitely be important to monitor and study this phenomenon over time.

#### 4. REFERENCES

- Bachmann, G. R., John, D. R. & Rao, A. R. (1993). Children's susceptibility to peer group purchase influence: an exploratory investigation. *ACR North American Advances*.
- Borzekowski, D. L. & Robinson, T. N. (2001). The 30-second effect: an experiment revealing the impact of television commercials on food preferences of preschoolers. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 101 (1), pp. 42-46.
- Boyland E. J., Harrold J. A., Kirkham T. C. & Halford J. C. G. (2011). The extent of food advertising to children on UK television in 2008. *International Journal of Pediatric Obesity*, 6, pp. 455–461.
- Buijzen, M., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2008). Observing purchase-related parent–child communication in retail environments: A developmental and socialization perspective. *Human Communication Research*, 34 (1), pp. 50-69.
- Cairns G., Angus K., Hastings G. & Caraher M. (2013). Systematic reviews of the evidence on the nature, extent and effects of food marketing to children. A retrospective summary. *Appetite*, 62, pp. 209-215.
- Colquitt, J. A., & Zapata-Phelan, C. P. (2007). Trends in theory building and theory testing: A five-decade study of the *Academy of Management Journal*. *Academy of management journal*, 50 (6), pp. 1281-1303.
- Connor, S.M. (2006). Food-related advertising on preschool television: building brand recognition in young viewers. *Pediatrics*, 118: pp. 1478–1485.
- Derscheid, L. E., Kwon, Y. H. & Fang, S. R. (1996). Preschoolers' socialization as consumers of clothing and recognition of symbolism. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 82, pp. 1171–1181.
- Dotson, M. J. & Hyatt, E. M. (2005). Major influence factors in children's consumer socialization. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 22 (1), pp.35-42.
- Drenten, J., Peters, C. O., & Thomas, J. B. (2008). An exploratory investigation of the dramatic play of preschool children within a grocery store shopping context. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*.
- Fiates, G. M. R., De Mello Castanho Amboni, R. D., & Teixeira, E. (2008). Television use and food choices of children: qualitative approach. *Appetite*, 50 (1), pp. 12-18.
- Forman, J., Halford, J. C., Summe, H., MacDougall, M. & Keller, K. L. (2009). Food branding influences ad libitum intake differently in children depending on weight status. Results of a pilot study. *Appetite*, 53 (1), pp. 76-83.

- French, S. A., Story, M., & Fulkerson, J. A. (2002). School food policies and practices: a state-wide survey of secondary school principals. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 102 (12), pp. 1785-1789.
- Gram, M. (2015). Buying food for the family: Negotiations in parent/child supermarket shopping: An observational study from Denmark and the United States. *Journal of contemporary ethnography*, 44 (2), pp. 169-195.
- Harrison, K. (2005). Is “fat free” good for me? A panel study of television viewing and children’s nutritional knowledge and reasoning. *Health Communication*, 17, pp. 117–132.
- Hastings, G., Stead, M., McDermott, L., Forsyth, A., MacKintosh, A., Raynor, M., Godfrey, C., Caraher, M. & Angus, K. (2003). Review of the Research on the Effects of Food Promotion to Children. Centre for Social Marketing, Glasgow, Scotland.
- Hofmeister-Tóth, Á. (2003). Fogyasztói magatartás, Aula Kiadó.
- Horváth, D. & Mitev, A. (2015). Alternatív kvalitatív kutatási kézikönyv. Alinea Kiadó, Budapest.
- Ji, M. F. (2008). Child-brand relations: a conceptual framework. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 24 (5-6), pp. 603-619.
- John, D. R. (1999). Consumer socialization of children: A retrospective look at twenty-five years of research. *Journal of consumer research*, 26 (3), pp. 183-213.
- Koschate-Fischer, N., Hoyer, W. D., Stokburger-Sauer, N. E. & Engling, J. (2018). Do life events always lead to change in purchase? The mediating role of change in consumer innovativeness, the variety seeking tendency, and price consciousness. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 46 (3), pp. 516-536.
- McNeal, J. U. (2007). On Becoming a Consumer. Development of Consumer Behavior Patterns in Childhood, Elsevier Inc., Burlington.
- Moore, E. S., Wilkie, W. L. & Lutz, R. J. (2002). Passing the Torch: Intergenerational Influences as a Source of Brand Equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 66 (2), pp. 17-37.
- Moreno, J. L., Jennings, H. H. & Stockton, R. (1943). Sociometry in the classroom. *Sociometry*, 6 (4), pp. 425-428.
- Ouwens, M. A., Cebolla, A. & Van Strien, T. (2012). Eating style, television viewing and snacking in pre-adolescent children. *Nutricion hospitalaria*, 27 (4), pp. 1072-1078.
- Page, B., Sharp, A., Lockshin, L. & Sorensen, H. (2018). Parents and children in supermarkets: Incidence and influence, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 40, pp. 31-39.
- Paul, N. C. (2002). Branded for life. *The Christian Science Monitor*. In: Dotson, M. J. & Hyatt, E. M. (2005). Major influence factors in children's consumer socialization. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 22 (1), pp.35-42.
- Piaget, J. (1970). Piaget’s theory. In P. H. Mussen (Ed.), *Carmichael’s manual of child psychology*. New York: Wiley.
- Pine, K. & Nash, A. (2002). Dear Santa: The effects of television advertising on young children. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 26 (6), pp. 529–539.
- Pólya, É. (2008). Családi vásárlási döntési folyamatok, A döntést befolyásoló tényezők. *Szolnoki Tudományos Közlemények XII. Szolnok*.
- Smith, J. & Noble, H. (2014), Bias in research. *Evidence-Based Nursing*, 17 (4). pp. 100-101.

- Szűcs, K. (2016). Marketingkutatás 2.0. *Vezetéstudomány-Budapest Management Review*, 47 (4), pp. 67-70.
- Turner, L., Kelly, B., Boyland, E., & Bauman, A. E. (2015). Measuring food brand awareness in Australian children: development and validation of a new instrument. *PloS one*, 10(7).
- Valkenburg, P. M. & Buijzen, M. (2005). Identifying determinants of young children's brand awareness: Television, parents, and peers. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 26 (4), pp. 456-468.
- Vidra, N. (2019). The obesity epidemic in Europe. [https://www.rug.nl/research/portal/files/79963875/Chapter\\_1.pdf](https://www.rug.nl/research/portal/files/79963875/Chapter_1.pdf) (retrieved: 2019.11.20)
- Wang, F., Wang, Y., Li, S., & Shi, K. (2010, August). 3–7-year-old children's brand awareness: A developmental investigation. *IEEE 2nd Symposium on Web Society*, pp. 559-562
- Ward, S. (1974). Consumer Socialization. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 1 (2), pp. 1–14.
- Wardle, J., Guthrie, C. A., Sanderson, S. & Rapoport, L. (2001a). Development of the children's eating behaviour questionnaire. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 42 (7), pp. 963-970.

## 5. LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

### JOURNAL ARTICLES

- Kásler, T. T. (2020). What we watch is what we eat? Evaluating the connection between television consumption and the eating behaviour of preschool-aged children. *Jel-kép: kommunikáció közvélemény média*, 2020/ 1. Issue DOI : 10.20520/JEL-KEP.2020.1.53
- Kásler, T. T. (2020). Investigating the ways parents perceive their preschool aged children's influence on their food purchase behaviour and brand preference. *Marketing és Menedzsment*, 54 (2) pp. 65-73. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15170/MM.2020.54.02.06>
- Kásler, T. T. (2017). Az óvodáskorú gyermekek televízió nézésének hatása a márkatudatosságukra és a fogyasztói magatartásukra. *Marketing és Menedzsment*, 51 (4) pp. 39-48.
- Kásler, T. T. (2017). Investigating in what ways television consumption influences preschool aged children and their development. *Vezetéstudomány*, 48 (11) pp. 2-11.

### CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS

- Kásler, T. T. (2019). *The influence of media, family and peers on the consumer decisions of preschool children – A qualitative study*. In: Bálint, Horváth; Zsombor, Kápolnai; Péter, Földi (szerk.) V. International Winter Conference of Economics PhD Students and Researchers: Conference Proceedings, Gödöllő, Hungary: Doktoranduszok Országos Szövetsége, pp. 77-85.
- Kásler, T. T. & Márkus, E. (2020). *Investigating how peers and the media impact the brand awareness of preschool aged children*. VI. International Winter Conference of Economics PhD Students and Researchers, Conference Proceedings, Gödöllő, Hungary: Doktoranduszok Országos Szövetsége, pp. 114-123 .
- Bogáromi, E. & Kásler, T. T. (2019). *Marketing foods to children: How packaging and product placement affect the product preferences of children and the buyer behaviour of their parents in the food industry* (2019) conference presentation, 13th Pangborn Sensory Science Symposium, 28 July - 1 August 2019, Edinburgh, UK, Poster session 1



Kásler, T. T. (2019). *Children's brand relationships and brand preference: How preschool aged children influence the consumption of their parents*. In: 6th International consumer brand relationship conference (2019) p. 50

Kásler, T. T. (2017). *Investigating in what Ways Television Consumption can affect the Development and Consumer Behavior of Preschool Aged Children*. In: Jonathan, Batten; Ender, Demir (szerk.) 21st EBES CONFERENCE : Program and abstract book. Istanbul, Turkey: Eurasia Business and Economics Society (EBES), (2017) p. 71

Kásler, T. T. (2017). *The Gender Differences in the Eating Behaviour of Pre-School aged Children*. In: Tihomir, Vranesevic; Claudia, Seabra; Doris, Perucic; Miroslav, Mandic; Irena, Pandza (szerk.) 6th International M-Sphere Conference for Multidisciplinarity in Business and Science: Book of Abstracts Zagreb, Croatia: Accent, pp. 79-80.

Kásler, T. T. (2017). *Relationship Between Eating Behaviour and Television Consumption among Pre-School Aged Children*. In: Keresztes, Gábor; Kohus, Zsolt; Szabó, P. Katalin; Tokody, Dániel (szerk.) Tavaszi Szél Conferece 2017: International Multidisciplinarity Conference: Book of Abstracts Budapest, Hungary: Doktoranduszok Országos Szövetsége (DOSZ), p. 245

Kásler, T. T. (2017). *Application of the Child Eating Behavior Questionnaire in Hungary*. In: Bányai, Edit; Lányi, Beatrix; Törőcsik, Mária (szerk.) Tükröződés, társtudományok, trendek, fogyasztás: Egyesület a Marketing Oktatásért és kutatásért (EMOK) XXIII. national conference: Conference Proceedings Pécs, Hungary: Pécsi Tudományegyetem Közgazdaságtudományi Kar (PTE KTK), pp. 521-531.

Kásler, T. T. (2016). *Az óvodáskorú gyermekek médiafogyasztásának hatása a fogyasztói magatartásukra*. In: Fehér, András; Kiss, Virág Ágnes; Soós, Mihály; Szakály, Zoltán (szerk.) EMOK XXII. Országos konferencia 2016 Tanulmánykötet : Hitelesség és értékorientáció a marketingben. Debrecen, Hungary: University of Debrecen, pp. 531-538.

Kásler, T. T. (2014). *Will the television be responsible for the death of art?: Analyzing the effect of television consumption on preschool children*. In: Andreani, J C (szerk.) 13th International Marketing Trends Conference Venice, Italy: ESCP Europe, (2014) Paper: online