

The role of children in the family's holidays decision-making process

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Objectives | Families with children are one of the most important markets of the tourism industry around the world, accounting for about 30 per cent of the leisure travel market, which is expected to grow faster than all other forms of leisure travel (Schänzel, Yeoman & Backer, 2012). The active social role of children in modelling the nature of their holiday experiences and of their family is gaining acceptance within the tourism industry, recognizing the value of children's travel needs and desires, although specific literature is still scarce. It is also visible in the literature that the concept of "family" is changing, with an increasing number of divorces and the rise of blended families, and the decline of the nuclear and traditional family. These changes in families' structure are believed to be one of the trends that will shape the future of (family) tourism (Schänzel & Yeoman, 2015).

The aim of this paper is therefore to identify in which way the Portuguese Children influence the holiday decision-making process. An emphasis will be placed on the perception of both children's and parents' behaviour and coping strategies. Moreover, different variables that may influence the decision-making process such as children's gender and age, level of cognitive development, family size and parent's marital status and income will be analysed, per the provided conceptual framework (Figure1). Based on results, implications for both tourism businesses and destinations management organisations will be discussed.

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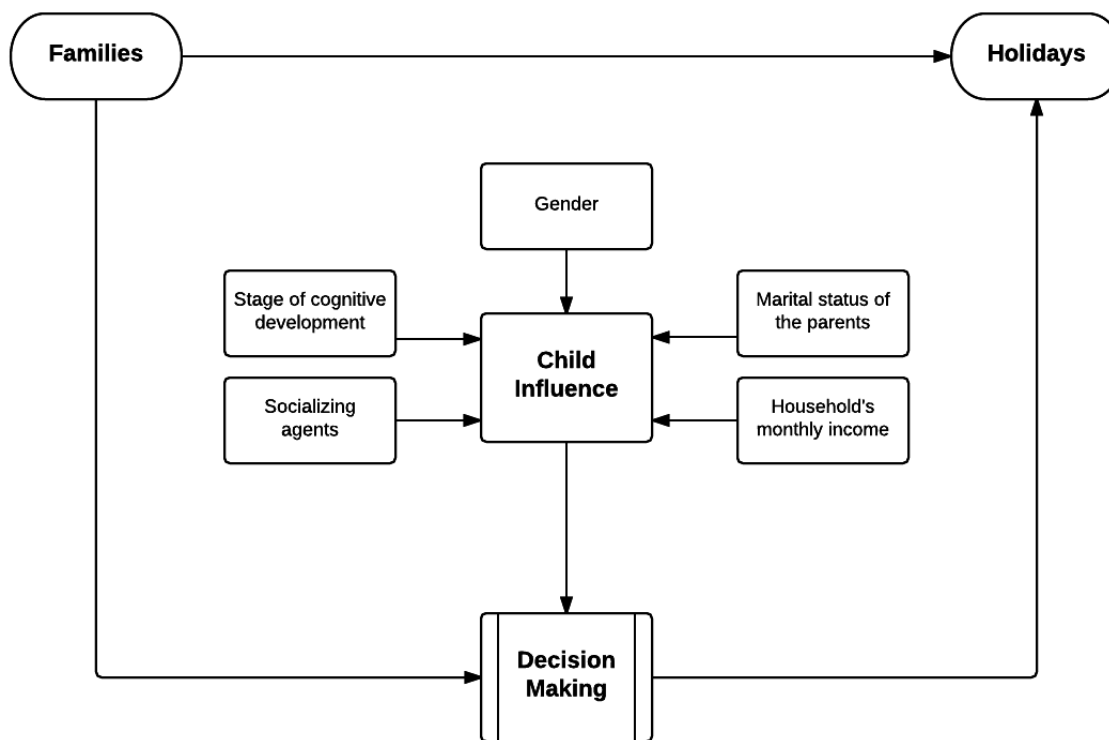


Figure 1 | Conceptual Framework

Methodology | This research has adopted a sequential multi-methods design (Creswell, Fetters & Ivankova 2004; Petter & Gallivan, 2004; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006) involving different stages of data collection. The rationale for adopting more than one method of data collection is developmental. In such situations, the results of one method help in the development of the other (Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989; Petter & Gallivan, 2004; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006; Creswell, 2007). This is the case of research that aims at conducting a quantitative approach, whose main research topic is under-conceptualized or under-researched. In this situation, outcomes of the exploratory interviews will inform the research questions and quantitative data collection instrument (questionnaire), enhancing its validity (Collins, Onwuegbuzie & Jiao, 2006).

A third stage might be considered, in the future, adopting a qualitative approach, will involve the organization of focus groups of parents and children, separately. The qualitative approach, according to Malhotra (2006), provides better vision and understanding of the context of the problem. This allows researchers to discover people's values, consumption patterns as well as their motives, attitudes, opinions, perceptions, preferences, experiences, actions, and future intentions (Sheth, Mittal, & Newman, 2001).

The sample used for this research will be convenient, non-probabilistic, made up of parents and children between the ages of 7 and 17, from two public school groups - EB2 / 3 and Secondary School in Viana do Castelo e Porto. The questionnaire will be distributed in schools to students and parents who meet the requirements, and who volunteer themselves to participate.

Main Results and Contributions | It is an ongoing project, therefore data collection is still not completed. However, because in the context of the new, non-traditional, family model, children have an

increasingly active and important role in the family, it is also anticipated they will play a determinant role in the holiday's decision-making process. Children, not only make more decisions about their life, but are also able to influence the decision making of their parents, having a higher importance as individuals, and as active consumers. Results will contribute to the identification and understanding of the marketing strategies should be adopted by businesses in general, and family oriented businesses, in particular, as well as destination management organisations.

Limitations | Although it is an ongoing project, we can already anticipate the challenges or difficulties that are related with data collection processes involving children which require additional ethical concerns.

Conclusions | At this stage, there is no conclusions to be presented, regarding the analysis of the data collected/ in process of being collected. However, according to the literature review already pursued, and to the analysis of the changes observed in the structure of families, namely, in Portugal, it can be argued that the role played by children in the decision-making process is changing and assuming higher relevance.

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