
Purchasing Decisions and Choices of Polish Mothers of Children Aged 0-6: The Role of Providing Opinions on Products by Scientific Units

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Abstract:

Purpose: The research aimed to identify shopping motivations and to determine the sources of knowledge and the degree of confidence in the sources of knowledge that mothers have when selecting products.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The main research method was a statistical survey on a group of Polish mothers of children aged 0-6 years. It was a nationwide study group, a territorially representative sample for the Polish population, a weighted sample on the basis of the following parameters, size of the place of residence, and voivodeship.

Findings: The main conclusion that more than half (54%) of mothers of children aged 0-6 years look for products recommended by a scientific institution. In the age of information overload and problems with assessing its reliability, such a recommendation is tantamount to a guarantee of safety, especially in the area of such sensitive products as food and cosmetics for the youngest children. Nearly 70% of Polish mothers of children have confidence in scientific and medical institutions issuing recommendations for products.

Practical implications: This research has practical implications in three main fields: first, it is relevant for companies to find adequate information about family purchasing agents, second to indicate to official bodies, such as medical and scientific bodies, the need to guarantee reliable information and third the issue of safety of the youngest children and the implementation of an appropriate quality policy for products and information about them.

Originality/Value: The value of the research is to find relationships between the motives for purchase decisions made by a group of mother-consumers aged 0-6 years and the sources of knowledge from which the shoppers draw their information. This is the first study of its type in terms of research volume. It is an indication for the advancement of some concrete actions, both marketing and institutional in terms of taking care of trustworthy information.

Keywords: *Podjęmowanie decyzji, marketing, instytucje badawcze, tworzenie nawyków, preferencje, gospodarstwa domowe.*

JEL classification: D11, D81, I 23, M31.

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1. Introduction

Human life happens only once and therefore we will never be able to say which of our decisions was good and which was bad because we could only decide once in a given situation. We were not given a second, third or fourth life so that we could compare the consequences of different decisions' (Kundera, 1996). Every day people are confronted with many choices and decisions. When choosing an option for action, they make decisions which, like the problem to which the choices relates, have different weights. Differences occur depending on what the choices concern.

Decision-making may concern mundane choices and day-to-day activities related to natural human functioning in the environment, in the family, at work, etc. It can concern specific selections and decisions in legal, medical and scientific fields, where the gravity of the decisions made sometimes determines life or death. Differences are influenced not only by the class of problems and choices, but also by the existence of individual differences in the decision-maker, which in turn are due to developmental and cultural diversity, but also to differences in temperament and competence.

As human beings, we like to think that we behave logically, and that when we make a decision, we carefully consider all the possibilities. This is the behaviour we encounter when decisions involve matters of great importance, existential matters. These would be logical ways of making decisions, and while we sometimes decide rationally and logically, we take hundreds of decisions every day and do not reflect on each of them logically. Even for the big decisions that we think are logical, research shows that most of our choices - big or small - are made unconsciously and emotionally, and especially so when the choices are made by children and their mothers. The background is the safe use of products designed for children.

The context of the research is much broader, as it is about personal health safety (Kuczabski, 2018). The choices we make always result in health problems, which can manifest themselves both in the short and long term. The problem of safety concerns decisions on each purchase of food, cosmetics or toys, and the fundamental question is: does the purchase endanger the safety of the child? We as a society live in a kind of information bubble, which does not facilitate the pursuit of reliable, credible information. Every piece of information influences our beliefs and opinions to some extent, often shaping the values and views we hold.

The article is a synthetical report of research on the sources of knowledge used by Polish mothers when selecting products for children aged 0-6 years, and a determination of the trust in these sources. The content of the article is embedded in an analysis of the dynamically growing purchasing potential of women in the world and a comparative analysis of world studies in order to indicate similarities and differences in the approach to consumer decisions of the studied group, conditioned by both socio-cultural and economic influences.

The factors that are taken into account when the choices are made are of varying importance. Kotler and Keller, (2010) identified cultural, social, psychological and personal attributes that influence buying behaviour and allow the creation of a five-stage behavioural schema of the buying procedure: awareness of need, exploration of options, evaluation of alternatives, purchase and post-purchase performance (Kotler and Keller, 2015). In each of these stages, information and trust in its source are of great importance. An interesting issue is the recognition of the determinants and factors that are taken into account when making purchase decisions in relation to the group of youngest consumers. Adults are responsible for these choices, especially mothers.

Human decision-making is not free from cognitive failures resulting from shortcuts and simplifications (heuristics), which we use in intuitive thinking. The problem of incomplete harmonious cooperation of two systems of our brain (fast - automatic and slow - reflective), as explained by Kahneman (2012), significantly influences the made choices, often remaining beyond the consciousness of the decision-maker. The universal choice architecture, also defined in the field of behavioural economics by Thaler and Sunstein (2017), is often not conducive to favorable choices. With this concept they defined the formulation of an appropriate interpretative framework for individual decisions. It is about creating the right environment to facilitate good decisions, without restricting freedom, but through an incentive, an impulse (the so-called nudge). Even slight changes in the context in which we take decisions, seemingly unimportant details such as the presentation of selected products at the checkouts, can have a huge effect on people - both children and adults. The power of small things can give a specific direction to our attention (Thaler and Sunstein, 2017).

How, then, do mothers in the 0-6 age group manage their shopping, satisfying the natural need to ensure the best for their children? Are they able to avoid the traps of thinking and escape the paradox of selection in a choice architecture that is far from Thaler and Sunstein's concept? What factors and characteristics do they pay attention to, what values guide them and where do they get their product knowledge from? Research conducted around the world, for at least a decade, clearly points to the growing and dominant buying potential of women (Women as Buyers: A Quad Infographic Study, 2017). What was easily observable in most Polish homes has been confirmed by reports from major global research companies.

Back in 2009, the Boston Consulting Group stated the modern era of the so-called female economy (Silverstein and Sayre, 2009), this trend is confirmed by subsequent studies and articles (Unnikrishnan and Blair, BCG, 2019). Women's economic power is projected to grow steadily and significantly, according to a report by Ernest & Young, by 2028 women will determine the spending of 75% of global consumption funds (Ernst & Young, 2012). The potential of a group of women-mothers deciding on purchases for children has also been noted (Report: The Rise of the Real Mom, 2009). Women decide on the majority of purchases made in the

world - all the more so as they are usually responsible for managing the family budget, not only in the area of fast-moving consumer goods. World rankings grant them total exclusivity in making the vast majority (about 85%) of purchasing decisions (Pawlikowska and Poleszak, 2018).

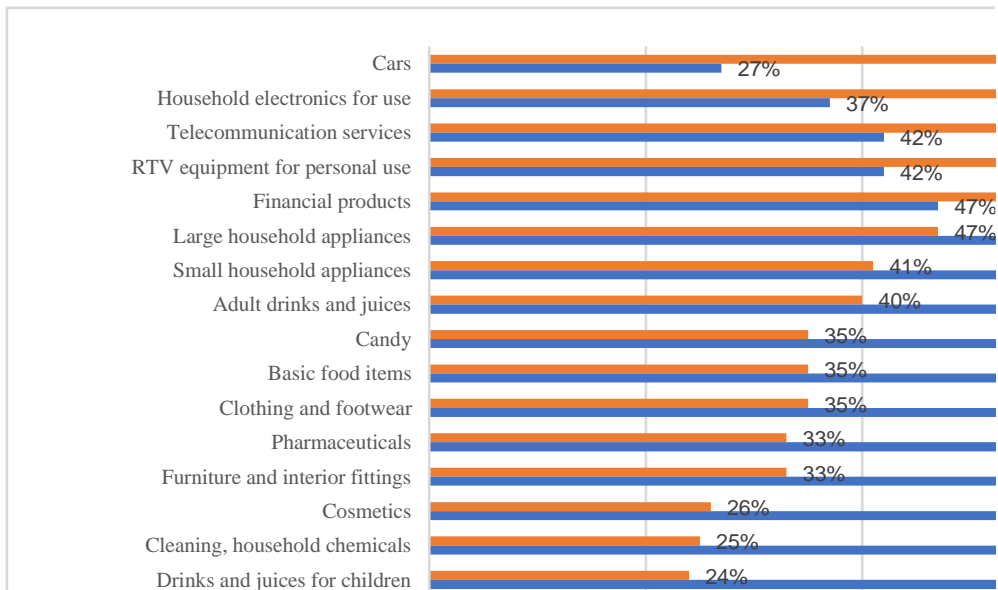
2. Consumer Behavior of Polish Women in Decision-Making conditions

The dominance of Polish women, both in decision-making and shopping, for most household products and services is confirmed in the current report, "Shopping in Polish homes - who decides and who buys?" (Mindshare as of July 2019). In accordance with it, 65% of women independently select and buy basic grocery products for their family, and in the category of juices and drinks for children - even 76%. The same is true for cosmetics, which even more women (74%) pick out themselves than for food.

Over the years, however, this level has remained fairly constant. In 2012, the results were very similar, indicating 66% of women as self-selecting food products for the home and 71% as making decisions on cosmetics and household chemicals (Polki o sobie, 2012). In comparison with the 2012 study, the current Mindshare report strongly points to men deciding on the choice of cars (the influence of women on these decisions decreased from 60% to 27%), radio and television equipment (from 51% to 37%) and telecommunication services. Noteworthy is also the even decision-making situation in the category of travel, tours and large household appliances, although even here we have a change in favour of men, as shown in Figure 1.

IAs far as influence on decisions related to household expenditures is concerned, Polish women are equal to women in other countries of the world. They either decide or have significant influence on decisions concerning practically all aspects of family life. Combining and performing many social, professional and family roles on a daily basis, they set the directions of development, plan larger and smaller expenses related both to everyday purchases, as well as important family undertakings requiring serious financial involvement. Sometimes they do it consciously and at times intuitively, without even thinking about it (Pawlikowska and Maison, 2014).

The population of Polish women differs significantly, and their shopping preferences are a resultant of so many factors that superficial demographic similarities, such as age, education, material situation or place of residence, in no way allow generating unambiguous conclusions. The segmentation of Polish women was created as a result of quantitative and qualitative research (Pawlikowska and Maison, 2014) and reveals an extremely polarised picture of Polish female consumers who, although they have much in common, especially in cultural and historical contexts, have clearly different approaches to shopping and different motivations.

Figure 1. Purchasing decision-makers in product categories

Source: Own study based on the Mindshare Report, *Shopping in Polish homes - who decides and who buys?* press release August 5, 2019, <https://www.wirtualnemedi.pl/artykul/w-polskich-domach-decyzje-zakupowe-podejmujakobiety>, accessed June 25, 2020.

Their world view has a significant influence on purchasing decisions of Polish consumers. Motives for choosing particular products or services, place and manner of their purchase are not only related to income level, family size or place of residence, but also, for example, to the level of professional involvement, openness to the world and novelties, number of trips, etc.

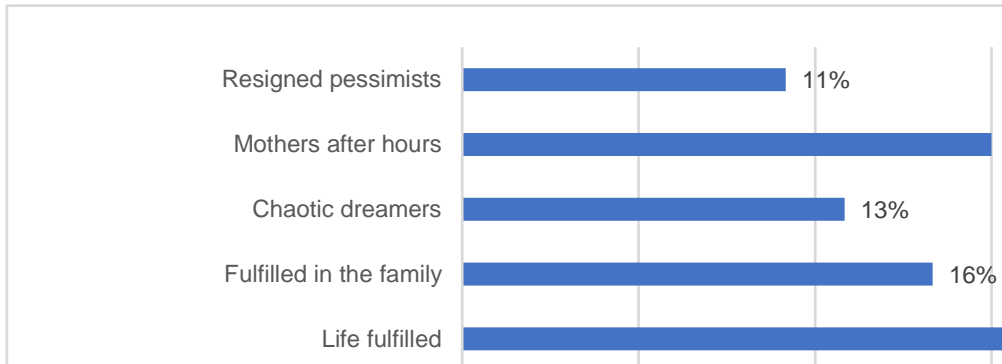
Of equal importance is consumer and health awareness, the need (or lack thereof) to ensure the highest quality of food (although everyone understands this differently) or striving for the most convenient solutions and limiting the time spent on shopping to the necessary minimum.

It is also important how emotionally consumers relate to brands, as well as to the place of shopping or even the sellers. Frequently, the decision to choose a product and buy it is a resultant of many factors. Women are driven in their decisions by various benefits, which are not always purely economic. It occurs that the financial profit and loss account, even in the case of people with very little resources, is pushed into the background, and emotional aspects have the greatest impact on decision-making (Pawlikowska and Maison, 2014). Women's autonomy in making purchasing choices is determined by their needs, values and preferred family model (Pawlikowska and Maison, 2014).

3. Analysis of the Purchasing Behavior of Polish Mothers of Consumers

Similar divergences are also noticeable among Polish mother consumers. A study by the Maison Research House (Maison Research House, 2014) detailed 7 types of Polish women with children aged 0-12 who differ in their attitudes to life, their vision of motherhood and raising children, and consequently in their purchasing behaviour and attitudes towards brands and their communication (Figure 2 and Table 1).

Figure 2. Segmentation of Polish mothers of children aged 0-12



Source: Own study based on the report: "What are Polish moms like and how do they shop?" Research by Maison Research House, Press release, <https://marketingprzykawie.pl/espresso/jakie-sa-polskie-mamy-i-jak-robia-zakupy-badanie-domu-badawczy-maison/>.

Table 1. Different types of female consumers depending on the mother segment

Typ	Mothers segment	Characteristics of the segment	Various female consumers
1	Passive traditionalists	Motherhood is a sacrifice and a duty for them	They don't buy on impulse
2	Life fulfilled	They seek a balanced life, perfectly combining work, family and time for	They choose branded products for their children
3	Fulfilled in the family	Home carers, home is their priority	They like brands that communicate about caring for the
4	Chaotic dreamers	Not quite sure how they want to be women and	They often don't pay attention to prices
5	Mothers after hours	Hard-working and task-oriented, would like to have more time to herself	They buy the most cosmetics and hygiene items

6	Resigned pessimists	Often annoyed and dissatisfied with motherhood	They like it when advertisements give them ideas on how to do their household chores faster
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Source: Own study based on the report: "What are Polish moms like and how do they shop?" Research by Maison Research House, Press release, <https://marketingprzykawie.pl/espresso/jakie-sa-polskie-mamy-i-jak-robia-zakupy-badanie-domu-badawczy-maison/>.

Regardless of these divisions, women are the main purchasing power in the market, making choices on behalf of themselves or their partners and offspring. Despite their material status, they feel responsible for satisfying the needs of their beloved ones in the best possible way. As a matter of fact, nowadays this does not seem to be a challenge. The countless goods on the market make it possible to satisfy the most discerning tastes and the highest demands.

Paradoxically, however, this huge number of possibilities may also be dysfunctional, making it difficult even to make decisions and reducing satisfaction from the purchase made. This mechanism, or the paradox of choice, was analysed in depth by the American psychologist Barry Schwartz in his famous publication "The Paradox of Choice. Why more is less" (Schwartz, 2013). On the one hand, a large number of product variants is desired by consumers. This enables them to better judge the quality of the products and perceive the brand as better. On the other hand, however, those who are faced with choosing from so many alternatives may feel confused, tired and frustrated, and once the decision is made, they are not content with it (Maison and Stasiuk, 2014).

4. Own Research on Purchasing Choices of Polish Mothers of Children Aged 0 to 6 Years

The solution to these dilemmas is to some extent provided by a study by Tkaczyk and Świeboda (2019), carried out by Kantar MillwardBrown in 2018, during which a representative group of 1001 mothers of children aged 0-6 was surveyed. It was a nationwide group, a territorially representative sample for the population of Poland, a weighted sample based on the parameters, size of place of residence, and province.

The survey asked, among other things, where they looked for information when trying to make the most appropriate choice of a product for the child, from among hundreds of available brands and their variants. The answers obtained were consistent with the results of the survey for the entire population in each of the seven categories in which the products were classified (food and beverages, cosmetics, hygiene articles, e.g., nappies, clothing and footwear, furniture, toys, accessories, e.g., pram, bathtub, bottle).

Among mothers who select products for their children, trust in their own personal experience prevails (54%). Almost 30% of them consult family and friends,

especially when they need information on food (28%) or cosmetics for children (27%). When choosing products from these two categories, noticeably more mothers are willing to take advice from experts (e.g., a doctor) than to browse the Internet. 20% of mothers ask experts about baby food, especially during the period of diet expansion, and 21% of mothers look for appropriate cosmetics for baby care. They look online for information about cosmetics rather than baby food, although a similar number, 19% for cosmetics and 16% for food respectively, visit well-known websites for parents.

However, when choosing a baby care product, mums also visit discussion forums (17%), read blogs (13%), check manufacturers' websites (11%) and look at reviews left on sites such as ceneo (10%). It is true that 11% of mothers, when choosing baby food, also visit manufacturers' websites and the same number confront their knowledge on discussion forums, but only a few percent use other sources.

For mothers buying food for their children the source of information is more often traditional TV advertising (10%). Only 8% of them get their knowledge from social media or from a shop assistant. Only 1% of mothers, and 2% in the case of cosmetics, admit to being influencers and well-known figures such as actresses or sportswomen, although their profiles are breaking records online (Figure 3).

The comparatively low results of online activity may come as a surprise in the context of the fact that current mothers belong to a generation for whom being online is a natural part of reality. A widely noticed characteristic of these groups is their exceptional activity in social media, above-average susceptibility to suggestions and opinions disseminated in this way (also in the area of shopping), and inclination to inform others about their own online findings (Report: Digital Women Influencers, August 2012).

The widely spread desire to express opinions and seek advice from others creates the current P2P (peer to peer) tendency, which allows everyone to communicate with each other, and at the same time increases the amount of information available on the Internet in such an intense way that for many web users it poses a problem. With verifying information, separating the relevant from the irrelevant, the reliable from the unreliable.

Most are looking for quick and simple solutions, preferably given in an equally simple, unambiguous form. Information from the scientific community or institutional authorities, often problematic and not always clearly presented, recedes into the background. It seems, however, that the health and well-being of children is an area where it is definitely worth looking for reliable, verified information based on the knowledge of credible, acknowledged authorities, which in the era of ubiquitous disinformation is a necessity (Kuczabski, 2021).

Figure 3. Sources of information when searching for products for children.

Source: Own study.

The conducted study provides valuable knowledge about the criteria that affect the choice of a product for a child. Quality, safety and price are the same set of values, chosen by mothers in each of the 7 specified product categories: food and beverages, cosmetics, hygiene products, clothes and shoes. Quality is of key importance here, indicated in the first place by 77% of the respondents in the case of food and beverages and 76% when choosing cosmetics. Product safety is, for 54% of mothers, the next factor after quality, which determines the choice of a cosmetic, and the third most important factor (indicated by 46% of the respondents), when the purchase concerns food and drinks for the youngest.

Although the price was next to the two previously mentioned, it did not take the first position in any of the categories, receiving over 20% less responses than the quality that dominated the responses. And in 2010 it was the price that played a decisive role in making purchasing decisions by Polish women (TNS Pentor, 2010), but even then the research of the Boston Consulting Group (Silverstein and Sayre, 2009) indicated that the common feature for women is the readiness to spend larger than the sums planned for the products or services they consider to be exceptionally good (Figure 4).

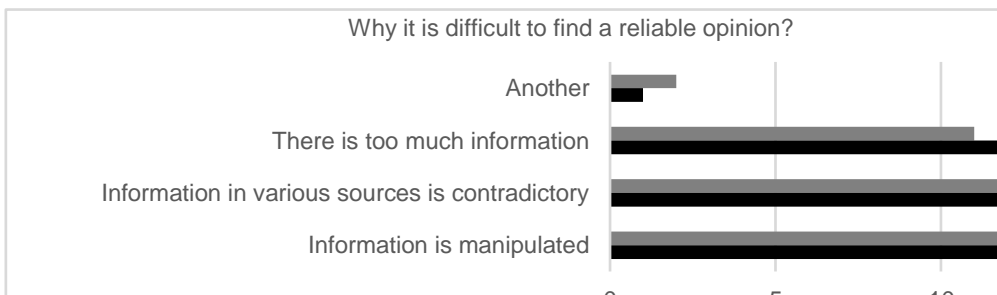
Figure 4. Criteria for selecting a product for a child for the group of products: food, drink and cosmetics



Source: Own study.

The survey questioned mothers about the ease of finding reliable information or opinions about children's products. The results of the survey indicate that in the case of food products it is somewhat more difficult than in the case of cosmetics, according to the mothers surveyed, to find a credible opinion, mainly due to a sense of manipulation and contradictory information and an excess of information (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Why is it difficult to obtain information about products for children?

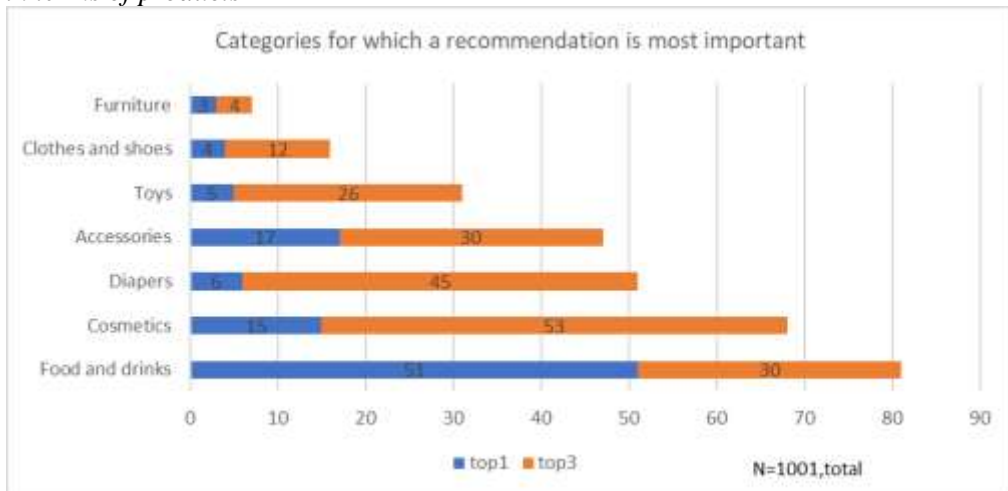


Source: Own study.

By listing safety among the three most important criteria for buying a product, most mothers find it fairly easy to determine by following their own experience, the manufacturer's description or the recommendation of a scientific and medical

institution such as the Institute of Mother and Child. However, what makes it difficult to find reliable information is its overabundance and contradiction. Mothers are also convinced that information is manipulated. Perhaps for these reasons, more than half of mothers (54%) often seek recommendations from these institutions, especially for grocery (81%) and cosmetic (68%) products for children (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Importance of recommendations from a scientific and medical institution in terms of products



Source: Own study.

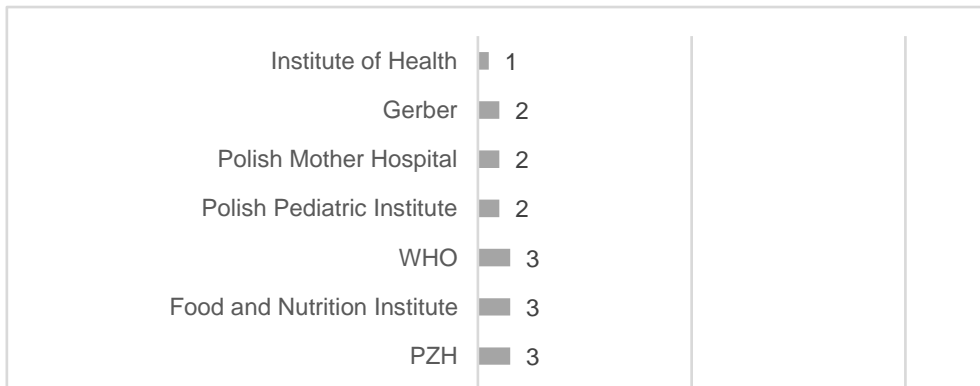
Approximately 70% of mothers aged 0-6 years place their trust in scientific and medical institutions making product recommendations, and 79% are pleased with the products they recommend. A noticeable majority of mothers (71%) are of the opinion that these institutions are guided by expert knowledge when giving recommendations (Tkaczyk and Świeboda, 2019). This is the case of the Institute of Mother and Child, which, as one of the oldest units in the medical sector, constantly carries out consultancy activities, primarily evaluating products for the most sensitive consumers - pregnant women and infants.

During this time, multi-stage procedures and a complex system of criteria have been developed. Its expertise is the view of many specialists, both doctors and scientists, issued in accordance with current legislation, medical standards, recommendations, consultants' guidelines and the results of scientific work, and at the same time enriched by expert sensory evaluations and application or use studies, also using hospital facilities (Figure 7).

It should be emphasized at this point that the principles of product evaluation, and thus the issuance of recommendations, are not uniform for all Polish scientific entities that have obtained the statutory right to issue them. It seems, however, that the procedures in force at the Institute of Mother and Child work for the extremely

high position it has achieved in the opinion of the surveyed mothers. According to the majority of consumers, it is the best known institution for recommending products for children. 74% of mothers spontaneously mention its name as an example of an institution reviewing products for children, and the logo is recognised by as many as 94% of them. 80% of mothers consider the Institute to be credible.

Figure 7. *Spontaneous awareness of organizations recommending products for children*



Source: Own study.

Of the mothers who most often follow the institution's recommendations, mothers of the youngest children aged 0-3 years, from smaller towns, employed on a permanent contract, are the most likely to follow the institution's recommendations. In line with a plausible interpretation, mothers of younger children may have less experience in caring for a child and therefore, in the common maze of information, are more likely to reach for the support of a known and reliable institution.

On the other hand, a smaller town as a residence often limits daily access to specialists. The recommendation of a scientific and medical institution is an expression of expert position, which is why we from such localities are also more willing to use product labels. A permanent job, on the other hand, means a greater burden of responsibilities and the need to make rapid, rational choices.

A favourable opinion from a scientific and medical institution, such as the Institute of Mother and Child, placed on a product's packaging in the form of an easily recognisable seal, is a simple and unambiguous signal which helps to make the right choice of product for a child which, particularly in the area of nutrition, has such a profound effect on human life, from infancy and even prenatal development. Until now, this signal has mainly reached women, who are mainly responsible for children and their purchasing decisions, as well as other family expenditure. In this context, there is often talk of women's increasing purchasing power.

The ongoing 2019 SARS-Cov-2 pandemic, through its impact on family relationships, has accelerated the social changes that have been taking place for some time in terms of family roles and the distribution of household chores, giving them a direction in line with women's expectations. Men are increasingly and willingly participating in household chores and childcare, which may increase their influence on purchasing choices for the family, erasing women's previous advantage.

At the same time, women's incomes are rising, giving them more individual financial resources. Time will tell how the situation will develop in the future, but one can only hope that reliable information based on credible research, such as the recommendation of a reliable institution, will always be welcomed by consumers choosing the best products for their loved ones.

5. Conclusions

The future consequences are fraught with making choices and decisions, because we will never know whether a decision was right or wrong. We can only decide once under given conditions. The decision-making process itself involves seeking information, considering many criteria and comparing alternatives. Purchasing choices for the youngest customers of children aged 0-6 are most often taken by their mothers, who, according to the research, are aware of information distortions and therefore seek reliable and credible information. Among the conclusions, the following should be mentioned in particular:

in each category, and in particular in the food and drink category, product quality, price and safety are crucial;

the recommendation of well-known organizations or medical and scientific institutes is an indicator of product safety and is therefore considered important, especially in the food category (food and drink);

it is quite widespread to be satisfied with products recommended by medical and scientific institutions;

when selecting a product, mothers base mainly on their own experience, on the advice of friends/family and, in the case of food, on experts (doctors);

mothers are conscious of distortions in access to information, therefore they look for reliable information from a trusted source;

institutions are not an important source of product knowledge, they support product choice;

IMiD is the best known (spontaneous awareness definitely dominates) and one of the most reliable institutes recommending children's products.

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