

ECONOMICS*Sociology*

Spasova, L. (2024). Influence of marital status on persuasion strategies in advertising regarding intention to purchase. *Economics and Sociology*, 17(3), 196-222. doi:10.14254/2071-789X.2024/17-3/11

INFLUENCE OF MARITAL STATUS ON PERSUASION STRATEGIES IN ADVERTISING REGARDING INTENTION TO PURCHASE

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Received: October, 2023

1st Revision: August, 2024

Accepted: September, 2024

DOI: 10.14254/2071-789X.2024/17-3/11

ABSTRACT. This study has three chief objectives. Firstly, it aims to identify individual susceptibility to Cialdini's persuasion strategies among consumers with different marital status. Secondly, it focuses on determining the susceptibility of each family member to persuasive strategies. Finally, the study examines the purchasing funnel among consumers with different marital status and different family roles. Two measurement scales are applied: the STPS questionnaire to establish susceptibility to persuasion strategies and the purchase funnel hierarchy model. The results of the first analysis of variance (ANOVA) show that divorced/separated users are susceptible to the principle of liking and authority, and married users – to commitment/consistency and social proof. The second variance analysis found the susceptibility of the children in the family: the first child was affected by liking, the second child – by scarcity, and the third – by commitment/consistency. Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) of a family member with age differences as the covariate shows that consumers of advertising exhibit a strong sensitivity to the principle of unity, which affects widowed husbands or wives. In the second covariance analysis, a strong sensitivity to product preferences was observed for single husbands over 25 and for young adults under 25 for divorced/separated people. These scientific findings may be valuable to various specialists in social psychology, consumer behavior, and those interested in the dynamics of family purchases.

JEL Classification: D20, M31, M37

Keywords: persuasion principles, STPS, purchase funnel, family purchasing in Bulgaria.

Introduction

The successful persuasion of media and advertising addressed at different audiences, as well as the ways in which consumers respond to persuasion, can determine the final results of the intention to purchase. This very complex process starts from the consumer attitude (Kaptein et al., 2009) perceived and preferred as the "most distinctive and indispensable concept" for predicting consumer behaviour (Allport, 1935, p. 784, Bohner & Dickel, 2011). Its strength and ambivalence are then altered through attitude accessibility, as a result of persuasive message

processing (Haugtvedt, Petty & Cacioppo, 1992) and metacognition in persuasion (Tormala & DeSensi, 2009). Traditional exposure to a stimulus can influence attitude formation at a subconscious level (Bargh & Apsley, 2001, Lee, 2001). Moreover, exposure frequency is an important factor (Crano & Prislin, 2006) in persuasion formation as marketers and advertisers resort to the repetition of advertising messages to achieve successful social influence. This is explained by the attitude-behaviour-supporting behaviour continuum (Kaptein, 2012). Modifying human behaviour through persuasion about a product or service is at the heart of marketing and promotion because social psychology and communication experts seek to influence purchase intention in the advertising process. This suggests that persuasion refers to attitude building, achievement of conviction as part of social influence, and ascertainment of various behavioral manifestations as end results of persuasion processes.

The presence of various theoretical and empirical evidence regarding advertising communication as part of persuasive communication shows that research interest in this topic has increased over the years. This is due to the ability to persuade consumers of goods and services to exhibit a certain behaviour or adopt a new belief which lies at the heart of desired advertising influence. Basic socio-demographic characteristics of consumers such as gender, age, education, income, marital status, etc. are studied in order to establish the individual differences in reactions of advertising consumers towards persuasion strategies, developed by Cialdini (2001; 2004; 2016; 2021). Some of the most researched characteristics are gender, age (Spasova, 2022) and education (Erchull, Chrisler, Gorman, Johnston-Robledo, 2002), however, the marital status of users has been researched to a much lesser extent. Therefore, this study attempts to remedy this lapse and determine whether marital status can influence the susceptibility of individuals to some of the persuasion strategies of social influence. A further aim is to investigate the factors that can add value to the intention to purchase a product or service offered in an advertisement. The main difficulties in the research are related to determining the role of family environment representatives, as well as the way in which they influence the purchase decision.

The paper is organized as follows: the first section reviews previous literature on the formation of persuasive messages by applying different scientific approaches to persuasion. We examine the conditions under which persuasion strategies are realized, focusing on social influence in family settings. In line with this review, we have formulated hypotheses regarding the role of advertising and the consumers' marital status in determining different exposures to persuasion strategies. In the following sections 2 and 3, we present our research methodology, the application of a reliable instrument to measure the susceptibility to each of the persuasion social influence strategies, as well as the consumers' purchase function in their preferences for a certain product. In the final part of the article we discuss the obtained results, make some generalizations about the social influence achieved through advertising among users with different marital status and comment on the role of the family. Some recommendations for future research on the processes of family purchasing of goods and services have also been added.

1. Literature review

A number of researchers are interested in the process of persuasion, observing two approaches to adapting persuasive messages. Kaptein and Eckles (2012) adapt some persuasive messages based on previous successful persuasive interactions (Kaptein & Eckles 2012), while Hirsch, Kang and Bodenhausen (2015) suggest persuasive messages based on the Big Five personality traits (Hirsch, Kang & Bodenhausen, 2012). The main goals of researchers are to predict the effectiveness of various social influence strategies for persuasion, create a

persuasive profile, or adapt persuasive messages based on personality traits of different target groups. In recent years, authors have primarily focused on the main characteristics of perceivers of persuasive messages, and then tried to design their interventions accordingly. The strong interest in persuasive communication is due to the various aspects of persuasion, which represent one of the most widely studied topics in the social sciences (Kaptein, 2012). Another reason is the wide applicability of persuasion strategies in different scientific fields, such as computer-mediated persuasion (McKenna & Bargh 2000, Postmes *et al.*, 2001; Sassenberg & Boos, 2003), the use of virtual reality as a persuasive environment (Blascovich *et al.*, 2002), applying persuasive strategies for leadership building (Hoy and Smith, 2007), and developing interactive systems that are designed to change users' attitudes or behaviours (Oinas-Kukkonen & Harjumaa, 2008; Ploug *et al.*, 2010; IJsselsteijn *et al.*, 2006). The positive role of persuasion should not be underestimated for different social groups that maintain a neutral to positive attitude towards products and services in advertising to achieve a certain consumer behaviour. This becomes evident when social marketing campaigns link positive role models to desired and expected consumer behaviour (Grier & Bryant, 2005). Other researchers note that average sales on e-commerce websites increase through the use of persuasion (Kaptein & van Halteren, 2012), and also these technologies should also address individual-level effects, such as changing the attitude or behaviour of individual consumers (Kaptein, 2012).

Significant progress in the study of persuasion processes for achieving successful social influence is expressed in understanding the conditions under which persuasion strategies are applied. Researchers like Fogg and Eckles (2007) argue that persuasive technologies can yield positive results only if persuasion occurs under the following conditions: 1) application of the appropriate message, 2) implementation at the right time, and 3) using it in an appropriate manner to be sufficiently effective (Fogg & Eckles, 2007). The conditions proposed by the authors are also relevant to advertising communication, where various persuasion processes are aligned with certain individual characteristics of consumers of products and services. Given the importance of persuasion strategies applied in advertising, every company should identify the key factors influencing persuasion processes. Generally, socio-demographic factors are well-known determinants for achieving social influence in the scientific literature, as they indicate significant effects on consumer behaviour (Thuan & Homolka, 2021). Successful advertising impact is achieved by segmenting consumers based on different criteria and understanding of the social influence achieved under specific conditions which alter consumer attitudes, behaviour, and satisfaction (Peterson & Wilson, 1992). Some researchers in behavioral psychology add that individual consumer differences in the persuasion process (Brug, Oenema & Campbell, 2003) are directly related to the effectiveness of the communicated message. According to the findings of Fogg and Eckles (2007), the understanding of messages can be perceived differently by an individual and a group of individuals, who have a direct connection and influence on each other (Fogg & Eckles, 2007). Other empirical studies show that disagreement within group members can mediate the effects of cognitive dissonance mechanisms (Festinger, 1957), with McKimmie, Terry, Hogg, and Manstead (2003) suggesting that the group maintains moderate dissonance consistent with expectations based on social identity (McKimmie *et al.*, 2003). The process of reducing dissonance is achieved by monitoring the behaviour of a large number of people - a phenomenon, observed in the application of the principle of social proof (Cialdini, 2001; Cialdini, 2016), or when we adopt the views of people from a family environment. Therefore, strategies for social influence through persuasion achieve certain effectiveness with partial or full alignment between the perceived and preferred basis of consumer attitude (Kaptein *et al.*, 2009) among members of a group or another collective.

Other empirical evidence has found that if an individual is outside a specific social group, expectations are that cognitive dissonance will be reactivated or a substitute dissonant arousal will be observed (Monin *et al.*, 2004; Norton *et al.*, 2003). In this situation, a consumer of advertising messages might make a purchase from the same product category at a nearby store because they were not sufficiently satisfied with a previous online purchase of a similar product. The consumer aims to reduce cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) through compensatory action, where persuasive advertising exerts a strong influence, where principles such as social proof or unity are applied (Cialdini, 2004). In addition, attitude change induced by a single source represents a special case in persuasion. Minority influence researchers focus on the intra-individual processes that are activated in response to opinion-based minority advocacy (Crano & Prislin, 2006). These processes include cognitive reactions or thoughts generated by recipients of minority appeals (Wood, 2000). This aspect of attitudes and persuasions is explained through the principles of liking and unity, where unity refers to the sharing of the same identity between an influential person and their followers (Cialdini, 2021). As a result, the majority can determine the consumer's final decision, overriding their initial attitude toward a product or service. According to Wood's (2000) concept, intra-individual processes activated in response to minority advocacy, i.e. from a particular community, also shape the formation of attitudes toward certain advertised products (Wood, 2000). Therefore, researchers compare the generation of positive and negative advertising responses with minority and majority advocacy under certain social conditions, such as group membership or family presence (El-Alayli *et al.*, 2002; Prislin & Wood, 2005).

The primary reason for conducting the present study was the need to identify the general role of the family and those assumed by its different members influenced by the effect of advertising on their intention to purchase products and services (Hawkins *et al.*, 2004). The main motivation is to expand the understanding of how to achieve desired consumer behaviour through persuasion, starting with the family and the role it plays in an individual's purchasing decisions under the influence of advertising. According to Thomson, Laing and McKee (2007), qualitative research will enable researchers to learn more about the processes and complexities of family purchasing, given the opportunity it provides to study consumers in their environment (Thomson *et al.*, 2007a). In the multidisciplinary literature on life satisfaction, it has been found that marital status is positively linked to physical and psychological well-being, with gender differences in the well-being of legally married couples and singles being widely explored (Williams, 1988). Furthermore, research on the influence of marital status on customer satisfaction during purchases (Dittmar, Long & Meek, 2004) has also identified some causal relationships between this factor and consumer behaviour after exposure to advertising. Gender differences in the effect of marital status on specific consumer behaviours before and after purchase may stem from differences in the orientation, pre-existing expectations of family members, and the meaning men and women find in purchased products. (Thuan & Homolka, 2021). Women's relationships with other family members and their social environment are often more intimate than those of male consumers (Williams, 1988; Thuan & Homolka, 2021). This suggests that gender is also an important factor in determining the role of each spouse in making individual or joint decisions (Xia *et al.*, 2006), with notable gender differences observed (Wut & Chou, 2009). The evolving social roles of men and women in the family, leading to more women entering the workforce and men assuming more household responsibilities, are additional factors influencing consumer behaviour (Xia *et al.*, 2006; Wut & Chou, 2009). Some authors have differentiated the roles of the two genders in the family as either masculine with respect to purchasing technology, cars, or accessories, or feminine regarding the frequently consumed items, such as food, cosmetics, and household goods (Commuri & Gentry, 2005; Piron, 2002). Therefore, future research expectations not only suggest that marriage is linked

to interpersonal relationships, physical and mental well-being, happiness, and social satisfaction, but also to purchase satisfaction and some post-use processes of products and services.

The process of making family purchasing decisions and the intention to buy are both instances where persuasive communication occurs within the family. The scientific literature examining family dynamics reveals that family exerts one of the most significant influences on consumer decision-making (Cotte & Wood, 2004; O'Malley & Prothero, 2007; Hamilton, 2009). The main research questions related to family decisions revolve around constructs such as family power, participation, and conflicts in purchases (Qualls & Jaffee, 1992), as well as social class, role orientation, family life cycle, perceived decision risk, and time pressure (Shepherd & Woodruff, 1988). Different family members assume various roles in influencing a purchase decision, and researchers point out that these roles are not static, but can shift and evolve, thus altering the persuasive process within the family (Su *et al.*, 2003; Belch & Willis, 2001). Researchers have identified five to six key roles within the family decision-making process: initiator or gatekeeper, influencer, decision-maker, buyer, and user (Engel *et al.*, 1973). In addition to the role distribution of family members, it is crucial to explore the way persuasion occurs within the family, the main distinction being the degree to which individuals in a family consciously accept or reject the object of advertising influence in the persuasion process. The cognitive model of persuasion outlines a series of information-processing stages that happen in response to persuasive messages (Albarrac, 2002; Albarrac & Wyer, 2001).

In-depth research requires clarity not only on the roles assumed by family members, but also on the nature of family relationships, such as husband-wife, parent-child, sibling-sibling, and others within the family unit. A particular focus is placed on the parent-child relationship, as in recent years, children have been recognized as an important market segment that influences family decisions (Kapoor & Verma, 2005). Kaur and Singh (2006) found that the degree of influence exerted by children varies depending on the product category and stage of the decision-making process. For certain products, children are active initiators, information seekers, and buyers, while for others, their impact is limited due to a lack of competence or experience (Kaur & Singh, 2006). Other researchers indicate that before children influence the family's purchasing decisions, the actual choice has already been made by the parents (Tinson & Nancarrow, 2007), although the latter may allow children to express an opinion in the form of a symbolic gesture (Ekstrom, 2005). Moreover, several authors note that as children grow older, their influence on the family's purchases increases (Özgen, 2003). The explanation is that as children mature, they are able to make more competent decisions and assist their parents (Ekstrom, 2005). The research problem that arises is to determine the extent to which children within the family environment influence the purchase of products and services under the allure of advertising, and to define the main factors that underlie this influence. On the other hand, creating a false sense of participation for children, which obscures the true power dynamics within family relationships, is explained as a way to mitigate the perceived risk involved in purchasing new products (Kaur & Singh, 2006).

In the scientific literature, purchase intention is defined as what consumers think they will buy (Blackwell *et al.*, 2001), and this type of consumer shows higher actual levels of purchase than those customers who demonstrate no intention to buy any products (Brown, 2003). Furthermore, there are three factors that can influence a consumer's purchase decision: personal, psychological and social (Khan, Nisar & Ullah, 2021). The marketer needs to know whether a reference group has a significant social influence on consumers, as well as which family members are affected by these groups (Thomson, Laing & McKee, 2007b). Various scientific studies suggest that family, peers, and media are the main social factors for adolescents. Certain family characteristics, such as parenting style, gender role orientation (GRO), and habits related

to interacting with other individuals and social groups, shape both family models and consumer behaviour in Western and Eastern Europe, as well as in Asia (Thomson, Laing & McKee 2007b; Kaur & Singh, 2006). In addition to family relationships, persuasion strategies should be developed for social influence in advertising, and the resulting impact among target groups should be studied, taking into account the repeated actions of consumers (Thuan & Homolka, 2021). The dynamism of decision-making within a family, as well as its interconnectivity among family members, is the reason these processes are studied in social psychology as separate phenomena, not necessarily tied to a specific purchasing decision (Sinha, 2005). The main stages described in the research literature on purchase intention are as follows: problem recognition, information search, and final selection (Solomon, 2003). Some authors indicate that children have a strong influence during the problem recognition stage, but significantly less influence during the final decision stage (Belch & Willis, 2001). In a more recent study, other researchers find that teenagers who actively use the internet have greater access to market information and significantly influence family decision-making (Belch *et al.*, 2005). This again shows that their influence is higher in the stages of initiation and information search, compared to the stages of alternative evaluation and final decision (Kaur & Singh, 2006). Joint decisions, i.e., decisions made collaboratively by spouses, are also influenced by children (Hundal, 2001). However, this influence is not expected among consumers of products and services who do not cohabit with children due to various personal and social reasons. Some empirical evidence suggests that the initiator of a purchase within a family is usually a young woman, likely the wife or one of the older children, but the purchase is made after consulting another family member, such as the husband (Kaur & Singh, 2006). On the other hand, there is insufficient evidence regarding the influence of children on instrumental decisions, such as how much to spend (Sinha, 2005), but regardless of age, children help increase the pressure to make a purchase decision (Kaur & Singh, 2006). Therefore, over the years, the importance of different types of families has grown, and the complex relationships within families that can determine consumer behaviour following persuasive communication must be studied. This includes various family structures, such as single-parent families (either single or widowed), two-parent families (either married or cohabiting), childless families, families with an absent parent (divorced, separated, or widowed), and, most importantly, children's involvement in purchase decisions. Children become customers at a later stage, but they follow the pattern of behavior provided by the parent as consumers of goods and services. Sociological research shows that family compositions will continue to evolve (Kaur & Singh, 2006; Thuan & Homolka, 2021). The behaviour of these consumers also needs to be analysed in terms of their responses to advertising following the application of persuasive communication. This would allow researchers and practitioners to learn more about the processes of family purchasing by studying consumers in their environment (Thomson *et al.*, 2007a).

In the present scientific research, consumers of products and services in advertising are classified into several different groups based on their marital status: single, cohabiting, married, divorced or separated, widowed. This classification is used to test their susceptibility to the persuasive strategies outlined by Cialdini (2001-2021), as well as consumer behaviour with purchase intention under the influence of advertising (Cialdini, 2001; Cialdini, 2016; Cialdini, 2021; Duffett, 2015). We expect that the established findings will contribute to the existing literature focused on persuasive communication (Johnson, 2004; John and Jackson, 2004), social influence strategies for persuasion (Cialdini, 2021), and the evaluation of the effectiveness of each strategy as an operational measure of the achieved persuasiveness of advertising to consumers (Kaptein, Markopoulos, Ruyter, & Aarts, 2009). To achieve this goal, we conducted a content analysis of certain family roles and relationships to determine the types of customers and their roles in purchase intention. These findings are important for existing

companies, online sellers, and other marketers, as well as for advertisers and merchants interested in achieving advertising effectiveness through persuasion.

Based on previous research, the researcher proposes the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 0: The marital status of consumers, as well as their roles within the family, do not determine their individual susceptibility to persuasive advertising strategies.

Hypothesis 1: Belonging to a family environment may increase susceptibility to social engagement and consistency.

Hypothesis 2: A lack of family relationships may increase susceptibility to principles describing personal relationships.

Hypothesis 3: The family role of each individual determines their susceptibility to specific persuasion strategies presented in advertising.

Based on the dependencies found in other studies on the dynamics of family purchases (Sinha, 2005), and the need to establish consumer purchase intention behaviour in their natural family environment (Thomson et al., 2007a), we seek to analyse certain socio-demographic characteristics as factors determining consumer susceptibility to advertising and persuasion strategies. The abovementioned sources do not measure persuasion strategies for social influence, so the author aims to establish the role of each family member in the purchase intention. We have also found that there is insufficient information in the scientific literature regarding individuals' susceptibility to persuasion strategies applied in advertising.

The goal of this research is to determine whether belonging to a specific family environment, the involvement of individual family members, and the relationships among them would influence certain consumer behaviour in the persuasion processes. Additionally, the main task of the author is to implement a reliable and valid instrument for measuring social influence persuasion strategies, as well as to find an appropriate scale for measuring purchase intention that can be applied in various scientific disciplines. Therefore, the analysis of family status and the role of each family member can be defined as two important factors of social influence that will benefit various sociologists, social psychologists, and specialists in marketing and advertising.

2. Methodological approach

The present study, which offers a reliable instrument for measuring persuasion strategies, aims to identify individual susceptibility to Cialdini's persuasive strategies among consumers of different marital status and to establish the susceptibility of each family member to the persuasive strategies. Another main aim is to determine "the purchase funnel" with persuasion strategies among consumers with different marital status. The study was conducted as an expression of our scientific interest in achieved social influence of Cialdini's persuasion strategies (2001-2021) in advertising. The data collection period spans from January 2020 to March 2022, with an analysis of the scientific data between April 2022 and June 2024. The data were collected from a total sample of 450 respondents, distributed according to various demographic characteristics, such as marital status and family members. They were determined as main factors, providing a 95% representative size ($e = \pm 5\%$; $p = q = 0.50$). A survey was conducted among various advertising consumers, and the data was processed using the statistical analysis package SPSS 19.0. The participants in the survey were asked by email to voluntarily participate in the study if they met several requirements: 1) within the age range of 18 to 65; 2) having seen the advertisements offered for evaluation; 3) having purchased or intending to repurchase products from the offered advertisements; 4) indicating their marital status as respondents, as for the purposes of the study they could choose to participate in the survey with different roles: husband, wife or child in the family (living with parents), aged 18

to 25 years. The target population for this study were individuals, aged 18 to 65, living in Bulgaria, acting in one of the following three roles - husband, wife or child in the family, living with parents, aged 18 to 25. This was justified by the main purpose of the first study which was to ascertain the influence of each member in the family regarding their purchase intention. The sample was made up of advertising consumers who indicated in advance whether they had been exposed to advertisements offering perfumes by Versace, Dolce & Gabbana, as well as Vogue media advertisements. Each case from the general population had had an equal chance of being included in the study according to the specified criteria, with the respondents being users of the advertised products and services in Bulgaria. All participants completed the questionnaire on paper to ensure the accuracy of the answers, and 15% of the questionnaires were not correctly completed and therefore we discarded them from the survey.

The survey comprised the following several modules: 1) First module: application of an adapted and modified version of the *STPS questionnaire* or *Susceptibility to Persuasion Strategies Scale*, developed by Kaptein, Ruyter, Markopoulos, and Aarts (Kaptein, Ruyter, Markopoulos, & Aarts, 2009), we determined the individual susceptibility of advertising consumers to seven persuasion strategies of Cialdini (2001-2021). The scale was adapted for users of advertisements and contained 26 positions of Kaptein's and 9 of ours as follows: the principle of reciprocity, of scarcity, of commitment and consistency were formed by 5 statements (as in Kaptein); the principle of authority consisted of 4 statements by Kaptein and one added by us – "Expert opinion is very important to me"; the principle of social proof consisted of 4 statements by Kaptein and one of ours – "If a lot of people buy something, I'll do it too"; the principle of liking consisted of 3 statements by Kaptein and 2 of ours – "I really like a person who has many positive qualities", "When someone compliments me, I start to like them"; the principle of unity was based on 5 statements, all proposed by the author of this study – "When I repeat someone's behaviour, it means that we have a lot in common"; "Sometimes I feel some people so close that it's as if we have the same identity"; "Only if a person has similar characteristics as mine will he make me follow him"; "The one who really meets my ideal of personality will be an example to follow", "If someone intrigues me with their appearance or soul, I feel that I am becoming a part of them" (Spasova, 2022). 2) Second module: statements for measuring purchase intentions, including the first two stages of the hierarchy model - the purchase funnel: Awareness Scale and Product Preferences Scale (Duffett, 2015, p. 503), applied in advertisements: *Awareness Scale* – "I would learn more about a product that interests me from an advertisement"; "I would find additional information about a product from an advertising that offers an incentive"; "I would find additional information about a product from an advertisement that offers benefits to the customer." *Product Preferences Scale* – "I would buy a product that has been used by a large number of other users" (social proof); "I would buy a product that is hard to find" (scarcity); "I would buy a product that brings me a gift" (reciprocity); "I would buy a product that is offered by an expert" (authority); "I would buy a product offered by an influencer" (unity); "I would buy a product that is offered by an attractive seller" (liking); "I would buy a product that is associated with more commitment, if it brings me important family benefits" (commitment and consistency). 3) Third module - demographic factors such as gender, marital status, member of family such as husband, wife or child in the family (living with parents), aged 18 to 25 years were indicators for forming the target group.

The survey instrument used in this study consisted of 45 items divided into the first two modules and a third module – demographic characteristics. Cronbach's alpha has been used to test the reliability of an adapted and modified version of the STPS questionnaire (Kaptein *et al.*, 2009). The reliability of Liking Scale was $\alpha=0.678$, that of Social Scale was $\alpha=0.775$, of Commitment and Consistency Scale was $\alpha=0.771$, of Scarcity Scale was $\alpha=0.648$, of Reciprocity Scale was $\alpha=0.709$, of Unity Scale was $\alpha=0.736$, of Authority Scale was $\alpha=0.731$.

For the whole sample, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the STPS questionnaire was $\alpha=0.716$. Since the values are close to or exceed the minimum recommended value of $\alpha=0.700$ (DeVellis, 2012), the internal consistency for the respective subscales is sufficiently high, i.e. the elements that compose them form a common scale.

Researchers point out that it is very difficult for consumers to reach the last level of the communication pyramid of effect, known as the purchase funnel (Safko, 2010; Belch and Belch, 2012; Duffett, 2015), so in the current study, statements were given to consumers to evaluate along “the purchase funnel” (Duffett, 2015, p. 503) through persuasive communication implemented through persuasive strategies (Cialdini, 2001; Cialdini, 2016; Cialdini, 2021). Respondents answered to all of the modules of the questionnaire, printed on paper for more precise completion, on a five-point Likert-type scale, which included grades from 1 – “Disagree”, to 5 – “Agree”. The participants had to agree or disagree with the statements from first and second modules.

In order to determine whether the adapted and modified scale of Kaptein, Ruyter, Markopoulos and Aarts (2009), (Kaptein *et al.*, 2009) applied in the study could be suitable for analysing the obtained data, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed using the principal components method (PCA) and orthogonal rotation using the Varimax with Kaiser Normalization method. Seven factors were assigned as in the methodology of Kaptein, Ruyter, Markopoulos and Aarts (2009), (Kaptein *et al.*, 2009). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was 0.667 for the entire sample (N = 450), which is above the recommended value of 0.600 (Kaiser, 1974). Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant for all subjects ($\chi^2(592) = 8727.5$, $p < 0.000$), (Kaiser, 1974; Bartlett, 1954). The adequacy measure of each subscale of the STPS questionnaire was also measured, and the subscales measuring the following principles were assessed as: liking: KMO 0.557; scarcity: KMO 0.605; reciprocity: KMO 0.642; authority: KMO 0.628; commitment and consistency: KMO 0.605; social proof: KMO 0.667; unity: KMO 0.608. Bartlett's tests of sphericity for each subscale were also statistically significant for all subjects ($p < 0.000$), (Kaiser, 1974; Bartlett, 1954). After applying principal component analysis (PCA), we assumed 7 factors, as in the methodology of Kaptein, Ruyter, Markopoulos and Aarts (2009), (Kaptein *et al.*, 2009), with the obtained factor loadings ranging from 0.828 to 0.423, as loads below 0.400 were not accepted.

Total cumulative variance was also calculated, amounting to 51%, which falls within the general range for multidimensional constructs. Since the main objective of the present study was to identify and calculate the combined susceptibility scores for the persuasion strategies of R. Cialdini (2001-2021), principal component analysis (PCA) was applied, and the value of the factors ranged from 0.828 to 0.423 as specified. The fit from the five- and six-component solution was also further examined using orthogonal rotation by means of the Varimax method with Kaiser normalization. Due to the relatively low loadings, the following four statements were removed from the scale: one statement about the principle of authority – 0.371; one statement about the principle of commitment and consistency – 0.314; one statement about the principle of social proof – 0.306 and one statement about the principle of liking – 0.278. After reducing the number of statements from 35 to 31, the cumulative variance increased from 51% to 55%. We continued our scientific work with the adapted and modified version of the STPS questionnaire with 34 items and 7 subscales as a measure to determine the susceptibility of consumers of advertising products and services to individual persuasive strategies. In one of their studies, Kaptein and van Halteren, due to the low loading of some of the statements in questionnaire STPS, removed 6 statements from the scale: the principle of authority - 11, the principle of authority - 12, the principle of commitment and consistency - 20, the principle of reciprocity - 25, the principle of liking - 28 and the principle of liking – 32 (Kaptein and van

Halteren, 2012). The following paragraph describes and estimates Pearson correlation coefficients, indicating their statistical dependencies.

In order to test the subscales in the STPS questionnaire, the Pearson correlation coefficient was used, and statistically significant positive correlations were found, which ranged from $r=0.222$ to $r=0.548$; $p<0.000$. The positive low and moderate correlations in the present study are accurate criteria for the construct validity of the subscales for the analysed sample, and we consider them to be satisfactory. Similar results were observed by other authors, where the subscales of the STPS questionnaire (Kaptein et al., 2009) ranged from 0.200 to 0.400 (Kaptein et al., 2012), and the positive correlation values were lower than those obtained in our sample. Therefore, the construct validity of the subscales in the present study is higher and the application of the adapted and modified scale of Kaptein et al. (2009) is perfectly acceptable.

According to some researchers, the application of messages as well as persuasive messages in persuasion systems causes some differences in the reported results (Kaptein and van Halteren, 2012; Oyebode, Alqahtani and Orji, 2022). The explanation of the same researchers is that persuasive strategies are implemented in different ways in computer systems in order to achieve a persuasion effect. There is insufficient theoretical and empirical evidence that persuasive strategies can motivate behavioral changes among visitors to different social platforms. Similar scientific evidence has not been established in the impact of advertising messages, and we seek to fill this gap. Therefore, we attempted to measure the receptiveness to advertising messages among advertising consumers by focusing on R. Cialdini's seven popular persuasion strategies.

In the first stage of the research, a valid and reliable research instrument was proposed, and in the second stage, we sought to achieve the last level of the communication pyramid of effect, known as the purchase funnel (Safko, 2010; Belch and Belch, 2012; Duffett, 2015). In order to achieve this second goal, statements measuring purchase intentions were proposed for the evaluation of advertising on consumers. The statements were divided into two stages of the purchase funnel: Awareness Scale with three statements and Product Preference Scale, consisting of seven statements (that is, as many persuasive strategies as there are in R. Cialdini). The ultimate goal was to determine the effectiveness of the various implementations of each persuasion strategy in the advertisements studied. For greater precision of the research, the value of Cronbach's alpha was also checked to test the reliability of an adapted and modified version of Duffett's hierarchy model (, 2015, p. 503), which was applied in advertisements. We found it challenging to formulate the statements measuring the purchase funnel, because the main purpose of the study was to establish the susceptibility to persuasion strategies in advertising. Two factors of the purchase funnel were taken into account: Awareness and Product Preferences, that is, two subscales of Duffett's hierarchy model were applied (Duffett 2015). The reliability of Awareness Scale was $\alpha=0.678$, and the reliability of Product Preferences Scale was $\alpha=0.775$. For the entire sample, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the hierarchy model - the purchase funnel was $\alpha=0.726$. Since the values were very close to the minimum recommended value of $\alpha=0.700$ according to some statisticians (DeVellis, 2012), the internal consistency for the respective subscales was sufficiently high, i.e. measurements could continue with this scale. Therefore, the research instrument, after the principal component analysis (PCA), consisted of 32 statements for the STPS questionnaire (Kaptein et al., 2009) and 10 statements for the hierarchy model - the purchase funnel: Awareness Scale and Product Preferences Scale (Duffett, 2015).

3. Conducting research and results

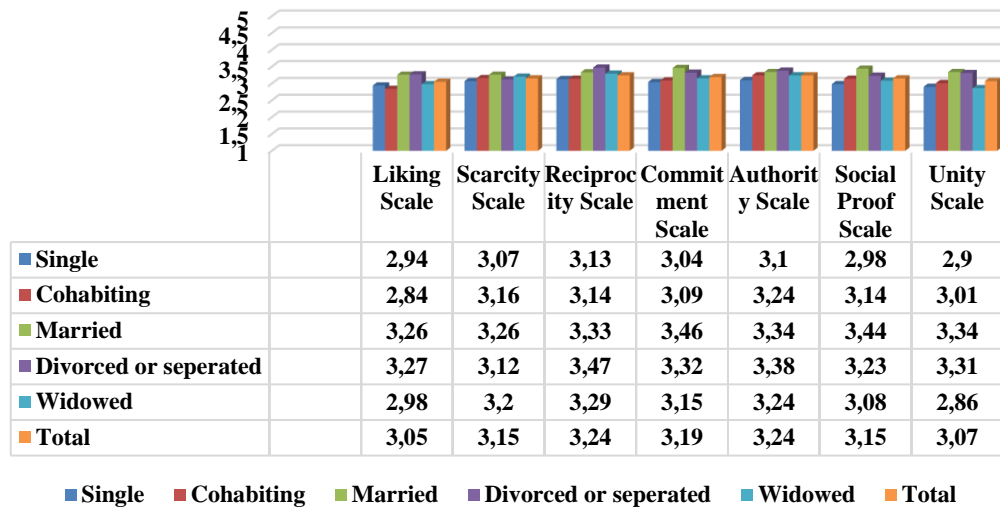
The study was conducted in the timeframe between January 2020 and March 2022. Self-reported data were collected from a total sample of 450 respondents from Bulgaria distributed according to the following demographic characteristics - gender, marital status and family member, ensuring a 95% representative size (being $e = \pm 5\%$; $p = q = 0.50$). The frequency distribution of respondents was as follows: 46% men (207 people) and 54% women (243 people), according to marital status: 19.8% (89 people) – single, 12% (54 people) – cohabiting, 42, 2% (190 people) - married, 16.2% (73 people) - divorced or separated and 9.8% (44 people) - widowed. The frequency distribution of respondents as family members was as follows: 28.4% (128 people) - first child, 6.2% (28 people) - second child, 6% (27 people) - third child, 28.9% (130 people) - husband and 30.5% (137 people) - wife. In the study, children in the family were defined as young adults under the age of 25 who might influence family purchasing, and husbands and wives were defined as consumers over the age of 25.

Data were processed using the statistical analysis package SPSS 19.0. The following statistical analyses were used: Descriptive analysis of frequencies and means; Internal consistency of each of the subscales measuring the different persuasion strategies (Cronbach alpha α coefficient), as well as for the whole sample; Principal components factor analysis to test internal and construct validity of persuasion strategies; One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine the influence of users' marital status as well as family member on susceptibility to persuasion, based on principles of persuasion; Student-Fisher t-test for statistical significance of differences between means, between groups formed by family members and between variables; Pearson correlations to reveal the strength of the relationship between different subscales that made up the factors and family member with age differences; Analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) were performed in order to 1) establish causal relationships between susceptibility to persuasion strategies and demographic factors - member of family and marital status; 2) establish causal relationships between the purchase funnel, measuring product preferences, and demographic factors - member of family and marital status (Ganeva, 2016).

3.1. Influence of marital status on susceptibility to persuasion principles

Susceptibility to influence based on different principles of persuasion can be visualized in *Graph 1*, according to marital status. The average values for the whole sample are presented next to the average values by marital status, which allows us to conclude that, in general, the susceptibility to persuasion based on different persuasion principles is average in degree (*Graph 1*).

Susceptibility to persuasion principles depending on marital status



Graph 1. Susceptibility to persuasion based on persuasion principles.

Source: *own data*

Graph 1 shows the measured average values for each of the subscales of the STPS questionnaire, developed by Kaptein, Ruyter, Markopoulos and Aarts (2009), (Kaptein *et al.*, 2009), as single people give the most positive answers on reciprocity scale (Mean=3.13), cohabiting people – on authority scale (Mean=3.24), married people – on commitment and consistency scale (Mean=3.46), divorced or separated people - on reciprocity scale (Mean=3.47), widowed people – on reciprocity scale (Mean=3.29). The highest mean values are observed for divorced or separated people regarding the principle of reciprocity (Mean=3.47), as well as for married people regarding the principle of commitment and consistency (Mean=3.46) compared to all target groups. The highest mean values are observed for married people and divorced or separated people for all principles (Mean<3.00), (*Graph 1*).

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) has been applied to determine the influence of persuasion principles on the different groups of respondents formed by marital status. The hypothesis that the mean arithmetic values for each of the subscales are different has also been tested, and the statistically significant results of the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) are presented in *Table 1*.

Table 1. Influence of marital status on the persuasion principles (ANOVA)

Independent variable	Dependent variable	Means	F p-value	T-tests
Marital Status	Liking Scale	x1 (single) = 2.94	F=3.56;	t _{1,4} = 2.98; p < 0.00
		x2 (cohabiting) = 2.84	p < 0.00	t _{2,4} = 2.18; p < 0.00
		x3 (married) = 3.26		t _{5,4} = 2.04; p < 0.00
		x4 (divorced/ separated) = 3.27		
		x5 (widowed) = 2.98		
	Authority Scale	x1 (single) = 3.10	F=2.20;	t _{1,4} = 3.01; p < 0.00
		x2 (cohabiting) = 3.24	p < 0.01	t _{2,4} = 2.87; p < 0.00
		x3 (married) = 3.34		t _{3,4} = 2.78; p < 0.00
		x4 (divorced/ separated) = 3.38		
		x5 (widowed) = 3.24		
	Commitment and Consistency Scale	x1 (single) = 3.04	F=3.23;	t _{1,3} = 2.76; p < 0.00
		x2 (cohabiting) = 3.09	p < 0.00	t _{2,3} = 2.27; p < 0.00
		x3 (married) = 3.46		t _{3,4} = 3.04; p < 0.03
		x4 (divorced/ separated) = 3.32		t _{3,5} = 3.01; p < 0.00
		x5 (widowed) = 3.15		
	Social Proof Scale	x1 (single) = 2.98	F=2.15;	t _{1,3} = 2.56; p < 0.00
		x2 (cohabiting) = 3.14	p < 0.03	t _{2,3} = 2.29; p < 0.00
		x3 (married) = 3.44		t _{3,4} = 2.33; p < 0.00
		x4 (divorced/ separated) = 3.23		t _{3,5} = 3.04; p < 0.00
		x5 (widowed) = 3.08		

Source: *own calculation*

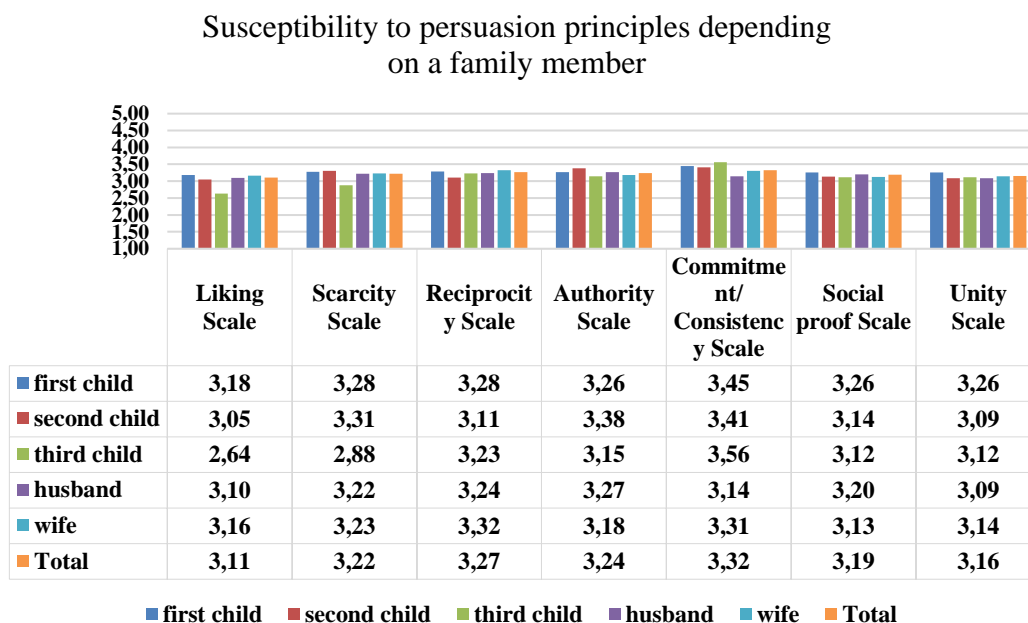
The results show that marital status affects both susceptibility to persuasion through four of seven persuasion principles, with the highest mean values observed for married people and divorced or separated people for the measured principles, and the lowest for cohabiting people and single people, (*Graph 1, Table 1*). The weakest susceptibility was found for single people to the following principles: liking (F=3.56; p < 0.00; x_{1 (single)} = 2.94), authority (F=2.20; p < 0.01; x_{1 (single)} = 3.10), social proof (F=2.15; p < 0.03; x_{1 (single)} = 2.98), as well as to commitment and consistency (F=3.23; p < 0.00; x_{1 (single)} = 3.04), (*Graph 1, Table 1*). The explanation is that consumers who are not in a family environment on a daily basis are not particularly susceptible to persuasion because there are not other family members to play different roles in influencing a purchase decision (Su *et al.*, 2003; Belch and Willis, 2001). There is much scientific evidence that the family is identified as one of the most important influences on consumer decision-making (Cotte and Wood, 2004; O'Malley and Prothero, 2007; Hamilton, 2009). On the other hand, divorced and separated people are statistically significantly more susceptible to persuasion by the principle of liking (F = 3.56; p < 0.00; x_{4 (divorced/ separated)} = 3.27) compared to the other groups (t_{1,4} = 2.98, p < 0.00; t_{2,4} = 2.18, p < 0.00; t_{5,4} = 2.00, p < 0.00), (*Graph 1, Table 1*). A statistically significant susceptibility to persuasion towards the principle of authority is observed in divorced and cohabiting users (F = 2.20; p < 0.01; x_{4 (divorced/ separated)} = 3.38) compared to the other groups (t_{1,4} = 3.01; p < 0.00; t_{2,4} = 2.87; t_{3,4} = 2.78; (*Graph 1, Table 1*). The explanation is that changes in the marital status of advertising consumers also affect persuasion processes, and divorced or separated people tend to comply with legitimate authority (Slater *et al.*, 2006) and being friendly to people they like (Cialdini, 2004; Kaptein and Eckles, 2010). The depth of research requires segmentation of consumers by psychological characteristics such as stages in human development (Prochaska and Velicer, 1997), as well as defining the role of each member in the family, because some authors find that personalized

interventions are more successful in persuasion than non-personalized ones (Kaptein and Eckles, 2010).

A strong susceptibility to the principle of commitment and consistency has been found among married people ($F=3.23$; $p < 0.00$; $x_{1(\text{married})} = 3.46$), compared to the other groups ($t_{1,3} = 2.76$, $p < 0.00$; $t_{2,3} = 2.27$, $p < 0.00$; $t_{3,4} = 3.04$, $p < 0.00$; $t_{3,5} = 3.01$, $p < 0.00$), (*Graph 1, Table I*). In their previous research, some authors indicate that married people are more motivated to act on their social commitments (Hoy and Smith, 2007). On the other hand, applying the principle of commitment and consistency in the field of online marketing, which requires its users to register to access this website, significantly leads to an increase in their commitment to use products and services (Prislin and Wood, 2005). In our study, susceptibility to persuasion was also found through the principle of social proof among married people ($F=2.15$; $p < 0.03$; $x_{1(\text{married})} = 3.44$), compared to the other groups ($t_{1,3} = 2.56$, $p < 0.00$; $t_{2,3} = 2.29$, $p < 0.00$; $t_{3,4} = 2.33$, $p < 0.00$; $t_{3,5} = 3.04$, $p < 0.00$), (*Graph 1, Table I*). Therefore, the declaration of high consumption by other consumers in the advertising messages would increase the purchase willingness of married consumers in the persuasion process. Another explanation for the observed result is that these consumers want to receive certain information and make decisions only after observing the behaviour and the consequences on the people around them (Clark and Tennessee, 2008).

3.2. Influence of a family member on the susceptibility to persuasion principles

In order to establish the influence of a family member on the susceptibility to persuasion strategies, the mean values for this criterion were measured, and the mean values for the entire sample were also presented (*Graph 2*).



Graph 2. Susceptibility to persuasion principles depending on a family member

Source: *own data*

The mean scores of different family members on R. Cialdini's persuasion strategies ranged from Mean=3.56 to Mean=2.64, with the highest value for the Commitment/Consistency Scale and the lowest value for the Liking Scale, which was found in third child in the family - young adults (under 25 years old), (*Graph 2*). The same dependence was observed in the first child in the family - young adults (under 25 years old), with Mean=3.45 for the Commitment/Consistency Scale and Mean=3.18 for the Liking Scale, as well as for the second child in the family - young adults (under 25 years old), where Mean=3.38 for Commitment/Consistency Scale and Mean=3.05 for Liking Scale. Therefore, it is possible to look for a relationship between the role of the child in the family and the making of commitments, as well as the following of the commitments made by these family members in the process of family purchasing, with the greatest susceptibility to the principle of commitment and consistency being observed for the third child in the family (*Graph 2*).

For the husband, the highest mean value was reported for Authority Scale - Mean=3.27, and the lowest for Unity Scale - Mean=3.09. Other causal relationships must be sought for the positive response to the principle of husband authority in the family, as well as husband dominance in purchasing decisions (Hamilton, 2009).

For the wife, the highest values are observed for Reciprocity Scale - Mean=3.32, and the lowest for Social Proof Scale - Mean=3.13, which is the reason for making new measurements regarding the principle of reciprocity and the role of the woman in the family for family purchasing, (*Graph 2*). Some authors argue that women play a leading role in buying food and personal care products (Dhemba *et al.*, 2002), but this may depend on the specific cultural and social environment of consumers.

In order to determine the influence of the persuasion principles on the different groups of respondents, formed by a family member, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied. The results of the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) are presented in *Table 2*.

Table 2. Influence of a family member on the persuasion principle (ANOVA)

Independent variable	Dependent variable	Means	F p-values	T-tests
Member of family	Liking Scale	x1 (first child) = 3.18	F=2.75	t _{1,2} = 2.19; p < 0.00
		x2 (second child) = 3.05	p < 0.02	t _{1,3} = 2.65; p < 0.00
		x3 (third child) = 2.64		t _{1,4} = 3.11; p < 0.00
		x4 (husband) = 3.10		
		x5 (wife) = 3.16		
	Scarcity Scale	x1 (first child) = 3.28	F=3.35	t _{1,2} = 3.06; p < 0.00
		x2 (second child) = 3.31	p < 0.01	t _{2,3} = 2.65; p < 0.00
		x3 (third child) = 2.88		t _{2,4} = 2.97; p < 0.00
		x4 (husband) = 3.22		t _{2,5} = 2.14; p < 0.03
		x5 (wife) = 3.23		
	Commitment and Consistency Scale	x1 (first child) = 3.45	F=3.04	t _{1,3} = 3.20; p < 0.00
		x2 (second child) = 3.41	p < 0.01	t _{2,3} = 2.69; p < 0.00
		x3 (third child) = 3.56		t _{3,4} = 2.99; p < 0.00
		x4 (husband) = 3.14		t _{3,5} = -0.85; p < 0.04
		x5 (wife) = 3.31		

Source: *own calculation*

Results indicated that family members influenced susceptibility to persuasion through three of the seven persuasion strategies, and overall susceptibility to persuasion was in the hypothesized direction. Susceptibility to persuasion was achieved by the following principles for young adults in the family (under 25 years): liking for first child (F=2.75; p < 0.02; x₁ (first

child) = 3.18), compared to other family members ($t_{1,2} = 2.19$, $p < 0.00$; $t_{1,3} = 2.65$, $p < 0.00$; $t_{1,4} = 3.11$, $p < 0.00$); scarcity for the second child ($F=3.35$; $p < 0.01$; X_2 (second child) = 3.31) compared to other family members ($t_{1,2} = 3.06$, $p < 0.00$; $t_{2,3} = 2.65$, $p < 0.00$; $t_{2,4} = 2.97$, $p < 0.00$; $t_{2,5} = 2.14$, $p < 0.00$) and commitment and consistency for the third child ($F=3.04$; $p < 0.01$; X_3 (third child) = 3.56) compared to other family members ($t_{1,3} = 3.20$, $p < 0.00$; $t_{2,3} = 2.69$, $p < 0.00$; $t_{3,4} = 2.99$, $p < 0.00$; $t_{3,5} = -0.85$, $p < 0.04$), (Graph 2, Table 2). According to research in this direction, it can be argued that the first child in the family tends to accept a product from advertising if this product is offered by people they feel close to (Latané, 1996; Nowak et al., 1990), the second child in the family reacts positively to messages that offer "limited release", and "while supplies last" (Lynn, 1991, p.50), and the third child is susceptible to the power of commitment, that is, these children are most likely to maintain logically consistent beliefs and actions (Cialdini, 2001). The obtained results confirm the statement that as individuals mature, their tendency to undertake commitments and their fulfilment also increases (Fesinger, 1957), especially when the information does not conflict with their beliefs, ideas or values (Dare et al., 2013). An important factor is the parent-child relationship in the family, children in recent years have been perceived as an important market segment that plays a role in the final decisions of the family (Kapoor and Verma, 2005). Although some studies indicate that before children can influence the purchase decision, the actual choice has already been made by the parents (Tinson and Nancarrow, 2007), however, in the present study we have found other dependences, as well. The collected data show that the persuasive power of the liking principle is valid for the first child, of the scarcity one – respectively for the second, and of the commitment and consistency – for the third infant in the family. It has been commented by a number of authors that as age increases, the influence of children on family purchases also increases (Özgen, 2003), i.e., they become more significant influencers in the family. The researcher of the current study believes that other causal relationships need to be established to shed more light on the positive advertising responses of children in the family to these persuasion strategies.

3.3. Implementations of persuasion principles according to marital status

In the next stage of the study, different procedures were done to establish susceptibility to different persuasion strategies, applied in advertising, using marital status and family member with different age characteristics as demographic characteristics. Since no statistical dependency was found between marital status and the principle of unity on the one hand, as well as between family members and the principle of unity on the other, applying ANOVA, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted. The goal of the analysis was to determine if there was a difference in sensitivity to the principle of unity among advertising users, distributed by marital status, using each family member with age differences as the covariate (continuous quantitative variable). A new variable was introduced, with respondents divided by marital status criteria into the following groups: 19.8% (89 people) - single, 54.2% (244 people) - cohabiting/married, 16.2% (73 people) - divorced/separated, and 9.8% (44 people) – widowed, ($M=3.04$; $SD=0.567$). The reason for this distribution was the different social circumstances within the family environment - the first group has never been married, the second group is in a relationship, and the third group has broken off relationships for some social reasons. The other new variable was the distribution of members of family, forming three groups - husband (over 25 years old), wife (over 25 years old) and children in the family or young adults (under 25 years old). This variable was necessary for using family members as the covariate (continuous quantitative variable), because the age of the respondents varied very widely (from 18 to 65 years), ($M=3.16$; $SD=0.638$).

Before performing ANCOVA, the following assumptions were checked: 1) checking the correlation between the Unity Scale and family member with age differences – Pearson's correlation was a weak positive correlation - $r=0.322$; $p<0.000$, meaning that the linear dependency was less than $r<0.800$; $p<0.000$; 2) the dependent variable was normally distributed; 3) homogeneity of variance, i.e., similar variances were observed across the groups. The results of the analysis of covariance were as follows: Levene's test was insignificant - $p=0.499$, indicating that the group variances were equal, and the assumption of homogeneity of variance was not violated (Ganeva, 2016). The results of the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) are presented in Table 3 (*Table 3*).

Table 3. Influence of a family member on Unity Scale depending on marital status (ANCOVA)

Dependent Variable: Unity Scale	df	Mean Square	F p-values	Partial Eta Squared
Member of family	2	0.603	$F=3.830; p<0.01$	0.21
Marital status	2	8.131	$F=11.201; p<0.00$	0.38
Member of family/ Marital status	4	1.845	$F=2.54; p<0.01$	0.28
Error	441	0.726	Adjusted R Squared =	
Total	450		.311.	

Source: *own calculation*

A statistically significant interaction effect of a family member and marital status was found on Unity Scale, where $F_{(4,441)} = 2.54$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta = 0.28$, which according to Cohen (1988) is a small effect size (Cohen, 1988). The results of Partial Eta Squared show that more than 2% of the variance of the dependent variable – Unity Scale, can be predicted by marital status, as Adjusted R Squared = .311 (*Table 3*). Therefore, family members with age differences have a statistically significant influence on the marital status of respondents on Unity Scale.

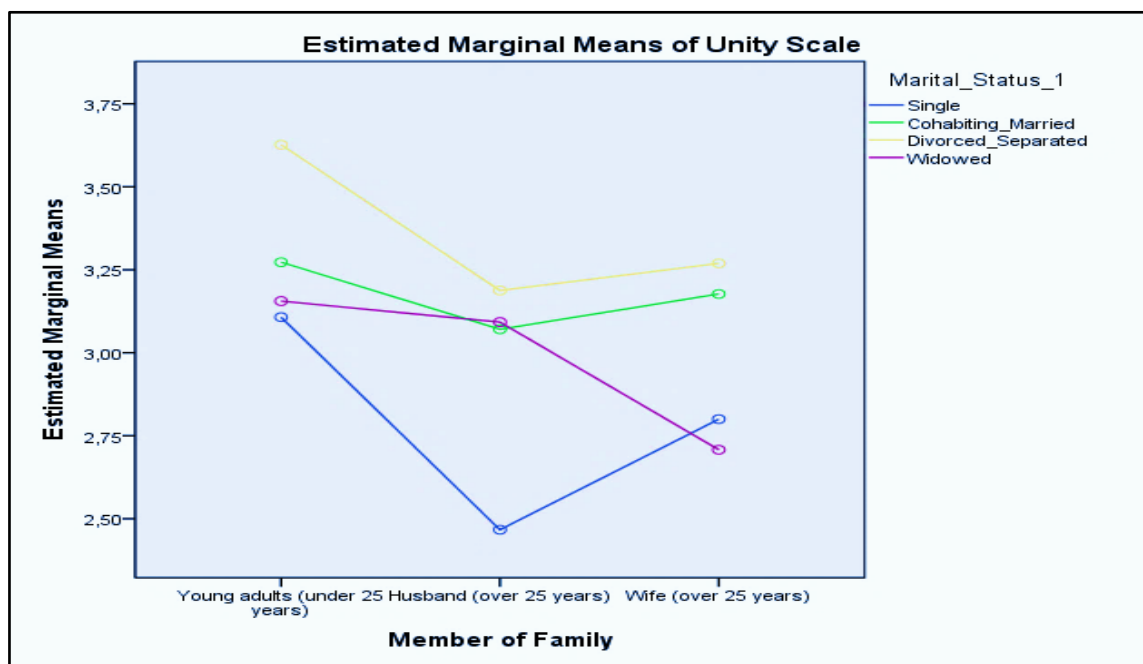
The two independent variables were analyzed separately and the main effect for a family member was statistically significant: $F_{(2,441)} = 3.83$, $p < 0.01$ in analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). Therefore, a statistically significant difference was found when applying Unity Scale in terms of family member. The main effect for the other qualitative variable – marital status on the application of Unity Scale is also significant, where $F_{(2,441)} = 11.20$, $p < 0.00$, because there was a statistically significant difference when measuring the Unity Scale according to marital status. Cohen's interpretation of eta, $0.24 \leq \eta < 0.37$, indicates that a medium effect size value is observed - $\eta = 0.38$, (Cohen, 1988). After conducting the analysis of covariance, the adjusted means for the studied groups were determined and are presented in Table 4, controlling for the covariate – family member with age difference (*Table 4*).

Table 4. Adjusted means for Unity Scale, controlling for the covariate (ANCOVA)

Dependent variable: Unity Scale	Marital Status	Means (before ANCOVA)	Estimated Marginal Means	Std. Error
Covariate: Member of family				
Young adults (under 25 years old)	Single	Mean= 3.11	Mean= 3.11	0.095
	Cohabiting/married	Mean = 3.27	Mean = 3.27	0.107
	Divorced/separated	Mean= 3.63	Mean= 3.63	0.225
	Widowed	Mean= 3.16	Mean= 3.16	0.206
Husband (over 25 years old)	Single	Mean= 2.47	Mean= 2.47	0.504
	Cohabiting/married	Mean = 3.07	Mean = 3.16	0.096
	Divorced/separated	Mean= 3.19	Mean = 3.16	0.154
	Widowed	Mean= 3.19	Mean= 3.19	0.242
Wife (over 25 years old)	Single	Mean= 3.09	Mean= 3.20	0.617
	Cohabiting/married	Mean =2.80	Mean = 2.75	0.089
	Divorced/separated	Mean= 3.18	Mean= 3.18	0.171
	Widowed	Mean= 3.27	Mean= 3.27	0.242
		Mean= 2.71	Mean= 2.76	

Source: *own calculation*

After the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), it was found that the cohabiting/married group, divorced/separated group and single group increased their means, therefore the marital status of these respondents determined their susceptibility to Unity Scale. An interaction effect was found between cohabiting/married people (Mean=3.16) and widowed people (Mean=3.20), which applied to husbands over 25 years old, with the effect being greater for widowed people (Mean=3.20), (Table 4, Graph 3). The second interaction effect was observed between single people (Mean=2.75) and widowed people (Mean=2.76) - these were wives over 25 years old, with the effect being greater for widowed people, (Mean=2.76), (Table 4, Graph 3).



Graph 3. Susceptibility to Unity Scale depending on marital status and family member

Source: *own data*

3.3. Implementations of product preferences according to marital status

In order to determine if there is a difference in susceptibility to the purchase funnel, measured by Product Preferences Scale (Duffett, 2015) among advertising consumers, distributed by marital status, using family member with age differences as covariate, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted. Different measurement variants of the subscales belonging to the hierarchy model - the purchase funnel: Awareness Scale and Product Preferences Scale (Duffett, 2015) were checked, and statistical significance was found only for the second subscale - Product Preferences Scale. Before performing ANCOVA, the following assumptions were checked: 1) checking the correlation between Product Preferences Scale and family member with age differences – Pearson's correlation revealed an average positive correlation ($r=0.502$; $p<0.000$), meaning that linear dependency is less than $r<0.800$; $p<0.000$; 2) the dependent variable is normally distributed; 3) homogeneity of variance, i.e., similar variances are observed across the groups. The results of the analysis of covariance were as follows: Levene's test was insignificant - $p=0.452$, which indicates that the group variances were equal and the assumption of homogeneity of variance was not violated (Ganeva, 2016). The results of the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Influence of a family member on Product Preferences Scale depending on marital status (ANCOVA)

Dependent variable: Product Preferences Scale	df	Mean Square	F p-values	Partial Eta Squared
Member of family	1	0.182	F=1.238; $p<0.01$	0.23
Marital status	3	2.144	F= 12.340; $p<0.03$	0.56
Member of family/ Marital status	4	0.763	F=2.808; $p<0.01$	0.29
Error	445	0.763	Adjusted R Squared =	
Total	450		.212.	

Source: *own calculation*

A statistically significant interaction effect of a family member and marital status was found on Product Preferences Scale, where $F_{(4,445)} = 2.81$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta = 0.29$, which according to Cohen (1988) is a small effect size (Cohen, 1988). The results of Partial Eta Squared show that more than 2% of the variance of the dependent variable – Product Preferences Scale, was predicted by marital status, as Adjusted R Squared = .212, (Table 5). Therefore, family members with age differences have a statistically significant influence on the marital status of respondents on Product Preferences Scale.

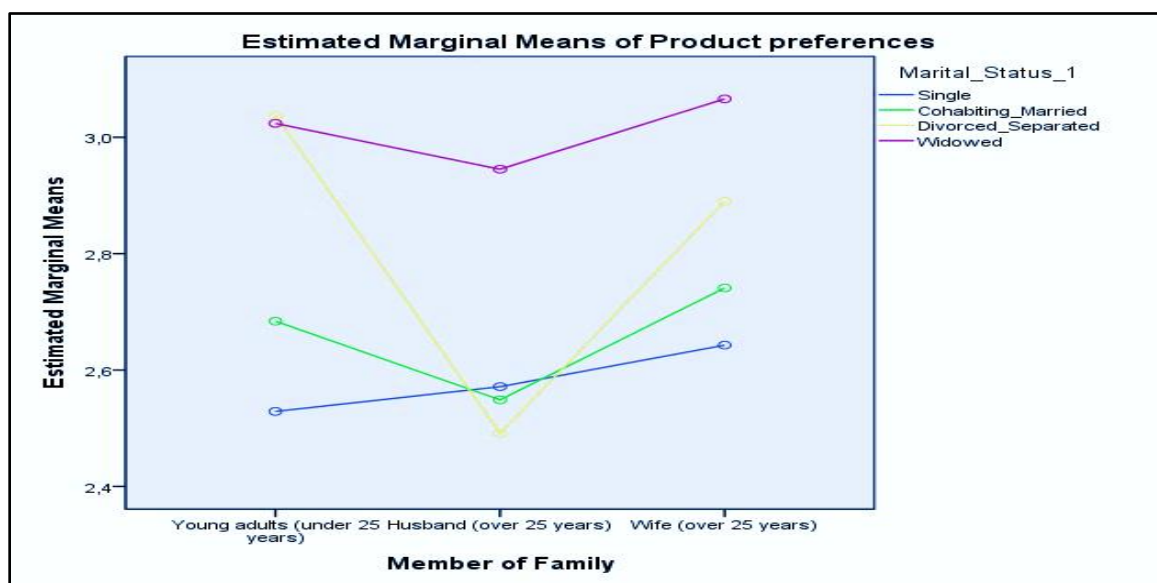
The two independent variables were analyzed separately and the main effect for the continuous quantitative variable - member of family was statistically significant $F_{(1,445)} = 1.24$, $p < 0.01$ during an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), i.e. there is a statistically significant difference when applying Product Preferences Scale regarding a family member. The main effect of marital status on the application of Product Preferences Scale is also significant, with $F_{(3,445)} = 12.34$, $p < 0.03$, because there was a statistically significant difference when measuring Product Preferences Scale according to marital status. Cohen's interpretation of η , $0.24 \leq \eta < 0.37$, indicates that a medium effect size value is observed - $\eta = 0.56$, (Cohen, 1988). After conducting the analysis of covariance, the adjusted means for the studied groups were determined and are presented in Table 6, controlling for the covariate – family member with age difference (Table 6).

Table 6. Adjusted means for Product Preferences Scale, controlling for the covariate (ANCOVA)

Dependent variable: Product Preferences Covariate: Member of family	Marital Status	Means (before ANCOVA)	Estimated Marginal Means	Std. Error
Young adults (under 25 years old)	Single	Mean= 2.53	Mean= 2.53	0.085
	Cohabiting/married	Mean = 2.68	Mean = 2.68	0.114
	Divorced/separated	Mean= 3.04	Mean= 3.09	0.112
	Widowed	Mean= 3.02	Mean= 3.05	0.110
Husband (over 25 years old)	Single	Mean = 2.57	Mean = 2.59	0.305
	Cohabiting/married	Mean= 2.55	Mean= 2.56	0.122
	Divorced/separated	Mean= 2.49	Mean= 2.50	0.230
	Widowed	Mean =2.95	Mean =2.95	0.384
Wife (over 25 years old)	Single	Mean= 2.64	Mean= 2.64	0.518
	Cohabiting/married	Mean= 2.74	Mean= 2.74	0.708
	Divorced/separated	Mean= 2.89	Mean= 2.89	0.408
	Widowed	Mean= 3.07	Mean= 3.07	0.493

Source: *own calculation*

After the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), it was found that the different groups increased their means when measuring a family member, therefore the marital status of these respondents determined their susceptibility to Product Preferences Scale. An interaction effect was found between single (Mean=2.59), cohabiting/married (Mean=2.56), and divorced/separated (Mean=2.50) people, which applied to husbands over 25 years old, with the effect being greater for single persons (Mean = 2.62), (Table 6, Graph 4). The second interaction effect is observed between divorced/separated (Mean=3.09) and widowed people (Mean=3.05) - these are young adults under 25 years old, with the effect being greater for divorced/separated people (Means=3.09), (Table 6, Graph 4).



Graph 4. Susceptibility to Product preferences depending on marital status and family members.
Source: *own data*.

Conclusion

Perceiving the family as one of the most important influencers in consumer decision-making with purchase intention (Cotte & Wood, 2004; O'Malley & Prothero, 2007; Hamilton, 2009), we found a number of regularities in the family buying process of goods and services, offered in the advertisement. First, divorced or separated people tend to comply with legitimate authority (Slater et al., 2006) and be friendly to people they like (Cialdini, 2004; Kaptein & Eccles, 2010). On the other hand, married people are more motivated to their social commitments (Hoy & Smith, 2007) and make decisions only after observing their behaviour and its consequences on the people around them (Clark & Tennessee, 2008). The established dependencies between four of R. Cialdini's persuasion strategies (for divorced or separated - the principles of authority and liking, and for married - the principles of commitment/consistency and social proof) shows some of the peculiarities in the perceived nature of advertising messages. Non-committed consumers (divorced or separated people) respond positively to advertisements with expert recommendations or if they feel sympathy for the character in the advertisement, in contrast, committed consumers (married people) show greater commitment and consistency in their actions by following the actions of other customers. Therefore, both consumers' gender (Thuan & Homolka, 2021) and their marital status determine their behaviour as customers when conducting persuasive communication in an advertising environment. In addition, the presence of children in the family (young people under 25 years of age), also complicates family purchasing processes, since the degree of influence exerted by children varies depending on the product category and the stage of the decision-making process (Kaur & Singh, 2006). These variations are reconfirmed because in the present study the first child in the family tends to accept a product from the advertisement if this product is offered by people they feel close to (Latané, 1996; Nowak et al., 1990), the second child in the family respond positively to messages that offer "limited release" and "while supplies last" (Lynn, 1991, p.50), and the third child is susceptible to binding power, i.e. children who identify as the third child in the family (young adults under the age of 25), are most likely to hold logically consistent beliefs and actions (Cialdini, 2001). Our results show that in the process of maturation in individuals, their tendency to make commitments and fulfil them (the third child in the family is the oldest) increases (Fesinger, 1957), when the information they receive is not in conflict with their beliefs, ideas or values (Dare et al., 2013). More importantly in present research, children are a factor in family purchase processes and are more likely to give more positive advertising responses to persuasion strategies such as: liking, scarcity, and commitment/consistency in advertising (Cialdini, 2001; Cialdini, 2016; Cialdini, 2021).

The presence of persuasive messages in advertising helps to increase the pressure to make a purchase decision (Kaur and Singh, 2006), with the greatest sensitivity being found through the principle of unity in the combined effect of marital status and family member. High susceptibility to persuasion is achieved through the principle of unity in a family environment, taking into account the different roles of family members - husband, wife and child in the family (young adults). Positive advertising responses in family settings to principle of unity were found when the role of the husband was enhanced in families that were widowed or cohabiting/married advertising consumers, with a stronger effect observed for widowed spouses. On the other hand, the wife in the family also plays an important role in family purchase, because in widowed and married people, wives over the age of 25, are an important factor for the same principle, and widows being more susceptible. Therefore, persuasive communication in a family setting is more successful when there is a shared identity between influencers and followers for widowed consumers of advertising (Cialdini, 2021), not to

underestimate the fact that the final purchase decision is made by parents (Tinson & Nancarrow, 2007; Ekström, 2005). This shows again that children's influence is higher in the initiation and information seeking stages, compared to the alternative evaluation and final decision stages (Kaur and Singh, 2006). The explanation is that young adults use the Internet more often, have greater access to market information, which can increase their influence in making family decisions (Belch et al., 2005). In addition, joint social influence on purchase intention also depends on the stage at which more family members participate (Kaur and Singh, 2006). The family member who exerts the most pressure cannot make a purchase and has little individual effect (Chadha, 1995; Kaur & Singh, 2006). However, the one with significant influence does not make any purchases due to an upcoming common decision. Therefore, various family members perform differently depending on certain social conditions.

The consumer's purchase decision is determined by factors such as awareness as, well as product preferences, according to some authors (Cotte & Wood, 2004; O'Malley & Prothero, 2007; Hamilton, 2009) and according to the results obtained in the present study susceptibility to product preferences, presented in advertising. Of the consumers surveyed, spouses (over 25) who are single, as well as children in the family (young adults, under 25) who are divorced/cohabiting, emerged as the biggest family influencers interested in the various benefits of products and services. Therefore, the persuasive power of the principle of unity determines the behaviour of husbands and wives for widowed people, but the product preferences are exhibited by men (over 25 years old) for single people, as well as young adults (under 25 years old) for divorced/separated people. The result for the participation of children is very indicative, which shows that marital status always affects the psychology, happiness and shopping expectations of individuals (Nguyen & Homolka, 2021), whereas family members with different roles have a different influence (Thuan & Homolka, 2021; Ozgen, 2003). In our study, the roles are not identified of decision-making for a purchase, but during the emergence of the intention to purchase, because this makes it possible to better determine the roles of consumers in a family environment. It is very important to point out that these roles do not remain static over time (Su et al., 2003; Belch and Willis, 2001) and other factors, influencing family purchasing of products and services, should be investigated.

A number of limitations can be observed in the present study, for instance, the limited number of participating consumers of advertising in Bulgaria. The present measurements found dependencies with some of the persuasion strategies, applied in advertising, but did not find their combined effects. In addition, other factors indicating the hierarchy model - the purchase funnel, were not measured. The author's recommendations for future research are to examine a number of economic and social factors in other countries, such as income, and territorial distribution of advertising consumers. It is utterly important to include some changes in the family environment, such as the sexual orientation of parents and children; the dominant role of husbands or wives over that of children in certain family settings; differences in purchase intentions in Western and Eastern countries, taking into account commitment to products with strong and weak connections and others.

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