

Modern Tendencies for the Development of the Family Services Market. Analyzing Russian and Foreign Practices



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Modern Tendencies for the Development of the Family Services Market. Analyzing Russian and Foreign Practices¹

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the issue of appearing of certain market services that replace or complete those function that have traditionally been fulfilled by the family itself. The paper analyses scientific and popular articles, forums and blogs as well as internet service supply for parenthood and childrearing with the purpose of identifying the examples of paid help to the family from the external experts and the ways of motivating parents to receive this kind of help. Creating motivation to handing over parenting and childcare functions to external experts and availability of commercial supply resources lead to appearing of the market of family services abroad and in Russia. The author makes an attempt to reveal and evaluate new, non-existent before or different from current paid services aimed at families as a target consumer, which lead to commercializing of family functions and outsourcing of traditional parental practices to external experts.

Keywords: market of family services, social roles, paid personal services, outsourcing, parenthood, modern family

In recent decades, many developed countries, including Russia, have been undergoing social and economic transformation in the traditional family life. Many functions that were inherent to the family before, have been lost to a significant degree as of today. At present, other institutes endeavor to supplement them almost in full [Nikolskaya, 2006]. The present-day Russian economic and social context made topical the needs for the development of a market of family services that replace the traditional family function on the upbringing and social adaptation of children and their identity formation. On the one hand, parents become increasingly aware of and responsible for the family upbringing of their children, which normally pursues three

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major goals: care of child's physical health and safety, preparing children for the responsible adult's life, and transmitting cultural values to them. The need for improving parents' knowledge that is key to understanding children's behavior [Bugental, Happaney 2002], and forms the basis for the timely monitoring of changes in the child's development and the corresponding preparedness to modify parenting practices [Stoiber, Houghton 1993] is growing. Expert parenting knowledge becomes relevant, which is evidenced by multiple studies that revealed a high degree of correlation between the parents' awareness of upbringing principles, family environment and child's behavior [Dichtelmiller et al. 1992; Benasich, Brooks-Gunn 1996; Caughy et al. 2003]. On the other hand, experts believe that a person may be happy with his/her life if he/she is actively involved in several life domains and deals with all of them not being focused on just one. From this perspective, expert assistance to parents enables their high-quality performance of the father's or mother's role without neglecting other social roles and without feeling frustrated because of the role polarity [Bruno 2015]. The key point here is the successful balance based on the recognition and performance of a particular role and the corresponding function, rather than a somewhat chaotic combination of roles and contexts [Mainiero, Sullivan 2005].

Service market: formation and development

Therefore, it is suggested that the development of a market of services that replace or supplement the functions, which have traditionally been performed by the family, will enable achieving a global parenting objective: to develop high-quality relations between parents and children and to release parents' time for other social and economic activities in order to attain overall satisfaction with life. Against this background, the following questions arise: To what extent is this objective justified? What kind of services does the global market offer to present-day parents? Does the Russian society need such services, and is it ready to pay for them in social and psychological terms?

The prerequisites for transferring family functions to paid external experts trigger certain mechanisms of social and economic development. Having sold refrigerators, washing machines and TV-sets to the society, manufacturers that became victims of their own success in developing the consumer goods market, to increase their profits, came up with an idea of selling products, which have always been strongly associated with office premises, to households. Several market-speaks were performed, and printers, customary by now (and quite recently –

fax machines, scanners and copying devices), appeared in living rooms and even in bedrooms. A somewhat similar process takes place with respect to patterns of family life. One difference is that, in case of office equipment, the office became part of the home life, and, in case of the family, it “goes to the office”. The former picture when a mother wearing an apron cooks the dinner, and a baby is sitting next to her in a high-chair, with whom she talks and holds a traditional training involving the necessary set of developmental skills (nursery rhymes, “what is the color”, “what does a cow/dog do”), has now been superseded by the picture when the mother drives a car, the high-chair is replaced by a child safety seat, in which the baby travels to a development center, where the same things will be done by a professional, for a fee. Just as companies used to downsize their legal and advertising departments replacing them by outsourced services [Malone, 2006], family functions are also being outsourced. This process demonstrates how present-day parents perceive the traditional social and psychological roles and how they allocate their responsibility.

In the context of market relations, the society lives by market laws either way. The “demand determines supply” principle still exists. But what did determine the demand? What (or who) helped families form this demand and agree that family members need a break, if not the refusal, of their historical functions?

For instance, in the market of children’s services and goods, the drivers are parents’ competition and anxiety about the present and future of their children [Tseluyko, 2004]. This market is fairly invulnerable, notwithstanding the economic crisis, as the motivation of its consumers is high and is continuously maintained at this level. The parents’ thesis “We didn’t have it – let them have it” sounds very promising to marketing specialists and gives an impetus for action. The state of competition has now moved from the business to the individual consciousness. Personal competition motivates parents to do what everyone else does believing that their child is with the best of them and wishing for him to grow up to be the cleverest, the brightest and the most talented [Chung-un, 2016]. Various children’s centers, development schools and preparatory courses are geared towards parents’ perfectionism and concerns that their child will not be with the best of them, or will not be successful enough. The fight for prestige has led to a large percentage of parents in the market that are willing to spend their hard-earned money on development centers and courses, or personal specialist assistants to ensure that their child will grow up to be with the best of them or even better, more successful and more educated than his/her average peer. The portrait of a potential customer of such centers provides an average reflection of people of the type that recently

emerged in our country: they have comfortable and stable income, which, however, requires continuous control (Aydinova, Popova, 2009]. In such situation, few people will be able to work hard and simultaneously provide proper care and upbringing to their children. And in such case, children's development and education centers come to help such people and become key to solve this problem. Recently, the number of children's early development centers has been increasing consistently. Therefore, defining the legal framework, in which they operate will also become topical in the future. At present, standards of their activities are regulated by local authorities.

Services of parenting consultants become an expenditure item of no little importance in a contemporary family's budget. A maturing opinion in the society is that parenting requires preparation, and that people need to recognize this role before having children, or at least do it as soon as possible if they already have children [Ishembitova, 2014]. Parental awareness which must replace the intuitive, spontaneous and ad hoc style of parenting is intended to do good for families themselves, and, in the long term, to benefit the society, into which personalities with generally accepted, stable moral behavior, personal responsibility and self-control will blend. Naturally, the society would win if its citizens have the qualities developed in them, such as sense of inner freedom, dignity, political correctness and law abidance, as well as skill of resolving challenging situations without panic. Parental authority, self-confidence, and control over the situation in the family arise from parents' awareness of and preparedness for their role, which allows rising above a conflict situation, rather than being part of it, and channeling the communication in the direction desirable for the parent. Awareness also releases the parent from the feeling of being a failure and being personally liable for everything that is happening. Therefore, one reason for attending parenting courses and family psychologists, whose services are quite expensive, is finding new and efficient forms of interaction with children.

For this purpose, resorting to specialists in the field of parenting becomes an increasingly common phenomenon. However, as they say, bad things come in threes. Just like when purchasing home appliances, together with the necessary household item, a buyer often unconsciously purchases many accessories to it, parents looking for basic products and services receive a whole bunch of "allied" products.

What are the "accessories" in the family services market? The examination and comparative analysis of the Russian and foreign (where considerable experience has been accumulated) markets of family services will help answer the above mentioned

questions, as well as identify the degree of success in selling such services and relevance of such offers to the Russian and foreign societies.

Safety expert

Starting from the very beginning, in other words – from the child's birth, one of the most popular service at this stage is services of a child safety expert. This service becomes common in the Western society, while it has not taken hold in Russia so far.

Critics of business consulting sarcastically note that a business consultant takes manager's watch to tell him the time. This metaphor is probably applicable to the visit of a safety specialist to tell parents that an operating stove poses a threat to their baby, as do opening doors and drawers of kitchen cabinets. A baby proofer (baby-proof – safe for a child) normally makes several visits. During the first visit, he/she checks the house for risks that a child may potentially be exposed to. A thorough inspection results in a summary of unsafe places, situations and potential injuries to the child. During this visit, the first three stages of the purchase-leading consumer behavior model using the AIDA formula (*Attention, Interest, Desire, Action*) are completed [Dushkina 2010]. The last stage – action – is completed during the second and third visits when the safety specialist minimizes all risks. A specially trained person wearing special clothing installs preventive latches onto doors of cabinets, covers table corners with soft cloth, and blocks child's access to sockets [BabyProofingMontgomery]. In addition to increasing the child safety level, parents also acquire the sense of parental realization: they have done something important for their baby. In addition, they get released from anxiety that they have missed something important from the list of actions performed by all their friends that have small children.

How is information disseminated, and how do new married couples get involved in the customer base? Today, the AIDA model as a classic advertising impact model is often referred to in its extended version – AIDA(s), where “s” stands for “satisfaction”. This means that, after the first four procedures have been completed, the customer's satisfaction with products must be achieved. The customer may tell relatives and friends about his/her purchase, become a loyal customer of the company, or acquire its other products [Rozen 2013]. For parents, one of the most effective means are on-line forums popular both in Russia and abroad, through which mothers share their achievements in providing their children with all the things needed. Forums, such as mama.ru, Mom's Locker – Forum for Present and Future Mothers, mamuski.ru, etc. form the consumer community that

comprises smaller loyal groups agitating for a particular product or service. In the foreign environment, moms' clubs, which bring mothers together to discuss parenting issues, become increasingly popular. Such clubs are distinguished by fairly the same financial and social status of mothers being their members. From a conversation with a Russian-speaking mother that resides in Dublin, Ireland: "Depending on the district's respectability, such meetings may discuss the topics from how to remodel clothes of elder children for younger ones to purchasing leather jackets for six-month old babies". According to Nielsen, an information and measurement company [Nielsen Holdings N.V], 92% of consumers trust the word-of-mouth advertising. That is why the activities of such clubs are encouraged, often sponsored and supported in terms of publicity by children's development centers and producers of children's goods and services.

Children's development centers

As a child grows older, the army of family assistants is supplemented by children's development centers. This type of services provided to a contemporary family should be given particular attention, as children's development centers are widespread both in the West and in Russia. Just like in the business, in the field of professional services, the principle of a "one-stop shop", where a company may obtain accounting, information, legal and advertising services, comes into operation in the outsourcing of family functions. A development center offers creative development, learning foreign languages, yoga for children, and services of a logopedist, psychologist, etc. depending on the size and creativity of a given institution of such kind.

The emergence and development of children's centers underwent certain changes in terms of their goals and objectives; their audience has changed also. First, originally, such centers served the needs of mentally retarded children to ensure their maximum adaptation to school (to the level of their normally developed peers) [Doherty et al. 2000]. Today, parents perceive the attendance of such centers as almost mandatory.

Second, the age of children attending early development schools (groups, centers) previously was 5 to 7 years old. The goal of such institution is "to develop intellectual and creative potential, cognitive interest, adaptation capabilities, and cognitive processes (thinking, speaking, attention, etc.)" [Mashinistova 2012] through creative activities. At present, their age is down to 1 to 3 years old, and the objective of teacher's activities in groups of children of such age is their socialization and creation of an educational playing environment [Korenkova 2016]. Therefore,

this market segment demonstrates a broad coverage of parents with children aged one to six. In view of this, it should be noted that the study by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development in the United States demonstrates that children attending development centers and children engaged in the same activities at home have no differences in their development levels [NICD 2006]. An important factor for the comprehensive development of a child is the favorable family environment and availability of a parent (mother or father) willing to spend his or her time on the child's development.

However, mass media and social media, both in Russia and abroad, translate the "early development" ideology to the society [Assonova 2010]. This ideology contemplates "equipping" the child's living space with brain building games, attending development centers and groups, as well as learning to perform various types of creative work, such as music, modeling and drawing. To do that, parents need to have certain stable income, free time, as well as social and cultural competency to select the most suitable early development product or service provider. Parents' energy and attention are distracted from the direct interaction with their child and are channeled to analyzing the market of the above mentioned services, and to maintaining stable income to pay for them. According to on-line polls, more than a half of young and socially active urban mothers visit development centers with their children, and 20% more are willing to do so, or looking for a suitable center for their children. From the perspective of psychologists, parents that bring their children to such institutions are often mistaken believing that it makes them good mothers and fathers [Shulga 2014]. In fact, they transfer their development authorities with respect to their children to other people for the reason of their own disability or unwillingness to exercise such authorities themselves as part of the family. The main idea noted on family forums is "while kids play, their mother can take time for herself". However, instead of developing, a child often learns how to adapt in a group without his/her mother. Parents should also consider that any occupation at a development center represents additional load on the child. Furthermore, the child's development within the family is a critical stage of formation of the primary attachment to adults surrounding him or her and playing an important role in the child's life. If a child is placed into various social groups too early, it leads to such child perceiving himself or herself as part of the group where adults, with whom attachment of different degrees is formed, change frequently.

The statistical analysis performed by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2011 shows that in the United States, 34.3 million of families have kids, and for the overwhelming majority of them transferring the care about their children to

paid specialists and development centers is normal [US Bureau..., 2012]. According to the National Child Care Info & Technical Assistance Center, these statistics may be attributed to two thirds of preschool children [National Child Care Info..., 2010].

Transgender specialist

A transgender specialist is a phenomenon typical purely for Western society where the transgender community is taken ever more seriously, and where sufficient attention is paid to the comfort of such people, and the emergence of transgender specialists is socially justified. The New Zealand Medical Journal published the study titled “Specialist services for management of individuals identifying as transgender in New Zealand” that analyzes the availability of various services and specialists [Delahunt et al. 2016]. The University of Michigan offers medical services associated to gender identification as part of the World Professional Association for Transgender Health program [World Professional...]. Parents are recommended to decrease the child’s focus on the behavioral signs inherent to such child’s gender and provide children with absolute freedom of choice of their gender roles. If parents notice that a girl prefers making a short haircut and wearing her brothers’ clothes, and a boy plays dolls and is interested in his elder sister’s cosmetics, parents may use transgender specialist’s services to clarify their child’s gender identity. For instance, the brochure of the Children’s Hospital of Chicago [Children’s Hospital of Chicago] describes the following services:

“We provide services for children and adolescents who

- are uncertain of their gender behavior;
- have questions with respect to choosing their gender;
- or selected to be transsexual”.

Services of a specialist like that are expensive [Gender Reassignment... 2012]; however, as such specialists say, families need them to avoid potential dysphoria resulting from a discrepancy between the biological gender and gender identification of a child as early as possible [Fuss et al. 2015, Simons et al. 2014]. The liberalization of laws and social acceptance of transgenderity are improving almost everywhere in industrialized countries, while in Russia the population still perceives this phenomenon negatively [Melnikov 2014]. At this stage of social and cultural mindsets in the Russian society as a whole, the emergence of transgender specialist services does not seem possible or widespread.

Cooking stations

Home-cooking stations represent another purely Western phenomenon. In US households, the typical family function of cooking was gradually fading away influenced by the emergence of a ready-to-cook food market. Thereafter, the lifestyle started contemplating visits to public dining facilities. Recently, influenced by the ideas of healthy lifestyle and advantages of organic nutrition, US families have been endeavoring to get back to the traditional eating style, but they do it in the context and under the rules of market relations that strive for retaining their consumers using new methods. A US mother may confidently say that she can cook, because she drives to a cooking station and cooks a lunch for several days for her family there [Simply Supper...]. A cooking station is either a public dining facility with a large kitchen, at which several half-finished dishes are cooked under the supervision of an experienced cook, or a kitchen in a private house, the owner of which made her cooking skill her source of income. One part of such semi-prepared foods will be cooked when participants arrive home, and another part (normally the larger one) will be frozen up and cooked as needed. Women and men, alone or with children, passionately wash, cut, dress and put into packages vegetables, meat or fish and greens at someone's kitchen under the slogan "Favorable environment for cooking healthy food!". They may bring their own ingredients, or buy them at the station. Therefore, the cooking function has returned to patterns of family life, but its implementation has transformed influenced by new marketing technology. This type of services may potentially become popular in our country also, but among a small segment of families, as in general, such mode of cooking undermines the positive image of a woman, wife and mother in the Russian gender mentality.

Nannies vs children's hotel

Nanny services have always been in great demand by parents due to various social and economic reasons. However, given the present trends, parents increasingly act as employers that need services of a nanny as an assistant in childcare and are unwilling to accept a stranger as a family member, as it was in the past. They would like to have a high-quality performer of their requirements at an affordable price. Still, in most cases, a nanny as the most prominent representative of a socio-economic profession partially substitutes the mother for a child in care. This is especially attributable to infants and may lead to a child becoming psychologically close to his/her nanny and having unstable emotional relations with his/her mother [Drobysheva, Romanovskaya 2014]. Contradictions

parents feel anyway in connection with nanny's activities in a contemporary Russian family become another argument for developing centers. Beside the psychological factor, children's centers represent the space where children are not only looked after, but are also being developed. Is there a place for nannies in the contemporary family services industry? Just like hypermarkets swallowed up small specialized stores quite recently, haven't children's institutions of various sizes offering one-stop shop services superseded individual nannies or baby sitters? What should parents do in the evening when they would like to go to the cinema, spend some time with their friends, or finish work they took home? Until recently, there were no options to replace a nanny. However, a while ago, an unparalleled offer appeared in social media – a children's hotel. This is a sort of development center with games, classes and workshops, which also offers taking care of a child until late in the evening, or even at night, if parents need that for some reason. The advertisement literally says as follows: "May we remind you that you can leave your child with us not only during the day, but also for the night, or for several days in comfortable and safe conditions. August is nearly over, so use your chance to make yourself a present – a warm summer weekend, while your baby is having fun with us!" [Детский-отель.рф (Detsky-otel.rf)]. One can say with a certain degree of confidence that this offer is purely a Russian phenomenon, as in the US society it would be unlawful, or would require a serious package of regulatory documents. The same is true for advertisements that recently appeared in Russia offering delivery and transportation of children to various destination points in a specialized taxi, if parents are unable to do it themselves. Offers of such kind are indicative of not only the decreased role of nannies, but also the fade-away of the institute of grandmothers and grandfathers, which previously enabled both parents releasing time for their work or evening cinema, and a child acquiring the necessary skills while playing in the atmosphere of love and joy [Borovikova 2014]. Notwithstanding the fact that grandmothers and grandfathers are often more emotionally stable and may understand what is important to a child better owing to their life experience, the increased pace of life, new knowledge and mindsets lead to the situation when parents consider it impossible to entrust their child to the grandmother, who has fallen behind the times, in their opinion.

Parent-coach

As a child grows older and especially when he or she attains a challenging period of adolescence, the family services market opens a new segment of offers for parents. A service of

holding an interview with a parent-coach becomes popular among US parents. In most cases, a wise elderly woman having various maternity experiences and able to help other parents acts as such coach. It is a person other than parents' mother or fathers, as they would not like to burden their mothers with internal problems of a nuclear family, and other than their spouse's mothers, to whom they would prefer not to show their weaknesses and deficiencies as per the established social and cultural stereotypes. This should be an elderly woman who has no daily or kinship relations with such parents and is willing to listen to them without voicing any value or critical judgments and to provide an advice at their request. From a conversation with a Russian-speaking mother that resides in New Jersey, the United States: "Sometimes acting as an advice may be a true story, or a practical recommendation of a kind like "disconnect the entire house from the Internet at 10pm". A parent-coach service is provided based on an advance order through a dedicated website. Parents mostly pay for three parent-coach's visits in average. If parents need a consultation on any other specific issue, they may purchase an "additional package" comprising three-to five workshops on the topic of concern [Senders Pediatrics]. In the Russian social reality, it is hard to imagine that such advises may be provided for a fee. In the Russian society, such service is normally substituted by advises from friends and colleagues that are perceived as part of informal and, naturally, free communications.

Conclusion

The cohort of specialists that provide family services is quite broad and performs functions, such as housecleaning, helping children in doing their homework, walking pets, childcare, car nannies, personal drivers, field animators, private day-care centers, development centers and other outsources assistants. Such services are in demand, as they enable saving time, which is often beyond money in the present-day world. On the one hand, a consumer gets freedom to build his or her private life and career, and on the other hand, providers of such services develop their businesses that shape a new type of a market – family services market. The sample considered in this article comprises providers of various forms of paid assistance to a contemporary Russian or foreign family in building its social and household activities, which appeared in the market in question fairly recently, but have already become indicators of new trends in the field of family and household services.

A wide range of professional services to perform family functions is fraught with danger of losing the skill of logical and associative thinking by the society, because one may address

any difficult or unclear issue to a specialist that acts as some sort of “surrogate parent” providing the family with ready-made solutions. Some people perceive it as optimizing and enhancing the effectiveness of contemporary family’s operation, and others regard it as the destruction of family basics and deformation of traditional patterns of family life and family values.

On the one hand, the phenomena described above represent the consumerism and life simplification policy. On the other hand, they are indicative of the increased awareness, competency and responsibility of parents. In the second case, from an objective, the consumerism policy transforms into a means, a tool that serves the interests of optimizing and enhancing the effectiveness of contemporary family’s operation, which leads to moral, social and demographic improvements in the society. However, the paces and volumes of parents’ use of services provided by professional assistants are increasing. The novel by Huxley titled *Brave New World* [Huxley 1932], in which people around the globe live in a single state, the society of which is the consumerist society, and children grow in bottles at specialized incubator plants, will probably not seem so utopian in the future.

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