

DYNAMICS AND CONFLICT OF SPOUSAL PURCHASE DECISION: A REVIEW STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at developing a comprehensive theoretical framework for dynamics and conflict of Spousal buying decision (SBD). The study also build a conceptual model of **Spousal-joint Purchase Decision Matrix Model (SPDCM)** used by spouses for purchase decision making exercise. The basic purpose of above is to explain the spousal involvement in family purchase decision and their conflict that arise in decision which lead to either joint or autonomous decision and finally arriving at a final decision with the help of conflict resolution strategies. Based on the theoretical evidences (C.B.Ward, 2003), it was concluded that Low initial level of disagreement results in lower level of relative conflict while High initial level of disagreement results in higher level of relative conflict among couples and High levels of disagreement should produce higher levels of relative conflict than low levels of disagreement for across product category decisions, while, for within product category decisions, there is no difference between high and low levels of disagreement on relative conflict.

KEYWORDS: SPDCM, Family Decision Making, Sex Role Orientation, Spousal Conflict, Household Decision Behaviour

INTRODUCTION

Family is not an informal or artless organization of people, but it is a divinely designed institution. It can be defined as any group of people closely connected by blood. The family role is important in every culture and society because it is the most important foundation and structure of society itself. According to some researchers, household is considered the relevant unit of analysis, not the individual consumer (Davis, 1976; Granbois, 1971). Given that the number of family household units is significantly greater than the number of single house-holds, research in the field of family decision making (FDM) is essential in advancing our knowledge of consumer behavior.

The family has been identified as the most important decision making and consumption unit and key research area for understanding of consumer behavior (Ekstro'm, 2004; O.Malley and Prothero, 2006, 2007). Moreover, Scanzoni and Polonko (1980) define decision making as an expression which expresses that it is the process by which family build choices and on the basis of that they make judgments and the finally come to the conclusion which direct that behavior. More than one member's input and conformity with decision is required and it is the most important aspect of the process of family decision-making. Another way of defining decision making is that it can be referred to as process of problem solving which includes process of recognizing a problem, opportunity or a choice and finding a solution to it. It is also referred to as the process of choosing between the alternative. Decision making may take place at any level;

it can be at individual or group level. Families make up an essential social and economic unit that affects consumption decisions of the household and individual family members. Cottee and Wood (2004) were of the view that family exercises a complex influence on the conducts of its members. The concept of involvement in family decision making suppose that the relative influence for the spouse in a decision is higher if he/she is more involved in the decision and that reflects his or her individual's preferences and interests (Qualls, 1987). Therefore, in general there is a positive affiliation between personal relevance and involvement.

Arch G. Woodside (1972) suggested that marital decision making processes have been studied from four points of view: (1) bases for role differentiation, (2) power structure, (3) decision making structure, and (4) demographic and psychosocial influence on the power structure. Herbst (1952) has suggested four bases for role differentiation: household duties, child control and care, social activities, and economic activities. Parsons and Bales (1955) distinguish between instrumental and expressive roles and, among economic activities, Ferber (1955) draws a dichotomy between "Policy" and "routine household" decisions.

Such bases for marital role differentiation have been used to theoretically develop, or empirically explain, categories of marital power structures. The study of power structure has focused on the question of husband or wife dominance. Herbst (1954) developed four decision making power structures: (1) autonomic, or when an equal number of decisions is made by each spouse, (2) husband dominant, (3) wife dominant, and (4) syncretic, or when most decisions are made by both husband and wife. In one empirical investigation Wolgast (1958) concludes that the husband dominates the wife in the decision making process for automobile purchases. She found the wife dominating the husband for household goods and furniture purchasing decisions. Almost perfect agreement in husband's and wife's reports about relative influence was found by the researcher.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Family behavior is an important issue and socio-cultural factor. The family is considered as a significant decision-making unit, due to the large quantity of products and services that are consumed by the household. The history of 1960's research can be tracked on husbands and wives roles played in family decision making. Several studies, since that time, have scrutinized different components of marital roles and family decision making. According to the researchers, household is considered as the relevant unit of analysis, not the individual consumer (Davis, 1976; Granbois, 1971).

A study on the relative influence of husbands and wives on the family decisions involves the decision structure in the purchase of automobiles is not related to the decision structure in the purchase of furniture. Within each of these product categories, product selection (model, make, color) and allocation decisions (how much to spend and when to buy) were shown to be the structure of the decision process- (Davis 1970).

Significant demographic and psychosocial relationships with the family power structure have been found to exist. For example, the degree of joint decision making typically declines over a family's life cycle- (Wolgast, 1958). Also, when neither husband nor wife belongs to a connected social network they have a greater tendency to engage in joint decision making- (Bott, 1957).

Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell (1968) have indicated that the extent of husband-wife involvement varies considerably from product to product. These authors report husbands having a greater tendency to be involved in problem

recognition when the product is technically or mechanically complex, as in the case of automobiles, refrigerators, and paint.

Fortunately, the study of family buying decisions has been concentrated on product purchase behavior (Hempel, 1974; Davis, 1970; Ferber and Lee, 1974; Davis and Rigaux, 1974; Sheth, 1974) which has produced substantial insights into the relative roles of husbands and wives in buying particular products and the effects of life cycle. Social class, employment status of wife, social networks, and prior decision-making on these buying roles (Sheth, 1974).

The Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell (1973) model of consumer behavior is the most related theoretical statement to extant research into family buying decisions and product purchase behavior. Both the Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell model and family buying research concentrate on the stages in cognitive decision processes of product purchases: Problem-recognition, search for information, evaluation, store choice and shopping decisions, purchasing, and post-purchase processes. Other models and research of consumer behavior have concentrated on the relations between perceptions, attitude, intentions and purchases of brands (Howard and Sheth, 1969; Hansen, 1973).

There has been a significant effect of prior decision-making, demographics, and psychographics on husband and wife roles for purchasing durables. A basis for developing family types based upon the effects of prior decision-making and demographic and psychographic information would exist given substantially accurate predictions of marital roles in product purchasing. It has been found that little basis for developing family types exists from patterns of husband-wife influence across several decisions when the decisions are not considered in independent and dependent relationships, e.g., where to buy not made dependent on when to buy- Davis (1970). However, the relative influence of husbands and wives in making actual purchases may indeed be dependent upon prior decision-making and demographic and psychographic variables which would be suggested by the Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell (1973) model.

The nature of familiar decision-making has been characterized in terms of distinct role perceptions, role definitions, and role performances by family members. Each family decision is analyzed with respect to a set of family role norms and task assignment responsibilities. During the seventies, significant changes occurred in the role perceptions and role structure of the family. These changes, which have been attributed to various social and economic phenomena, have caused researchers to re-conceptualize family roles in terms of sexual orientations. The long-term significance of sex roles is not totally clear, having surfaced only recently because of the increased visibility of women outside the home. It is the contention of the researcher that the concept of sex role is central to the process of modeling family decision-making. The purpose is to discuss two related topics: (1) the role of an individual's sex-role orientation in the family decision making process, and (2) the measurement of sex-role orientation and its impact upon family decision making processes. The SRO and its impact include a brief presentation of some empirical evidence which lends support to the relevance of sex-role orientation (SRO) in a family decision-making (FDM) context. Empirical findings reported during the last ten years have suggested a gradual shift in men's and women's perceptions of the appropriate distribution of labor within the household and the appropriate place for women in this society. These changes entail a new pattern of reported shared roles and joint decision-making (Haas 1980). The literature suggests that men are becoming increasingly involved in household activities, while women are increasing their participation in the labor force (Haas 1980). The breadwinner/provider role, traditionally the domain of the male, and the housekeeper role, traditionally occupied by females, are no longer separate and distinct roles within the family- Qualls 1982.

The changing sex roles and how they are perceived by family members has a tremendous impact upon family decision-making processes. The precise nature of these shifts in role perceptions and role behavior and the extent of their effect on FDM processes remain unclear. Green and Cunningham (1975) found that differences in contemporary and traditional female role perceptions had an effect upon family decision-making patterns. Alternatively, Roberts and Wortzel (1979) found that the general role orientation of the wife toward the household task, foot shopping behavior, is not as effective a predictor variable as the specific attitude toward that household task. Today, the general belief among family researchers is that sex-role orientation has an impact upon the family decision-making process and not upon specific family tasks- Scanzoni (1977)

It has been observed that when the responses of wives are compared with those of their own husbands, the results vary considerably depending on what decisions are being investigated- Dunsing and Hafstrom (1975).

Many purchase decisions are made by families and organizations rather than by individuals. This realization has motivated consumer behavior researchers to develop conceptual models of the group decision making process (Sheth 1974; Webster and Wind 1972) and empirical studies on such topics as who is involved in purchases (Davis and Rigaux 1974; Silk and Kalwani 1982), decision role structure (Davis 1976; McMillan 1973), and the determinants of relative influence (Kriewall 1980; Thomas 1982). However, limited progress has been made in testing descriptive models of group purchasing and relative influence, especially those with strong theoretical bases (Corfman & Lehmann 1987).

Although joint decisions are more dynamic and complex than individual decisions, the role of each spouse in decision making should not be ignored. Many changes have occurred within the last four decades that have had a profound effect on the roles of husbands and wives in household purchase decisions. Economic and social changes in women's employment, income, education, and gender role norms have changed the influence of females in purchase decisions within the family context. With regard to women in workforce, there has been a more than 100% increase since early 60's (Hopper, JoAnne S. 2001). Although women have been traditionally seen as primarily purchasing agents for household goods, wives are becoming increasingly involved in expensive durable goods purchases (Kotler, 2001). Women are gaining more purchasing power in households in most of the countries. Market research has shown that women (wives) make or greatly influence most family purchase decisions (Peters, 1997). The increased power of women in (American Demographics, 1995, 1996; Burns, 1992) purchase decisions is often linked to the wives' earning power. Research also indicates that traditional roles in family purchase behavior are shifting; married women are becoming more involved in major purchases. Current research also indicates that baby boomer couples frequently shop together, rather than autonomously for many products (Lavin, 1993). Automobile manufacturers have reported that women now compose 34% of the luxury automobile market, and numerous design changes have been implemented to reach the needs of the female consumer (Alder, 1996)

Research on household decision behavior (HDB) suggests that changes are taking place in the attitudes and behavioral direction of men and women in today's household (Commuri and Gentry, 2005). There are changes attributing to various causes that have occurred which distorted the decision and role structure of the traditional household unit. These changes include changing cultural norms, increases in the number of working wives, family income, family life cycle, education and shifting societal standards. Researchers have focused mainly three significant areas of household

decision behavior (HDB): (1) The decision maker in the family, (2) The out-comes of household decision behavior, and (3) Determinants of family decision making (Levy and Christina, 2004). Nelson and Jenny (2005) found that strong organized family significantly makes more joint buying decision on vacation (specialty product) than weak organized family. They also established that modern family make significantly more joint purchase decision on vacation than traditional family. Nelson and Jenny (2005) proved that strong unified family significantly makes more joint purchase decision on furniture (shopping product) than the weak unified family. They further held that modern family makes significantly more joint purchase decision on furniture (shopping product) than the traditional family.

Kirchler (1993) is also of the view that often husbands and wives are unaware of each other's influence within joint purchase decision-making processes. The commonly accepted role structure of family buying decision-making is (1) husband-dominated decisions, (2) wife-dominated decisions, (3) autonomic decisions (in which either the husband or wife is the primary or sole decision maker, but not both), and (4) syncratic or joint decisions (in which both are influential).

SPOUSAL CONFLICT IN PURCHASE DECISION MAKING

Conflict in family decision making means "perceived divergence of interest", that is, the belief that if one party gets what it wants, the other(s) will not be able to do so. Although chances of serious conflicts in family purchase decisions are exceptional but there is some form of family conflict which is highly probable, because forming a joint preference needs a combining of individual preferences or interests of the family members- Pruitt and Kim(2004).

The management of spousal conflict is an important consideration when studying the mechanics of husband-wife purchase decisions. "Conflict is crucial, because conflict outcomes help to determine consumption behavior" (Buss & Schaninger, 1987, p. 312). However, conflict in family decision-making is typically not handled in a rational fashion. Conflict management has also been described as a muddling through process where the final purchase decision is actually a recurrent process consisting of a series of small decisions (Lackman & Lanasa, 1993).

Two spouses bringing two different purchase preferences to a purchase decision will inevitably experience conflict at some point. The presence of disagreement between family members implies that there will be attempts to resolve the disagreement prior to making a joint purchase choice. When disagreements occur during decision processes, the partners have to adopt accommodative tactics to resolve their disagreements and choose a suitable alternative (Kirchler 1993)

Numerous studies have attempted to examine the process that family members engage in when conflict in decision making is present (Davis, 1976; Nelson, 1988; Sheth, 1974). Family members will often disagree about the desirability of various alternatives. This disagreement may result in contradictory desires by spouses for products in different product categories. During the period when various alternatives are being considered, each spouse will often attempt to influence the other toward his or her preferred position (Spiro, 1983).

Douglas (1983) suggested that decisions within the family are interrelated, that one decision is not made independently of other decisions, and that as such decisions must be considered in this context. Supporting Douglas' study, Corfman and Lehmann (1987) found that spouses' decision(s) regarding past purchases may affect subsequent purchases, but they did not attempt to distinguish between the types of conflict the couples may be experiencing. For example,

if the spouses have jointly decided to purchase a new television set, the next step is to select a specific brand and model of TV. Both spouses "win" in this type of purchase, because even though an individual spouse may not get the brand of his/her choice, ultimately the family still has a new television for the home. This situation is a typical example of within category decision-making.

Ward (2003) found evidence to support the distinction between across versus within product category choices in a related paper exploring product category in relation to the level of disagreement experienced by the spouses and the relative conflict they reported. When looking at within category product choices in a purchase situation the relationship between level of disagreement and relative conflict was not statistically significant; however, the relationship was highly significant when looking at across category product choices only.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To re-examine the concepts behind dynamics and conflict of spousal purchase decision with context to Cheryl B.Ward (2003, 2005, 2006 & 2007).

METHODOLOGY

This paper is of a broader research line that focuses on different concepts related to the couple's role in the joint-purchase decisions for which different products as well as the conflicts that arise in the decision-making process has been studied. The sample of the study focus on the studies carried out during the beginning of the concept to the recent (1950s to 2013).

HYPOTHESIS & DISCUSSIONS

In summing up, this can be suggested on the basis of studies that the roles of husbands and wives in the family decision-making process are changing and emphasis is being made to examine current practices in family decision making. Consequently, the following hypotheses proven by C.B.Ward (2003) are put forward for re-examine:

H1: Low initial level of disagreement should result in lower level of relative conflict while High initial level of disagreement should result in higher level of relative conflict among couples.

Discussion: The level of disagreement (low versus high) was significant i.e. if the spouses initially indicated low levels of disagreement between the product choices, the spouses also experienced lower levels of relative conflict in the decision process. If the spouses had indicated high levels of disagreement, significantly higher levels of conflict were present when the spouses were faced with coming to a joint decision between the two opposing products. It appears that spouses are more apt to compromise when they do not have a strong desire for one product over the other in a decision choice in an effort to avoid possible conflict with their spouse. On the other hand, when spouses initially strongly disagree on the likelihood of a product's purchase, that initial disagreement appears to carry over and generate more relative conflict when faced with choosing between two opposing products. Thus, Hypothesis 1 is accepted.

H2: High levels of disagreement should produce higher levels of relative conflict than low levels of disagreement for across product category decisions, while, for within product category decisions, there should be no difference between high and low levels of disagreement on relative conflict.

Discussion: The product category by level of disagreement is a two-way interaction which qualifies for the main effect. The interaction was marginally significant. In order to prove the above hypothesis, a contrast was done between conflict at high and low levels of disagreement for across, then for within category choices. The findings reveal that the relationship between level of disagreement and relative conflict is greater when the product decision involves across category choices than when the product decision involves within category product choices. Thus, Hypothesis 2 is accepted.

It has also been pointed out that whenever there is an initiation in spousal joint purchase decision making exercise, a significant level of disagreement among spouses arises with respect to purchase decision and as a result a significant level of potential conflict arises among the spouses. Then spouses attempts to resolve the potential conflict by adopting accommodative tactics to resolve the conflict and choose a suitable alternative and finally the outcome of conflict or joint purchase choice should results in a win/win situation.

SPOUSAL-JOINT PURCHASE DECISION MATRIX MODEL (SPDCM)

More specifically, a spousal-joint purchase decision matrix model has been created, which shows the outcome of joint spousal purchase decision exercise regarding varied products.

Table 1

	Product Category			
	Within Category		Across Category	
	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife
Husband	Win	Win/lose	Win	Win/lose
Wife	Win/lose	Win	Lose/win	Win

In the above model, it has been shown that when couples chose product from within category products, then it doesn't matter whoever win or lose in purchase decision making exercise. For spouses, situation will be treated as win-win. While, when couples chose product from across category products, then either male win and wife lose or vice verse in purchase decision making exercise. For spouses, situation will be treated as either win-lose or lose-win, depending upon the relative influence attempt by one spouse on other and avoid the conflict which will arise during purchase decision exercise.

Su et al. (2003) suggested that spousal decision behavior is a key to understanding how families reach purchase decisions. Su et al. (2003) established evidence that spouses do not tend to force in a distinct purchase situation; however, they do tend to alternate use of strong influence measures across decisions. The major findings of their study are as follows:

- Their study results negative reciprocal pattern of spousal decision behavior i.e. when one spouse is faced with coercion within a discrete purchase decision he/she may not reciprocate because of decision avoidance. Consequently the other spouse may get his or her way by using strong means of influence without retaliation from his or her partner. Influence in purchase decision is not necessarily a F^n (his or her power) but F^n (spousal behavioral interaction or reciprocity).
- Spouses tend to revise behavior across decisions according to their past decision evaluation of the outcomes. The results from the study identify not only the efficiency of coercion and its consequences within a discrete decision but also the effects of spousal past decision evaluations on spouse's subsequent decision behavior.

- This study investigated spousal purchase decision behavior from a dynamic interaction perspective. Three major findings emerged from the empirical investigation:
 - Spouses tend not to return coercion in kind within a discrete purchase decision.
 - Spouses tend to alternate in using strong means of influence across decisions.
 - Spouses post decision evaluations such as perceived influence and satisfaction tend to affect their subsequent decision behaviors.

Finally, the theoretical results of this study show what might be expected intuitively. The changes in families which occurred as a result of increased role of media, changing family structure, use of the modern technology have also been reflected in changes in the family buying decision. Overall, more influence have gained by women in most of the decision-making process stages. Significantly, more influence is gained in the initial stage by women, and then increased influence regarding search and evaluation of the alternatives and the final choice stage for household durable goods purchases. The husband's influence in all decision stages is significantly but is fading.

Closer assessment of particular decision areas shows that women have amplified their influence in the husband dominant culture. The increased influence of wife is reflected in the joint decision made by families for the buying of household durable goods. The main factors influencing the family buying decision about purchasing household durable goods is spouses involvement in the decision making process. While the legitimate conflict resolution strategy mediates between the influence of the family involvement and family buying decision.

MARKETING IMPLICATIONS

Producers, marketers, and sales executive of varied products could use the theoretical insights of this study. These theoretical insights can be functional for the marketers when making marketing strategies. An understanding of spousal influence in family buying decision used can help marketers to identify influential spouses. The prediction of spousal influence in different stages of the decision making process help marketers to better target marketing programs and enable marketers to design specific message appeals for targeting specific spouses who may have primary decision making authority regarding the various product buying decision (Su et al., 2003).

In the light of the theoretical evidence provided by this study, it is advisable for marketers to develop specific marketing strategies (for example, product, price, promotion, and distribution) that best match the family buying behavior (joint; autonomic) and involvement of family in decision-making process (that is, initiator, information collector, information evaluator and final choice) that are likely to be come across in markets. Doing so will enable the marketer to craft product positioning strategies and promotional strategies at the appropriate spouses for products that distinguish themselves with family buying decision.

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