

PERCEPTION OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES IN FAMILY DECISIONS MAKING:
IN AN ORIENTAL CULTURE
A MULTIDIMENSIONAL SCALING APPROACH

YAU, Oliver H.M., Hong Kong Baptist College,
SIN, Y.M., Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Abstract

This paper attempted to investigate husband-wife influence at different stages of the family purchasing decision process and to see if differences in perception exist between working wives and non-working wives in family purchasing decisions. Findings showed that husband-wife influence at different stages existed, and their perceptions of various purchase decisions were consistent across different stages. Results also supported a shift from wife-dominant purchase decision making to joint decision making in the case of working wives.

Introduction

There has been considerable research in the field of marketing concerning the family decision-making process. Most research is conducted as though individuals make decisions independent of other household members (Kasulis and Hughes, 1984). However, it was found that husbands and wives performed different roles in purchasing decisions. Employing a convenient sample of fifty couples of married college students, Kenkel (1961) discovered that husbands assume an instrumental role in helping their spouse make final purchasing decisions while wives assume an expressive role to decide on colour, style, and design which conform with social norms. Davis (1970) further improved the idea of the roles of husband and wife in purchasing decisions. The results of his study rejected the belief that family purchasing decisions took a unidimensional or bidimensional role structure.

He concluded that an "overall" power (dominance) score for the family is not appropriate as consensus between husband and wife can be reached in purchasing products in specific categories. Along the same lines, Scanzoni (1977) also identified changing sex roles in family decision making.

Ferber and Lee (1974) successfully confirmed that among newly married couples there was a high tendency for joint decisions and that wives in American society tended to take the role of family financial officer. Szybillo, Sosanie and Tenenbein (1979) also supported this finding by indicating that husbands and wives did exert, to a great extent, independent influences on the household purchase decisions, while Cosenza and Davis (1980) reported that the locus of familial control appears to shift when the wife becomes employed. However, different findings were found. Sheth (1984) explained that greater

incidence of working wives has created time pressure within the family, encouraging individual decision making for many products that might ordinarily be purchased on a joint basis. Filiatrault and Ritchie (1980) revealed that husbands tend to dominate decision making more in family decision-making units (husband, wife, and children) than in those where no children are present.

While research efforts were made on joint decisions, the focus of study has been shifted to an international comparison of family decisions. Green, Verhage and Cunningham (1979) were amongst the earliest to compare how American and Dutch consumers differ in household purchase decisions. It was found that substantial and significant differences exist between the two countries. wives in the U.S. play a more autonomous role than the Dutch wives in family decision making but purchase decisions in Dutch families tend to be made on more of a joint basis than in US families. Along the same lines, Tan, Teoh and McCullough (1986) compared responses of dyads of husbands and wives on buying decisions in a cross-cultural analysis between Singapore and the United States. Discrepancies between the two were found.

However, perceptual differences between husband and wife were related to the family's values orientation in Singapore but not in the U.S. These research findings seemingly suggest the existence of cultural difference and support the need for contextualisation of consumer behaviour in a specific culture as advocated by Engel (1985). Therefore, this paper tries to achieve the following objectives:

- investigate husband-wife influence at different stages of the family purchasing decision process;
- measure the congruence of role perception between husbands and wives at different stages of the family purchasing process; and
- investigate if differences in the perception between family purchasing decisions exist between working wives and non-working wives

in an oriental culture.

*Authors wish to express their gratitude to Mr. Chan, Kwan Chung and Mr. Lai, King Chee, both students of the Chinese University, for their kind assistance in data collection. Thanks are due to Mary Bension for her editorial comments.

For the rest of the paper, please contact the authors.