FAMILY MEMBERS ROLE IN PURCHASE DECISION MAKING

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ABSTRACT

A large number of purchase decisions are influenced by a person’s interaction with his family, friends, relatives and acquaintances. There are distinct roles in the family decision process, and to effectively market the products, marketers must identify who makes and has input into the buying decision. This study is an attempt at understanding the roles played by family members and the social influences in purchase of consumer durables viz., television, refrigerator and washing machine. It studies if there are variations by product in the family buying roles and also identifies dealers understanding of these roles and social influences. It was found that for television, the demand was initiated and influenced mostly by children but for refrigerator and washing machine it was done mostly by females. The study also revealed that although the demand was initiated and influenced mostly by children and female members of the family, the final decision and payment was done mostly by male members. This indicates that even today our society is a practical one. It was also found that children’s playing an increasingly important role in purchase decisions of the family, which may be attributed to the sociological changes taking place. Further this study explores dealers understanding of these influences and ascertains the extent to which it is congruent with the actual consumer behaviour.

Keywords: Family Role; Buying Decision; Consumer Satisfaction; Purchase; Social Influence

INTRODUCTION

Marketers and consumer researchers consider the family to be the most important decision making and consumption unit. A considerable share of consumption decisions takes place within the family context and is therefore collective rather than individual in nature. As family members, children have been acknowledged as playing an important role within purchasing decisions. However, much of the early research on family decisionmaking only considered the roles of adult partners about the processes and complexities of family purchasing, such as how families arrive at purchase decisions and what influence behaviour and communication dynamics form part of the decision process.

The primary objective of this study is to explore the roles performed by the family members in the decision making process and to ascertain the transmission of authority, if any, in the family decision making while buying.
OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

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1. To provide an in-depth understanding of the family Purchase process
2. What are the qualitative methods that included the whole family in decision making
3. The role of children’s in a Family in Purchasing Decisions

Consumer Attitude

Consumer attitudes are a composite of a consumer’s (1) beliefs about, (2) feelings about, (3) and behavioural intentions toward some object—within the context of marketing, usually a brand or retail store. These components are viewed together since they are highly interdependent and together represent forces that influence how the consumer will react to the object.

Behavioural Intention: The behavioural intention is what the consumer plans to do with respect to the object (e.g., buy or not buy the brand). As with affect, this is sometimes a logical consequence of beliefs (or affect), but may sometimes reflect other circumstances—e.g., although a consumer does not really like a restaurant, he or she will go there because it is a hangout for his or her friends.

Attitude-Behaviour Consistency: Consumers often do not behave consistently with their attitudes for several reasons:

Ability- He or she may be unable to do so. Although junior high school student likes pick-up trucks and would like to buy one, she may lack a driver’s license.

Competing demands for resources- Although the above student would like to buy a pickup truck on her sixteenth birthday, she would rather have a computer, and has money for only one of the two.

Social influence- A student thinks that smoking is really cool, but since his friends think it’s disgusting, he does not smoke.

Measurement problems- Measuring attitudes is difficult. In many situations, consumers do not consciously set out to enumerate how positively or negatively they feel about mopeds, and when a market researcher asks them about their beliefs about mopeds, how important these beliefs are, and their evaluation of the performance of mopeds with respect to these beliefs, consumers often do not give very reliable answers. Thus, the consumers may act consistently with their true attitudes, which were never uncovered because an erroneous measurement was made.

Families and Family Decision Making

The Family Life Cycle: Individuals and families tend to go through a “Life Cycle;” The simple life cycle goes from

- Young Single
- Young Couple
- Full Nest I/II/III
- Empty Nest I/II
- Older Single
Family Decision Making: Individual members of families often serve different roles in decisions that ultimately draw on shared family resources. Some individuals are information gatherers/holders, who seek out information about products of relevance. These individuals often have a great deal of power because they may selectively pass on information that favours their chosen alternatives. Influencers do not ultimately have the power to decide between alternatives, but they may make their wishes known by asking for specific products or causing embarrassing situations if their demands are not met. The decision maker(s) have the power to determine issues such as:

- Whether to buy;
- Which product to buy (pick-up or passenger car?);
- Which brand to buy;
- Where to buy it; and
- When to buy.

Note, however, that the role of the decision maker is separate from that of the purchaser. From the point of view of the marketer, this introduces some problems since the purchaser can be targeted by point-of-purchase (POP) marketing efforts that cannot be aimed at the decision maker. Also note that the distinction between the purchaser and decision maker may be somewhat blurred:

- The decision maker may specify what kind of product to buy, but not which brand;
- The purchaser may have to make a substitution if the desired brand is not in stock;
- The purchaser may disregard instructions (by error or deliberately).

It should be noted that family decisions are often subject to a great deal of conflict. The reality is that few families are wealthy enough to avoid a strong tension between demands on the family’s resources. Conflicting pressures are especially likely in families with children and/or when only one spouse works outside the home. Note that many decisions inherently come down to values, and that there is frequently no "objective" way to arbitrate differences. One spouse may believe that it is important to save for the children’s future; the other may value spending now (on private schools and computer equipment) to help prepare the children for the future. Who is right? There is no clear answer here. The situation becomes even more complex when more parties—such as children or other relatives—are involved.

Some family members may resort to various strategies to get their way. One is bargaining—one member will give up something in return for someone else. For example, the wife says that her husband can take an expensive course in gourmet cooking if she can buy a new pickup truck. Alternatively, a child may promise to walk it every day if he or she can have a hippopotamus. Another strategy is reasoning—trying to get the other person(s) to accept one’s view through logical argumentation. Note that even when this is done with a sincere intent, its potential is limited by legitimate differences in values illustrated above. Also note that individuals may simply try to "wear down" the other party by endless talking in the guise of reasoning (this is a case of negative reinforcement as we will see subsequently). Various manipulative strategies may also be used. One is impression management, where one tries to make one’s side look good (e.g., argue that a new TV will help the children see educational TV when it is really mostly wanted to see sports programming, or argue that all "decent families make a contribution to the church"). Authority involves asserting one’s "right" to make a decision (as the "man of the house," the mother of the children, or the one who makes the most money). Emotion involves making an emotional display to get one’s way (e.g., a man cries if his wife will not let him buy a new rap album).
Conceptualising Family Purchasing

For this research, a family purchase was defined as one in which all family members were involved in the decision-making process or consumption. Although the family is of central importance to marketers and consumer researchers, research has tended to focus on a narrow set of issues.

Purchase influence and influence strategies

A key focus for researchers exploring the consumer behaviour of the family has been purchase influence. In a Family, members adopt various decision or influence strategies in an attempt to resolve conflict during purchase decisions. It is argued that some form of conflict is highly likely during family purchase decisions because decision making involves integrating various individual preferences.

Influence Strategies in a Family in Purchase Decision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGY</th>
<th>BEHAVIOUR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Using experience and knowledge as a source of information that will influence the outcome of the decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimate</td>
<td>Emphasising a role stereotype in order to obtain influence. For example, a mother may assume or point out that she is the one who deals with the provision of food and therefore should dominate this decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalition</td>
<td>Two or more members of the family decision-making unit collude in order to obtain a particular outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion</td>
<td>A member of the decision-making unit tries to persuade others by using emotive appeals, crying, pouting and other non-verbal techniques in order to achieve influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bargaining</td>
<td>Giving in on this occasion in return for getting their way on some other occasion</td>
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Children as Influencers

Children constitute a huge secondary market by influencing family purchases, which begin as soon as children have developed the communication skills to make requests. Children’s are more likely to influence the purchase decisions that directly affect them and have more influence over less expensive products and those for their own use.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, children have been found to have less influence on decision making for products that are of high cost and used by the whole family. It is argued that parents will take responsibility for these higher-risk decisions. Although some of found minimal child influence for larger, family purchases, others have found higher levels of influence than was anticipated by earlier research. Some of the highest levels of influence are seen for child oriented family purchases such as holidays and leisure activities. Influence levels are lower for family purchases that are classed as adult oriented such as cars, furniture and TV’s.

Dimensions of Buying Roles in Family Decision-Making

Knowledge about buyer behaviour is necessary for the development of effective marketing strategies. The members of a family influence the decision-making process in the purchase of different products; therefore the real target for the marketer is not an individual member but the family as a whole. While there have been several studies on family dynamics in decision-making, very few pertain particularly to the Indian context, where the traditional family is different from its Western counterpart in that the ‘empty nest’ stage of the family life cycle is not very common. A large number of Indian families still have three generations staying together.

A marketer has to compete not only with other brands in his product category but also with different product categories. This becomes even more significant when the family is considered as a unit where
the needs of several members have to be met from the limited funds. It is then important for the marketer to understand the intra-family dynamics and inter-personal relationships at play in the purchase of a consumer durable product in order to decide the optimal marketing-mix.

**Influencing Family Purchasing Decisions**

The research highlighted an array of sophisticated, complex and well thought-out influence behaviours adopted by children in seeking to influence family purchase decisions. The most important behaviour was the use of knowledge and information. This was seen to enhance and facilitate the adoption of other influence behaviours and is there for classified as a unifying theme when considering child purchase influence. A distinction can be made between knowledge and information. Knowledge refers to expertise or experiences initialised by the children that they articulated when a purchase was being make, for example, many of the children had gained knowledge of computer technology through using PC’s at school and at friend’s homes. In contrast, information was an external resource that the children accessed during a purchase decision. For example, for holiday purchases, some children went on the Internet to gather information on the alternatives and presented this to their parents. In some cases, it was evident that through accessing information the children became more knowledgeable about a purchase and could draw on this source during future purchase decisions.

The knowledge and information theme can be linked back to the expert and problem solving strategies derived their ‘experience’ strategy, these strategies focused on drawing on expertise and experience from individuals both within and external to the family and using information from various sources. Knowledge and information supported and enhanced the adoption of other influence strategies, forming the backbone of all influence behaviour.

The most significant role knowledge and information played was allowing children to justify their purchase requests by highlighting the benefits and enabling them to ‘sell’ their idea to others. Most of the child influence behaviour started with this base, and was then enhance by the use of other behaviours.

**FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION**

Findings indicating more joint decision making in low and medium level income amilies may not mean that such a procedure in as much choice as it is necessity. Regardless, such knowledge should be helpful in structuring the agent’s approach to such families. However, the possiblity of family involvement in decision making procedures as the basis for effecting change in higher income families should not be overlooked.

Members of the family influence the decision making process in the purchase of different products, especially high value items, such as consumer durables. Research on the relative influence of husband, wife and child has shown that, while both the partners play a major role in the purchase process, the particular forms of influence depend on a number of factors including, the product, the stage of the decision process, a couple's sex-role orientation, the intensity of each individual's preferences and a couple's consideration of equity or fairness issues within the context of their relationship. The involvement of children has also seen to grow in the present system of nuclear family setup. This research stream indicates that, in general, the level of joint decision-making is quite high.

**REFERENCE**


