

A THEORY OF FAMILY BUYING DECISIONS

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The paper attempts to develop a comprehensive theory of family buying decisions based on current empirical evidence in several disciplines in addition to marketing. The major emphasis is the development of a conceptual framework of determinants of joint vs. autonomous decision-making in family buying decisions and the resolution of conflict present in joint decisions.

Family decision-making is probably unique among research areas of social sciences in that several disciplines have contributed to its development including rural sociology, social anthropology, social psychology, clinical psychology, home economics, consumer psychology, marketing, and economics. This interest of diverse disciplines in family decision-making is largely due to the fact that the whole societal structure in the western world rests on the composition,

maintenance and survival of the family unit. In addition, most decisions and consequent behaviors of individuals beginning from their birth till death are anchored to the family. Consequently, today family decision-making enjoys a long tradition of research.

The purpose of this paper is to present a comprehensive theory of family decision-making in consumer behavior. A theory in general serves any of these functions: (a) descriptive function in which it

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tidsskrifter og hans bok (skrevet sammen med John A. Howard): «The Theory of Buyer Behavior» er omtalt som et hovedbidrag til marketing-teorien.

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describes and narrates a phenomenon with the use of a set of constructs or categories, (b) delimiting function by which it explicitly states the purpose of the theory and hence specifies what it does not include, (c) generative function which essentially means the extent of speculation, inventiveness and creativity it provides, and finally (d) integrative function in which the theory attempts to reconcile a variety of findings and thoughts by a network of constructs. (Howard and Sheth, 1969, chapter 1.) In view of the fact that family decision-making is a well-researched area, the first and the third functions are already performed by others to a considerable extent. However, the second and the fourth functions warrant some attention because in the area of consumer behavior very little has been attempted to specify purpose and nature of family decision-making and to integrate existing thinking. Accordingly, the theory presented here is basically an attempt to specify perimeters of family decision-making in consumer behavior and to integrate diverse findings by means of a nomological network of constructs. To me, it appears that no other area of consumer behavior is as prepared for such an integrative effort as family decision-making.

I. Review of Family Decision-Making.

In the process of developing the theory of family decision-making,

one is struck with the variety of perspectives that researchers have taken and the variety of findings that have emerged. This section briefly reviews the current thinking and knowledge.

A. Approaches to family decision-making.

Most of the approaches to family decision-making can be summarized in the following categories.

(1) Macro vs. Micro Approach:

In general, economics, social anthropology and marketing have taken a macro approach in which households rather than members of the household have been the primary units of observation and investigation. (Alexander 1947; Bell 1958; David 1962; Ferber 1962; Foote 1961; Meyer 1957; Oeser and Emery 1954; Shaffer 1963; Wolgast 1957; Young 1957; Zimmerman 1947; Zober 1964.) On the other hand, rural sociology, consumer psychology and clinical psychology have, in general, adopted a micro approach in which the major thrust has been observing and investigating the interaction processes among members of the family. (Alderson 1957; Blood and Wolfe 1960; Bott 1957; Bortel and Gross 1954; Foote and Cottrell 1955; Gilbert 1957; Kenkel 1966; Kirkpatrick 1963; Nicosia 1966; Olsen 1956—57; Parsons and Bales 1955.) This has tended to keep polarized thinking and findings which are otherwise so interrelated.

(2) *Descriptive vs. Determinative Approach:* Some researchers have been interested primarily in observing and empirically describing the phenomenon of family decision-making (Alderson 1957; Berry and Pollay 1968; Bortel and Gross 1954; Ferzeira and Winter 1965; Glick 1947; Kirkpatrick 1963; O'Rourke 1963; Shaffer 1963; Wolgast 1958). No attempt is made to examine the determinants of observed phenomenon. Others have hypothesized a variety of determinants including personality, family orientations and childhood upbringing and background to explain the interactive processes and development of roles among family members. (Blood and Wolfe 1960; Blood 1958; Bott 1957; Foote and Cottrell 1955; Foote 1961; Heer 1958, Hoffman 1960; Ingersoll 1948; Kenkel 1961; Kenkel and Hoffman 1956; King 1967; Komarovsky 1946, 1961; Life 1965; Lu 1952; Moty 1950; Oeser and Emery 1954; Parsons and Bales 1955; Strodtbeck 1954; Weller 1968; Wilkening and Bhardivaj 1967, Zimmerman 1947.)

(3) *Attitudinal vs. Behavioral Orientation:* Most of the research seems attitudinal, i.e. the verbal responses of the family members have been the basic sources of information. Attitudinal approach has generally produced more information which has been useful to examine causal factors of family decision-making. The behavioral orientation has tended to concentrate on the terminal aspects of family decision-making which

culminate in actual behaviors. Basically, several characteristics of this terminal behavior are observed and analyzed. For example, M.R.C.A. panel records, on a weekly basis, several characteristics such as price, brand, store and quantity of purchase behavior manifested by the family with respect to numerous grocery and personal care products.

To a considerable extent, attitudinal approaches have also remained cross-sectional and behavioral approaches have tended to be continuous observations. There are some recent exceptions, however, notably the General Electric panel and the Berkeley-Illinois panel on household decision-making where both types of information is gathered continuously over time.

B. *Classification of Findings on Family Decision-Making.*

Research findings on family decision-making are literally hundreds in number in several disciplines such as sociology and social psychology. I have attempted to summarize most of the findings in terms of the following categories.

1. *Types of Family Decisions:*

Most of the research in this area deals with the distinction between buying decisions and consumption. (Alderson 1957; Converse and Crawford 1950; Coulson 1966; Ferber 1954; Foote 1961; Fry 1967; Gilbert 1957; Herbst 1954; Hill 1958; Howard and Sheth 1969; Life 1964; Nicosia 1966,

Morgan 1961; Shaffer 1963; Wells 1966.) It is pointed out that one member, particularly the housewife, may be the buyer, but the products and services may be consumed either by all the members or even some other member. Specific attention has been paid to the role of the housewife as a purchasing agent, and whether some decisions are truly joint among all members of the family.

In general, consumption of goods and services are classified into three types: (1) consumption by individual members by themselves, (2) consumption by the whole family jointly, and (3) consumption by the household unit. The latter mostly includes asset accumulation and their maintenance such as a house or a boat or household furnishings (Shaffer 1963).

2. *Process of Family Decision-Making:*

It would appear that three distinct aspects of the process of decision-making have received considerable research attention. The first relates to the role structure in decision-making among members of the family. Perhaps the single most consistent finding is that the husband plays the instrumental (idea man) role and the wife plays the expressive (emotional) role in family decision-making. (Blood and Wolfe 1960; Burchinal and Bander 1965; Ferreiva and Winter 1965; Hill 1954; Kenkel 1961; Komarovskiy 1946; Life 1965; Lu 1952; Parsons and Bales 1955;

Strodtbeck 1954.) Wolgast (1957, 1958) found that in the joint decision-making of buying automobiles, the husband usually initiated the thought of buying a new car and the make of that car, while the wife concentrated on the interior features of the car. This specialization brought about by differential roles among family members in decision-making is considered significant to minimize conflict in decision-making.

The second aspect is the pattern of interaction and exchange of information among family members. (Alderson 1957; Berry and Pollay 1968; Bott 1957; Brown 1961; Converse and Crawford 1950; Coulson 1966; Foote 1961; Fry 1967; Gilbert 1957; Gilser 1948; Glock and Nicosia 1964; Granbois 1964; Herbst 1952; Hill 1958; Kenkel 1961; Life 1964; Morgan 1961; Murphy 1960; Nicosia 1966; Olsen 1956-57; Pollay 1968, Sharp and Mott 1956; Strodtbeck 1954; Wells 1966; Wilkening 1958; Wolgast 1958.) Probably the most salient aspect is that of Carter (1954) who suggested that three patterns called individual predominance, group goal facilitation and sociability are manifested by small groups including the family members.

The last aspect encompasses the individual differences in motives, preferences and even values among family members and their effects on the process of family decision-making (Bolt 1957; Clawson 1961; Coulson 1966; Fry 1967; Gilbert 1957; Morgan 1961).

3. *Determinants of Family Decision-Making*

Bulk of the research on family decision-making is in exploring its determinants. This exploration has also covered a wide territory ranging from basic personality traits of the spouses to specific life styles of the members. (Alexander 1947; Bell 1958; Bott 1957; Foote and Cottrell 1955; Heer 1958, 1963; Ingersoll 1948; Komarovsky 1946, 1961; Lu 1952; Oeser and Emery 1954; Parsons and Bales 1955; Zimmerman 1947.) Kenkel (1957), for example, examined the reinforcing or counteracting effects of dominance, persistence and self-confidence. The latter has been researched further by other researchers in terms of specific self-confidence and general self-confidence (Howard 1969). Lu (1952) constructed a scale on which a spouse can be rated dominant, equalitarian or submissive vis-a-vis the other spouse, and investigated as many as eleven background factors such as attachment or conflict with parents and home involvement prior to marriage.

Several studies have, directly or indirectly, examined the status of the wife in the family. Both Converse and Crawford (1950) and Zober (1964) find greater autonomy of the wife among the upper and lower social classes but not the middle class. This agrees with Komarovsky's (1961) exhaustive work in this area.

Perhaps the single determinant which has attracted the biggest attention is family's style of life.

Bell (1958), for example, presents a typology of families based on whether familism, career or consumership are the dominant theme of living. White (1966) presents five types of family values: flexible vs. rigid, nonevaluative vs. evaluative, objective vs. family role, emancipated vs. limited, and appreciated vs. unappreciated. Based on combinations of these values, a family's life style may be quite distinct and different from other families. Wilkening (1965, 1964) has examined familism, integration and father-centered orientations as manifestations of life style.

In addition, a number of studies have specifically examined factors such as sex (Alexander 1947; Komarovsky 1946), social class (Bell 1958; Bortel and Gross 1954; Glock and Nicosia 1964; Komarovsky 1961; Moty 1950; Oeser and Emery 1954; Olsen 1956-57; Zimmerman 1947) peer group influences (Neiman 1954) ethnic background (King 1967) and prior family orientations (Lu 1952, Wilkening 1958) as determinants of variety in family decision-making.

II. *A Theory of Family Decision-Making.*

After reviewing the existing knowledge on family decision-making, I have attempted to integrate those findings and thoughts which seem intimately related to buying decisions of the family. Out of this integration has resulted a theory of family buying de-

cisions described in this section. I must, however, point out that what I am about to describe is as yet only a theory untested in its totality, although several parts have substantial empirical evidence. Secondly, the theory is "static" in the sense that it does not deal as yet with repetitive family decisions over a period of time. It does, however, examine the process of a specific decision that extends over time.

The theory of family buying decisions is summarized in Figure 1. If it looks quite similar to Howard—Sheth theory of buyer behavior (1969), it is very true with respect to the format of the two theories, and only partly true with respect to both the type of constructs and their network of relationships. As you can see, the theory is a complex set of interactions among a large number of constructs and also among several individuals. But then family decision-making is a complex process itself, and to describe it, map it if you will, mandates the complexity inherent in comprehensiveness. I am, indeed, tempted to repeat my viewpoint on buyer behavior (Sheth, 1967), namely that if we do not remain far-sighted to comprehend the totality of a research area, we are liable to resemble the proverbial seven blind men and the elephant. One can, on the other hand, somewhat simplify the theory in at least two ways: First not all the constructs are likely to be active at a point in time because a number of them are

temporally related to one another. Also, several of them can be considered as antecedent conditions for holding constant some of the differences either among families for a specific decision or among decisions of a family. Second, there are several constructs, particularly the exogeneous constructs presented surrounding the rectangular box in Figure 1, which can be abstracted further into a much smaller set. For example, we may be tempted to lump social class, reference groups, role-orientation, etc. into a grosser construct called societal values. This would be particularly useful in a decision situation where there are no large differences in the effects of each of the specific exogeneous constructs.

A. Brief Summary of the Theory

Before describing parts of the theory, it may be useful to provide a brief overview. Perhaps it is easiest to start with consumption behavior of the family and work backward toward buying decisions which determine it.

The total consumption of a family is classified as that by (1) the individual members, (2) the family as a whole, and (3) the household unit. For example, beer may be exclusively consumed by the father, hair spray by the mother, and cereals or baby food by the child. On the other hand, vegetables and cake mix may be consumed, after suitable transformation, by all of them. Finally, there are several items such as paints, wall papers, lawn mowers,

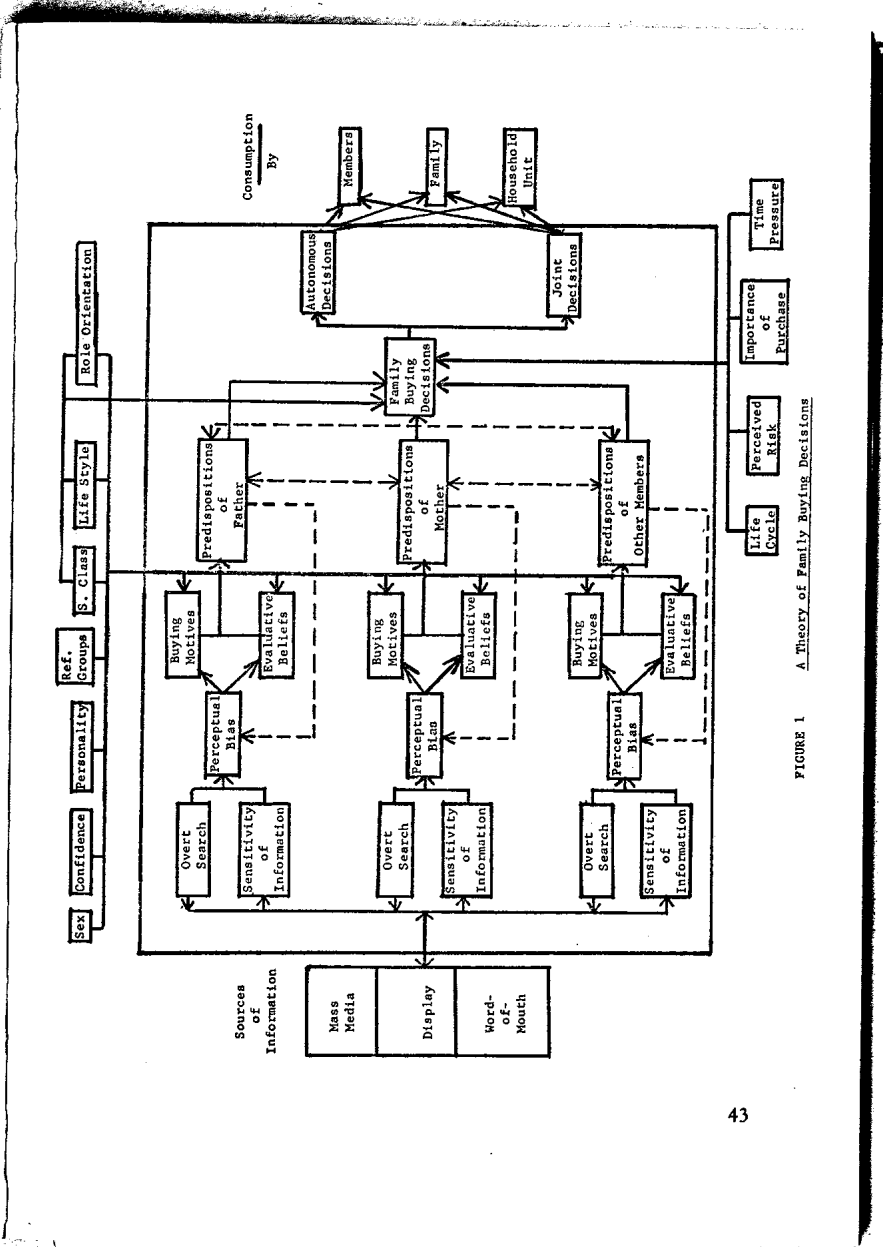


FIGURE 1 A Theory of Family Buying Decisions

etc. which are consumed by the family indirectly in the process of consuming the household shelter unit. This classification of consumption behavior has the advantage of pointing out whether the demand for goods and services is collective and indirect or otherwise.

The family consumption behavior is considered largely to be the derivative of family buying decisions. Accordingly, consumption arising from gifts, rentals, and acquisitions by means other than buying is not explicitly taken into account. Family buying decisions are considered to be of two types: autonomous by a single member or joint by several or all members of the family.

It would appear that if consumption of a product is by a particular member, it would be his autonomous decision to choose a specific brand. However, this is not always true. There are quite a number of products, particularly consumed by a child, for which buying decisions are strictly with the mother. In addition, lots of products are actually bought by the housewife acting as a purchasing agent for all members including the father in which the consumer member exerts his preferences but does not buy them himself. (Alderson 1957; Berry and Pollay 1968; Carlson 1966; Gilbert 1957; Hill 1958).

On the other hand, the buying decision may be completely autonomous with a member, although the consumption is joint by the

whole family. It has been found that in grocery and personal care products where the brand is not visible at the time of consumption (spaghetti), and where the product is transformed considerably by the time it is consumed (cake mix), the housewife is an autonomous buyer for the joint consumption of the family. However, a large number of buying decisions are likely to be joint if their consumption is also joint.

Since there is no one-to-one correspondence between type of consumption and type of family decision-making, it is critical to examine the determinants of joint vs. autonomous decision-making. The theory specifies that family's social class, role orientation and life cycle as well as relative importance of purchase, perceived risk and time pressure impinging upon a buying decision determine whether a buying decision will be joint or autonomous. The first three determinants are not product-specific (although family-specific) whereas the last three are product-specific.

If the decision is autonomous, it is largely a function of the particular member's predispositions toward specific brands. These predispositions are based on his buying motives and evaluative beliefs about salient alternatives. All the three constructs — predispositions, buying motives and evaluative beliefs — are aggregately called his cognitive world relevant to the autonomous buying decision, and it is based on three

factors: (1) First is the availability of information at the time of decision from a variety of sources including mass media and word-of-mouth, and its processing by the individual member so as to make it congruent with his already stored knowledge. (2) Second, there is internal family influence from other members which attempts to revise his buying motives or his evaluative beliefs about alternatives. (3) Third, there are a set of antecedent factors including personality, life style, social class, role orientation and reference groups that have exerted considerable influence in the past to mould his cognitive world in a certain biased way.

In the autonomous buying decision, a member is likely to take into consideration, specific requests and preferences of other members especially when the latter are likely to participate in the consumption of the products and services he decides on. Even in situations where he is the only consumer member, he may take into account preferences and biases of other members so that his choice and consumption thereof is not consistent with the general pattern of behavior of the family.

Joint buying decisions are, by definition, more complex, and perhaps they entail greater time interval between initiation and completion. Not only do they result in greater communication among family members, but also probably evoke inter-member conflict and its resolution. The theory states

that both the necessary condition (of felt need of joint decision-making) and sufficient conditions (of differences in goals and perceptions among members) are likely to be present in joint decisions to entail some conflict. How is this conflict resolved and what benefits or hardships entail are further described later.

B. Description of Parts of Theory

The theory of family decision-making consists of the following meaningful subparts, and it may be easier to describe it by describing these subparts.

1. Individual members of the family, their predispositions, and the underlying cognitive world of buying motives and evaluative beliefs about products and brands.

2. Determinants of the cognitive world of individual members. There are both external and internal determinants.

3. Determinants of autonomous vs. joint family decision-making.

4. Process of joint decision-making with consequent inter-member conflict and its resolution.

Below is a brief description of each of these parts.

1. Cognitive Aspects of Individual Members

The theory classifies family members as husband, wife and all other members. The latter largely consists of children but also includes other relatives such as parents of the spouses. It assumes that a married couple have formed a family unit if and only if they live away from their parents and

are not totally dependent upon someone else. Accordingly, it excludes a young married couple which lives with parents in the initial stages of forming a family unit. The parents would have a family unit in which the couple is a part of other members.

At a point in time, each member of the family has a set of predispositions, both positive and negative, toward products and specific brands involved in a buying decision. These predispositions are presumed to be different in many instances because of differences in motives and perceptions of individual members. For example, in buying of an automobile, the husband may prefer a medium-priced full size sedan, the wife may prefer a low-priced full size station wagon, and the teenage children may prefer a high-priced small imported sports car. Within each of these types, the members may perceive the benefit of specific cars differently.

A member's predisposition is a function of his buying motives and evaluative perceptions (beliefs) of specific brands in attaining or blocking his buying motives. Motives are the biogenic or psychogenic needs, wants or desires of the person in purchasing and consuming a product or service. I am implying, by the plural specification, that a person has a set of motives in a specific buying situation, and generally these are ordered by him to really provide a motive structure of some sort. Buying motives not only do impel or

arouse behavior but also direct behavior toward specific alternatives because most buying motives are learned from past experiences and acculturation. For an excellent treatise on motivation I refer you to Cofer and Appley (1964).

Another determinant of a family member's predisposition is his evaluative beliefs about specific brand alternatives as to whether they block or facilitate achievement of buying motives. As I have pointed out elsewhere, the evaluative beliefs are a very small part of the total cognitive awareness and knowledge about relevant products and brands (Sheth 1969, 1970). They solely consists of the person's evaluation of an alternative as a perceived instrument to satisfy a set of motives. Thus evaluative beliefs of an alternative may vary from one member to the other not only because their buying motives are different but also they perceive the same alternative differently in its extent of being a perceived instrument to satisfy those motives.

It is easy to see that compared to an individual's buying decisions, family buying decisions tend to be inherently more complex because of the variety of predispositions and the underlying cognitive worlds of members of the family.

2. Determinants of Differences in Predispositions

There are three factors in the theory that govern a family member's buying motives, evaluative

beliefs and the consequent predispositions.

The first factor is a series of exogeneous constructs at the top of the rectangular box in Figure 1. These consist of individual member's personality, life style, perception of his social class, role orientation within the family and reference group. It would be repetitive to elaborate how these exogenous conditions determine a person's cognitive world because considerable thinking has been provided in Nicosia (1966) and Howard and Sheth (1969). However, two things should be pointed out. First, the same exogeneous constructs are likely to affect members of the family differently. This partly explains the conflicts and incompatibilities existing in most families even with respect to some fundamental values (Alderson, 1957). Second, some exogeneous constructs are likely to be more homogenous determinants than others among members of the family, particularly between the spouses. These include life style, social class and role orientation. By contrast, personality and reference group are very specific to individual members, and hence more heterogeneous in their effects among family members.

A second factor determining the cognitive world of individual members is the availability of information from a variety of sources including mass media, displays and word-of-mouth during the process of family decision-making. However, members are very likely

to differ in their accessibility to the sources, in their sensitivity toward information, and in their extent of overt search for information. For example, the husband may easily secure information on a given buying decision from sources near his place of work, may be more sensitive to print media, and may indulge in greater search prior to deciding buying decision as compared to other members of the family. The wife, on the other hand, may easily utilize displays and broadcast media and may be more sensitive to them than other members. In particular, the family members are likely to be heterogeneous in their sources of word-of-mouth communication.

In addition, each member is likely to process information, actively sought or passively received, differently from other members because he has different predispositions than others. The cognitive consistency theorists (Feldman, 1966) tell us that perceptual distortions of received information is clearly a function of existing attitudes and predispositions. This is indicated by the dashed lines from predisposition to perceptual bias construct in Figure 1.

The third factor determining the cognitive world of each member is the family itself. Members of the family interact and influence each other over the life cycle of the family. This is, therefore, an internal determinant in the theory, and it is represented by the dashed lines among the member's predisposition constructs.

3. *Determinants of Autonomous vs. Joint Decision-Making*

As discussed earlier, all family buying decisions can be dichotomized as autonomous by any one member or joint by all or some members of the family. A large number of buying decisions are autonomously with the wife in our culture. However, it should be remembered that in quite a few instances, the housewife acts merely as a purchasing agent carrying out family member's desires and sometimes actual independent decisions (Coulson 1966). The process of autonomous decision-making by any one member is tantamount to individual buyer behavior which has been extensively examined by others. Accordingly, I have attempted to focus on joint decision-making in this paper.

The critical aspect is the identification of factors that determine joint decision-making among family members. In Figure 1, I have isolated these determinants from a variety of sources: social class, role-orientation, life cycle of family, perceived risk of a decision, importance of purchase decision, and time pressure felt by family members. Perhaps it might be better to briefly discuss the manner in which each determinant enhances or curtails joint decision-making in a family.

1. **Social Class.** A number of studies have clearly indicated that there is greater autonomy of buying decisions among all the members in both the upper and

lower social classes. This in turn, suggests that incidence of joint decision-making is likely to be more among middle-class families. Knowing that middle class families have the least discretionary income and the highest perceived risk (Bauer, 1960), it seems plausible that there will be greater planning, deliberation and participation by all members in decision-making.

2. **Role Orientation.** This refers to specific roles implicitly or explicitly allotted to members of the family in the process of continuous interaction. The more clearly the allocation of the roles, the greater is specialization and division of labor brought in the family. Hence, role orientation will tend to bring about greater autonomy and less joint decision-making. It is possible that even in joint decisions among families in which roles are clearly marked, each member may only participate in the joint decisions only partially depending on his expertise and specific role. For example, the husband may only perform the function of bringing information in decisions related to home furnishings to enable the wife to decide more rationally.

3. **Life Cycle of Family.** We should expect, in general, that the extent of joint decision-making would vary inversely with the age of the family. Hence, joint decision-making is likely to be more prevalent among newly marrieds

and much less prevalent among senior citizens.

4. **Perceived Risk in Buying Decisions.** The greater the perceived risk of making a wrong decision for the family, the greater the amount of joint decision-making among members of the family. This results primarily because the aversive consequences affect the whole family either directly or indirectly and hence numbers tend to seek support and guidance from one another.

5. **Importance of Purchase to Family.** The greater the importance of a specific buying decision to the family, the greater it is likely to be jointly decided by all members of the family. Most of the "big ticket" items such as major durable appliances, automobiles and houses are jointly decided by all members of the family including the children.

6. **Time Pressure.** The more a family is pressed for time due to whatever reasons, the less will be the incidence of joint decision-making. One major factor in increased time-pressure on the family today is the increase in number of working wives. (Media/Scope 1968). Even children seem to be heavily engaged in part-time work. A second factor is related to the ever-increasing achievement motivation that the society seems to encourage. Today, time is considered to be a scarce

resource along with monetary resources, and any activity that uses up time more than what it can return to the family is relegated in importance.

4. *Process of Joint Decision-Making.*

The heart of the theory of family buying decisions is the process of joint decision-making. As discussed at the time of reviewing the literature, considerable attention has been paid to the specific roles that spouses take in joint decisions: the husband performs the instrumental function and the wife performs the expressive function. In consumer behavior, we need to investigate on several other aspects of joint decision-making.

First, who initiates the joint decision? This seems important from the marketer's point of view in that he would selectively direct advertising appeals that intensify the initiator's buying motives. The theory suggests that who will initiate a buying decision depends on life style and the role-orientation of family. If a member is dominant, for example the father, he is likely to be the initiator of buying decisions. On the other hand, if all members are equalitarian, the initiation of a purchase decision will not be centralized in any one member. In very broad terms, the father seems to predominate in initiating joint buying decisions.

Second, who provides information related to joint buying decision? Several studies have indicat-

ed that all the members share this task largely proportional to their expertise in various aspects of a specific decision. For example, the father is reputed to concentrate on technical and economic aspects, the mother on decorative and ornamental aspects, and the children on socially-related aspects of the buying decision. It is, however, increasingly felt that children, particularly the teen-aged children, have become the primary source of information for numerous joint decisions including those of automobiles, appliances, homes, and vacations (Gilbert 1957).

Third, who carries out the actual process of shopping and buying? In the grocery stores, contrary to common belief, both the father and the children shop and buy for the family either alone or together with the mother. However, it seems that children are generally less involved here. Furthermore, even between parents, the majority of shopping and buying rests with the mother because she has the extra time that will not cut in the leisure activity of the whole family and she is generally the budget manager in a family.

Finally, and probably most importantly, is the question of conflict that may exist in joint buying decisions. March and Simon (1959) have presented a conceptual framework of inter-person conflict which seems extremely relevant to the family decision-making. The necessary condition for inter-person conflict is a felt need for joint decision-

making. In family buying decisions, the theory elaborated on a number of factors that mandate joint decision-making among family members, and hence the necessary condition is certainly present. The sufficient conditions for inter-group conflict are (1) differences in goals and (2) differences in perceptions about relevant alternatives or goal-objects. Both of these conditions are considered to be present in family decision-making in that each member has a specifically defined cognitive world of his own in buying behavior. We pointed out how family members are likely to differ with respect to their buying motives (goals) and evaluative beliefs (perceptions about alternatives). In fact, some studies have explicitly examined the conflict at least between husband and wife in joint decision-making with respect to buying automobiles and other "large ticket" items (Alderson 1957; Life 1965; Hill). Recently, other unpublished studies indicate that a good deal of conflict arises between parents and children in buying of homes and vacations.

Presence of inter-member conflict in joint buying decisions entails attempts to resolve it prior to choosing specific brands. These attempts are tactically different, and a particular type is more appropriate if conflict has arisen primarily due to differences in evaluative beliefs as opposed to in buying motives. Resolution of conflict is presumed to take any one of the following forms.

a. **Problem-solving.** If the inter-member conflict is the consequence of disagreement on evaluative beliefs rather than buying motives, problem-solving is the most common approach. In other words, the family members agree on the need of a product or service but argue on the type or brand that seems most appropriate. For example, all the members may agree that the family needs a new car but members may differ as to whether it should be sedan, station wagon or personal car. A large number of family's joint buying decisions seems to suffer from this type of conflict.

In problem-solving, the immediate consequence is to actively seek more information or deliberate more on available information. Then it leads to seeking support from credible personal sources outside the family and finally to seek out newer alternatives previously not even considered in joint decision-making.

b. **Persuasion.** Sometimes a conflict arises among family members with respect to some specific criteria by which alternatives are evaluated. In other words, while there is agreement at a more fundamental level, there is disagreement as to specific subgoals. This type of conflict is resolved by persuasion in which an attempt is made to test for consistency in the motive hierarchy of the members and to avoid any suboptimization that may be found. For example, the husband may initiate the

thought of replacing the car at a time when family is already in enough debt; other members may persuade him to change his mind by pointing out the economic inconsistency.

In persuasion, there is no attempt to gather more information on any of the alternatives. Basically, it entails greater interaction among members at conflict, and sometimes an outsider is brought in to reconcile the differences.

c. **Bargaining.** If the disagreement over buying motives is taken as fixed by the family members, the conflict is resolved by the process of bargaining. In resorting to bargaining, the concept of distributive justice or fairness is quite likely to be evoked, and conflict is explicitly acknowledged by members to exist. One common way this type of conflict is resolved through bargaining is to degenerate the joint decision into an autonomous one given to a member in return for some favor or exchange to all other members. For example, the father may be allowed to buy a new car for his business activities in return for an agreement to provide other things desirable to members of the family.

Bargaining would seem to be quite common in family buying decisions in view of the fact that economic resources of a family are scarce and some basic incompatible viewpoints are present among spouses due to differential premarital backgrounds.

d. Politics. When the members of a family not only have disagreements about specific buying motives, but also, more fundamentally, about the whole style of life, the constant conflict is likely to be resolved either by dissolution of the family or by politics. The latter usually results in formation of coalitions and subgroups of some of the family members in an attempt to isolate the member with whom there is basic conflict. Although this type of conflict resolution in buying decisions is not likely to be widespread, it is neither uncommon. In particular, children are likely to be used as coalition members of one parent against the other. Also, today we seem to witness coalition of teen-aged children against parents.

From the social value viewpoint, all conflicts within a family are considered undesirable. However, given that they occur, conflicts resolved by process of problem-solving and persuasion are much less harmful than those resolved by bargaining and politics.

III. To Sum Up.

This concludes my presentation of the theory of family buying decisions. I hope it motivates researchers to fully test it, and probably in the process modify it.

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