What do You Think, Darling? Revisiting Knowledge on Purchase Decisions of Couples within Households

By Elena Dinkevych and Robert Wilken

Many purchase decisions are made by couples living together. Previous research has investigated antecedents of which partner has more influence in these decisions. However, due to societal changes in gender roles, this research requires an update. Hence, we review whether extant findings still apply to contemporary couples. In an online study, we investigate product category-unrelated (education and income) and product category-related (knowledge and preference intensity) as well as contextual (product category, gender) antecedents of relative influence in joint decisions regarding vacations, television sets, groceries, and dining out. Although income still plays a role, individual’s education does not – possibly due to increasingly similar educational levels among partners. Knowledge and preference intensity both strongly affect the relative influence on joint decisions as follows: Women (men) are more knowledgeable and have more intense preferences for the purchase of groceries (TV sets). This result points towards persistent gender-bound decision making in some product categories.

1. Introduction

Although consumer decision-making research mostly focuses on the individual consumer, products in fact are often purchased within multi-person households (Simpson et al. 2012). Especially for products consumed jointly, the preference-building process is at least partly a matter of joint decision making rather than a solitary activity. Examples include the purchase of major household items in families, such as cars, houses, furniture, insurance, or financial services (e.g., Davis 1976; Razzouk et al. 2007; Schneider et al. 2013; Spiro 1983).

Early (1970s/80s) research studied marital roles and spousal decision processes, aiming at identifying the “dominant” party, and therefore examined which product categories were husband- resp. wife-dominant. For instance, husbands dominated decisions on insurances whereas wives dominated the purchase of food (Davis and Rigaux 1974). In contrast to the anecdotal evidence that the wife spends approximately 85 per cent of a household income, as early commercial studies indicate, some authors demonstrate that husbands have more power in decision making than wives (e.g., Filiatrault and Ritchie 1980), while others posit that the influence distribution is specific to the product category (e.g., Davis 1976). In conclusion, this stream of literature investigates the “dominance” question – i.e. who decides – and often finds product category-specific answers – i.e. specific to what is purchased jointly.

Other researchers studied the underlying decision process, i.e., why him or her? Consequently, these researchers focused on antecedents of the decision dominance (or, equivalently, the influence distribution). Numerous studies have been guided by Resource Theory (Blood and Wolfe 1960) to postulate that one partner’s influence in joint decision is a function of several power-related resources to the relationship (e.g., income, education, status, and their respective [in]equality among partners). With this perspective, Rosen and Granbois (1983) show that partners’ educational levels impact the role structure in family decisions, and Filiatrault and Richie (1980) find that the husband’s income contributes to his relative influence on the ultimate joint purchase decision.

All studies during this period have focused on married, heterosexual couples who share one household. As a result, research in this area is heavily influenced by gender
roles that, however, have undergone significant societal changes. In fact, research at the turn of the millennium suggests that women are increasingly exerting more influence in domains that were traditionally male-dominated and vice versa (Belch and Willis 2001). Consequently, answers to the combined “who decides” and “what is purchased” questions are potentially outdated.

Moreover, women’s traditional role of being responsible for the household while their husbands earn a living and make careers outside the home has changed. The male role as breadwinner has become obsolete; women increasingly participate in the workforce and thus contribute to the household income (Gini 1999). Relatedly, also more recent literature studying cohabiting couples (Belch and Willis 2001; Razzouk et al. 2007; Webster and Reis 2001) or same-sex couples (Schneider et al. 2013; Wilkes and Lavarie 2007) challenge the validity today of known antecedents of dominance in joint purchase decisions (the “why him or her?” question). However, this research remains scattered, with several antecedents mostly having been tested in isolation. Moreover, the context in which decisions are made (i.e., what is purchased?) has been merely subordinate to the investigation of antecedents.

Thus, our first contribution is to update and extend research on antecedents of the relative influence of one partner in joint purchase decisions. To this end, we first review whether established antecedents still apply to contemporary couples, to provide a fine-grained picture on “why him or her” questions (see 2.1; empirical results in 5.1).

As our second contribution, we seek to update knowledge on the related “who” and “what” questions, in that we systematically select product categories associated to either one or no specific gender (see 2.2; empirical results in 5.2).

The remainder of this article is structured as follows: The next chapter provides a theoretical basis for our hypotheses in the subsequent section. We then introduce our methodology, followed by the results. We conclude with a discussion of our findings, as well as their implications for the study of purchase decisions of couples in households.

2. Theoretical background

Several distinct theories coexist to explain the relative influence of family partners in joint decisions (Schneider et al. 2013). An integrated framework is thus missing. Recently, Queen et al. (2015) proposed a theoretical framework for decision-making processes of couples, drawing on multiple disciplines including economics, marketing, and psychology. The researchers propose that both individual (e.g., cognitive abilities, interpersonal resources) and contextual factors (e.g., gender roles; children) play a role in the decision process. Each partner brings his or her individual resources into the decision process. While the individual factors relate to the question of why one partner exerts more influence than the other (2.1), the contextual factors impact the dyadic decision making in different decision phases and clarify what the subject of the decision is and its impact on the relative influence of partners (2.2). In the following, we will follow Queen et al.’s (2015) framework and elaborate on our choice of antecedents and our research model.

2.1. Individual resources: Why does one partner exert more influence than the other?

Each partner brings his or her individual resources to the table when couples engage in a joint decision. These resources can be cognitive, emotional, or interpersonal, and determine the process and the outcome of a joint decision (Queen et al. 2015). An influential theory in family decision research, Resource Theory (Blood and Wolfe 1960), suggests that resources can play a crucial role in the distribution of influence. This theory postulates that each partner possesses certain characteristics (= resources) that correlate with power. The relative distribution of such characteristics determines the influence distribution in decision making; in other words, the partner with more of a certain characteristic is also more influential.

Education

As opposed to resources that a partner may actually use (e.g., withholding money to be spent on a product), there are resources that only need to be possessed to impact one’s relative influence (Corfman and Lehmann 1987). Like education, they need not be related to a specific purchase but can pertain to general characteristics possibly associated with more competence in general and more power in particular decisions. For instance, when a partner has a higher level of education, his/her partner may imply that he/she is more qualified in general and allow him/her to decide more.

Income

Resources can also be of economic nature. A significantly higher income can skew the power balance in relationships so that the partner with the lower income might feel financially dependent on the wealthier partner. This might also have implications for purchase decisions: According to Resource Theory, the partner who contributes more will have more influence in decisions (Blood and Wolfe 1960). Currently, it is common for women at least in Western societies to contribute equally to household income and be just as well educated as men. Hedonic Theory – an extension of Resource Theory – posits that if both partners have a similar amount of a resource, the influence of this characteristic declines (Webster and Reis 2001).
Knowledge

Queen et al. (2015) assume that decisions might be deferred to the partner who is more knowledgeable about the subject in question or is more involved in the decision. This might improve the decision outcome since domain-specific knowledge facilitates superior performance in related tasks (Larrick and Felker 2016). Experience with or knowledge of the decision alternatives results in expertise (Corfman and Lehmann 1987) which is also conceptualized in Social Power Theory, as “expert power”. Being one of five power bases it is considered crucial for the influence distribution in decision making (Belch and Willis 2001; Raven 1993). According to Social Power Theory, people believe in the opinions of others who admittedly have superior relevant knowledge (French and Raven 1960). These “experts” are also seen as more credible and trustworthy. The persuasive effects of knowledge/expertise are well documented and even supported by neuroscientific findings (Klucharev et al. 2008).

Preference intensity

In relationships, relative preference intensity captures how much more important a product category or decision is to one compared with the other partner (Corfman and Lehmann 1987). Research has shown that the person with more intense preferences will exert more influence throughout the process of purchasing (Webster and Reis 2001). Caring more can affect the influence distribution nearly twofold: Either the more involved partner makes use of his or her influence sources, or the less involved partner steps back because (s)he recognizes the importance of this decision or product to the household partner (Corfman and Lehmann 1987).

In an extreme case, knowledge and preference intensity lead to a constellation in which one partner dominates the decision or takes over all decision responsibility, which represents autonomous (one person decides alone) decisions as opposed to syncretic decisions (made jointly) (Davis and Rigaux 1974).

2.2. Decision context: Who (men vs. women) decides on what (product category)?

Many joint decisions depend on the purchase context. The object of the decision – the product category – can determine whether couples engage in a joint decision to equal parts or whether decisions are dominated by either partner. When one partner decides primarily it can increase efficiency because couples save time and reduce effort required to make a decision (Razzouk et al. 2007). The downside of dominance is that with increasing relationship duration, the relationship might increasingly align with more traditional allocations, especially after the birth of the first child (Strough et al. 2002), so that gender stereotypes become increasingly more pronounced (Lavin 1993).

Although the importance of gender roles is decreasing due to societal changes, gendered products are still widely marketed. Undoubtedly, some products are considered “male” and others “female”. We observe increasingly high levels of gendered marketing activities that mirror the blurred expectations towards men and women: Although gender equality has increased, products such as cosmetics and toys are subject to gender stereotypes to an unprecedented extent (Auster and Mansbach 2012). In a similar vein, consumer behaviour research shows that products can be associated with male or female attributes depending on their features (Tilburg et al. 2015). Similarly, in the research on family decision making it could be demonstrated that in the past, husbands assumed responsibility for the purchase of traditionally male products such as insurances, cars, and television sets, whereas wives dominated the purchase decisions for supposedly female products such as groceries and home appliances (Davis 1976; Webster and Reis 2001). Thus, influence distribution in a given product decision might also be affected by the product category in question or by the fact that a specific product category is associated with male or with female attributes.

Fig. 1 displays our research model that combines the “who,” “what,” and “why” questions of joint purchase decision-making.

3. Hypotheses

In line with Queen et al.’s (2015) framework, we will analyse several resources of both partners as antecedents of the individual’s influence in a joint purchase decision. We further subdivide them into product category-unrelated (income and education) and product category-related (knowledge and preference intensity) individual resources.

The theoretical reasoning outlined thus far relates to various aspects of the joint decision. For instance, individual resources such as income or education relate to factors that each partner brings into the relationship unrelated to a specific product category. For these factors, their distribution between partners is assumed to affect perceived influence, more specifically, to skew it in favour of the partner who owns more of them. Resource Theory (Blood and Wolfe 1960) provides the theoretical frame for the subsequent discussion. In the time since the theory emerged, it seems obvious that society has changed, which brings some of its implications into question. Indeed, more recent studies with same-sex couples and cohabiting couples challenge the notion of resources as antecedents of influence (Schneider et al. 2013; Webster and Reis 2001; Wilkes and Laverie 2007). Hedonic Theory offers guidance regarding the direction in which this development could have moved. The more similar resources become, the less they affect the influence distribution among partners. Due to societal changes, the skewed distribution of resources between men and wom-
en is declining; thus, the effect of such resources as income and education should be less pronounced. Webster and Reis (2001) support this notion and show that in cohabiting couples, resources are more equal among partners and hence do not impact the relative influence in joint decisions. However, the researchers merge several factors such as income, occupational status, and the educational level into an aggregate measure. Thus, the separate influence of any individual resource in contemporary couples has remained unclear to date. Instead, resources should only have an effect on the influence distribution when partners contribute substantially different amounts of resources to the relationship. In sum, we will challenge the following hypotheses (see e.g., Schneider et al 2013):

**H1:** The higher a person’s level of education than his/her partners’, the stronger this person’s influence in a joint purchase decision.

**H2:** The higher a person’s income than his/her partners’, the stronger this person’s influence in a joint purchase decision.

The argument that made us claim to “challenge” H1 and H2 (which expresses some doubts that they are still valid today) relates to the dyadic constellation of educational and income levels among partners: the more balanced education or income in a couple, the less variance we find in these antecedents of relative decision influence, and the more likely it is that the hypothesized relationships are insignificant. In contrast, knowledge and preference intensity relate to a specific product category to be purchased and thus simply vary across categories. There is no specific reason to believe that gender roles have shifted both partners’ knowledge levels or preference intensities to a higher equality or balance. Therefore, we assume relative preference intensity and knowledge to play the same role as in previous investigations. We therefore can hypothesize the following:

**H3:** The greater a person’s knowledge in a product category compared with his/her partners’, the stronger this person’s influence in a joint purchase decision.

**H4:** The more intense a person’s preference for a product category compared with his/her partners’, the stronger this person’s influence in a joint purchase decision.

Our review of literature and extant findings regarding the subject (men vs. women) and object (product category) of joint purchase decision-making revealed combined effects. In particular, in some product categories there is (still) a gender dominance. Applying this finding to the impact of preference intensity on the relative influence in joint decisions, this would lead to the following interaction hypothesis:

**H5:** The relationship between a person’s preference intensity and his/her exerted influence will interact with his/her gender and the product category. Women (men) have more intense preferences in female (male) specific product categories so that they will exert more influence in the product category associated with their gender compared to their partner.

### 4. Method

#### 4.1. Procedure

We conducted an online study to reach people who live as part of a couple together with their partner in one
household. Participants were recruited through a German panel service provider, and paid for participation. Data was collected in spring 2016 and pertained to one partner of a couple only, because the panel of our service provider is organised by individual consumers, not couples, and cannot collect dyadic data.

First, participants provided information about their perceived influence in purchases in four product categories usually bought and consumed jointly: vacations (see also Filiatrault and Ritchie 1980), television sets (Ward 2007), dining out (Lalwani 2002), and groceries (Bawa and Gosh 1999). The two latter product categories are especially appropriate considering their high purchase frequency and relevance for consumers within relationships (e.g., food and grocery account for more than 40% of retail spending in Germany; Statista 2016). We used vacation decisions because they regularly involve more than one person (Rojas-de Garcia and Alarcon-Uribondo 2016). Similarly, several previous investigations of joint purchase uses electronics in general (e.g., Barlés-Arizón et al. 2013). We selected products and services because the latter is underrepresented in joint decision research (Stafford 1996) so that our extended focus allows for some degree of generalisation.

In order to ensure a moderate duration of the survey and to avoid reiterated questions, two of the four product categories were randomly selected and presented to each participant. For each category, participants were asked to remember the last time they faced such a purchase decision with their partner or to imagine it if not been faced before. The relative influence distribution between partners was assessed with the same questions across all product categories (see 4.3). Participants then provided information about their and their partners’ knowledge and preference intensity in each product category. At the end, they provided demographic information (income, educational level, age, sex), and characterisations of their relationships (marital status, length of relationship, household size, number of children).

4.2. Sample

We considered only heterosexual couples who lived together. We had to exclude nine respondents as part of same-sex couples as well as 28 respondents who filled out the questionnaire in less than three minutes or more than 30 minutes ($M = 6.8$ minutes, $SD = 3.8$ minutes). The final sample included 141 participants (53% female), ranging in age from 19 to 63 years, with a mean age of 32.4 years ($SD = 8.2$ years). 42% of participants were married, and 56% of the sample had children. Furthermore, 76% of the married couples and 42% of the cohabiting couples had children.

On average, couples had been living together for 7.8 years ($SD = 6.8$ years). Cohabiting couples were on average significantly younger than married couples ($M = 30.00$ years, $SD = 5.88$ years vs. $M = 36.08$ years, $SD = 8.89$ years; $p < .001$). Hence, they also had been living together for a shorter period of time than married couples ($M = 5.01$ years, $SD = 3.93$ years vs. $M = 11.60$ years, $SD = 8.08$ years; $p < .001$). Both cohabiting and married couples rated their relationship to be fairly equal ($M = 4.50, SD = .66$ and $M = 4.35, SD = .79; p > .05$).

4.3. Measures

For both product categories that a given respondent assessed, we determined his/her relative own influence or dominance on the purchase decision with a direct measure on a 5-point Likert scale, indicating increasing degrees of dominance as follows: Only his/her partner influenced the decision ($= 1$), his/her partner influenced the decision more than the respondent ($= 2$), both partners had the same amount of influence ($= 3$), he/she exerted more influence than the partner ($= 4$), or he/she completely dominated the decision ($= 5$).

This direct measure of relative influence was split into three items, to account for the fact that joint decisions can be complex and as such include several phases until a final decision is reached. In particular, we followed Davis’ and Rigaux’s (1974) conceptualization of the decision process into the initiation phase (item: “Who initiated the decision?”), the information search phase (“Who searched for information?”), and the final decision phase (“Who decided finally?”). We averaged these three items to get an overall measure of relative influence.

To measure product category-related antecedents, participants indicated their own and their partner’s knowledge as well as both sides’ preference intensities (each one of those measures were single item and collected per product category). Using these two assessments, we computed relative scores by subtracting the scores of the partner from those of the respondent, so that high scores indicate the superiority or dominance of the respondent over his/her partner. These relative scores of independent variables entered our subsequent analyses. Finally, participants provided their and their partners’ monthly incomes and education levels (these are the product category-unrelated antecedents in our model). We determined whether both partners had the same or adjacent levels of education/income ($= 0$), or whether the respondent had a substantially lower ($= -1$ resp. higher level of education/income ($= 1$).

Finally, we included several control variables. First, we collected categorical information on marital status because prior research shows that married couples tend to engage less in joint decision making and more in autonomic decisions than cohabiting couples (Webster and Reis 2001), both of which are represented in our data. Second, to account for potential differences between couples with and without children, we enquired about the number of children with an open question. Third, we asked participants to evaluate the equality of the relationship; because the current general societal perception is that relationships should be more equal, this perception might affect the actual influence distribution among partners.

Tab. 1 summarizes the measures collected in this study.
### Tab. 1: Overview of measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model component</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Item(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outcome*</td>
<td>Relative own influence in a joint decision</td>
<td>Who initiated the decision? Who searched for information? Who decided finally? 5-point Likert scale (1=only my partner; 5=only me)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product-unrelated resources</td>
<td>Education (respondent)</td>
<td>Six categories based on German school system (1= lower secondary education; 6 = PhD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education (partner)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Income (respondent)</td>
<td>Monthly net income Six categories (1 = &lt;800€; 6 = &gt;3.000€)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Income (partner)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product-related resources*</td>
<td>Knowledge (respondent)</td>
<td>How much do you know about “product category X”?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge (partner)</td>
<td>How much does your partner know about “product category X”? 5-point Likert scale (1=very little; 5=very much)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preference intensity (respondent)</td>
<td>How important is “product category X” to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preference intensity (partner)</td>
<td>How important is “product category X” to your partner? 5-point Likert scale (1=very little; 5=very much)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control variables</td>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>Married: yes or no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of children</td>
<td>Free input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equality of relationship</td>
<td>Eight items based on Kurdek (1998): 1. My partner and I have equal power in our relationship. 2. My partner shows as much affection to me as I think I show to him/her. 3. My partner and I invest equal amounts of time and energy in the relationship. 4. My partner and I are equally committed to working out problems that occur in our relationship. 5. All things considered, my partner and I contribute an equal amount to the relationship. 6. My partner and I deal with each other as equals. 7. My partner treats me and respects me as an equal. 8. My partner depends on me as much as I depend on him/her. Cronbach’s alpha=.90 5-point Likert scale (1=totally disagree; 5=totally agree)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** * This information was collected for each of the four product categories separately (vacations, TV sets, groceries, dining out).

### 5. Results

#### 5.1. Individual resources: Why does one partner exert more influence than the other?

We ran a multiple regression to match the research model displayed in Fig. 1. Tab. 2 summarizes the results. The predictors in sum explained 41.6% of variance in relative influence, $F(15,254) = 12.05, p < .001$. Among the product category-unrelated factors, we do not find educational level ($\beta = -.03, p = .59$) but only income ($\beta = .11, p = .048$) to significantly impact relative influence in joint decisions, so that only $H2$, not $H1$, receives empiri-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antecedent</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>SE $B$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative educational level</td>
<td>$-0.05$</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>$-0.03$</td>
<td>.590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative income</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative knowledge</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative preference intensity</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender × product category (television sets vs. groceries)</td>
<td>$-0.50$</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>$-0.19$</td>
<td>.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative preference intensity × gender × product category (television sets vs. groceries)</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.040</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** $R^2 = .42$.  

Tab. 2: Predictors of the relative influence of respondents
Education Income
Men (% of male respondents) Women (% of female respondents) Men (% of male respondents) Women (% of female respondents)

The answer to the why question can thus be summarized as follows: A partner exerts more influence when he/she earns more, has more intense preferences, and/or greater knowledge, compared to his/her partner.

5.2. Decision context: Who (men vs. women) decides on what (product category)?

Education and income

We challenged the assumption that product-category unrelated individual resources, such as education and income, still impact the relative influence of a partner. In our sample, the relative educational level is indeed not important. To understand the reasons behind this shift, we conducted complementary analyses that considered gender as a potentially interacting factor. Tab. 3 thus illustrates relative educational level and relative income by gender. Results of the z-Test indicate that significantly more female respondents indicate a higher educational level than their partner, compared to male respondents (13.5 % vs. 6.2 %, p < .05). However, most respondents have similar educational levels independent of their gender (79.7 % vs. 83.11 %). Regarding income, we find that male respondents earn significantly more than their female partners (23.8 % vs. 1.4 %, p < .05). In conclusion, rather similar educational but dissimilar income levels of male and female partners can explain why (relative) income, but not (relative) education impacts relative influence in joint decisions.

Knowledge and preference intensity

We further expected that the two product category-related antecedents would be less affected by societal changes and still be decisive for a partner’s relative influence nowadays. Certain product categories may be inherently associated more strongly with a man’s or a woman’s purchase responsibility. We hypothesized that women (men) would have more intense preferences for a product category associated with female (male) attributes, and in consequence exert more influence in joint decisions concerning this product category. We chose to investigate two product categories, TV sets and groceries, because in the past they were associated with men or women, respectively (Davis and Rigaux 1974; Bawa and Gosh 1999).

Hence, we complemented our analysis by adding gender and product category (TV sets vs. groceries) to the regression analysis of relative influence (see Tab. 2). We observe an interaction between gender and product category (ß = -.19, p = .017) indicating that, overall, in the purchase of groceries women exert more influence than men. We find no difference in relative influence between men and women when both have intense preferences (for TV sets or groceries, respectively). However, when preference intensity is low for both, men (women) have more influence than women (men) in the purchase of television sets (groceries) (see Fig. 3). This finding partially supports H5: Gender and product category interact with a person’s preference intensity and his/her exerted influence (ß = .16, p = .040); not always does the higher preference intensity account for the greater influence of men/women. Instead, product categories might have distinct gender ascriptions on their own, which leads partners to assume responsibility for this category and/or exert greater influence.

To follow up on this finding, we applied an independent t-test (Tab. 4). For television sets, male respondents attributed more knowledge to themselves than to their female partners (.87 vs. -.61; t(69) = 5.74, p < .01). They also rated their own preferences as more intense than their partner’s in this product category (.37 vs. -.63; t(69) = 3.26, p < .01). In contrast, in the purchase of groceries, female respondents attributed less knowledge to their male partners (-.44 vs. .61; t(72) = -3.76, p < .01). The same pattern is evident for preference intensity in this category (-.31 vs. .74; t(72) = 2.90, p < .01). In contrast, gender differences do not appear in the dining out and vacation categories. In sum, our results are quite differentiated, indicating that the why, who, and what questions are interrelated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Product Category</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Men (% of male respondents)</td>
<td>Women (% of female respondents)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No difference between partners</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>(79.7 %)</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher level than partner</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(6.2 %)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower level than partner</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>(10.8 %)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Boxes indicate significant differences between male and female respondents within a product category (p < .05).

Tab. 3: Relative educational level and relative income by gender

Das Erstellen und Weitergeben von Kopien dieses PDFs ist nicht zulässig.
6. Conclusion

This study sought to update and extend research on antecedents of influence in joint decisions among contemporary couples. We reviewed the effects of established antecedents of influence (why question) and also studied the role of the decision context who and what questions).

Concerning the why question, we found evidence for the decreasing importance of education as an antecedent of relative influence in joint decisions. In contrast, income seems to still play a role. Although it is assumed that women contribute to the household more than they did in the past, in our study men earned more than their female partners. Thus, we observe that the partner who contributes more to the household income also has more decision power in the purchase of products. These findings are in line with Hedonic Theory which postulates that the increased similarity of a resource contributes to its decreasing importance as an antecedent of influence (Webster and Reiss 2001). Therefore, as levels of education become more similar, the role of this resource declines whereas the unequal distribution of income still serves as a source of power and supports the position of the partner with higher income. Consequently, as the gender pay gap decreases (Danaj 2016), income should increasingly impact the dominance of one partner in joint decisions in the near future. In that respect, it would also be interesting to examine whether in couples where the woman is the chief wage earner income is an antecedent of relative influence as well (as would Hedonic Theory predict), or whether in such situations other factors come into play (Commuri and Gentry 2005).

Furthermore, in line with our assumptions, we observed both knowledge and preference intensity to be powerful antecedents of influence. Partners who are more involved with the product category also have more power in the decision process. Thus, we replicated previous findings (e.g., Corfman and Lehmann 1987) and supported their applicability in the present days. Additionally, we demonstrated that beyond its role as relevant antecedents, knowledge and preference intensity are associated with gender (who question) and vary across product
categories (what question). We find women to be more knowledgeable and having more intense preferences for grocery shopping, whereas the same applies to men and the purchase of TV sets. This finding indicates that at least some purchase responsibilities are still divided by gender and further implies that antecedents of influence must be investigated by product category, because they have different associations and meanings. At the same time, other categories (here: dining out and vacation) represent so much joint activities that both partners are equally involved in the ultimate purchase decision.

Several add-on questions emerge from our research. For instance, as women still dominate the purchase of groceries, the question arises how dominated decisions on products consumed by both partners are different from individual decisions for the same goods. It is conceivable that the purchase process becomes more efficient if one qualified partner makes the decision. However, a joint purchase may be more satisfactory on other dimensions when both are involved. Moreover, it would be worthwhile investigating how the decision mode (joint vs. dominated) influences consumers’ willingness to pay, to derive profit-related implications for companies. Lastly, future steps in this research should acknowledge the increasing importance of collaborative online shopping (i.e., when partners residing at different locations can shop together online) as a promising and nearly unexplored venue for future investigations.

To conclude, we acknowledge some limitations that open additional avenues for future research. Although our choice of antecedents was guided by Queen et al.’s (2015) framework, other antecedents may impact the influence distribution as well. For example, relationship-related concepts such as attachment styles or relationship quality have been widely neglected so far (Simpson et al. 2012) and could be included in future work on the subject. Similarly, alternative forms of living arrangements should be considered, such as patchwork families or couples not sharing a household since they may have to deal with more complex forms of influence. Finally, we collected data from one partner of a couple only which might bias the respondent’s assessments of his/her partner’s product category-related characteristics and his/her share in the joint decision. Future research should therefore collect data from both partners. In a similar vein, future works should study actual purchase behavior instead of retrospective accounts.

Notes

[1] The other four power bases are reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, and referent power.

[2] At this point it has to be noted that the term “gender” relates to socialized, cultural features related to masculinity/femininity whereas the term “sex” refers to biological physical features related to feminaleness/maleness (van Anders 2015). We use the term gender since we refer to social roles rather than to biological differences between men and women.

References


Rojas-de García, M. M., & Alarcón-Urbistondo, P. (2016). Toward a Gender Understanding of the Influence of the Couple on...


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