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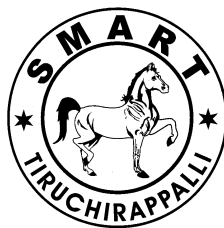
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# **CHANGING SEX ROLE ORIENTATION AND ITS IMPACT ON HOUSEHOLD DECISION BEHAVIOR IN INDIA**

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One interesting aspect of consumer behaviour is the issue of who is making decisions in purchases of durables in the Indian families. While a plethora of empirical studies have been made elsewhere, there are scanty inquiries for Indian families that share radically different life-styles, societal pattern and values from those of the countries wherein these studies have been made. Addressing this issue is imperative in the milieu of liberalized economy and the increasing per capita income in India. An understanding of who is dominant in making decisions in durables purchases will immensely help the international marketers oblivious of the domestic societal and cultural pattern. In this article, the authors have delved into the marital influence structure in purchases of durables.

## **Introduction**

One of the major areas of consumer behaviour is the understanding of the spousal influence in purchase decisions in families. Researches on purchase decisions have identified that it is not the individuals who ultimately make decisions but the decisions themselves are influenced by different persons. Researchers have identified family members, especially the spouses, as the key influencing persons in purchase decisions for several product categories (Davis and Rigaux, 1974; Davis, 1976; Jaffe and Senft, 1966; Sharp and Mott, 1956). The importance of this field of inquiry is also evident from considering the space allotted in textbooks on the consumer behaviour for topic of spousal influence in purchase decisions. A knowledge and understanding of the influential spousal will enable the marketers to reorient their marketing strategies by focusing the influential spouse in the advertisement for the product. Many studies (Green and Cunningham, 1975, 1980; Green et al. 1983) have been conducted elsewhere revealing interesting findings on how decisions are made in families in different cultures. A brief review presented in the succeeding paragraphs will enable one to know how the findings are different for each culture. The countries where these studies have been conducted share a different societal pattern, viz. egalitarianistic. The applicability of these findings to families in India, which is characterized as patriarchal society is questionable as the cultural pattern, the economic development, the living standards, societal hierarchy are different from those countries where previous studies were conducted. Thus, there is a need for exploring the family decisions making behaviour in the Indian context. The findings of the study are expected to be of immense use to the marketers, especially the global players, who are eager to understand the consumer behaviour in India.

## **Review of Literature**

Many studies have been conducted on the topic of husband –wife influence in family purchase decision-making. A survey of empirical research in this area helps exploration of this

topic in different dimensions. Much of this earlier work on marital influence in family decision-making originates in the sociological literature. This is evident through the availability of articles published by Kenkel (1957) and Blood (1960). Nonetheless, the journals in the field of marketing too carried several articles on this topic since the early 1970's. The seminal work by Davis (1970) analyzed the marital influence in the purchase of automobile and furniture. It was found that the purchase influence in automobile and furniture are not the same. Husbands were found dominant for automobile purchase while joint influence was found for furniture purchases.

Studies have also analyzed the marital influence across the wide range of products from financial investments to going on vacation and it is found that wife's education and employment had no influence on purchase decisions (Ferber and Lee, 1974). But Davis and Rigeux (1974) observed that marital influence differs according to various product categories and that too, across decisions in each of the products. Using a three-point scale for measuring the influence, Hempel (1974) found no difference for the same decisions made by spouses across different cultures. Replicating the study of Sharp and Mott (1956), Cunningham and Green (1974) found joint influence for automobiles, vacation and housing and wife dominance for groceries and husband dominance for insurance purchases.

The impact of couples' sex role orientation (SRO) on the purchase influence was first put forth by Qualls (1982) who found that couples with modern SRO tend to exert egalitarian influence and thereby increase interaction in the purchases of automobile (indeed his study used only this product) than that of traditional SRO couples. The study by Israel (1995) conducted among sample families taken from the then French colony of the state of Pondichery analyzed the impact of couples' SRO, wife's work status and their resource contribution to the family. Recently, the study made by Ganesh (1997) on spousal influence in consumer decisions between Indian immigrants to USA and Indian living in India provided interesting findings to understand consumer behavior to totally different cultures. More number of husband decisions was observed toward Indian samples compared to that of US samples. The review of these studies indicates that different researches have taken different products, adopted different sampling techniques chosen different respondents and studied influence through variety of scales. While majority of the studies have considered simply the husband wife influence sans studying the impact of particular variable(s) on spousal influence, it is felt pertinent to make an endeavour to analyze how the marital influence differs for families with different SRO couples, that too, in the changing Indian societal context.

## **Objectives**

The aim of this paper is to bring out the purchase decision-making behaviour in Indian families in this era of liberalization and globalization. Specifically, it has the following objectives:

- i) To find out the dominant spouse in the purchase of durables;
- ii) To identify the influential spouse across decision stages in the purchase of durables;

- iii) To find out whether any significant difference exists among families with SRO – Modern (SRM) couples with SRO- traditional couples (SRT) and SRO\_opposite (SRP) couples and
- iv) To identify the presence of significant difference among families with SRO –modern SRO – Traditional and SRO\_opposite couples across different decisions.

### **Methodology**

The required data for this study was collected in two stages. In stage I, the conveniently selected families residing in the staff quarters of Karunya Institutions were apprised of the purpose of the study and were requested for their cooperation. In this way, a total of 55 families have agreed to participate in this study. The families so agreed were distributed with two sets of part I of the questionnaire which measures the SRO of the couples. The couples were told not to consult each other while filling out this part of the questionnaire. In this way, the independent scores were obtained for husband and wives in the same families so as to classify them into either SRO-Modern (SRM) or SRO-Tradition (SRT) or SRO-opposite (SRP). Filled in questionnaire for part I was obtained from 55 families.

In stage II, these 55 families were contacted for their cooperation in filling out Parts II and III of the questionnaire. They were instructed to consult each other before filling out these parts. A total number of 48 families completed this task and the data obtained from all these 30 families were coded for analysis. Upon entry of data and preliminary analysis, it was found that 14 families had conflicting SRO perceptions among the couples, i.e., husband had SRO- M and wife in the same family had SRO-T perception and vice versa. Hence these families were eliminated from the analysis of data for this study. Thus the present study utilizes responses collected from 40 families thus yielding the response rate of 54%. Part II of the questionnaire contained questions related to the amount of influence shared between the husband and the wife on various decisions pertaining to the purchase of durable that was made after their marriage. The influence for each decision was measured using a three –point scale ranging from “husband more than wife (=1)” to “wife more than husband (=3)” Finally, part III elicited the demographic profile of the respondent families. Even though much of influence obtained in this part was not utilized for the purpose of the analysis of the study, they were collected for taking up for exploring the impact of these demographic variables on the marital influence in future studies. All parts of the questionnaires were self-administered and the data collection was over in six day time period.

### **Analysis and Interpretation**

The collected data were analyzed based on the objectives framed. A combination of different statistical techniques such as Mean score, Kruskal Wallis One-way ANOVA were utilized for the purpose of analysis.

#### **Objective -1**

The dominant spouse in the purchase of durables was found out by computing the overall mean score for all the influence decisions under study. In this study, a total number of 10 decisions

were considered for the measurement of spousal influence. The influence itself was measured on a three-point scale ranging from “husband dominant (=1)” to “wife dominant (=3)”. In this way, the responses collected from a total number of 30 families were analyzed and their overall influence score was computed after adding the responses to each of these 10 decision elements. Likewise a minimum score of 10 (10 decisions\*a score 1) and a maximum of 30 (10 decisions \*a score 3) were found out for the sample. An arbitrary index as shown in **Table-1** was framed in categorizing the families into husband dominant, wife dominant or joint influence.

The table indicates the number of sample families in which the husband dominance, joint influence and wife dominance were observed based on the arbitrary index developed as mentioned in the same table. It is quite interesting to note that in majority families, the decisions are husband dominant (n=16), followed by joint influence in considerable sample families (n=13). However, it is a wonder that the wife dominance in the overall purchase decisions for durables was not found in any of the sample families but in one. These findings clearly reveal that in Indian situation, both make the decisions for the durables purchases jointly and the wife has almost no major influence in the durables purchased. Perhaps the cultural values and the traditional orientation as shared by Indian society, which is widely prevalent among the Indian families, keep the wives to follow or allow their husband’s say in whatever decisions are made.

## **Objective -2**

The second objective was to identify the influence of the spouse across the decision stages on the purchase of durables. For this purpose, the number of decisions made by husband alone, joint and wife alone was calculated and are reported in the following table. For this purpose also, an arbitrary index was framed to find out the number of decisions for which the influence was exercised. Accordingly a mean value of less than 1.5 was considered as husband dominant, a mean score of between 1.5 and 2.5 joint influence and more than 2.5 wife influence. Their results are presented in **Table-2** along with Kruskal-Wallis One-way ANOVA (KW-Anova) values.

As shown in the table for the total sample respondents, the marital influence across purchase decisions stages in respect of durables indicates that most of the decisions in Indian families are made by husbands, with only two stages the joint influence is observed namely, recognize the need for the purchases of the product and deciding on the colour of the product. The KW-Statistics of 19.28 is found significant at 0.05 levels.

## **Objective -3**

The bedrock of the present paper is to address the importance of couples’ SRO on the influence exerted in the purchase of durables .An understanding of the presence of impact of SRO will enable the consumer behaviour researchers as well as the advertising strategies to reorient the approach in the field of family decision making. While the study of SRO in house hold decision is still in its nascent stage of the marketing literatures, the availability of few evidences indicates that the impact of this variable is of immense significance in exploring the household decision-making

behaviour theories. It is with this intention an attempt is made here to test SRO's impact on family decisions in a totally different cultural setting India shares.

To this objective, the couples in these samples (N=30) were classified into three categories as SRO-Modern (SRM), SRO-Traditional (SRT) and SRO-Opposite (SRP). The overall mean influence and standard deviation of purchase scores obtained for the couples in the respective categories are reported in **Table-3**.

Upon analyzing the impact of SRO on the overall marital influence scores, the table clearly reveals that the durable purchase decisions are husband-dominant (score<18) while it is closed to joint influence for families with SRM couples (mean influence score is 17.17) Even though these SRM families are coming under husband dominance in the purchase decision as per the mean influence index developed for this study and described in Table 1 , the marital influence is definitely less husband dominant than that of SRT couples ( mean influence score =14.40). On the contrary, it is surprising that decisions are jointly made in families where the spouses share opposite SRO. As shown in the Table, the overall mean influence score for this category is found to be 18.36, which is clearly within the ambit of joint influence category as per arbitrary scale developed in Table 1. The results are significant as is evident from the Kruskal-Wallis One-way ANOVA statistics; value of 18.81, significant at 0.01 level. The reason for the SRP couples reporting joint influence in purchase decisions might be due to the deferring orientation; couples would try to exert a balanced approach to avoid conflicts in decision-making.

#### **Objective -4**

In continuance of the impact of spousal SRO in durable purchases, the study aimed at testing the presence of significant differences for couples of different SRO types across the decisions stages. As already mentioned in the methodology, a total number of 10 decisions stages were identified that are commonly involved in the purchase of any durable. Using the KW-statistics, the difference in the spousal influence pattern was analyzed. **Table 4** reports the mean influence score for each different decision stage for the families of different SRO couples along with its KW-statistics.

In deciding the influential spouse across several decisions stages in the durables purchase by classifying the families into SRO types, the table indicates very clear influence pattern exerted by them. As described in Table- 2, the decisions with score less than 1.75 are considered as husband dominant, a score between 1.75 to 2.25 joint, and a score greater than 2.25 are wife dominant. Accordingly, all the decisions are husband dominant for SRT families, with none of the decisions reporting the influence score of greater than 1.75. However, in the case of SRM families, four out of ten decisions are jointly made. This strengthens the observations made in objective 3 that the husband dominance is definitely lesser for SRM-couples which also betoken that the SRM-couples families tilt towards joint influence. More interestingly, the SRP-families report more joint and wife dominance with 2 and 3 out of 10 decisions are clearly under by wife dominant category and the joint influence respectively.

Upon analyzing the types of decisions that are husband dominant or joint or wife dominant by couples' SRO, it is observed that decisions regarding the need for the purchase, model, colour and amount spent are jointly made with rest of the decisions made by husbands. However, for SRP families' decisions such as need recognition and colour are reported to be under wives' dominance while decisions on time spent over purchases, amount to spend and actual purchase are joint. One common observation from the findings is that decisions such as brand, shop to buy, and information collection, about the product purchased are clearly the domain of husbands irrespective of families' SRO. It is surprising to note that the influence of wife is almost nil even for decisions like colouring and modeling decisions.

### **Major Findings**

The major findings of the study are summarized below:

1. Considering the overall influence in the durable purchase decisions, it has been found that husband dominance is prevalent in most of the sample families followed by joint influence by the respondents. The wife has no major influence in the durable purchases.
2. The influence of the spouse across the decisions stages reveals that joint influences is observed only for need recognition and on the colour of the product purchased. Wives' exclusive influence was not found in any of the decisions.
3. Upon analyzing the impact of couples' SRO on influence, it is evident that the durable purchase decisions are husband dominant in SRT families while it is the joint influence for families with SRP spouses. The influence pattern for families with SRM couples is fewer husbands dominant.
4. The impact of spousal SRO across several decisions stages of the durables purchased indicates that all decisions are husband made in SRT families, more joint or wife dominance in SRP families and a moderate number of joint influences in SRM families.

The type of decision for which a spouse is dominant with reference to classifying the families into SRO is presented in **Table - 5**.

The wife dominance is not reported for any of the decisions stages in SRT and SRM families. However, in the case of SRP families, the wife is found dominant for "need recognition" and 'colour' decisions of the product. The decision on 'how much to spend' is jointly made by couples of both SRM and SRP families. However, the colour decision is jointly made in SRM families.

### **Conclusion**

The major focus of the study was to unearth the husband – wife influence pattern in durable purchases in the Indian scenario. After identifying the lack of any such attempt in this direction, the authors focused their attention in the measurement of the spousal influence in the durables purchased by the sample families after their marriage. Even though respondents were

given freedom to narrate their purchase influence for the products of their choice, this would sometime (hopefully!) be a risky factor in generalizing as different families might have responded to different durables purchase experiences, thereby preventing the specific influence pattern for specific products. In spite of this limitation, this present study revealed an interesting finding that is of immense use for the marketers. An understanding of the observations made in the study will help the marketing strategist to focus their attention not only on the product attributes but also to consider the portrayal of the influential spouse in purchase decision for a particular product in the advertisements, thereby increasing the sales. While it is observed that overall the decisions are husband dominant, additional researches are required to look into analyzing the existence of spousal influence by the type of product purchased. Hopefully future researchers can fill this void.

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**Table-1**  
**Arbitrary Marital Influence Index**

<b>Score obtained</b>	<b>Spousal influence</b>	<b>No. of families</b>
Less than 18	Husband dominance	16
Between 18-22	Joint influence	13
Greater than 23	Wife dominance	1

**Table-2**  
**Mean (Standard Deviation) Influence Scores Across Decisions Stages (Overall)**

<b>Decisions</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>KW statistics</b>
Problem Recognition	<b>1.97</b>	<b>0.55</b>	
Collecting information	<b>1.60</b>	<b>0.55</b>	
Deciding on brand	<b>1.60</b>	<b>0.56</b>	
Deciding on model	<b>1.67</b>	<b>0.65</b>	
Deciding on colour	<b>1.93</b>	<b>0.69</b>	<b>19.28*</b>
Deciding on time of purchase	<b>1.73</b>	<b>0.58</b>	
Deciding on amount to spend	<b>1.70</b>	<b>0.69</b>	
Deciding on mode of payment	<b>1.60</b>	<b>0.56</b>	
Deciding the shop	<b>1.43</b>	<b>0.56</b>	
Actual Purchase	<b>1.57</b>	<b>0.56</b>	

**\*Level of significance=. 05**

**Table- 3**  
**Mean (Standard Deviation) Scores by Couples' SRO (overall)**

<b>Couples'SRO</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Overall mean influence scores</b>	<b>KW-statistics</b>
SRO-Modern (SRM)	6	17.17(4.74)	
SRO-Traditional (SRT)	10	14.40(4.0)	18.81*
SRO-opposite (SRP)	14	18.36(4.39)	

**\*Level of significance = 0.01**

**Table -4****Mean (Standard Deviation) Influence Scores for Decision Stages by Couples' SRO**

Decision Stages	Couples' SRO			KW _ statistics
	SRT	SRM	SRP	
Recognizing the need for the product	1.70(.48)	2.1(.63)	3.00(.53)	.99
Collecting information	1.50(.5)	1.67(.52)	1.64(.63)	13.29*
Deciding on Brand	1.40(.51)	1.67(.83)	1.71(.46)	7.59*
Deciding on model	1.40(.5)	2.00(.89)	1.71(.61)	11.22*
Deciding on colour	1.60(.51)	2.00(.89)	3.00(.66)	3.96
Deciding on time of purchase	1.60(.52)	1.50(.54)	1.93(.62)	13.49*
Deciding on amount to spend	1.30(.48)	1.83(.75)	1.93(.73)	15.50*
Deciding on the mode of payment	1.40(.52)	1.67(.52)	1.71(.61)	18.19*
Deciding the shop to buy	1.20(.43)	1.23(.52)	1.64(.63)	19.38*
Actual purchase	1.30(.48)	1.50(.55)	1.79(.70)	22.54*

**\*Significant @ .05 level**

**Table- 5****Dominant Spouse Across Decision Stages by Couples' SRO\***

Decision stages	SRT Families			SRM Families			SRP Families		
	Husband	Wife	Joint	Husband	Wife	Joint	Husband	Wife	Joint
Need recognition	✓			✓				✓	
Information search	✓			✓			✓		
Brand	✓			✓			✓		
Model	✓					✓	✓		
Colour	✓					✓		✓	
Time of purchase	✓			✓					✓
Amount to spend	✓					✓			✓
Mode of payment	✓			✓			✓		
Shop to buy	✓			✓			✓		
Actual purchase	✓			✓					✓

\*H=Husband; W=Wife; J=Joint

SRT=both husband and wife are sex-role traditional; SRM=both husband and wife are sex-role Modern; SRP=husband is sex-role traditional and wife is sex-role modern and vice-versa.