

# Sport, culture and consumer behaviour

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## **Introduction**

The literature of family decision-making in general is extensive. The area has received attention e.g. in consumer behaviour, sociology, economics and cultural anthropology (Belch & Willis 2002). However there is relatively little theoretical and empirical work regarding the interpersonal communication in the development of consumer behaviour of young people and especially between parents and children (Palan & Wilkes 1997). Very little attention has been paid to the content of family communications (Moschis 1985) and decision-making about free time activities, like sport and cultural activities. Also the adolescents' use of influence strategies has been a largely unexplored area to date (Kim. et.al. 1991).

The most common theories from family decision-making perspective have been the resource theory (Blood & Wolf 1960) and social power theory (French & Raven 1959). According to resource theory the basis of power is the individual's resources available (income, education, available time, social status etc.) relative to others. According to the social power theory e.g. expert power – the belief, that one family member has superior knowledge or ability which will result in the best possible outcome – was shown to be one of the most important ones in family decision-making (e.g. Kirchler 1988, Belch & Willis 2002). Also the reference-group influence varies from the products consumed publicly versus privately and for products considered luxuries versus those considered necessities. Intrafamily communication can influence e.g brand preferences, media reliance, price sensitivity and adherence to price-quality beliefs (Childers & Rao 1992).

This research examines current practices in family free time decision-making, especially vacation (between USA and Finland) sport activities of children (examples: ice-hockey and aerobics) and cultural activities of children (music, examples: playing guitar or drums). We were especially interested in decision-making areas like e.g. the price, the target and the length of the vacation or price, site, club/organisation, equipment/instruments, clothes, literature or events related to the hobby (sport/cultural activities) as well as the role and power of different members of family in these decision-making processes.

## **Method**

The research employed a self-administered survey with 2 case families with 2 children (2 boys and 2 girls, same ages and same kind of hobbies) from Central Finland followed by in-depth interviews. The first questionnaire (family decision-making about vacation) was designed to match very close to that employed in Belch et.al.(1985) and Belch & Willis (2002) studies in USA. The second, completely new one about family decision-making about sport and cultural activities, was developed. One of the main targets here was to improve and complete this study with a broader sample during the year 2004.

Respondents were asked to complete the surveys separately (with no input from e.g. the parents, the other spouse or children) using a six-point scale ranging from “no influence at all” to “all of the influence”. A similar scale was used to measure the amount of influence each family member had in specific decision areas.

## **Results**

The results showed, that the parents had very similar roles in all described decision-making processes. The children were able to get what they wanted especially if they were able to use those two strategies (parental response strategy and adolescent influence strategy) reported also by Palan & Wilkes (1997): In families where parents reported using reasoning strategies, the most effective adolescent influence strategy was reasoning. In families, where parents used “can't afford” for reasoning, it was useful to use strategies, where children were able to show the low cost of the product/service to their parents.

In the Finnish families they had almost one person–one vote –principle, when they decided about their vacation (target, length, accommodation) – parents had superiority in financial decisions only. The differences between American and Finnish studies were not significant.

As far as the sport activities were concerned the children had very strong effects on everything related to their hobbies (boys playing ice-hockey and girls having aerobics). The parents had some influence only when they made decisions about the total price of the activity in general or (sometimes very expensive) sport equipment. There were also no remarkable differences between genders.

Children were also very powerful, when they made family decisions about music activities (girls playing drums and boys playing guitar). Also here parents had some influence when families obtain e.g. new instruments.

### **Discussion**

In the old days, men had the power. Nowadays women have gained more influence and also independence in most of the decision-making areas and stages. Decision-making might also be influenced by the relative expertise of individuals. The stronger the expectations of all family members about the product or service (vacation) are, the better is to use collaborative decision-making on equal terms.

Decision making about sport and cultural activities seem to be based on individual preferences of the children. According to this case study, in marketing of sport for children, it's better to concentrate on the children and not so much to the parents. If the youngsters really know, what they want, they have strategies to get the satisfactory decisions – even within family's income.

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