

THE BUYING BEHAVIOR OF COUPLES: SPOUSES' PERCEIVED INFLUENCE UPON PURCHASE OF PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

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Abstract

This paper investigates the spouses' perceived influence on household purchases. A questionnaire-based survey among 200 Romanian couples was conducted. The research sample included only couples in which women are involved in circular migration toward Austria and Germany. As a result of their financial empowerment, an increase of women's perceived influence on the couple's purchase decision-making has been expected. Yet the research shows that influence upon purchase of products and services is stronger correlated with the performance of household chores than spouses' income. After returning home, spouses tend to resume their traditional roles. Moreover, in many couples, there are major incongruences between the perceptions of spouses regarding both the influence upon the purchase decision-making process and the performance of household chores. Managerial and societal implications are discussed.

Keywords: *buying behavior of spouses, household purchases, spouses' perceived influence, circular migration, spouses' purchase decision-making.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Circulatory migration represents an endemic phenomenon in Romania and most of the Eastern European countries (Ciortuz, 2014). It is defined as a „pendulum-like movement between migrants' country of origin and one or various destination countries” (Cassarino, 2008).

In Caraș-Severin County, the main countries of destination for women working abroad are Austria and Germany. Migrant women are caring for old people abroad 30 days in a row, return home and stay a month or two and repeat the cycle. Because these women earn usually more money than their husbands who remain at home, circulatory migration presumes a level of women's financial empowerment which is expected to increase their influence on the couple's purchase decisions. Yet there is insufficient empirical evidence of this in marketing literature. Much more, some sociologists argue that women empowerment is only temporary and superficial, (e.g. Silver, 2006; Debnath and Selim, 2007).

The paper aims to provide an answer to the following research questions:

1. Which are the products and services for which the household purchase decision is influenced by spouses' gender?
2. Is there a correlation between spouses' income and their perceived influence on household purchase decisions?

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3. Does performing certain household chores increase the perceived influence on purchase decisions of products related to the chores?
4. How frequent the spouses' perceptions about who is performing household chores are incongruent?

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The couple's purchase decision-making process is influenced by multiple factors.

Most of the sociologists and marketing authors deal with the dynamics of household economics from the gender roles perspective (Scanzoni and Szinovacz M. (1980); Qualls (1982); Madill and Bailey (1999); Kozak (2010); Barlés-Arizón et al. (2013); Demyen et al. (2016)).

There is a broad consensus in the migration literature that circular migration of women is changing family roles and power relations between spouses (Silver (2006); Wahyuni (2005), Pantea (2011)). The males who remain at home will take expressive roles, met traditionally by the migrant women. Women will assume the instrumental role of family providers. How this fluidity of family roles is affecting the couples' purchase decisions remains unclear.

Working abroad in western Europe family homes, women are in close contact with a more egalitarian domestic environment (Ciortuz (2014)). This fact allows them to confront the traditional hegemony of men in Romanian families. As a result, the power dynamics of spouses' purchase decision processes are expected to change. The extent to which this is happening is also unknown.

3. METHODOLOGY

The empirical study uses the data obtained through a questionnaire-based survey from 200 Romanian co-habiting couples in which wives are practicing circular migration toward Austria and Germany. An individual code was given to each couple and spouses completed the questionnaire separately. A convenience sampling was carried out between February and May 2019. The study has an exploratory approach and the snowball sampling method was used to meet the quota of the explicative variables matrix. Spouses were asked about their perceived influence upon purchase of 33 products and services and their level of involvement in performing 11 household chores. All spouses have answered the questionnaire using a 5-point scale: 1-Always the partner, 2- Most often the partner, 3- Both equally, 4-Most often me, 5- Always me. SPSS was used for the descriptive and inferential statistical analysis of the collected data.

3. RESULTS ANALYSIS

The first objective of the study was to find out the spouses' perceived influence upon purchase of 33 products and services. The distribution of scores presented in Table 1 shows that there are five types of products/services:

- a) products/services whose purchase is perceived by both partners to be slightly influenced by women (home appliances, the majority of food products and toys),
- b) products/services whose purchase is perceived by both partners to be strongly influenced by women (household products),

- c) products/services whose purchase is perceived by both partners to be slightly influenced by men (TV, laptop, beer, and wine),
- d) products/services whose purchase is perceived by both partners to be strongly influenced by men (automobile),
- e) egalitarian products/services whose purchase is perceived to be equally influenced by both partners (juice, furniture, holiday destination, restaurant, place to spend leisure time). Interestingly enough, the standard deviation of these scores is low for both cohorts of respondents (male and female).

The purchase decision-making process of the smartphone is perceived differently by spouses. Males report a greater influence from their part while women perceive the purchase of these products in a more egalitarian way. This has to do probably with the fact that women consider their preferences on subjective characteristics like product design as equally important as technical attributes of the product, usually valued by men.

Table 1 The spouse’s perceived influence upon purchase of product and services

Item	Female		Male	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
Refrigerator	3.24	0.794	2.85	0.803
Gas cooker	3.13	0.934	2.87	0.852
Washing machine	3.19	1.055	2.84	0.924
Kitchen robot/mixer	3.58	1.130	2.54	1.078
Vacuum cleaner	3.36	1.195	2.47	1.176
Flatiron	3.71	1.276	2.10	1.152
Smartphone	2.94	1.229	3.66	1.154
Laptop	2.51	0.998	3.47	0.954
TV	2.50	0.919	3.53	0.989
Detergent	3.95	1.304	1.80	1.129
Laundry softener	3.99	1.318	1.90	1.209
Soap	3.93	1.245	2.00	1.163
Dishwasher detergent	3.92	1.283	1.80	1.142
Toilet paper	3.63	1.231	2.19	1.182
Chicken meet	3.12	1.188	2.78	1.129
Pork meet	3.10	1.077	2.96	1.069
Vegetables	3.49	1.125	2.61	0.978
Cheese	3.11	1.078	2.69	1.182
Fruits	3.42	1.169	2.57	1.072
Butter	3.51	1.167	2.50	1.073
Milk	3.35	1.157	2.49	1.048
Eggs	3.31	1.102	2.68	1.032
Salami	3.11	0.981	2.86	1.011
Beer	2.27	1.373	3.66	1.366
Wine	2.50	1.154	3.67	1.063
Juice	3.07	1.107	2.94	0.931
Coffe	3.35	1.128	2.70	1.088
Automobile	2.52	1.113	3.89	1.018
Furniture	2.90	0.684	3.18	0.845
Holiday destination	3.11	0.618	2.88	0.676
Restaurant	3.11	0.627	2.99	0.648
Place to spend leisure time	3.14	0.597	2.97	0.534

Toys for child/children	3.30	1.057	2.72	0.787
Scale: 1-Always the partner, 2- Most often the partner, 3- Both equally, 4-Most often me, 5- Always me; N= 200 couples (200 females, 200 male)				

The second objective of the study was to test if the "income" variable is more strongly correlated with the spouses' perceived influence upon purchase of products and services than gender or the responsibility in performing certain household chores.

Table 2 Correlations between gender, household chores, income and the spouse's perceived influence upon purchase of product and services

Products and services	Gender		Household chores		Income	
	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Refrigerator	-.236**	0.006	.295**	0.001	-0.003	0.974
Gas cooker	-0.141	0.115	.230**	0.010	-0.064	0.472
Washing machine	-.176*	0.040	.230**	0.007	-0.060	0.492
Kitchen robot/mixer	-.428**	0.000	.317**	0.000	-0.044	0.608
Vacuum cleaner	-.352**	0.000	.397**	0.000	-0.032	0.708
Flatiron	-.555**	0.000	.611**	0.000	-0.020	0.815
Smartphone	.292**	0.001	Not applicable		-0.062	0.474
Laptop	.445**	0.000	Not applicable		-0.105	0.218
TV	.477**	0.000	Not applicable		.210*	0.012
Detergent	-.662**	0.000	.681**	0.000	-0.123	0.141
Laundry softener	-.639**	0.000	.674**	0.000	-0.127	0.129
Soap	-.628**	0.000	.660**	0.000	-0.139	0.095
Dishwasher detergent	-.659**	0.000	.658**	0.000	-0.124	0.137
Toilet paper	-.514**	0.000	.554**	0.000	-0.150	0.070
Chicken meet	-0.146	0.076	.227**	0.006	-.198*	0.016
Pork meet	-0.066	0.438	.214*	0.011	-.229**	0.006
Vegetables	-.387**	0.000	.479**	0.000	-.203*	0.014
Cheese	-.180*	0.029	.396**	0.000	-.192*	0.020
Fruits	-.356**	0.000	.447**	0.000	-.189*	0.022
Butter	-.411**	0.000	.526**	0.000	-.187*	0.024
Milk	-.365**	0.000	.443**	0.000	-.181*	0.028
Eggs	-.283**	0.001	.335**	0.000	-.202*	0.014
Salami	-0.125	0.134	.278**	0.001	-.231**	0.005
Beer	.455**	0.000	-.345**	0.000	-0.154	0.073
Wine	.468**	0.000	-.389**	0.000	.188*	0.034
Juice	-0.061	0.469	0.048	0.570	.175*	0.036
Coffe	-.282**	0.001	0.116	0.167	.210*	0.012
Automobile	.544**	0.000	Not applicable		-0.173	0.051
Furniture	.178*	0.036	Not applicable		-.322**	0.000
Holiday destination	-.174*	0.039	Not applicable		-.365**	0.000
Restaurant	-0.101	0.235	.175*	0.039	-.387**	0.000

Place to spend leisure time	-0.150	0.075	Not applicable		-.435**	0.000
Toys for child/children	-.297**	0.002	.223*	0.021	.278**	0.004
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).						
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).						

The results show that income is significantly correlated with only 4 of the products/services categories that have been analyzed (Table 2). Most of the food products, for example, are correlated with income categorical variable, although the correlation is rather weak. The direction of the Pearson correlation coefficients suggests that gender has more to do with this correlation than the high level of the women's income.

Gender is significantly correlated with the spouse's perceived influence upon purchase the majority of the analyzed products/services. The direction of the Pearson correlation coefficients mirrors the means distribution from Table 1. The perceived influence upon purchase household products, for example, is strongly correlated with feminine gender while the purchase of beer and wine with masculine gender.

Household chores, on the other hand, are strongly correlated with all the applicable items (products/services that could be logically linked by a specific chore - e.g. washing machine and detergent, gas stove and cooking, detergent and washing clothes). Indeed, there is a strong correlation between the identity of spouses' which perform a certain household chore and their perceived influence upon purchase the products linked with the chore.

The linear regression analysis (Table 3) shows that all of the household chores are significantly correlated with the perceived influence upon the purchase of home appliances and household products. In the case of washing the clothes and the dishes, performing these chores explain almost half of the dependent variable's variance (perceived influence upon the purchase of detergent, laundry softener, dishwasher detergent etc.).

Table 3 The relationship between household chores and spouse's perceived influence upon purchase home appliances and household chores (linear regression)

Independent variable	Dependent variable	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized coefficients	Sig.*	Adjusted R Square
		B*	Beta**		
Who is doing the cooking?	Gas cooker	.174	.230	.010	.045
	Kitchen robot/mixer	.327	.317	.000	.094
	Who is choosing the restaurant	.096	.175	.039	.024
Who is doing the laundry?	Washing machine	.147	.230	.007	.046
	Detergent	.694	.681	.000	.460
	Laundry softener	.685	.674	.000	.450
Who is doing the ironing?	Flatiron	.538	.611	.000	.368
Who is doing the dishes?	Dishwasher detergent	.810	.719	.000	.514
Who cleans the living room	Vacuum cleaner	.364	.397	.000	.152
Who cares about	Toys	.302	.223	.021	.041

children					
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level					

The third objective of the research was to determine if the fluidity of family roles induced by the circular migration of wives leads to a more egalitarian distribution of household chores. The means distribution shows that when women are back home, household chores are performed mostly by them (Table 4). This means that spouses return to their traditional roles.

Table 4 The perceived distribution of household chores by gender

Item	Female		Male	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
Who is doing the dishes?	3.67	1.131	2.00	1.048
Who is cleaning the living room?	3.62	1.119	2.07	1.113
Who is cleaning the kitchen?	3.73	1.150	1.89	1.056
Who is cleaning the bathroom?	3.89	1.138	2.06	1.185
Who is making the bed?	3.65	1.128	2.11	1.128
Who is doing the laundry?	4.01	1.191	1.90	1.212
Who is doing the ironing?	3.99	1.319	1.90	1.291
Who is doing the cooking?	3.63	0.912	2.28	0.988
Who is taking care of the children??	3.26	0.739	2.69	0.650
Who is fixing what is broken in the house?	1.75	1.175	4.11	1.057
Who is paying the bills?	2.90	1.426	3.01	1.327

Scale: 1-Always the partner, 2- Most often the partner, 3- Both equally, 4-Most often me, 5- Always me; N= 200 couples (200 females, 200 male)

Much more, the Pearson correlation analysis (Table 5) shows there is a significantly strong correlation between gender and perceived performance of the household chores. These scores mimic the traditional distribution of family roles.

Table 5 Pearson Correlations between gender and household chores

Item	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Who is doing the dishes?	-.609**	0.000
Who is cleaning the living room?	-.572**	0.000
Who is cleaning the kitchen?	-.643**	0.000
Who is cleaning the bathroom?	-.623**	0.000
Who is making the bed?	-.567**	0.000
Who is doing the laundry?	-.662**	0.000
Who is doing the ironing?	-.626**	0.000
Who is doing the cooking?	-.580**	0.000
Who is taking care of the children?	-.378**	0.000
Who is fixing what is broken in the house?	.729**	0.000
Who is paying the bills?	0.040	0.632

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
 *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

4. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The empirical study is based on the spouses' perceptions. These perceptions are problematic due to their subjectivity. When measuring the incongruences between spouses' scores regarding their contribution to the household chores, the

percentage of major incongruences vary from 0% up to 21%. 10% of the couples report scores' incongruences on all items. The only item with no scores' incongruences was: "Who is fixing what is broken in the house?" solely because this household chore is exclusively performed by men. Combined with the minor incongruences, the aggregated scores percentage suggests that in almost a quarter of couples the spouses do not share the same reality.

If the spouses had difficulties to assess accurately their contribution to the household chores, evaluation of their perceived influence upon purchase of home appliances shows even more incongruences. 15% of couples report scores' incongruences for all the items. The most difficult purchase decisions to evaluate have proved to be buying a laptop (34% total incongruences), a TV (27% scores incongruences) a smartphone (26% scores incongruences) and a washing machine (13% scores incongruences).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The research shows that influence upon couples' purchase decision-making process does not depend on spouses' income but their expertise as the performers of certain household chores. Despite their financial empowering, when at home, women involved in circular migration return to the gender roles of the traditional families. From this position, they exert a significant influence on the purchase of products and services related to the household chores which they perform. The acquisition of food and cleaning products remains the realm of women. These results confirm the conclusions of Debnath and Selim, (2007) which argue that women empowering, as a result of migration, is temporary and superficial.

Men also are still meeting the traditional gender stereotype by significantly influencing the purchase decisions for beer, wine, electronics and automobiles. The most egalitarian purchase decision-making process is related with products and services like furniture, holiday destinations, restaurants and places to spend leisure time.

The results are especially important for retail businesses operating in the regions where circular migration of women is prevalent. These firms will have to develop gender-specific communication campaigns for home appliances and household products. Choosing the right channels of communication with the women segment caught in the pendulum movement of the circular migration is also a must.

From a societal point of view, it is clear that women involved in circular migration live in a freer, more liberal spirit, even if, at home, the family roles remain largely segregated by gender. The incongruences between spouses' perceptions regarding their influence upon the purchase decision-making process and household chores responsibilities represent a major limitation of the study and require further investigations.

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