CHAPTER 7

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

As the geographical extent of this study was limited to the villages of Uttar Pradesh, India, similar studies in other regions of the country would add both breadth and depth to our understanding of the family as a decision making unit considering the simple fact that the rural market is not only large, but also geographically scattered and exhibits linguistic, regional, economic and cultural diversities (Bargal, 2004; Halan, 2004).

In order to fully understand the dynamics of family decision making in rural India, there is a need to consider the impact of personal relationships based on love and affection and intimacy, as important sources of individual goals and desires that influence joint decisions in families (Park, Tansuhaj & Kolbe, 1991). The inclusion of love, affection and intimacy in models of family decision making should yield greater insights into the interpersonal dynamics at work in the closely knit Indian rural families during the family decision making process.

Considering the fact that the rural respondents are sometimes semi-literate and illiterate, the researchers need to reorient their enquiry approaches to get a more insightful outcome for e.g. innovative research tools like images with varying expressions to ascertain preference and liking, colour association tests could be used (Krishnamurthy, 2000; Krishnamacharyulu & Ramakrishnan, 2002). Alternative research approaches like observational studies, interactive interviewing and focus group interviews can also be adopted.

Children have emerged as a dominant player in the purchase process of not only FMCGs but also big ticket items. Thus, more studies dealing specifically with the involvement of children belonging to different age groups are needed to ascertain as
to which group plays a more dominant role across different product category especially in the Indian rural context.

Understanding the age at which brand names become important may provide "the foundation to better predict the evaluative judgments and purchase decisions made and influenced by children, as well as the decisions made by those children when they become adults" (C. Hite & R. Hite, 1994). Thus research needs to be undertaken in this area especially in the Indian rural context.

A widely held assumption is that brands purchased by the family will continue to be purchased by the children when they become adults. Research is needed especially in the direction of whether there is continued parental influence on the purchase behaviour of rural youth who move to cities for higher education. What needs to be investigated is that whether the parents continue to hold sway, on their product decisions, or whether their peers start taking the place of their parents in purchase influence. The reduction in parental influence may indicate an important marketing opportunity.

The sub-cultural factor of religion, and the related dimension of religious orientation, also has been found to be associated with family decision making (Guber, 1991). They assume even greater significance in the Indian rural settings where buyer is strongly bagged down to local social and cultural pressures (customs, habits, religion, attitude) which have indomitable influences on the buying pattern (Kashyap, 2000; Mathur, N 2005). This aspect needs to be explored in the Indian rural context.

Although durable and non-durable purchases encompass a multitude of decisions, they have little to do directly with how families manage their overall finances or plan other areas of their life. These areas also require frequent decision making and thus provide opportunities for differing degrees of husband-wife involvement and consequently can be an interesting subject of research.

The home economics literature has long contained a normative but largely non-empirical discussion of family financial management. It is also true that studies of durable goods buying, as was the case with this study, frequently contain questions
relevant to the family budget (e.g., deciding how much to spend and when to make the purchase, etc). The view of husband, wife and children involvement that emerges when these decisions are “piggybacked” onto product decisions must surely be incomplete, however. Decisions to spend rather than save or to spend money for a new roof instead of a vacation involve “across-product” evaluations that cannot possibly be understood if one focuses only on one or two product categories (Davis, 1976). Thus, research needs to be undertaken in this direction incorporating a range of products.

Future research needs to consider the relative frequency of consensual versus accommodative decision making within families. Moreover, little is known about the extent of goal agreement as a function of product category. Each spouse can engage in the same consumption behavior for different reasons. The diversity of ends that can support the same behavior within families needs to be explored.

Children of different sex will likely manifest different types of interaction with their parents (Moschis and Mitchell, 1986). Thus, future studies should examine the impact of adolescent sex on interactions with parents and its consequent impact on family decision making.

Most of the reported research is US centric. Although many aspects may be generalisable to other countries, it is questionable whether families from different cultural backgrounds function similarly. Cross-cultural studies in family decision making in the rural context have not been actively pursued, although such studies are required for the determination of generalisable principles.

Given the heterogeneous ethnicity found within rural India, as well as different levels of economic development, additional replicative and extension efforts will be necessary to “paint” a more complete picture of family decision making. With the rich diversity in cultures present in India, the family structures also vary. Thus, there is a need to examine these differing family structures too. This type of exploratory research is necessary to provide the impetus for future studies that can provide additional information about the complex nature of the Indian culture and the mechanics at work during the family decision making process.
The body of research pertaining to family decision-making, as it presently exists, appears to be fragmented. Though a multitude of concepts relating to family decision-making have been investigated, unfortunately, there has been little attempt as of yet to integrate these related lines of research. Family decision-making research will be significantly furthered if the relationships between constructs such as roles, family power, influence, participation, etc. are clarified, and phenomena attributed to each are identified.

Most husband/wife influence studies classify family consumption decisions as husband-dominated, wife-dominated, joint (i.e. equal or syncratic) and autonomic (i.e. unilateral) (Herbst, 1952; Davis and Rigaux, 1974; Lavin, 1985; and Corfman, 1991). But studies have found that such influence is fluid and likely to shift, depending on the specific product or service, the family role structure orientation, and the specific stage in the decision making process. These factors also are mediated by changing lifestyles, particularly the changes in family lifestyle options associated with women working outside of the home, late marriages, starting families at a later age and changes in de facto relationships. The roles of husband, wife and children are fluid and continuously change with time. With these changes there is also a continuous change of their involvement in purchasing decisions. All these changes quickly make empirical work obsolete (Assael, 1987). So the behaviour of husband wife and children as consumers has to be studied regularly to find out the main decision makers within the family. Further, the marketers need to be alert to how shifting family roles may be affecting the composition of their target markets in order to make timely adjustments to their marketing strategies. Thus, there is a need for ongoing research in this direction.