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Who is the decision-maker: the parents or the child in group package tours?

Kuo-Ching Wang^{a,*}, An-Tien Hsieh^b, Yi-Chun Yeh^c, Chien-Wen Tsai^{d,e}

^a Department and Graduate School of Tourism Management, Chinese Culture University, Taipei, Taiwan, ROC

^b College of Business, Chinese Culture University, Taipei, Taiwan, ROC

^c Eslite Corporation, Taipei, Taiwan, ROC

^d Graduate Institute of International Business Administration, Chinese Culture University, Taipei, Taiwan, ROC

^e Department of International Business, Ling Tung College, Taichung, Taiwan, ROC

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Abstract

Family decision-making research has frequently examined role relationship between husband and wife across stages and subdecisions. In contrast to previous researches, this study examines how family role relationships, inclusive of parents and children, vary over decision-making stages for the group package tour (GPT). A total of 240 different families (mother or father as respondents) purchasing GPTs were surveyed, among them, 35 families also included children.

Results indicated that family has a tendency to make a joint decision in problem recognition and the final decision stages, and wives were found to play a dominant role in the information search stage. This study broadens the theoretical domains used in understanding family decision-making for the GPT. For practitioners, marketing implications are provided and recommendations for future research are also discussed.

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1. Introduction

Family decision-making has been an important research topic in consumer behavior for nearly 40 years (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Cunningham & Green, 1974; Filiatrault & Ritchie, 1980; Howard & Madrigal, 1990). Marketing managers request information on family member involvement in buying subdecisions, such as color offerings and price evaluation, to assist them in development of product offerings and special promotions (Szybillo & Sosanie, 1977). Effective tourism marketing requires that managers understand not only what people do on vacation but also how people make leisure travel decisions (Fodness, 1992).

In the decision-making process, family members play diverse roles, including the initiator, influencer, decider, buyer, user, etc. (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 1999). Most of the early research emphasized the relative

influence of husbands and wives on purchase outcome (Davis, 1970, 1971, 1976; Ferber & Lee, 1974; Munsinger, Weber, & Hansen, 1975).

With respect to the main decision-maker, prior studies mainly centered on who “gives the orders” on family travel. There are primarily three types of decision-making modes husband-dominant, wife-dominant, and a joint decision between husband and wife (Jenkins, 1978; Filiatrault & Ritchie, 1980; Nichols & Snepenger, 1988; Fodness, 1992). The vacation decision generally results from joint decision-making, as documented in the studies by Sharp and Mott (1956), Cunningham and Green (1974). Davis and Rigaux (1974) also indicated that the husband and wife share in most vacation decision stages such as problem recognition, information search, and the final destination decision.

Although, the husband and wife are the family’s chief decision-makers, the child’s influence cannot be ignored. Several empirical studies have tried to test the relative influence of children and parents in family decision-making. Assael (1995) noted that children play an

*Corresponding author. Tel.: +886-926-236-536.

E-mail address: wangkc@faculty.pccu.edu.tw (K.-C. Wang).

important part in family decision-making and their influence varies by product categories, services, and different decision stages. Howard and Madrigal (1990) stated that various studies have found that the relative influence of the husband, wife or child is likely to vary according to: (1) the type of purchase decision; (2) the stage of the decision-making process; and (3) the family characteristics.

Jenkins (1979) once reported that with regard to vacations, 20–35 percent of parents reported their children's influence to be strong in the choice of timing, destination, accommodation and activities. Swinyard and Sim (1987) indicated that child influence ranged from 68.7 percent of respondents in problem recognition, 39 percent in information search, 49.2 percent in final decision and 20.2 percent in purchase choice. In a similar vein, Szybillo and Sosanie (1977) indicated that husbands, wives, and children were involved in idea initiation, obtaining and providing decision alternatives and making the final decision with respect to families' decisions to eat at a restaurant and to go on a family trip. Their results found children involved at approximately 60–80 percent of all decision stages.

Although several studies have indicated children have a certain influence in family decision-making, other studies suggested children have little influence over how much to spend, where to make the purchase, and the final decision (see rigorous reviews in Foxman, Tansuhaj, & Ekstrom, 1989a). Filiatrault and Ritchie (1980) concluded that: (1) husbands dominated decision-making in families with children; joint decision-making was more prevalent where there were no children; (2) relative influence of husbands and wives across subdecisions varied more in families than in couples; and (3) children exerted relatively little influence in the overall decision process.

Other child-relevant decision-making variables have also been discussed in the literature on preference subordination (Walmsley & Lewis, 1984), child-centered (Swinyard & Sim, 1987), child impedance (Pearce, 1991), and the age of the child as a factor in family decision-making (Darley & Lim, 1986).

2. Research problem

Based on the aforementioned discussions, most of the family travel decision-making studies are mainly concentrated on the 1-day family trip (Szybillo & Sosanie, 1977), the family vacation (Jenkins, 1978; Fodness, 1992), the family outing (Darley & Lim, 1986), and public recreation services (Howard & Madrigal, 1990).

In Asia, countries and areas such as Taiwan, Japan, Korea, China, etc., the group package tour (GPT) is one

of the main modes of outbound travel (Wang, Mao, & Chou, 2001; Wang, Hsieh, & Huan, 2000; March, 2000; Prideaux, 1998; Tourism Bureau, 2000; Wang & Sheldon, 1995; Nozawa, 1992). In Taiwan, the majority of overseas pleasure travelers, about 83.1 percent, choose the GPT as their outbound travel mode, and most of the under 19 travelers were likely to participate in a GPT (57.9 percent) (Tourism Bureau, 2000). However, empirical studies concerning how husband, wife, and child react to the GPT is scant, leaving issues unresolved in an important research arena.

Obviously, the propensity of travelers to choose a GPT is somehow related to: travel risks; financial considerations; and the attractiveness of the package tour (Sheldon & Mak, 1987; Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992; Tsaor, Tzeng, & Wang, 1997). In a study by Wang et al. (2000, p. 177), it indicated that the median length of stay overseas for GPT traveler was 6.1 nights, and the average expenditure by GPT travelers was NT\$42,012, or about US\$1241 (including package fees, shopping fees, extra fees for food and drink, and all other fees). Therefore, in the family GPT decision-making process, typically tourists have to take various factors into consideration while planning a GPT, such as, destination country, departure date, optional tour, shopping, length of tour, price, travel risk, travel agency, tour guide, etc. These factors create a rather different context from that of the above-mentioned 1 day family trip, family vacation, public recreation services and family outing.

Furthermore, from the decision-making perspective because of the difficulties and type of information involved in the GPT, it is reasonable to postulate that the husband, wife, or husband and wife would dominate the GPT decision. However, the GPT could be a "child-centered" product (because most children participate in the GPT during summer and winter vacations, many travel agencies will sell tailor-made GPTs, such as, "5 Days GPT for Your Children at Tokyo and Disneyland" "4 Days Learning Tour for Your Children in Singapore" for this market). Beatty and Talpade (1994, pp. 333–334) once indicated the more importance a teen attaches to a product, the higher the likelihood s/he will be motivated to participate in the decision process for that product. Thus, we may postulate that the child would, at least, have some important influence in the GPT decision-making process.

In summary, due to the essential distinctions between the family vacation and the GPT, the relative influences of the parents and the child in the GPT are still unclear. How do family members make GPT decisions? Who will actually make the purchase, and who will wield influence in the GPT decision-making process? The main purpose of this research is to answer the above questions and to further extend the epistemology of family decision-making research to the GPT.

3. Hypotheses

Swinyard and Sim (1987) concluded that children tend to be significant participants in each stage of the decision process for a variety of “child-centered” products (e.g., toys and children’s clothing) as well as for products and services consumed by the whole family (e.g., vacation plans, restaurant choice). Howard and Madrigal (1990) once found that mothers dominated in the search and final decisions; and children are only involved meaningfully in the final decision to engage in public recreation services. In Fodness’s (1992) family life cycle study, he stated that wives were more likely to make individual decisions in families while in the presence of children.

As indicated, tailor-made GPTs for children during summer and winter vacations are popular. Thus, it seems plausible to postulate that children should have some influence on the GPT decision-making process. On the other hand, Capella and Greco (1987) indicated that most vacation decisions encourage some external information search due to high price, higher perceived risk and less experience, etc. Clarke and Belk (1979) once noted that involvement with purchases leads one to search for more information and spend more time searching for the right selection.

Accordingly, we may infer that the GPT is a high-involvement product; tourists, the parents, are likely to spend more time engaging in an external search for information. Since the characteristics of the GPT, the role of parents and child in the GPT decision-making process may differ from previous family decision-making studies. Hence it is hypothesized:

H₁: Family members’ influence varies as a function of GPT decision-making stages.

Jenkins (1978) concluded that husbands dominate in information collection responsibilities, length of vacation decisions, amount of money to spend and lodging decisions. Children influence vacation decisions concerning kinds of activities in which to engage, selection of destination point(s), and actual date of vacation. Subsequently, Jenkins (1979) identified that both spouses perceive children to be highly influential in deciding what activities the family will participate in jointly, especially vacation decisions. In fact, some specific vacation subdecisions (whether to take children and what kinds of activities to engage in) could be called “children dominate”.

Belch, Belch, and Ceresino (1985) also found that financial decisions regarding how much to spend are dominated by the husband; however, he has less influence in the where-to-go and where-to-stay vacation decisions. Since overseas GPTs typically involve lots of information and service features, such as the optional

tour, activities, tour leader, shopping arrangement, etc. (Wang et al., 2000), family members may like to participate in each of the GPT subdecisions in order to reach the agreement. Thus, it is hypothesized:

H₂: Joint decision-making by family members will dominate GPT subdecisions.

Previous studies suggested that children’s ages influence the parents’ travel decision. In Darley and Lim’s (1986) study, differing influences were found to vary by age group for family outing, but only to a limited extent. In Swinyard and Sim’s (1987) research on the perception of children’s influence over family decision processes; the children were split arbitrarily into two groups: under 12 and 12–19. They found significant differences in the influence exercised between older and younger children in family vacation decisions were only seen in the information search stage. In Howard and Madrigal’s (1990) study, children were divided into three age groups 4–5, 6–10, and 11–14. Even with a clear directional tendency toward increased decision influence (final decision) with age, the overall extent of shared decision-making was not perceived to be significantly different between the youngest and oldest children.

The dissimilar findings cited above may be due to the diverse decision-making stages the researchers investigated or the different age groups they defined. The influence of the age of the child on the GPT decision-making process is still unclear. In many Asian countries, children between 13 and 18 typically have to face tough challenges of entrance examinations for senior high school and university. Many children have to undergo all conceivable hardships to get into the ideal school. Hence it is hypothesized:

H₃: The child in the 13–18 years of age group will have less influence in the GPT decision-making process than other age groups.

Since demand for travel is highly income-elastic, family income may influence family travel decisions. In a recreation service study by Howard and Madrigal (1990), they concluded that there is no significant difference in children’s influence in recreation decision-making between single and double income families. However, research also indicated that parents in dual income families have more discretionary income and are “busier and feeling guiltier and therefore are softer when it comes to children’s requests” (Sellers, 1989, p. 115).

As a rule, the length and expense of typical family travel are more flexible than GPTs. According to economic ability, parents can easily and freely modify the itinerary, such as: route, meals, hotel and transportation. Quite differently, in the typical GPT the itinerary

and expenses are inflexible and as mentioned in the previous section, the propensity of the travelers to choose a GPT is somehow related to travel risks or financial considerations (Sheldon & Mak, 1987; Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992; Tsaur et al., 1997).

According to the preceding rationale, we may infer that finance-related factors for a GPT play a more important role for the single income family than the double income family, it is then hypothesized as

H₄: Single income parents will have more influence relative to their children than double income parents in the GPT decision-making process.

Children tend to believe they have more influence in decisions than parents attribute to them and parents may not give an adequate representation of the child's influence on the family decision-making process (Belch et al., 1985). Foxman and Tansuhaj's (1988) study on adolescents' (11–18 years old) and mothers' perceptions of relative influence in family purchase decisions indicated that adolescents and mothers do differ in their perceptions with regard to family purchase decisions. Subsequently, Foxman, Tansuhaj, and Ekstrom (1989b) replicated this finding for fathers but not for mothers, whose responses were not different from their children's. Contrary to finding of Foxman et al., Beatty and Talpade (1994, p. 337) once found that teenagers (16–19 years of age) attribute stronger influence to themselves than their mothers do at both initiation and search/decision stages for family purchases decision-making.

Whether different perceptions by parents and child exist in GPT decision-making still remains unknown. In order to test this possible discrepancy, both the parent (father or mother) and child were separately questioned to assess the following hypothesis:

H₅: There is no significant difference between the parents and child with regard to the GPT decision-making.

4. Methodology

Numerous ways of examining the decision-making process have been identified in the literature. The most common approach has been to break down the purchase decision process into three distinct stages: (1) problem recognition or problem initiation; (2) information search; and (3) final purchase (Davis & Rigaux, 1974; Szybillo & Sosanie, 1977; Nelson, 1979; Howard & Madrigal, 1990). Engel, Blackwell, and Kollat (1978) once itemized five important phases of consumer decision-making behavior: (1) problem recognition;

(2) search; (3) alternative evaluation; (4) choice; and (5) outcomes. Following that, Engel, Blackwell, and Miniard (1995) developed seven stages of consumer decision-making: (1) need recognition; (2) search for information; (3) pre-purchase alternative evaluation; (4) purchase; (5) consumption; (6) post-purchase alternative evaluation; and (7) divestment.

The above-mentioned five- and seven-stage decision-making processes involve post-purchase behaviors or divestment. Though they are important, they are beyond the scope of this paper. Additionally, research has suggested that consumers actually evaluate information simultaneously with search (Katona & Mueller, 1954). Eliminating the phase of alternative evaluation was also motivated by the practical difficulty of asking respondents to break down their decision-making into many different stages (Davis & Rigaux, 1974). Consequently, a three-stage decision-making process, problem recognition, information search and final decision, was employed in this study.

4.1. Sample selection

The definition of child is diverse as noted in prior cited studies. Darley and Lim (1986) defined the child as 0–18 years of age. In Howard and Madrigal's (1990) recreation study, the child category was divided into three age groups, namely, 4–5, 6–10, and 11–14 years of age. In addition, according to the 1999 *Annual Survey Report on R.O.C. Outbound Travelers* (Tourism Bureau, 2000), under 19 years of age was defined as a cluster. Consequently, this study operationalizes the child as 18 years old and below.

Previous research has showed that if the purpose of a study is limited to describing the relative influence of husband versus wife in making various decisions, it is sufficient to question only one spouse (Davis, 1976; Howard & Madrigal, 1990).

Therefore, an on-site intercept interview procedure was utilized at an international airport in Taiwan over a 1-month period. Potential respondents (father or mother) were invited to complete the questionnaire as they waited for check-in. Respondents were initially qualified to participate in the survey by the on-site researchers. Only those adults identified as parents enrolling one or more under 18 children in a GPT were invited to participate.

The major respondent was the husband or wife; but in addition, 35 children at least 12 years old, were also invited to participate in the survey in order to examine if they possess different viewpoints from their parents'. In total, 260 samples were finally collected (from 260 different families), of which 240 were usable. Of the 240 usable questionnaires, 35 families were investigated both included a parent (mother or father) and a child (at least 12 years old).

Table 1
Background characteristics of respondents

Variables	N	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male/father	68	28.3
Female/mother	172	71.7
<i>Age</i>		
30 and below	3	1.3
31–40	143	59.6
41–50	90	37.5
51 and above	4	1.7
<i>Financial source of family</i>		
Single income	60	25.0
Double income	180	75.0
<i>Household monthly income</i>		
NT\$ 50,000 and below	13	5.4
NT\$ 50,001–80,000	60	25.0
NT\$ 80,001–11,000	63	26.3
NT\$ 110,001–140,000	45	18.8
NT\$ 140,001 and above	59	24.6
<i>Highest education level</i>		
Junior high school and below	7	2.9
Senior/business high school	60	25.0
College	61	25.4
University	87	36.3
Graduate school	25	10.4
<i>Family status</i>		
Single parent	2	0.8
Nuclear family	175	72.9
Three generations living together	62	25.8
Others	1	0.4
<i>Age (oldest child)</i>		
0–6 years	21	8.8
7–12 years	139	57.9
13–18 years	80	33.3
<i>Number of children traveling with</i>		
1	97	40.4
2	118	49.2
3 and above	25	10.4
<i>Occupation</i>		
Housewife	48	20.0
Business & industry	93	38.8
Government agency	25	10.4
Faculty/teacher	33	13.8
Professional	19	7.9
Workers	12	5.0
Others	10	4.2
<i>Destination</i>		
Mainland China/Hong Kong/Macau	10	4.2
Northeast Asia	69	28.8
Southeast Asia	43	17.9
America/Canada	37	15.4
New Zealand/Australia	40	16.7
Europe	23	9.6
South Africa	5	2.1
Pacific Islands	13	5.4

Table 1 (continued)

Variables	N	%
<i>Frequency of visiting this destination</i>		
1	173	72.1
2	39	16.3
3	12	5.0
4	5	2.1
5	2	0.8
6 and above	9	3.8
<i>How the GPT was booked</i>		
Directly from the travel agency	150	62.5
From retail travel agency	39	16.3
By way of friend(s)	25	10.4
By way of relative(s)	13	5.4
Be way of company	8	3.3
By way of school	1	0.4
Others	4	1.7

4.2. Questionnaire development

The questionnaire consisted of four parts. The first part evaluated the influence of parents and the child. Respondents were asked to indicate the amount of influence each family member (father, mother, and the oldest child) had in each of the three stages of the decision process (*problem recognition/proposing the idea for overseas GPT, information search/who provides and collects information for GPT, and final decision/who makes the final choice for GPT*) (Davis & Rigaux, 1974). A six-point scale was used ranging from “no influence at all” to “all of the influence” (Belch et al., 1985).

In the second part, the influence of family members in subdecisions for GPTs was assessed. The subdecisions included: the destination (where to go), budget (how much money to spend), days (how much time to spend), accommodation (where to stay), and departure day (when to go) (Belch et al., 1985; Szybillo & Sosanie, 1977); also, airline, restaurant, coach, shopping, optional tour, travel agency, tour leader (Wang et al., 2000; Heung & Chu, 2000), and kinds of activities (Jenkins, 1979). A six-point scale was used ranging from “no influence at all” to “all of the influence.” In the third part, several questions were asked including destination, frequency of visiting destination, number of child traveling with, and how the GPT was booked.

In addition, the respondents were also asked to provide information on various sociodemographic variables including gender, respondent’s age, children’s age, occupation, financial source of the family, household monthly income, family status, and highest education level (Howard & Madrigal, 1990; Darley & Lim, 1986; Fodness, 1992).

5. Data analysis and results

5.1. Analysis of respondents

Two hundred and sixty questionnaires were collected, 20 were removed from the sample because of incomplete answers. In total, 240 questionnaires were usable. Chi-square analysis was performed on the incomplete questionnaires. The results showed that no significant differences were found between the incomplete returns and the 240 completed questionnaires. While the possibility of non-response bias cannot be ruled out with the data that are available, it was thought that with a respectable 92.3 percent response rate non-response bias would have minimal effect on interpretation (Guinn, 1980).

Table 1 shows the background characteristics of 240 respondents. It shows that 28.3 percent of usable questionnaires were filled out by the father and 71.7 percent by the mother; most of whom were between 31 and 40 years old (59.6 percent), followed by 41–50 (37.5 percent). Twenty-five percent were single income families and 75.0 percent were double income families. Nearly 27 percent of average household monthly incomes were at NT\$80,001–110,000 (about US\$2353–3235), 25.0 percent were at NT\$50,001–80,000, and 24.6 percent were NT\$140,001 and above. Many of the respondents had university degrees (36.3 percent); followed by college (25.4 percent) and senior/business high school diplomas (25.0 percent). With respect to family status, most were nuclear family (72.9 percent), followed by three generations living together accounting for 25.8 percent. Nearly 40 percent of the respondents' occupations were business and industry, followed by housewife, 20 percent. Finally, the age group of the oldest child was mostly 7–12 years old (57.9 percent), followed by 13–18 years old (33.3 percent).

Regarding the number of children traveling with almost one-half of all families traveled with two children, 49.2 percent, while 40.4 percent were accompanied by one child. With respect to family travel destinations, 28.8 percent of the families were going to

Northeast Asia, 17.9 percent to Southeast Asia, and 72.1 percent of families were visiting the destination for the first time. Finally, 62.5 percent of the families bought the GPT directly from a travel agency, 16.3 percent via a retail travel agency.

5.2. Extent of influence across decision-making stages

The first hypothesis concerns the influence of the family members regarding GPT decision-making stages. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test whether there were significant differences in perceptions regarding the relative influence of family members in the decision-making process. First, separate ANOVAs were run for each family member in the three decision stages. Family members as independent variable, and the influence scores of the husband, wife, and child represented the dependent measure.

As Table 2 reveals, significant differences were identified in each of the three stages. In both the problem recognition and final decision stages, the parents' influences are significantly higher than the child and no significant difference was found between husband and wife. Apparently, in these two stages joint decisions are dominant. However, in the information search stage, a significant difference was found between husband, wife, and child and, as the mean score reveals, in this stage wife is the main initiator of information search. The child shows the highest amount of influence in the problem recognition stage and is lower in the information search and final decision stages; this finding is rather consistent with Belch, Belch, and Ceresino's study (1985). Overall, H_1 is partially supported.

The above findings do not entirely support earlier findings of Howard and Madrigal's (1990) study, which concluded that mothers exercise substantial influence at each decision-making stage, especially in the search and the final decision stages. A prior study also indicated that children participate much more in problem recognition (68.7 percent) for family vacations than in information search (39.0 percent), final decision (49.2 percent), and actual purchase (20.2 percent) (Swinyard

Table 2
Influence of family members across decision-making stages*

Decision-making stages	Mean influence score			<i>F</i>
	Husband	Wife	Child	
Problem recognition	4.39 ^a (1.77)	4.75 ^a (1.52)	3.23 ^b (1.88)	50.327**
Information search	4.22 ^b (1.82)	4.71 ^a (1.60)	1.82 ^c (1.28)	228.572**
Final decision	4.84 ^a (1.62)	5.00 ^a (1.41)	2.56 ^b (1.84)	166.939**

* Each score represents the average of the husband's, wife's, and child's influence, as measured on a scale where 1—no influence at all and 6—all of the influence. Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations. Means with similar superscripts are not significantly different based on Scheffe tests p significant at 0.05 level.

** F ratio significant at $\alpha \leq 0.01$.

Table 3
Influence of family members across subdecisions*

Subdecisions	Decision-maker	n (240)	%	Mean influence score			F
				Husband	Wife	Child	
Destination	Joint	211	87	4.57 ^a (1.60)	4.86 ^a (1.46)	2.68 ^b (1.79)	112.438**
Budget	Joint	170	70	4.80 ^a (1.55)	4.66 ^a (1.58)	1.41 ^b (1.02)	316.379**
Days	Joint	204	85	4.77 ^a (1.69)	4.51 ^a (1.69)	2.99 ^b (2.04)	57.405**
Accommodation	Wife	141	58	4.55 ^b (1.67)	5.10 ^a (1.24)	2.65 ^c (1.89)	89.044**
Departure day	Joint	212	88	4.65 ^a (1.82)	4.49 ^a (1.77)	3.56 ^b (2.24)	19.228**
Airline	Joint	118	49	4.77 ^a (1.42)	5.02 ^a (1.27)	2.59 ^b (1.91)	86.593**
Restaurant	Joint	101	42	4.36 ^a (1.57)	4.85 ^a (1.40)	3.22 ^b (1.89)	26.540**
Coach	Joint	81	33	4.85 ^a (1.49)	4.74 ^a (1.51)	2.90 ^b (1.87)	36.399**
Shopping	Wife	128	53	4.17 ^b (1.79)	4.92 ^a (1.45)	2.22 ^c (1.66)	92.443**
Optional tour	Joint	172	71	4.63 ^a (1.77)	4.97 ^a (1.39)	1.87 ^b (1.51)	202.375**
Travel agency	Wife	204	85	4.64 ^b (1.79)	5.03 ^a (1.54)	1.64 ^c (1.34)	285.502**
Tour leader	Joint	82	34	4.57 ^a (1.79)	5.18 ^a (1.26)	2.20 ^b (1.82)	75.566**
Kinds of activities	Joint	208	86	4.82 ^a (1.47)	5.11 ^a (1.35)	4.22 ^b (1.97)	16.344**

* Each score represents the average of the husband's, wife's, and child's influence, as measured on a scale where 1—no influence at all and 6—all of the influence. Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations. Means with similar superscripts are not significantly different based on Scheffe tests p significant at 0.05 level.

** F ratio significant at $\alpha \leq 0.01$.

& Sim, 1987). As Table 2 shows, the child has much more influence in problem recognition, followed by final decision, and the least influence in the information search stage. It appears that this present study's finding is fairly consistent with Swinyard and Sim's (1987) study.

5.3. Influence of family members in subdecisions

The second hypothesis suggests that joint decision-making by family members will dominate the subdecisions. Table 3 shows the mean score and frequency for each of the subdecisions. The results reveal that among the 13 subdecisions, departure day (88 percent) was most considered by the respondents, followed by destination (87 percent), and types of activities (86 percent). Husband and wife's joint decisions were found in 10 subdecisions. Interestingly, the wife has substantially more influences in 3 of 13 subdecisions with wife-dominated decisions found in accommodation (5.10), shopping (4.92), and travel agency (5.03). The child has more influence in types of activities (4.22) and departure day (3.56), and least influence in budget (1.41) and travel agency (1.64). On the whole, the results were generally, though not completely, consistent with the initial hypothesis, joint decision-making by husband and wife dominate most of the GPT subdecisions.

5.4. Influence of different child age groups in GPT decision-making

In Table 4, the ANOVA results indicate that the influences of different child age groups varied by decision-making stages. Children were divided into

three age groups mainly according to the educational system: preschool (0–6 years of age); elementary school (7–12 years of age); and junior and senior high school (13–18 years of age). No significance was found between the 7 and 12 and 13–18 age groups in the decision-making stages, but both age groups have significant influence relative to the 0–6 age group in the information search and final decision stages.

This above finding is inconsistent with Swinyard and Sim's (1987) study: older children have a little more influence than younger children in the information search stage, and it is also found inconsistent with Howard and Madrigal's (1990) finding that youngest and oldest children were not perceived to be significantly different in the final decision stage. However, these inconsistent results may be due to the different age groups the researchers defined. In Table 4, an interesting finding was the mean scores of the 7–12 age group were slightly higher than the 13–18 age group. This result may imply that in the hypotheses section we inferred that in many Asian countries children between 13 and 18 typically have to face entrance examinations for senior high school and university. The result may possibly reflect such influence, however, more research is still necessary before drawing any firm conclusions about this. Overall, the results were not completely consistent with the initial H_3 , therefore it was not supported.

5.5. Influence of family members in single/double income families' decision-making

ANOVA was used to test whether there were significant differences between single/double income families' perceptions regarding the relative influence of

Table 4
Different age groups for child's influence across decision-making stages*

Decision-making Stages	Mean influence score			<i>F</i>
	0–6 years (<i>n</i> = 21)	7–12 years (<i>n</i> = 139)	13–18 years (<i>n</i> = 80)	
Problem recognition	2.69 (1.82)	3.41 (1.93)	3.20 (1.82)	2.055
Information search	1.19 ^b (0.75)	1.89 ^a (1.36)	1.99 ^a (1.28)	5.308**
Final decision	1.75 ^b (1.46)	2.71 ^a (1.93)	2.70 ^a (1.76)	4.253***

* Each score represents the average of the oldest child's influence perceived by their parents (father or mother), as measured on a scale where 1—no influence at all and 6—all of the influence. Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations. Means with similar superscripts are not significantly different based on Scheffe tests *p* significant at 0.05 level.

** *F* ratio significant at $\alpha \leq 0.01$.

*** *F* ratio significant at $\alpha \leq 0.05$.

Table 5
Influence of family members in single/double income families' travel decision-making

	Mean influence score		<i>t</i>
	Single income* (<i>n</i> = 60)	Double income (<i>n</i> = 180)	
<i>Husband</i>			
Problem recognition	4.18 ^a (1.99)	4.46 ^a (1.69)	–1.034
Information search	3.97 ^b (1.97)	4.30 ^b (1.77)	–1.229
Final decision	4.82 ^a (1.73)	4.84 ^a (1.58)	–0.115
<i>Wife</i>			
Problem recognition	4.73 ^a (1.49)	4.76 ^a (1.53)	–0.098
Information search	4.70 ^a (1.63)	4.71 ^a (1.60)	–0.046
Final decision	4.77 ^a (1.69)	5.07 ^a (1.30)	–1.454
<i>Child</i>			
Problem recognition	2.85 ^b (1.91)	3.36 ^b (1.86)	–1.828**
Information search	1.58 ^c (1.09)	1.89 ^c (1.33)	–1.631
Final decision	2.22 ^b (1.82)	2.68 ^b (1.83)	–1.690**

* Each score represents the average of the husband's, wife's, and child's influence, as measured on a scale where 1—no influence at all and 6—all of the influence. Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations. Means with similar superscripts are not significantly different based on Scheffe tests *p* significant at 0.05 level.

** Significant at $\alpha \leq 0.1$, the independent-samples *T* test method was used here.

family members in the decision-making process for a GPT. As presented in Table 5, in both single/double income columns the husband, wife, and child's influence in each of the decision-making stages were consistent (as shown by a, b, and c superscripts). The H_4 parents in the single income family will have more influence relative to their children than the parents in the double income family in the GPT decision-making process therefore was not supported.

However, in Table 5 several interesting findings were noteworthy. In both single/double income families, wife was found to be the dominator in information search and husband and wife tend to make decisions jointly in problem recognition and final decision. This result was rather consistent with the findings in Table 2 and implies that “family income” would not hold a moderating effect in the family decision-making for a GPT.

Also, an interesting pattern in the finding was the mean score of double income family was higher than the single family's. For the purpose of examining this

difference, the Independent-Samples *T* test was used here. In Table 5, child in double income family has significantly more influence in problem recognition ($t = -1.828$, $p \leq 0.1$) and final decision ($t = -1.690$, $p \leq 0.1$) than child in single income family. This finding was similar to Beatty and Talpade's (1994, p. 337) study, they concluded that influences of teens in dual income versus single income families have significant differences in perception regarding the initiation and search/decision decision-making stages for family purchases.

5.6. Influence perceptions between parents and child

The final hypothesis concerns the amount of agreement between parents and child. According to Table 6, in perceptions regarding influence in GPT decision-making between parents and child, no significant differences were found, thus, hypothesis H_5 is supported by the result. Table 6 also reveals two interesting patterns, in each of the decision-making stages; parents'

Table 6
Influence perceptions between parents and child^a

	Mean influence score				<i>t</i>
	Parents' perception ^b (<i>n</i> = 35)		Child's perception ^c (<i>n</i> = 35)		
<i>Husband</i>					
Problem recognition	4.63	(1.59)	4.09	(1.54)	1.449
Information search	4.26	(1.75)	3.94	(1.71)	0.758
Final decision	5.17	(1.40)	4.83	(1.34)	1.046
<i>Wife</i>					
Problem recognition	4.63	(1.65)	4.86	(1.24)	−0.656
Information search	4.57	(1.65)	4.74	(1.34)	−0.478
Final decision	5.03	(1.42)	5.06	(1.14)	−0.093
<i>Child</i>					
Problem recognition	3.51	(1.80)	3.03	(1.52)	1.216
Information search	2.54	(1.38)	2.69	(1.59)	−0.402
Final decision	3.37	(1.85)	3.23	(1.77)	0.330

^aEach score represents the average of the husband's, wife's, and child's influence, as measured on a scale where 1—no influence at all and 6—all of the influence. Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

^bThirty-five parents samples include six fathers and 29 mothers.

^cThe 35 respondents (children) were at least 12 years old.

perceptions of husband's influence are all higher than child's, and, children overestimate the mother's influence in all three stages.

The above findings provide a fairly different result from the Belch et al. (1985) family decision-making study which concluded that the child's perception differed from the parents', with the child attributing more influence to himself/herself than did either parent, or attributing more influence to the father than did the mother or father himself. Contradiction was also found between this study and Beatty and Talpade's (1994, p. 339) adolescent influence in family decision-making study where teenagers (16–19 years of age) attribute stronger influence to themselves than their mothers do at both initiation ($t = 1.82, p \leq 0.05$) and search/decision ($t = 4.86, p \leq 0.001$) stages for family purchases. However, it must be noted that this divergence may be due to a slight difference in the research design.

6. Discussion and conclusion

Few empirical studies have explored how family travel has evolved in relation to the GPT, and more specifically, in relation to the decision-making pattern for the GPT. The results of this present study indicate that the role of parents and child in the GPT decision-making process vary by different decision-making stages. Joint decisions were found in the problem

recognition and final decision stages and wives were dominant in the information search stage.

Previous study has indicated that children are significant participants in vacation plans; however, in the GPT the parents remain the most important decision-makers, while children share less influence. On the whole, children have comparatively greater influence in problem recognition only and the influence of the children was fairly limited for GPT subdecisions. Older children do not necessarily have more influence than younger children do and children in double income families have significantly more influence than children in single income families. Lastly, no significant difference was found between the parents and children's perception regarding family member's influence in GPT decision-making.

According to the result, one finding has conceptual and applied implications. That is, traditionally, Taiwan and most Asian countries are not feminism-oriented. An old Chinese saying has also well put it: "*Males are gold, females are water*" (Chen, Lai, & Tarn, 1999). However, with an increase in feminism, females have gradually been given more political freedoms, have received higher education, and enjoyed higher consumption ability. The above perception and the old saying might no longer apply. A recent study of senior tourist's decision-making (50 years old and above) for the GPT by Wang et al. (2001) concluded that husbands play the dominant role in most decisions and subdecisions. In contrast, an unexpected finding of this present study was that according to the wife's mean scores in Table 2, wife plays as a dominator in the information search stage and the mean scores are all higher than husband's in the three decision-making stages.

Bartos (1982, p. 6) once identified that working mothers have far more involvement with pleasure travel than their stay-at-home counterparts (non-working mothers). Take the above view into consideration and to avoid the present result might be moderated by the difference between working and non-working mothers, the Independent-Samples *T* test analysis was used to examine the influence between working ($n = 183$) and non-working ($n = 57$) mothers. The result indicated that in all three decision-making stages, problem recognition ($t = -0.174, p \geq 0.05$), information search ($t = -0.413, p \geq 0.05$), and final decision ($t = -1.481, p \geq 0.05$), no significant differences exist.

Overall, from the above discussion the role of wife in family GPT decision-making is changing rapidly. This phenomenon is most noteworthy for travel marketers who should place more attention on them.

From the subdecision results found in Table 3, husband and wife mutually decide a total of 10 out of 13 decision-making items, while the mother dominates the other three items (accommodation, shopping, and travel agency). Such result indicates that the wife enjoys

rather significant influence in the 13 GPT subdecisions. However, this finding is quite contrary to the finding in Belch et al. (1985) study where they identified that husband's influence is higher than wife's in 4 out of 5 specific vacation decision areas (e.g., how much money to spend, where to stay, where to go, etc.). Obviously, as found in this present study, the role that wife plays in the GPT subdecision-making is much more important. This variation, between our studies and studies of Belch et al. may imply that product itself is a dominant factor in determining where the family members' influence will lie. This phenomenon also deserves special note and the attention of marketing managers.

Furthermore, it was noteworthy that for the consideration and selection of the important subdecision "travel agency", 85 percent of families interviewed shared this decision item, and wife enjoys greater influence (5.03) than husband (4.64) and child (1.64). In addition, in the consideration of activities, a statistical difference was found between children and parents, yet the mean score of children in this item is the highest of all subdecisions (4.22) and the closest to that of husband and wife (4.82 and 5.11). In short, wife's influence in travel agency selection and the children's influence in activities also deserve the marketers' attention.

Jenkins (1978) found husband dominance in information collection responsibilities, length of vacation, amount of money to spend and lodging decisions. However, the result of this study is somewhat different. With respect to "hotel accommodation", the wife dominates this subdecision. And husband and wife make the "days" and "budget" subdecisions jointly. This may reflect the existence of a growing number of double income families. With the fact that as the financial influence of females increase, couples have to think about the length of travel and traveling expenses together.

Consequently, according to the above discussion, results of this study have several implications for practicing managers. First, in the high seasons for family travel namely the summer/winter vacations. The advertising strategy of travel agency could mainly emphasize on accommodation and shopping of GPT. A promotion or marketing slogan like "*Superior Accommodation/Shopping! Exploring the World with Your Family*" can be convincing and attractive to wives in particular. Besides, if the GPT is a child-centered product, kinds of activities should also be taken into consideration in promotion. Second, in Heung and Chu's (2000, p. 56) study on Hong Kong consumers' choice of a travel agency for all-inclusive package tours, they indicated that agency reputation was rated first among 29 travel agency selection attributes. In this present study, we have found that wife enjoys greater influence in selecting travel agency than husband and

child. Therefore, we suggest that to promote or model the corporate image, practicing manager can connect these two findings together; centering on women could be more effective.

Some ideas for future study are suggested by the limitations of the current research. First, only some researchers have taken the influence of "others" (e.g., friends) into consideration when examining the vacation decision-making process (Jenkins, 1978; Capella & Greco, 1987). However, if we take the *guanxi* and people connections (Jones & McCleary, 1998) in Chinese culture into consideration, it seems a fruitful area for future research to incorporate this factor and further investigate the relative influence among husband, wife, child, and others in the family GPT decision-making process. Second, with the increase of the single parent family (Alessandri, 1992; Manning & Smock, 1997), it is doubtful if the pattern of decision-making of husband and wife found in this study will remain the same. Indeed, the influence of the child might be enhanced in decision-making for the GPT in a single parent family. And it is worth to research in future studies, to assess if any change in family membership would bring comparative changes in respective degrees of influence.

Finally, because the sampling was conducted during winter vacation, there are more GPTs going to North/Southeast Asia than to other areas, might it be different in the longer summer vacation? Besides, this present study did not take different types of GPT into consideration, this variable could be a moderator, might it be diverse in the different types of GPT? Future research might take these points into consideration.

This study has provided useful marketing information for those interested in GPTs, especially in the family and child-centered GPT segment. As Wang and Sheldon (1995) once pointed out, China represents the largest population in the world and is currently experiencing stunning growth in outbound travel as travelers are now discovering the rest of the world. Taiwan and China are similar in race, culture, and language; it is reasonable to believe that China will become the largest outbound GPT export country in the world (Wang et al., 2000). Certainly, it is worthwhile for destination countries to pay closer attention to it and to its outbound family travel market.

In conclusion, understanding the influence of family members in the GPT decision-making process is an important issue for both practitioners and academics. Our research broadens the theoretical domains used in understanding travel decision-making and for practitioners these findings also provide useful information for GPT marketing. However, empirical research is still needed to increase our knowledge of GPT decisions to extend the epistemology of family travel decision-making.

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