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To cite this document:

Isabel Carrero, Torgeir Aleti, (2017) "Decision-making dynamics between Spanish mothers, fathers and children", Young Consumers, Vol. 18 Issue: 3, pp.245-260, <https://doi.org/10.1108/YC-02-2017-00664>

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# Decision-making dynamics between Spanish mothers, fathers and children

Isabel Carrero and Torgeir Aleti

## Abstract

**Purpose** – *The purpose of this paper is to investigate the roles of mothers, fathers and children in family decision-making (FDM) processes in families with different characteristics in terms of household structure, parents' resources and family communication styles. As several structural changes regarding families have taken place within the last decades, there is a need to update the theories around FDM – in particular, regarding to the role of women and children.*

**Design/methodology/approach** – *A survey was distributed to 520 individuals in 183 families, where mothers, fathers and children above nine years living at home completed the survey.*

**Findings** – *The study demonstrates that the product category largely influences FDM dynamics, as well as housework division, parental characteristics and communication style. The study also reveals that structural changes may put more pressure on mothers. This pressure can partly be relieved if the family encourages children to become independent consumers rather than trying to control their consumption. Moreover, when fathers take a larger part in the housework, traditional gender roles become more fluid.*

**Social implications** – *For policymakers concerned with equality within the family, it may be a better approach to enable fathers to more actively participate in household chores than to try to change behaviour through information about equality.*

**Originality/value** – *This study extends the understanding of FDM in contemporary households by taking into account the views of all family members and produces a more complete picture of the decision-making dynamics within families.*

**Keywords** *Consumer socialization, Childhood studies, Family decision-making*

**Paper type** *Research paper*

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## 1. Introduction

The family is considered to be the most significant unit for consumer decision-making (Moschis, 1985). It is important for policymakers, practitioners and researchers to understand the mechanisms that explain the role-structure in the family decision-making (FDM) process (Kerrane and Hogg, 2013). FDM can be defined as “the type of process the family uses to come to a joint decision” (Lee and Collins, 2000, p. 1182). Essentially, this is based on an understanding that consumer decisions are negotiated within a family context (Aleti *et al.*, 2015a; Watne *et al.*, 2014). Early conceptualisation of FDM was focused on husband-wife dyads, with children as more or less passive participants (Ashraf and Dhan, 2016). More recently, the role and influence of children have received more attention (Watne *et al.*, 2014; Ekstrom, 2007; Tinson and Nancarrow, 2005), acknowledging that children are active participants in FDM in contemporary families. Although parents often have “the final say” in most decisions, children still play an important role – especially in regard to products of their own use (Ashraf and Dhan, 2016; Götze *et al.*, 2009; Wang *et al.*, 2007). Nevertheless, others suggest that children hold an essential passive role. That is, children's preferences are “forwarded” or “taken into account” by other family members who make the decisions (Kaur and Singh, 2006; Lee and Marshall, 1998) or they act as “advisors” to their parents' decisions (Alonso and Grande, 2004). It is important to better

Received 27 February 2017  
Revised 30 April 2017  
Accepted 22 June 2017

understand the causes and consequences of the role played by children in the FDM process to plan efficient policies that support families and enable them to make better and more efficient joint decisions.

In the last decades, Western families have gone through major changes that have had important consequences in the structure and organisation of the family. One significant change is the increasing participation of women in the workforce; contemporary women have more educational and economic resources, but also more time pressure because they are often still in charge of household and care work (Carrigan and Szmigin, 2006; Ionescu and Chirianu, 2014). In families with working mothers, the male is not the only breadwinner anymore and the family needs to find new ways to allocate finances when there are two sources of income (Vogler, 2005). Further, as a consequence of mother's time pressure, household tasks may need to be reorganised among family members, and traditional gender-roles might start to overlap (Aassve *et al.*, 2014). Also, traditional "nuclear families" are no longer the norm; smaller family units are more common with a rapid growth of non-traditional families, such as single-parent families or cohabiting couples (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014). This may, in turn, impact on the style of communication within families. Finally, many mothers are choosing to have children later in life (Shelton and Johnson, 2006). These changes are likely to impact how families distribute consumer decision between members. In light of these changes, there is a need to investigate how modern families come to joint decisions about household purchase.

The aim of this paper is to study the impact of these family changes on how mothers, fathers and children participate in FDM based on differences in terms of household characteristics, parents' resources and family communication styles. To understand FDM in contemporary families, a comprehensive study was needed that includes the opinions of each family member, and that refers to a number of household decisions. Thus, this study considers all family members' opinions and asks specifically about all FDM process stages of the purchase of a variety of common household purchase decisions, associated with different levels of consumer involvement in the decision-making process. This was important to see how decision-making differs across purchase decisions that are infrequent but vital for the family compared with decisions that are made repeatedly on a daily/weekly basis.

Past literature on FDM has largely been focused on American and North European families, although more recent studies have used samples from Asian countries (Ashraf and Dhan, 2016; Kakati and Ahmed, 2016) or Africa (Akinyele, 2010). This research offers a new perspective in the study of decision-making as it is conducted in Spain, a country in which social changes took place later but more rapidly than in most Western countries (Alberdi, 1999). These social changes have seen Spanish women invest in tertiary education and careers (INE, 2015b), which has resulted in their economic independence. This may add extra time pressure on working mothers. Also, family size in Spain is significantly lower than in other European countries, partly because both emancipation and age at first childbirth occur fairly late in life (Meil and Rogero-García, 2016). Moreover, there is a higher number of single-parent families (INE, 2015a), which may impact the role of children in FDM. The changes in gender roles and family structure add extra stress on families. Indeed, Spanish families are experiencing a higher level of work-life conflicts than most Northern Europeans, as traditional family roles are being challenged by new work roles (Ollo-López and Goñi-Legaz, 2015). Spain is said to be in a period of transition between two family models, characteristics of late modernity as well as some of the traditional family practices inherited from the past (Dema-Moreno, 2009). Thus, a heightened level of negotiation strategies in FDM processes can be expected. Because of the pace in which social change has taken place in Spain, this country offers an interesting opportunity to analyse the impact of the change in family decisions because of coexisting modern and traditional families.

The paper is structured as follows:

- first, the relevant literature about parent's and children's influence in FDM is reviewed, which forms the foundation for the hypotheses.
- Second, the hypotheses are investigated using a sample of 520 individuals from 183 families.
- Finally, a discussion of the implications of results and recommendations are provided.

## 2. The changing roles in family decision-making process in modern households

In the last decades, many studies have revisited the fundamentals of FDM processes to update FDM theory to include modern families (Commuri and Gentry, 2000). However, only a few studies have been focused on the influence of children on FDM (Flurry, 2007; Pandey and Singh, 2011; Thiagarajan *et al.*, 2009). Studies that have investigated children's involvement in FDM have found relationships between their influence on outcomes and a range of variables (see Table I).

Many of the conclusions drawn in the studies outlined in Table I also suggest that the role of the mother is instrumental in terms of children's participation in FDM. Moreover, literature on the role of children in FDM suggests relationships between the child's influence and whether the mother is in the workforce (Lee and Beatty, 2002) or the increasing number of female-headed households and other new household structures (Flurry, 2007; Geuens *et al.*, 2002). The structural changes of the family unit in light of previous studies form the foundation of this study. Four hypotheses were derived from variables that may impact on how the family makes consumer decisions: type of decision, family lifecycle variables, parental resources variables and family communication styles.

One of the most important contributions in the decision-making theory was made by Davis (1970, 1971, 1976; Davis and Rigaux, 1974) who developed the well-known and frequently cited triangle of marital roles. It shows that some decisions are made jointly; some are

**Table I** Key variables in studies of children role in FDM

Type of decision	Geuens <i>et al.</i> (2002); Ruth and Commuri (1998), Holdert and Antonides (1997), Hall <i>et al.</i> (1995), Ahuja and Stinson (1993), Mangleburg (1990), Foxman <i>et al.</i> (1989), Foxman and Tansuhaj (1988), Ekstrom <i>et al.</i> (1987)
Decision stage	Beatty and Talpade (1994), Ahuja and Stinson (1993), Mangleburg (1990), Nelson (1979)
Socialisation process	Bao <i>et al.</i> (2007), Bao (2001), Mangleburg <i>et al.</i> (1999), Foxman <i>et al.</i> (1989), Ekstrom <i>et al.</i> (1987)
Parents' ideology of roles	Lee and Beatty (2002), Ahuja and Stinson (1993), Ekstrom <i>et al.</i> (1987), Jenkins (1978)
Age of child and parents	Hall <i>et al.</i> (1995), Ahuja and Stinson (1993), Mangleburg (1990), Darley and Lim (1986), Jenkins (1978), Nelson (1979), Atkin (1978)
Gender	Lee and Collins (2000), Hall <i>et al.</i> (1995)
Years of marriage	Jenkins (1978)
Household size	Geuens <i>et al.</i> (2002), Ahuja and Stinson (1993), Foxman <i>et al.</i> (1989), Nelson (1979)
Parents' work status	Lee and Beatty (2002), Geuens <i>et al.</i> (2002), Beatty and Talpade (1994), Foxman <i>et al.</i> (1989)
Family type	Mangleburg <i>et al.</i> (1999), Holdert and Antonides (1997), Hall <i>et al.</i> (1995), Beatty and Talpade (1994), Mangleburg (1990), Ekstrom <i>et al.</i> (1987)
Family resources	Hall <i>et al.</i> (1995), Ahuja and Stinson (1993), Ekstrom <i>et al.</i> (1987)
Children's resources	Beatty and Talpade (1994), Ekstrom <i>et al.</i> (1987)
Family communication style	Aleti <i>et al.</i> (2015), Moschis (1985), Watne and Brennan (2011)

dominated by one member, while still others are decided autonomously. These roles depend on the implication of each member of the family with each decision, but also, and perhaps more importantly, on the expected cultural roles (Davis, 1976; Webster, 1995). A couple's power and preferences are "built into the roles of husband and wife on the basis of cultural norms" (Davis, 1976, p. 250). In families with traditional roles, the father is the main breadwinner of the household. In such families, purchase decisions are made more autonomously, although it also depends on the type of product. While men have a higher involvement in the purchase of automobiles, technology or financial decisions, women are responsible for decisions such as household products, children's products or home appliances. However, in modern families, these traditional roles are said to have vanished and decisions are made jointly (Belch and Willis, 2002; Parkinson *et al.*, 2016; Ruth and Commuri, 1998). Children, particularly teenagers, have more influence on family decisions than ever before, especially on innovation-buying decisions (Götze *et al.*, 2009; Kerrane and Hogg, 2013). Also, in the case of products for their own usage, children play a more significant role in FDM in small households (Flurry, 2007, Geuens *et al.*, 2002, Ruiz de Maya, 1994). This leads us to the first hypothesis:

*H1.* Product categories are significant determinants of children's, father's and mother's involvement in FDM.

### **2.1 Family life cycle**

The family life cycle theory states that, in general, as the family goes through the life cycle and parents and children get older, buying decisions get more autonomous and children increase their level of involvement in FDM (Wells and Gubar, 1966; Wilkes, 1995). That is, in families with older parents and families where the parents have been together for longer, the children would have a greater influence on FDM. However, this effect may be less obvious in Spanish families, as parents place greater emphasis on maintaining the material wellbeing of their children even after they have left home (Holdsworth, 2004).

Regarding family size, past research is not conclusive in determining the relationship between household size and children's level of influence in FDM. Traditionally, it has been suggested that the higher the number of people in the family, the higher will be the role of children in FDM (Jenkins, 1978; Nelson, 1979). In contrast, Mangleburg (1990) contemplates that, although all children may play a more significant role in larger families, individually family size has an overall negative impact in children's influence.

Children may have more resources and freedom to choose in smaller families because the competition among children would be lower than in larger households (Flurry, 2007). Thus, it is unclear from previous research to what extent a household structure influence FDM between parents and children. Nevertheless, past studies agree that household structure is key to understand the role of children in FDM. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

*H2.* Family life cycle variables are significant determinants of children's, father's and mother's influence in FDM.

### **2.2 Parental resources**

The relative resources contribution theory (Blood and Wolfe, 1960) affirms that the resources supplied by the family members such as income or education affect power structures in decision-making. Here, we view parental resources as their individual income and education, as well their hours of work and contributed hours to housework. Traditionally, as the male used to be the major household provider, he was perceived as the dominant member in the FDM process. However, in dual-career families, FDM patterns and roles may differ (Belch and Willis, 2002; Flurry, 2007). For example, Ahuja and Stinson (1993) carried out research in single-parent families and concluded that mothers with high level of education tend to give less power in FDM to their children due to their high self-confidence.

The working status of women is one of the most relevant family changes in the last century, and it may also be crucial in children's consumer activities (Beatty and Talpade, 1994). The higher level of participation in the workforce for many women means that they have to spend many hours outside of the household, which means that allocation of housework may change. Children may have a greater influence in FDM in dual-income families, as a consequence of parental delegation. Parents have more money but less time to spend with their children. Both time pressure and sense of guilt could make children more involved in FDM (Ashraf and Dhan, 2016; Chen *et al.*, 2016; Foxman *et al.*, 1989). Large variations in terms of how parents organise housework, their hours of work outside home, as well as their education, will naturally occur within society.

Spanish women spent much more time than men in parent-child activities (Gracia and Kalmijn, 2016). Compared with Danish fathers, Spanish fathers also spend less time caring for their children (Gracia and Esping-Andersen, 2015). However, these differences decrease when the mothers are more active participants in the workforce. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

*H3.* Parental resources are significant determinants of children's, father's and mother's influence in FDM.

### *2.3 Family communication styles*

Past research has suggested that family communication style also influences FDM (Mangleburg *et al.*, 1999; Watne and Brennan, 2011). Regarding communication, families were originally classified as having a "socio-oriented" or a "concept-oriented" style of communication (Moschis *et al.*, 1986; Moschis, 1985). However, these old dimensions were recently updated to "controlling" and "encouraging" communication styles; reflecting the views of modern families (Aleti *et al.*, 2015b). In a controlling style of communication, parents maintain control over children's purchase decisions and "punish" if the child is not obedient. In contrast, an encouraging communication style focuses on children's development of their own evaluations and opinions; children are told to make their purchase decisions autonomously (Carlson and Grossbart, 1988; Carlson *et al.*, 1994). As a consequence, in families with an encouraging as opposed to controlling communication style, children will likely take a greater part in the FDM process (Ekstrom *et al.*, 1987; Moschis *et al.*, 1986). Different levels of both dimensions between families can be expected, which will impact FDM (Watne and Brennan, 2011). As a consequence, children's level of involvement in FDM may not reflect a lack of parenting, but be a consequence of different styles of intra-household communication (Aleti *et al.*, 2015b).

When it comes to communication styles, it is evident that parents who encourage their children to develop their own opinions as consumers are also more likely to learn from their children about new products and services. Watne and Brennan (2011) found that encouraging communication from the parent's side was strongly related to how parents learnt from their children about consumption of environmentally friendly household products. Similarly, Watne *et al.* (2014) found that children are more likely to make holiday decisions for the family when the parents have adopted an encouraging communication style. However, these studies were both done on older children (above 18 years) living at home. It is not clear how communication style influences FDM between parents and children in families with younger children. Finally, research has not established how communication styles influence the involvement of FDM by the parent. It may be assumed that controlling parents "take more control" over family purchases as well, but this relationship is not known. Thus, we propose our final hypothesis:

*H4.* Family communication style is a significant determinant of children's, father's and mother's influence in FDM.

### 3. Methodology

A random stratified sample of 183 families headed by one or two parents with one, two or three children living in Madrid (Spain) was surveyed using a personal home questionnaire administered by an independent marketing research firm. The sample was randomly selected and was representative of the Madrid population in terms of family size and socioeconomic status (see Table II). Using a stratified sampling technique, households of different size, from different districts and with different socioeconomic status were chosen to control the proportion of families in the sample. Madrid was selected because it represents a rich and varied environment with a diverse and cosmopolitan population, as well as being the major centre of economic and social activity in Spain.

In FDM studies, there is much literature discussing whether it is efficient to use the opinions of more than one family member or just that of the mother (for a review, see Kaur and Singh, 2006). In this study, all the members of the family above nine years old responded to the questionnaire, following the suggestions of Foxman *et al.* (1989). The age of nine was selected because at that age, children are already able to make decisions, perform their own evaluations and use negotiating tactics to achieve their goals (Geuens *et al.*, 2002; Flurry and Burns, 2005).

Regarding the dependent variables (FDM), respondents were asked about all stages of the process. Evidence suggests that, to obtain accurate responses, it is better to ask about concrete stages of the FDM process (Kim and Lee, 1997; Gentry and McGinnis, 2003; Qualls, 1982). In this study, Ruiz de Maya (1994) and Wilkes' (1975) four stages of FDM were used: problem recognition (Stage 1), information search (Stage 2), alternative evaluation and final choice (Stage 3) and purchase (Stage 4). For each stage, the participants were asked to consider six different goods/services: house, car, internet service, children's sports shoes, yogurt and fast-food dinner. The sample of

**Table II** Sample description

Construct	Descriptor	Result	
Participating family members	Mothers	177	
	Fathers	148	
	Child 1	131	
	Child 2	57	
	Child 3	7	
	Total	520	
Family size	Mean	3.4	
Family type	Married	73%	
	Single-parent	21%	
	Non-married couples	6%	
Years together	Median	11-20 years <sup>a</sup>	
Age	Median, Mother	40-49 years <sup>a</sup>	
	Median, Father	40-49 years <sup>a</sup>	
	Mean, Child 1	15.41	
	Mean, Child 2	12.18	
	Mean, Child 3	10.69	
Level of education		Mother	Father
	Primary school	13%	8%
	Secondary school	18%	21%
	Vocational training	31%	29%
	University degree	38%	43%
Weekly working hours	Housework	26.9 9.8	
	Work outside home	27.3 40.2	
Income	Median	€13.001-€19.000 <sup>a</sup> €13.001-€19.000 <sup>a</sup>	
Family communication style (1-low to 5-high)	Control	3.74	
	Encouragement	3.69	

**Note:** <sup>a</sup>Categorical variables was used because age, years together and income can be sensitive topics for adults

products was chosen because they were representative of high/medium/low-involvement decisions, tangible/intangible products and parent/children decisions (Davis, 1976). As this paper is aiming at analysing FDM changes in modern families, we follow Davis and Rigaux's (1974) traditional list of categories, although we include some new products categories that have emerged since 1974 (e.g. internet services).

For stages 1 and 4, family members had to indicate (Yes/No) if that member usually "recognises the need" or "is responsible for the final purchase" – more than one answer was allowed. For the central phases, respondents were asked to indicate the percentage of influence from each member of the family on the "information search process" and on the "evaluation of the alternatives and final decision to buy". A constant sum scale was used to identify not only if that member usually participates in the decision, but his/her level of influence on it. These scales of measurement were used as they better reflect the level of involvement in FDM than Likert scales (Ahuja and Stinson, 1993; Jenkins, 1978; Ruiz de Maya, 1994). The respondents had to report about the role of every child of the family, *Child1*, *Child2* and *Child3* ordered by age, as well as fathers and mothers.

In total, there were 120 possible FDM questions (dependent variables) in each family; three children, two parents, four stages and six product categories  $((3 + 2) \times 4 \times 6)$ . To reduce the number of dependent variables and produce measurable outcomes, the individual responses were first averaged within each family. That is, mother's, father's and children's individual responses for each family member's level of FDM involvement was combined to make a family measure. This was perceived as permissible because the assumption of non-independence was upheld (Kenny *et al.*, 2006). That is, the intra-family correlations were high – suggesting that the family as a whole has a large level of agreement about who is responsible for what in the FDM process. The strong intra-family correlations also provide evidence of construct validity for family measures. From this, the family's combined view of the individual level of influence on FDM for each family member was calculated for each product category.

Further, the level of participation in FDM at each stage of the process was averaged for each family member and for each product category. Again, this was done based on the assumption of non-independence (Kenny *et al.*, 2006). Strong correlations were found between the four stages for each family member within each product category. On the contrary, correlations were not found across categories. That is, there was no designated "problem recogniser" (for example) in the family across product categories. Rather, involvement in FDM depends on product category and not the stage in the process. Consequently, each family member was given a FDM index score between 1 and 0, for each product category. Finally, the second and third child had a very marginal influence on FDM and was combined into an overall score of FDM for all children. This was also due to the low responses from second and third children, as outlined in Table II. This process reduced the number of FDM variables from 120 to 18, father, mother and child level of involvement, times six product categories.

Concerning the independent variables, only parents were asked about family size, family type (single or dual parent), their individual resources and family communication styles. Controlling and encouraging styles of communication was measured using a commonly used scale (Carlson *et al.*, 1994; Bristol and Mangleburg, 2005; Geuens *et al.*, 2002). Both parents also had to respond about their age, level of education, hours of housework per week and weekly working hours.

The description of the sample is summarised in Table II. The means for family size and type, level of education and working hours are consistent with the general Spanish population (INE, 2015a, 2015b). Thus, the sample was regarded as representative.



#### 4. Results

To produce a meaningful multivariate analysis, we re-organised the data to make them appropriate for regression analyses. Each of the six product categories were consequently structured as responses rather than variables. That is, the product categories were placed on rows rather than columns in the SPSS spreadsheet. Further, we pasted the same independent variables for each individual response after each product category. With the data reorganised, we were able to perceive product category as another independent variable and leave overall FDM participation as the dependent variable. This enabled us to conduct multivariate analysis on three dependent variables, FDM for children, fathers and mothers.

We created dummy variables for each product category, so we could compare the level of FDM involvement based on product category in the regression. We chose “house” as the dummy we would compare the other product categories with because this purchase decision has the highest level of involvement (most important family decision). A negative  $\beta$  value means that the family member is less likely to be involved in the FDM process for that product category. The higher (or lower) the  $\beta$  values, the further away from FDM they are compared with house.

We had a large pool of independent variables that previous research had indicated would have an impact on FDM between family members. To reduce the number of independent variables and as such remove “noise” in the regression analysis, we removed the variables that did not significantly contribute to the level of FDM involvement for all family members. Parental education, work hours and income, were consequently removed. Further, family type and size also had to be removed because of “single mother bias’s”, as well as lack of responses from at least three family members. Finally, multicollinearity was evident between the parents’ age and the years they had been together. As such, we retained only the years together variable as a proxy for different stages in family life cycle. In the following, we discuss the findings from the regression analysis as they relate to the research questions. The results are presented in [Table III](#).

The regression analysis clearly outlines that different variables impact the level of involvement in FDM between children, fathers and mothers. Overall, our models explained a large part of the variance in FDM involvement. For fathers, the model explained 64.6 per cent of the variance ( $R^2$ ). The model was also good for children, explaining 43.3 per cent of the variance. However, for mothers, the model only explained 30.7 per cent. This may indicate that mothers’ FDM participation is more complex, and that other variables not covered in this study play a role. Traditional families used to have their gender-roles

**Table III** Regression analysis for family member’s participation in FDM

	<i>Children</i>	<i>Father</i>	<i>Mother</i>
ANOVA ( <i>F</i> )	50.450***	120.704***	29.246***
Model sum ( $R^2$ )	0.433	0.646	0.307
Item		Standard $\beta$	
Car	0.024	0.122***	-0.342***
Internet	0.251***	-0.121***	-0.349***
Shoes	0.473***	-0.645***	-0.191***
Yogurt	0.242***	-0.627***	0.135**
FFD	0.673***	-0.317***	-0.340***
Years together	0.084*	-0.083**	-0.149***
Mother housework	-0.065*	-0.014	0.042
Father housework	-0.024	0.077**	-0.103**
FCS encouragement	0.122***	-0.019	-0.061
FCS control	-0.072*	0.063*	0.161***

Notes: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

patterns clear, but social changes have altered them, especially in the case of women's role (Bartley *et al.*, 2005). According to Scanzoni (1977, p. 187) seminal work on family gender-roles "as women shift their interests solely from domestic goals to include extra-familial goals and interests as well, they are also likely to shift the ways in which they carry out the processes of decision making". In general, changes in family roles imply a greater level of conflict within families when making decisions because couples need to negotiate and reorganize their new rights and duties, not anymore defined as they used to be (Madill and Bailey, 1999). The level of complexity will be greater in those families with modern women, who will try to change the roles towards an equal distribution, and traditional husbands, who will try to maintain a situation in which they are favoured. Instead, smaller conflicts will occur in families where women have a traditional ideology (as they will maintain established roles) or with the two modern spouses, as both will be willing to rearrange roles (Gentry and McGinnis, 2003).

Firstly, we looked at the six product categories as independent variables (*H1*: The influence of product category on FDM). For children, it appeared that they were equally uninvolved when it came to FDM for houses and cars. On the contrary, children were highly involved in FDM for fast-food dinners and their own shoes. They also participate in the other medium and low-involvement categories. This indicates that children's involvement is highest when the products are for their own usage, but that they also play an important role in other low- and medium-involvement purchase decisions for the family. They may advise on what internet service to get for the family, as well as assist with household chores such as purchasing yogurt.

Fathers would mostly be in charge of car purchases. In fact, their involvement here was significantly higher than for houses. For all other categories, they would be less involved than for houses as cars. In particular, they would participate much less when it came to children's shoes and yogurt. The latter category seemed to be "mother dominated". Mothers was even more involved in FDM for yogurt than for the family home, which suggest a lack of balance when it comes to buying basic household groceries.

When it comes to family life cycle (*H2*: The influence of family life cycle on FDM), children's participation increases when the parents had been together for longer, while the parent's role – in particular the mother – decreased. This indicates that, over time, parents are involving the children more in FDM, which particularly relieves the burden on the mother.

The housework balances between the parents also impacted FDM involvement (*H3*: The influence of parental resources on FDM). Children seem to partake more in FDM when mothers do less housework. This may indicate that, when mothers are doing a larger portion of the housework, they are also less concerned with involving their children in the FDM processes. That is, "full-time housewives" rely less on their children in FDM. This seems contradictory in a sense, as these mothers will have more time to spend with their children and as such could spend more time involving them in FDM. In time-poor families where the mother does less housework, children participate more, which may be more a result of necessity than convenience for the family. Fathers, on the other hand, are more involved in FDM when they partake more in the housework. Also, mothers participate less in FDM when the fathers are doing the housework. These findings certainly indicate that FDM is dynamic, and that traditional sex-role orientations could shift depending on the parental housework contribution.

When it comes to family communication styles (*H4*: The influence of family communication style on FDM), children will partake more in FDM when the family practices an encouraging communication style, and less when it focuses on controlling their children. This finding confirms the suggestions made by Aleti *et al.* (2015b) that controlling communication is associated with a lack of connection between parents and children. The results suggest that encouragement builds up children's confidence and capacity to take on the consumer

role. As such, this form of communication has a positive impact on how they assist in FDM. On the contrary, controlling communication focused on parental control leaves a greater burden on both parents to make consumer decisions for the family. Controlling families leaves this extra burden to both parents – and in particular, the mother.

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this study add to a growing body of literature on FDM. Although, there have been some attempts to revisit the fundamentals of the FDM process in contemporary families, most studies in the field had only focused on certain family members' opinions and roles or in specific product decisions. This study makes a contribution because it included the opinions of each family member and because it referred to a wide variety of household decisions – and every part of the decision-making process.

When it comes to FDM, we found that family members tend to divide roles between product categories. Previous research has suggested that individuals (children in particular) participate in various stages of FDM for a range of products. We found that this is not the case. Rather, family members go through every stage individually, but for different product categories.

Children are only marginally participating in the important high-involvement purchase decisions, but are still important players in low-involvement purchases, especially when the products are for them (e.g. shoes). Regarding FDM division between parents, fathers were traditionally responsible for buying automobiles or technology, while mothers were more involved in the purchase of household appliances and children's products (Davis, 1976). These tendencies were also evident in our study. Our results show that both parents share high-involvement decisions. This finding would be consistent with previous studies in contemporary families (Parkinson *et al.*, 2016) that argue that modern households share responsibilities in FDM. However, our findings also show that the mother still controls the acquisition of children's and household products.

As already suggested by Blood and Wolfe (1960) more than 50 years ago, with the “new status of women” (more resources and time pressure), a change is required within the power structure (Gentry and McGinnis, 2003; Kim and Lee, 1997). Our findings suggest that such a change has not occurred, and that mothers are still responsible for the majority of FDM. This view is also supported by Chen *et al.* (2016) in Taiwanese households. It could be said that, in modern Spanish families, mothers tend to take up new position in important decisions without losing their “traditional role”. Consequently, their situation may not be favourable, as they have to assume not only their traditional tasks, but new ones as well. This is in line with recent findings that suggest Spanish mothers still do the majority of the parent-child activities (Gracia and Kalmijn, 2016).

Parents' financial or educational resources make little impact on FDM structure; the key resource variable is family division of housework. How much housework each parent does had an impact on how FDM roles were distributed within the family. In particular, mothers would participate less in low-involvement purchases when the fathers are doing more of the housework. One reason of this could be the fact that household chores could be reflecting the ideology of gender-roles in the family. These results indicate that the “traditional” gender-roles do change when the mother is a more active player in the workforce – and indeed, does less housework. The life cycle theory predicts that, in more mature households, purchase decisions are made autonomously and more mature parents are better at encouraging FDM participation in their children. Regarding the family structure, past literature was not conclusive when studying the influence of family type and size in the role of children.

Research by [Watne and Brennan \(2011\)](#) and [Watne \*et al.\* \(2014\)](#) indicated that, when the family focuses on encouraging children to make their own purchase decisions, the children are more likely to reciprocate and assist their parents. These findings were confirmed here, although the children in this study were much younger than that in the previous studies mentioned. That is, parents who foster an encouraging communication style may receive benefits from their young children in terms of increased assistance in FDM. On the contrary, children will participate less in controlling families. Keeping in mind that this study asked about involvement in all stages in FDM processes, more involvement from children means less to do for the parents. If families want to lighten the household decision-making burden for mothers, they may focus on encouraging the children to develop as independent consumers, rather than focus controlling their consumption.

A relationship between both parent's participations in the FDM process and level of controlling communication within the family was also evident. When the parents focus on a communication style based on controlling and restricting the consumption of the children, they are left to carry a heavier load. As contemporary children are known to be savvy consumers, parents may miss out on valuable assistance when they focus on controlling their children's consumption, rather than encouraging them to make decisions and help with the purchases of the family. [Table II](#) indicates that control was overall more prominent than encouragement. This indicates an opportunity for parents to receive more assistance from their children in FDM as long as they focus on encouraging them to develop as independent consumers.

## 6. Implications

### 6.1 *Theoretical implications*

This research extends the FDM research by demonstrating how complex relationships can be unpacked. We demonstrate the value of using the family as the unit of analysis to get a holistic view of how decision-making tasks across a variety of household purchases are divided between individuals. It was clear from our analysis that families view product categories as "silos", where members either do or do not participate. This is in contrast to some previous research that suggest that children have a "support role" across a variety of product categories.

### 6.2 *Practical implications*

Although the overall results suggested that mothers do the bulk of low-involvement purchases, it seems that the family may reorganise the roles depending on which parent does the majority of the housework. This also has an impact on the participation of the children in FDM; mothers who do less housework "outscores" some of the FDM tasks to the children. For policymakers concerned with equality within the family, it may be a better approach to enable fathers to more actively participate in household chores than to try to change behaviour through information about equality. Such enabling could, for example, be done through more generous paternity arrangements that would make it more attractive for the father to stay at home with the children.

The focus on controlling over encouraging family communication also has implications. As previous studies have also pointed out, Spanish parents seek to look after their children's material wellbeing, rather than to teach them about responsibilities ([Holdsworth, 2004](#)). As such, cultural norms in Spain may hinder children to partake more in FDM. A long-term approach by, for example, school programmes aimed at encouraging children to develop as responsible consumers both inside and outside of the home could be effective.

**Table IV** Summary of hypothesis testing

<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Support</i>
<i>H1.</i> Product categories are significant determinants of children's, father's and mother's involvement in FDM	Children partake more when the products are for them. Fathers decide for cars, while the mothers mainly decide for all other purchases, across all levels of involvement
<i>H2.</i> Family life cycle variables are significant determinants of children's, father's and mother's influence in FDM	As parents move through the family life cycle, they participate less in FDM and the children participate more
<i>H3.</i> Parental resources are significant determinants of children's, father's and mother's influence in FDM	Parental resources mainly influence FDM when it comes to their individual participation in housework. Income, work hours and education play a lesser role
<i>H4.</i> Family communication style is a significant determinant of children's, father's and mother's influence in FDM	Encouragement increases the participation of children, while control makes children participate less and leave the burden with the parents

## 7. Conclusion

This study makes new discoveries in terms of how modern families allocate family decisions about a wide range of common family purchase decisions. The findings illustrate that families first and foremost allocate consumer decisions based on product categories. Although much has changed in terms of household structures over the last 50 years, it appears that traditional roles still remain; fathers are in charge of decisions related to automobiles, mothers are in charge of low-involvement household items and children are mainly participating in decisions that concern them directly. This is potentially bad news for mothers, as they are better educated than before and also work longer hours outside of the household.

As the household matures in the life cycle, the children increase their involvement in decisions related to technology. Division of housework and family communication style are also instrumental in how decisions are allocated. When fathers take a larger part in the housework, traditional gender-roles become more fluid. A more equal FDM distribution may be achieved by focusing public debate on how families allocate the housework. Finally, in a household with a controlling communication style, it appears that the traditional roles are more rigid. It is clear that families that focus on encouragement are better equipped to divide FDM tasks between family members and also receive benefits from greater participation of children.

As with all research, this study also has its limitations. We recommend that further research looks at other contexts to investigate whether families in different cultures allocate FDM differently. Further, the results of the regression offered good results for fathers and children, but the model was weaker for explaining mothers' involvement in FDM. As mentioned before, a mother's participation in FDM is more complex due to the new roles and tasks that she has to assume. To further investigate a mother's FDM participation, it would be beneficial to conduct further research on mothers alone. This may be best investigated with a qualitative approach, as the broad range of variables investigated here did not capture a mother's roles, as well as the other family members. Finally, it was clear that FDM differed in a single-parent household. However, these differences can only be attributed to single mothers because there were not enough single fathers in our sample. Then, further research may focus on single-parent households and investigate the differences between single-mother and single-father households.

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