



Family and Store Choice - A Conceptual Framework

Sanjeev Tripathi
P.K. Sinha

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Sanjeev Tripathi¹
P.K. Sinha²

Abstract

Retail Store choice has traditionally been studied from the perspective of an individual. The retail offering is however consumed more by the family than by an individual. This study questions the study of store choice by an individual and argues that the family is the relevant unit of analysis.

The study draws on the extensive literature available on store choice and also on the family decision making for products and services. It identifies the key factors from the literature, which might be affecting the store choice of a family. On the basis of these factors, it proposes a conceptual framework for studying the retail store choice as a family decision.

¹ Doctoral Student (Marketing), Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, India
(Email: sanjeev@iimahd.ernet.in)

² Professor, Marketing Area, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, India

Introduction

With the high growth being registered in the retail sectors in the developed countries, and the developing countries such as India almost on the verge of a revolution, there is a high research interest in the area. Retail is responsible for delivering the product or the service to the ultimate consumer. Traditionally the research has focused on the issues of store choice, store patronage and other similar questions from the perspective of an individual. However, the ultimate consumer, of the products, the services or even the retail offering in terms of the ambience and the experience is not an object of individual consumption, rather it is mostly the family which consumes it. If the ultimate consumer of the retail offering is the family, is it valid to deal with these questions only from an individual's perspective? In addition, in terms of the spending power, the family is seen as the most important consumer-buying unit in society (Thomson, 2003), hence it is quite fair that any research in this regard take up the study in the context of the family.

Research Gap and relevance

It has long been held that it is the household, which is the relevant unit of analysis, and not the individual consumer (Davis, 1976; Grashof and Dixon, 1980). It is well known that the families jointly consume the major items of consumer spending such as food, shelter and transportation. In addition even for the products, which are consumed by one of the family members the actual purchase is done by other family members such as children's toys, men's undergarments and even light alcoholic beverages. This realization has sparked research in terms of, the family as a unit of consumption, and as the unit, which decides on the products, brands and the services to be purchased and consumed. Research has been done on the role of the various family members, and mechanism of the decision-making across product lines, (whether it is a consumable or a durable), the stages of decision-making etc.

The studies on store choice have mostly dealt with individual choices and the studies have investigated the drivers of store choice taking individuals as the samples (mostly housewives). Little research exists, which analyses the shopping behaviour with a family or household as a unit. Researchers have found that, store choice and shopping trip timing decisions tend to differ for individuals and households as a result of personal differences,

household composition, and activity patterns (Leszczyc and Timmermans, 1997; Kim and Park, 1997). Similarly work has been done on household demographic variables (Leszczyc, Sinha, and Timmermans, 2000; Bawa and Ghosh, 1999) and relating them to the shopping behaviour of the household, the trip timing (Kahn and Schmittlein, 1989) and the store choice (Kau and Ehrenberg, 1984). However, as compared to the work on the product and service choices by the families/households, the work on store choice is quite less and covers few dimensions.

The other studies on store choice have mostly dealt with individual choices and the studies have investigated the drivers of store choice taking individuals as the samples (mostly housewives). It has to be realized that most of the store visits are not the visit by an individual family member (but accompanied by spouse/children). Even when the store visit is by the individual, chances are that the store choice might be decided/influenced directly by the family or indirectly through previous store visits along with the family.

Evidence already exists that, most of the shopping takes place on weekends (Kahn and Schmittlein, 1989) and also, that at times it is aggregated with other tasks and takes place as a multipurpose trip. This provides further incentive for the families to visit the store together. Especially in the Indian context, it is well observed that shopping is mostly a family activity, but any shopping activity needs to be preceded by store choice. All these point towards the adoption of a store not individually but collectively as a family.

With the growing influence of the retail in influencing the consumer choice, the retail strategy is very important from the manufacturers point of view and thus the store choice becomes a matter of concern to the manufacturer. In addition with the high growth in the organized retail in the recent times, as well as increasing competition for a retailer the store choice becomes an area of concern. If the family has an influence in deciding the store choice, the loyalty and the patronage it is very relevant that the perspective of the family be taken in any future research in these areas.

Objective

The above discussion, reveals that, literature has answered the questions like what to buy and when to buy. However the questions like where to buy and how to buy has as yet not been answered. As there is very little research in this area, this work is seen as the first

step in setting up the outline for further work. It will primarily deal with the question on the role of the families in answering the question of where to buy. The study is therefore aimed at developing a conceptual framework, for exploring the role of family in store choice. It is being conceived as broadly setting the tone for future studies in this direction, by incorporating the major factors, which might affect the store choice for the family. It might also be used further to answer the question on how to buy or in other words, how do families actually carry out the purchase process in the retail store.

Outline

The study will first trace the existing literature in the store choice, and then trace the research that has been done in the Family decision-making. It will then try to connect how the different factors internal to the family (as size, composition etc.) and those external (as situational factors) affect the store choice.

Literature survey -Store choice

The study of consumer store-choice or patronage behavior has been an important area of research in retailing for many decades. The decision on the choice of store has been modeled in different ways in the literature. Some of the studies have taken the household as a rational decision making unit, (Becker, 1965; Goldman and Johansson, 1978; Bawa and Ghosh, 1999). Similarly, Bell, Ho and Tang, (1998) in their work on store choice found evidence that each shopper is more likely to visit the store with the lowest total shopping cost.

However, the research has also revealed that customers also care also about other store attributes in making their patronization decision. Some of the researchers (Bell, Ho and Tang, 2001) have worked on the shoppers perceived utility and the store image in making the store choice. Research also exists on how store environment cues influence consumers' store choice decision criteria, such as perceived merchandise value and shopping experience (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal, and Voss, 2002). Store choice has also been seen in the context of the risk reduction strategies of the shoppers (Mitchel and McGoldrick, 1996; Mitchell and Harris, 2005). In addition work on store choice has also been done on the role of situational factors (Wu, Petroschius, and Newell, 2004) and the task-store attribute relationship (Kenhove, Wule, and Waterschoot, 1999). It has also been

found to be dependent on the timing of shopping trips, with consumers visiting smaller local store for short "fill-in" trips and larger store for regular shopping trips (Kahn and Schmittlein, 1989).

Most of the studies in store choice have however pointed out the primacy of store location (Arnold, Oum and Tigert, 1983; Freymann, 2002) and price (Bell, Ho and Tang, 2001; Freymann, 2002; Arnold, Oum and Tigert, 1983) as the key drivers of store choice. Lastly Bell and Lattin (1998) found a systematic relationship between a household's shopping behavior and store preference, especially in the context of choice of a format (EDLP/Hilo).

Literature survey-Family Decision Making

The research in Family decision-making is drawn from various areas such as economics (Becker, 1976), social conflict (Sprey, 1979) and family sex roles (Scanzoni, 1977). The research in this field basically deals with the interaction and the role of the couple (parents) and the children.

The importance of husband-wife decision-making has been well recognized (Davis and Rigaux, 1974; Corfman, 1991). The research by Davis and Rigaux (1974) one of the earliest, has classified family purchases into four decision influence categories: husband dominant; wife dominant; autonomic (separate) and syncretism (joint). Mainly, three major theoretical beliefs resource theory, Sex Role Orientation (SRO) theory, and involvement have been developed to explain relative influence in decision-making (Webster, 1995). The resource theory professes that the influence of the partner depends on the resource that he/she contributes (Blood and Wolfe, 1960). Researchers have studied the same across different resource contributing contexts such as education (Rosen and Granbois, 1983), job status (Rosen and Granbois, 1983; Wolgast, 1958), social class (Rigaux-Briemont 1978), and income (Davis, 1976; Green and Cunningham, 1975; Wolgast, 1958).

The second belief, SRO, says that sex role preferences are indicative of culturally determined attitudes (traditionalism/modernity) toward the role of wife/husband in the household (Qualls, 1987). Various household decision practices have been shown to be affected by sex roles such as the buying process (Cunningham and Green 1975, Qualls

1981), household task allocation (Eriksen, Yancy, and Eriksen, 1979), and marital behavior (Scanzoni, 1975). The studies have also found a significant relationship between SRO and relative influence in decision-making (Green and Cunningham, 1975; Rosen and Granbois, 1983; Qualls, 1987).

The third concept, the concept of involvement suggests that the relative influence in a purchase decision is higher for the spouse who is more involved in the purchase and desires than the partner (Corfman and Lehmann 1987; Qualls 1987). This concept explains the relative influence across product classes and explains the husband's domination for such product categories as homes or housing (Cunningham and Green, 1974; Davis and Rigaux, 1974) insurance (Davis and Rigaux, 1974; Green et al., 1983), and automobiles (Burns and Granbois, 1977; Green et al., 1983; Wolgast, 1958). At the same time the wives have a dominant position in the purchase decisions for products associated with their homemaker role, such as appliances (Green et al., 1983; Wolgast, 1958), groceries (Davis and Rigaux 1974; Green et al., 1983) clothing, children's toys and cosmetics (Ganes, 1997).

Researchers (Davis and Rigaux, 1974) have found evidence for relative influence at various stages in the purchase decision process. They found that wives were more dominant during the problem recognition and information search stages for household furnishings while husbands were more dominant at the information search stage for autos and to a lesser degree, at the problem recognition and final decision stages. Other studies (Belch, Belch and Ceresino, 1985; Belch and Willis, 2002), also found different relative influences across different stages.

Considerable research has also been carried out on young children's influence (Berey and Pollay, 1968; Szybillo and Sosanie, 1977; Atkin, 1978; Swinyard and Sim 1987;). Theories like social power (Flurry and Burns, 2005) have been used to explain the roles and the influence of the children in the decision-making. It has been found (Palan and Wilkes, 1997) that the children and adolescents use various strategies like bargaining, persuasion or emotional strategies to get their wishes entertained.

More recently studies have investigated and reflected changes in the decision-making process, suggesting a movement toward more joint decision-making. There is evidence of significant changes occurring in the influence of members in the household.

Family and the Store Choice

As discussed above, it can be seen that, the areas of store choice and family decision-making have been studied quite extensively. However, as discussed earlier, little literature is there on how families/households choose the stores. We now develop a framework for exploring the relationship between the various internal and external factors involved in purchase for the family and the store choice. The literature survey, gives a basic idea on some of the variables affecting store choice by the families. We will discuss them one by one to establish the relationship with the store choice. As a first step we will first establish the relationship between the shopping basket, the choice of retail format and the choice of retail store.

Relationship between shopping basket, choice of retail format and retail store

Consumers typically shop for multiple items on a given trip rather than a single item; and these items form the shopping basket for the shopper. Shopping basket has been defined as 'comprising the collection of categories that consumers purchase on a specific shopping trip' (Manchanda, Ansari and Gupta, 1999). Shopping basket will affect the store choice in various ways such as

- ❖ The size itself will affect the store choice, as shoppers are prepared to go farther to shop for a larger basket than a smaller basket (Bawa and Ghosh, 1999).
- ❖ The contents of the shopping basket will restrict the choice across formats and stores (Leszczyc and Timmermans, 1997).
- ❖ The contents of the basket will affect the shopper's perspective of the store and affect the ongoing store choice (Desai and Talukdar, 2003).
- ❖ Overall preference for the store might shift as a function of the composition of the shopping basket (Leszczyc and Timmermans, 1997).

In the literature pertaining to store choice the consumers evaluate a group of stores on a set of attributes and then, depending upon their individual preferences, patronize the best store. It has generally been seen that all the stores in the choice set are in the same

formats (Bhatnagara and Ratchford, 2004). This indicates that the first choice for the shopper is that of the format. Since not all the products/services are available in all retail formats, this means that the shopping basket will narrow the scope of the store choice to particular formats. However, since some formats offer overlapping products or services, the choice is also between various formats. Bell and Lattin, (1998), demonstrated how the size of the basket determines the choice of store between EDLP/Hilo formats. These indicate that the first choice for the shopper is that of the format, which depends to a large extent on the shopping basket, but will also depend, on the other format attributes that the shopper would derive from the format.

It is then proposed that family attributes, as family composition, occupation status etc. will decide the shopping basket. The choice of the shopping basket will, then play a major role in deciding first the format and then the store. The final store will be chosen keeping in mind the store attributes such as location, store image, price image, ambience etc. In certain exceptional circumstances, such as strong loyalty to a store, a particular type of ambience or location, considering the composition of the basket and the availability in the store of the merchandise, the choice might be made directly for the store instead of going through the process of basket-format-store.

Family size and composition

Family size and composition implies the total number of members in a family and the distribution between adults and children. Larger families will have higher levels of consumption and will buy larger quantities of products/services to satisfy the consumption. They will also require a wider variety of products, and therefore are likely to get stocked out more frequently than smaller families (Bawa and Ghosh, 1999). It is thus likely that larger families will have larger basket sizes and larger number of shopping trips. The existing research supports that household size has a positive effect on the likelihood of a shopping trip (Leszczyc, Sinha, and Timmermans, 2000). Similarly Bawa and Ghosh, (1999), found that the size of the family was positively associated with the frequency of shopping trips and the basket size.

The household composition, will also affect the shopping basket, it has been suggested that for a given household size, the presence of children in the household is likely to

lower expenditures relative to an all-adult household due to differences in consumption rates for children and adults (Prais and Houthakker, 1971; Benus, Kmenta and Shapiro, 1976; McClements, 1977; Muelbauer, 1980). In addition, the presence of children is likely to result in a more diverse basket size, with higher chances of stock outs and greater impulse purchases. Thus the presence of children will induce baskets, with larger baskets in terms of categories, but smaller baskets in terms of size.

The composition (presence of children) will also spark of the need for particular (high service) formats and for stores with a particular ambience.

Employment Status of the family members

The number of working members in the family is expected to be related to the income of the family, the consumption levels and thus the size of the basket. The increase in the number of working adults will increase consumption in two ways. Firstly it will have a positive effect on the income and the consumption; secondly it might result in higher demand for services and products as a result of the time constraint of the adults and the opportunity cost of time.

For the families with higher number of adult members working, the opportunity cost of time is high, and tends to reduce the frequency of shopping trips and at the same time increase the basket size. Bawa and Ghosh, (1999) and Leszczyc and Timmermans (1997) support that households having working adults have a lower frequency of shopping trips as compared to households in which adults are not working. It also found that households with two working adults shopped less than households with one working adult.

The number of working adults affects the time constraints and has effect on store choice in terms of greater salience of location and familiarity of the store. It has also been found that store loyalty is cultivated when the female and the male are working (Leszczyc and Timmermans, 1997). A high opportunity cost for time will force the shoppers to economize on their search costs and breed store loyalty. Also because of time constraints, households may combine their shopping trip with a work or an entertainment trip and engage in a multi-stop, multipurpose trip behavior (Leszczyc and Timmermans, 1997).

Income Level of the family

High family income levels, may lead to higher consumption levels, which would imply larger aggregate shopping. Previous research (Prais and Houthakker 1971; Houthakker and Taylor 1970) supports the view that a household's income has a major effect on its consumption. In addition the higher income will result in a shopping basket comprising of goods of better quality (Bawa and Ghosh, 1999) and is also expected to have a wider variety of assortment in the consumption. Thus the aggregate shopping is expected to grow with the income levels and also diversify in terms of the objects of consumption. With a higher income level, the impulse shopping will be less drain on the resources and is also expected to increase.

In addition high-income households will have a higher opportunity cost for time and should be less willing to spend time on shopping trips for utilitarian consumption. Thus the frequency of shopping trips is expected to be negatively related to household income (Bawa and Ghosh, 1999). This would however, be moderated by increase in consumption and inducing need for hedonic shopping (in addition to utilitarian) and impulse purchases on non-shopping trips. Bawa and Ghosh, (1999) found that higher income households tend to shop more frequently, similar result was also found by Leszczyc and Timmermans (1997).

An increase in the income will increase the need for experiential shopping thus affecting the format choice. The store choice will also get affected by moderating the affect of location, as higher income might reduce the cost and increase the ease of transportation. It has also been observed that high-income households are more likely to display a store switching behaviour (Leszczyc and Timmermans, 1997).

Stage in life-cycle

The stage in the life cycle of the family will also affect, the shopping behaviour in a number of ways. Primarily it will have an effect on the size and the composition of the basket by affecting the consumption of the family members. A young family, with small or no children and a mature family with grown up children will have different needs to save, needs to spend and different consumption patterns. The life stage of the family will

also affect the size and the consumption of the family thus affecting the consumption pattern and the shopping basket.

The stage of the family life cycle is also reflected in the age of the head of the household and may affect the household's consumption and shopping pattern. Fareed and Riggs, (1982) proposed that older consumers might have lesser number of shopping trips since the family size is small, and also the income is lower. On the other side, Bawa and Ghosh, (1999) argued that for older people, the opportunity cost of time is low and hence might induce larger number of visits and also found empirical support for the same. The frequency of shopping trips inversely affects the basket size and furthers the choice of store format and the retail store.

In addition, the age factor also has important repercussions in terms of how far the shopper would visit for the shopping, and liking for a particular store format and a particular store. It has been shown that (Lumpkin, Greenberg, and Goldstucker, 1985) that, shoppers of different age groups have different sensitivities to fixed and variable utility. Similarly tendency for multi-store shopping has also been found to be strongly dependent on the life cycle stage of families (Prasad, 1972).

Task

Every shopping occasion will have tasks associated with it. For a family the situation becomes much more complex as they might approach the same store with a variety of tasks, while the shopping might be a chore for the mother it might be a means of enjoyment for the child. The task definition comprises the set of goals a consumer forms to resolve needs deriving from a specific situation (Marshall, 1993). It has also been defined as 'the reasons that occasion the need for consumers to buy or consume a product or service' (Belk, 1975). Task definitions is applicable to both purchase as well as usage situations, while the purchase situation refers to the circumstances of the purchase a usage situation refers to the circumstances of the usage of the product or service (Kenhove, Wule, and Waterschoot, 1999).

It has been found (Mattson, 1982) that store-attribute salencies differ, depending upon whether the shopper was looking for a gift for another person or for personal needs. Research also suggests that at the time of shopping the retrieval of different store

attributes will depend upon the task in hand (Simonson and Tversky, 1992; Green and Krieger, 1995). Also Kenhove, Wule, and Waterschoot, (1999) found evidence for the fact that Store choice is differentiated by task definitions. Thus even for the same shopping basket, changing the task will result in change in format or store choice. When the family approaches the shopping, it is highly likely that the different members approach, shopping with different tasks, in such a situation the multiplicity of the tasks of the individual members will result in a very complex choice decision for the store.

Influence of family members

The literature review on the family decision-making indicates that, different members in the family have different influences across the stage of decision-making, the product or service being considered. The factors already discussed, also affect the influence of the different family members, as when the wife is working, the balance of power shifts towards her (Rosen and Granbois, 1983; Wolgast, 1958). Similarly in families where both the parents are working children will have a greater influence (Geuens et al., 2003). The involvement theory suggests that the members who use a product or are more involved with it have more influence in the purchase decision. Foxman and Tanshuaj (1988) found that children had more influence for child products than for family products.

When it comes to store choice in the case of a goal oriented shopping, it is expected that the influence and the conflicts should be less than that for a product choice, as the utilities might be satisfied from the product itself. However, when the nature of the shopping is more experiential the format choice and the store choice are expected to be more difficult. What complicates the situation is that; individuals within a household may have different preferences for particular stores (Leszczyc and Timmermans, 1997). Also as discussed in the previous section different members might approach the same shopping situation with different tasks in mind. One way in which the situation can be simplified is that, if the shopping basket is dominated by a particular product class or task with which a particularly family member identifies, that member will have the dominant influence in the store choice. However, the family member actually going to do the purchasing on behalf of the family will have still greater influence in the actual choice.

Conceptual model

The diagram in figure 1 represents the conceptual model of the retail store choice by the family, as developed above. This model presents the basic framework, and establishes, the basic relations between some common variables, which might affect the format and store choice for the family.

Discussion

The study is a venture into an area of research, which has been quite under researched. It is obvious that, the retail store choice by the families appears to be a much more complex process than the retail store choice by the individuals. However, as it is mostly the family and not the individual who is the consumer of the retail offering, the model of the retail choice by the families is better suited for exploring the store choice.

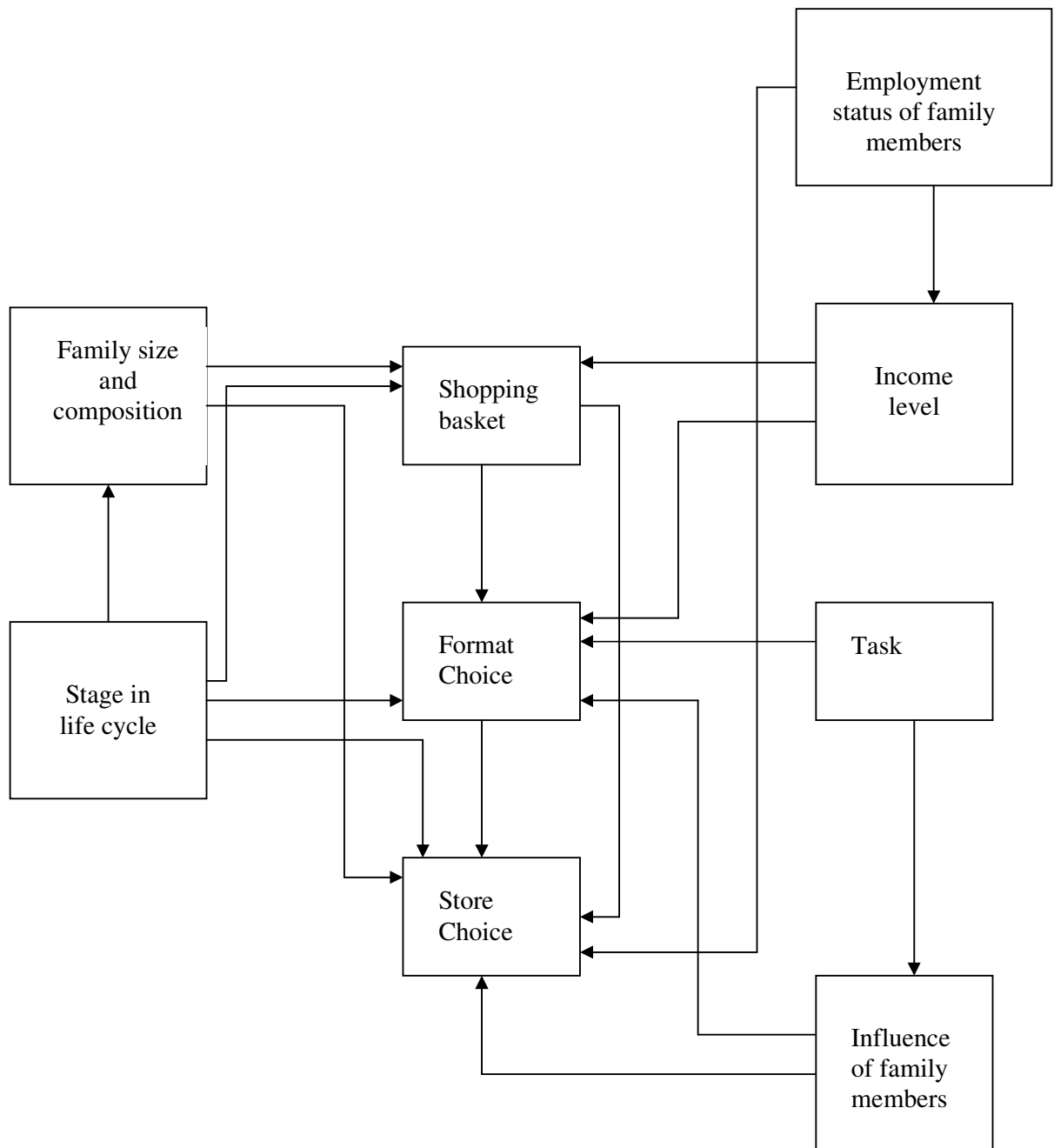


Figure 1: Conceptual model of Retail Store choice by families

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