



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The process of eliciting and generating a script for the acquisition of major household appliances necessitated integration and in depth study of several topics from different disciplines. Consumer decision-making theory and its relevance in marketing and consumer behaviour formed the basic background for the research project (Chapter 3). The purchasing of major household appliances was approached as an example of complex, high-risk household decision-making behaviour and required the study of resource management, household decision-making strategies, marketing and household equipment literature from a variety of non-related sources and disciplines (Chapter 7). Script theory was considered and introduced as a result of a suggestion in relation to consumer behaviour research (Chapter 3) but required a study and understanding of basic script theory, memory and thought processes from the domain of cognitive psychology (Chapter 4).

During the integration of theory from various disciplines and in the justification and execution of the research procedure (Chapters 5 & 6), answers to, or at least guidelines for addressing concerns/questions that initiated this research project (Chapter 2) were concluded.

The initial questions that led to the formulation of the problem statement for this research project (Chapter 2), were:

- How do consumers handle the acquisition of major household appliances to eventually conclude decisions with potentially satisfying outcomes?
- Are consumers in general capable of making informed choices from the spectrum of household appliances that are available in the market place -of which some are very impressive in terms of product features and design but at the same time technologically highly advanced, complex and expensive? If an attempt is made to study consumers' acquisition of major household appliances, how could researchers structure and approach research projects taking into consideration that traditional consumer decision models probably do not satisfactorily reflect what happens in practice and that there is conflicting evidence regarding consumers' approach to and handling of complex decision-making tasks?

- Can an alternative to traditional consumer decision-making models be found/generated to serve as a more realistic portrayal of the consumer decision-making process so that research in this regard as well as consumer education and consumer facilitation efforts attempted within the discipline of consumer science be approached and structured more effectively?

The problem statement was consequently formulated as follows:

Can a script that conforms to the properties and structural characteristics of a script according to basic script theory be elicited and organized within the consumer behaviour context to portray the acquisition of major household appliances?

CONCLUSIONS

A script-elicitation procedure was formulated and justified (Chapter 5) after thorough study of script theory and previous research in this regard (Chapter 4 & 5). A script for the acquisition of major household appliances was consequently elicited and generated successfully (Chapter 6) and it was consequently evaluated in terms of the script content and its application (Chapter 7).

The initial questions can now be responded to as follows:

It became apparent that consumers' approach to -, and handling of the acquisition of major household appliances as described from the perspective of consumers during the script-elicitation procedures represents a fairly simple straightforward approach when compared to what could be concluded from traditional consumer decision-making models (Chapters 6 & 7). Of the nine scenes contained in the final script (Figure 7.2), six probably take place in the store, which also has consequences in terms of the time allocated to the decision-making and purchasing process.

Much can be learnt from the extent to which traditional decision-making models and the final script eventually *agree* but also in terms of how they *differ* in portraying the decision-making process/event. Of specific interest are the contribution of informal personal information sources (recommendations of friends and family) prior to store visits and the decisive role of the store visits in terms of information search and finalizing of a purchase decision. The apparent lack of using objective non biased information sources (in written as well as personal form) as well as a tendency to do comparison-shopping rather than to devote time and energy to the formal evaluation of product alternatives after a listing of suitable product alternatives (evoked set), provide interesting avenues for further research. Possible reasons for such behaviour that came to the fore during individual interviews and focus-group discussions, included remarks such as "there is no place to go for information/advice and assistance; friends can be trusted whereas salespeople earn commission on sales and are therefore biased in their assistance, apart from advertisements that

provide limited information, stores are the only places where information is made available.....consumers are left in the dark." The fact that financial decision-making was prominently identified as a noteworthy scene of the decision-making event rather than an element of in-store shopping or pre-purchase planning, may be indicative of this specific purchasing event as imposing a significant degree of financial risk. This thus merits a proper discussion of the financial consequences and the impact of financial consequences of the purchasing decision within any consumer decision-making framework. This aspect is ignored in traditional consumer decision-making models, which gives the impression that the financial decision has been neglected and assumed as part of the choice stage with little attention to the relative amount of time and energy devoted to this aspect by consumers during the decision-making event. The fact that consumers apparently do comparison-shopping instead of browsing first, selecting potential suitable appliances, drawing up a short-list and doing proper evaluation in terms of pre-meditated purchasing criteria, explains the concentrated activity in the in-store environment. This has consequences for consumer education and consumer facilitation: consumers will have to be empowered and assisted to act on well-deliberated intentions and product knowledge to ensure informed decisions. The interaction of both spouses through out the decision-making event until the closure of the deal emphasizes the importance of a non-sexist approach to consumer behaviour research, consumer education, consumer facilitation and marketing. This is especially important for industry and retail in terms of their marketing strategies and for communication in media while it inevitably also affects the general approach during consumer education and -facilitation.

The question of whether consumers are able to make informed choices from the spectrum of household appliances that are available in the market place, revealed several shortcomings. These could be addressed through liaison between all interested parties and through focused future research to determine the cause and effect of so-called problem areas. From the contents of the empirical script (Chapter 6, Figure 6.10) there is no doubt that consumers use heuristics during consumer decision-making and that little attention is given to objective product evaluation and information search. Although consumers admit that household technology provides a challenge in terms of decision-making, little evidence of active information search became evident. Consumers seem to be unaware of alternative routes of information search. Only a small percentage of participants (25-39%) mentioned the use of product specifications as decision-making criterion (the need for product specifications did not even surface in all of the elicitation procedures) (Chapter 6). During focus-group discussions, participants were unable to suggest any formal, objective sources of product information, but simultaneously admitted that such sources would be very useful. One can conclude that consumers often depend on the recommendations of trusted others (friends and family) and although it not necessarily reflects a situation of "the blind leading the blind", it exposes a reliance upon brand name information and friends' recommendations in terms of functional aspects as decisive factors. Consumers can benefit from more attention and guidance towards concluding more informed decisions. This gap could be addressed by an integrated approach by

industry, retail and professionals in the field of consumer science in taking hands to contribute towards a general climate that promotes responsible and informed decision-making behaviour, especially in the in-store environment.

Traditional consumer decision models are very helpful in terms of concept formation and – identification. The script for the acquisition of major household appliances that was elicited and generated from the perspective of consumers (Chapter 6) puts consumers' approach to the purchasing event in a new perspective. The ideographic, emic theoretical approach provided the opportunity to give a reflection of what happens in reality. The script thus contains only the apparent relevant information and excludes non-relevant decision-making actions. Traditional consumer decision-models are ideal to be used by academics and other interested parties involved in consumer education and –facilitation to structure and direct consumer education and – facilitation programmes. Traditional consumer decision-models could serve as a frame of reference against which script content and structure could be compared to inter alia identify areas of specific activity or shortcomings in actual consumer decision-making behaviour. Conflicting evidence regarding consumers' approach to and handling of complex decision-making tasks (Chapter 7) could hereafter be studied and discussed within this alternative framework.

The generation of a script for the acquisition of major household appliances in the hope that the result would adhere to the basic characteristics and properties of a script within basic script theory (Chapter 6) is of importance for the discipline of consumer science. It was shown that scripts as an alternative to traditional consumer decision models could be generated to serve as a more realistic portrayal of the consumer decision-making events. Within the domain of consumer behaviour in the discipline of consumer science, this study provides new avenues to explore and has confirmed the value of multi disciplinary research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The contribution of this study to the discipline of consumer science is twofold.

In the field of consumer behaviour the script concept firstly provides a new platform for the study of complex consumer decision-making of which major household appliances was used as an example. Empirical research with regards to major household appliances, specifically from the point of view of consumer behaviour, is limited. Although aspects such as sustainability, energy conservation and service life expectancy of household appliances have been touched on by researchers in this field over the past few years, this study sets the scene for future research against the background of applied consumer decision-making. The script portrays the consumer decision-making process in terms of consumers' interpretation of real life experiences from where recommendations could be made to address consumers' needs and to facilitate consumer decision-making. Quantitative

studies to determine the extent of certain problem areas are recommended (for example a quantification of the use of various information sources during decision-making so that measures could be taken to improve shortcomings through education and the availability of consumer-friendly information where and when needed).

The study, done within the discipline of consumer science, involved theory from the field of cognitive psychology to suggest an alternative framework to portray the consumer decision-making process. This study focused on the acquisition of major household appliances as an example of complex consumer decision-making for major household appliances. Expanding this principle to other commodities such as housing decisions and clothing purchases may result in many advantages for consumer science, retail and industry because scripts provide a closer look into the reality of consumer decision-making behaviour.

In retrospect, the script-elicitation procedure proved successful in terms of the combination of techniques included as part of the recommended procedure. The sequence in which the various techniques were applied proved very successful. Although an ideographic approach recommends minimum structure during the research process to encourage spontaneous reaction from participants without imposing thoughts that could influence responses, the use of a specially designed data-capturing sheet during the stage 1 written elicitation technique could have resulted in a more satisfactory elicitation of role schemata from the start. In this research project the initial idea to implement stages of script-elicitation based on the results of preceding stages, provided the opportunity to focus and include on limitations identified along the way. The stage 3 discrimination procedure as well as the focus-group discussions thus eventually provided the opportunity to capture the relevant data.

It is further hoped that this study would encourage multi disciplinary research from which, ultimately, consumers would benefit.