

Decision-Making in Couples: It Takes Two to Tango

by

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*“Action delayed is action abandoned. There may be other chances for other actions,
but the present moment is lost - irretrievably lost. All preparation is for the future -
you cannot prepare for the present. Clarity is now, action is now”*

S. N. Maharaj

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Abstract

The main aim of this thesis is to gain a better understanding of collaborative decision-making in primary groups (couples) when approaching complex choice situations. To understand how decisions in couples are made, many variables have been studied. Most of these variables are related to the general model of family decision-making, consisting of couples' demographic characteristics, family life cycle, and influence/gender role attitudes. However, existing theory on decision-making cannot grasp all the complexity of choice processes modern couples make. More women at work, different couple structure, and circumstances under which couples take decisions (increased range of choice, for example) indicate that more extended decision-making theory is needed. Because the theories of "power" and "roles" were developed in the context of traditional couples, they may not apply to cohabiting couples these days. Thus, I suggest that in order to gain a broader understanding of complex decisions made in couples, we would benefit from the entire approach to the investigation being revised.

Firstly, variables related to the interpersonal ties investigated in previous research have shown to be beneficial to group performance. Thus, it would be beneficial to move from studying already well-explored demographic variables to investigating the role of interpersonal factors. Secondly, studies on shared/joint decision-making in other research areas and among more secondary types of groups indicate that collaboration in complex choice situations is vital for taking "good" decisions. Thus far, collaborative decision-making in primary groups, such as consumer couples is in its early stage of investigation.

Consequently, three research aims address the lack of current knowledge in the area of couples' decision-making. Study 1 aims to gain an understanding of how couples work in situations where a decision is made together and not being delegated to one of the partners. My goal

here is to identify which interpersonal factors within a couple guide decision-making in complex choice situations. Study 2 aims to empirically test the conceptual model developed in Study 1 on a wider population. To gain a better insight on how interpersonal factors shape decision-making in close relationships, I aim to test whether shared experiences, flexibility, engagement, role exchange, and partner's support, identified in Study 1, affect the perception of decision-making collaboration among partners. The results of the survey in Study 2 indicate that all factors, but one (role exchange), positively affect partner's perception of collaboration when making decisions. Study 2 also shows that during complex choice situations collaboration is a central driver of decision process satisfaction.

The goal of my third study is to investigate whether individuals, couples and random groups differ when making decisions, and to explore the performance of couples on the same task, but under time pressure. This study builds on the two former studies of my thesis. The results demonstrate that couples perform better than their partners do individually, however groups consisting of members who do not have this kind of close relationship do not show the same results in problem solving performance. Consequently, my findings suggest that couples as a decision-making unit benefit from their shared experiences, and therefore outperform both random groups and individuals when task specific knowledge is held constant.

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1 Introduction

This thesis focuses on decision-making in couples, with a special emphasis on interpersonal relationships and collaboration, and on how couples perform as a decision-making unit. How couples go about making decisions is interesting for many reasons, both from a practical and a theoretical view. For example, households and couples are among the largest marketing target groups for a great deal of products and services throughout the world. According to the 2019 NAR Home Buyer and Seller Generational Trends report, 63 percent of US homebuyers were married couples, and eight percent unmarried couples. A 2017 global segmentation report revealed that 66 percent of the 12,000 interviewed tourists from 10 European countries traveled with their partner (Strømseth & Steven, 2017). Couples and people travelling with their significant others is also one of the largest groups of so-called wellness or health tourists (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001). Moreover, the fact that consumption interests change with variations in a couples' life cycle stages further indicates that decisions couples take together are numerous (Shannon, Sthienrapapayut, Moschis, Teichert, & Balikcioglu, 2020). For example, while young married couples without children are likely to have consumption interests focused around products and services typical for relationships in their phase of establishment, couples in the stage of parenthood are the biggest consumers of real estate, medical services, bank loans, child education, recreation and entertainment, and of course food and clothing. In fact, working their way through the family life cycle, couples make an enormous amount of decisions together, and this makes them a consumption unit of significant interest for both marketers, policy makers and decision researchers.

However, traditional research on consumer decision-making has been based on two main assumptions. Firstly, most choices are made by individuals, and secondly, these decisions are the result of individual's

own preferences, beliefs, and attitudes (Simpson, Griskevicius, & Rothman, 2012). For several reasons, these assumptions may at least be superficial and at most misleading. From a psychological perspective, the decisions and choices we make in social encounters are influenced by at least six principles: reciprocity, commitment and consistency, social proof, authority, scarcity, and liking (Cialdini, 1993). In other words, they are influenced by the ones we interact with. Also, current consumer research is placing accent on decisions not being solely rational choices of counting and comparing gains and losses (Martinez-Selva, Sanchez-Navarro, Bechara, & Roman, 2006). For example, recent findings in the area of neuroscience demonstrate that decisions we take are often based on emotions rather than logic (Pfister, & Böhm, 2008), and that our emotions systematically influence how we perceive and evaluate things (Han, Duhachek, & Agrawal, 2014). To complicate matters further, decisions we make are oftentimes shaped by people we are in relationships with, for instance, partners, family members, and friends. Whether deciding where to travel, what to eat, or which leisure time activities to purchase, our significant others influence our decisions, behavior, and perceptions (Cavanaugh, 2016).

Even though researchers and marketers are aware that close relationships affect consumption, this area remains understudied within the field of consumer behavior (Cavanaugh, 2016). While mental processes related to decision-making on the individual level are more and more understood (Gold & Shadlen, 2007), existing research on processes and factors that influence decision-making in close relationships is in its early stage, and only touches the surface of the potential for understanding of the phenomenon (Queen, Berg, & Lowrance, 2015). Up to date research on couples' decision-making in several research areas (Hilton, Crawford, & Tarko, 2000; Moen, Huang, Plassmann, & Dentinger, 2006) suggests that both partners bring their individual resources in terms of interpersonal and cognitive abilities, emotional skills, and experience to the decision-making context (Queen et al., 2015). This implies, that

gaining a deeper insight on how couples make decisions together, which factors influence their decisions, and how they perform when making joint decisions, might help researchers to extend the knowledge of this area that is only partially understood. Covering such gaps in the consumer behavior literature may assist marketers and practitioners to develop more targeted strategies aimed at a significant part of their market. Thus, to gain a better understanding of decision-making in primary groups, the overall aim of this thesis is to 1) examine the role of interpersonal variables in decision-making processes in close relationships, and 2) scrutinize how couples perform when making decisions together. The background leading up to the three studies reported in this thesis is presented in the next paragraph.

Background

2 Background

2.1 Brief review on decision-making theory

Extensive research efforts have been devoted to understanding and assisting people who make decisions. Theoretically, research on decision-making has focused on four major units, as presented in Figure 1 below. Traditional decision research has invested most of its energy in only one part of decision-making, specifically when the *individual* decision maker chooses from a known and fixed set of alternatives, weighs the probable consequences of choosing each, and makes a choice (Orasanu & Connolly, 1993; Smith, Pitts, Litvin, Agrawal, 2017).

Accordingly, rational decision theory has influenced a substantial amount of research on individual decision-making. It typically makes the central prediction that choices should maximize the subjective expected utility based on multiplying the subjective probability and the value of choice outcomes (Koechlin, 2020).

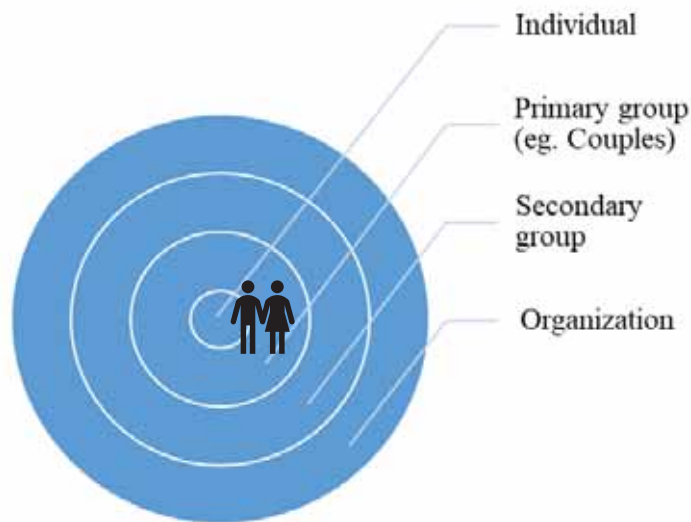


Figure 1 General model of decision-making units

Models of rational decision-making have covered different areas of research, from individual consumer decisions to family and government decision-making (Zey, 1992).

On the other end of the spectrum we find the broader *organizational* level, where structures, group cohesion, goal orientation and conflicts, power distribution and decision categories are typical issues that have seen the limelight (Harrison, 1999). To name one typical example of an explicit theory, the garbage can theory describes decision-making under chaotic circumstances, characterized by problematic preferences, unclear technology, and uncertain participations, where problems, participants, and solutions all have a life of their own (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972; Lomi & Harrison, 2012).

On the level of *secondary groups*, a more traditional approach to understand decision-making is the social communication approach (Baron, Kerr, & Miller, 1992). This approach assumes that the best way to analyze how a group reaches its decision is to analyze the communication and discussions that are needed among members to formulate decisions and choices. In its turn, a functional theory of group decision-making implies a conceptual analysis of processes that groups generally follow when making a decision, with a focus on each step (Orlitzky & Hirokawa, 2001).

However, *primary groups with couples* as the focus, have its own “structure”. They are characterized by more close relationships, with more direct and consistent interaction among partners. These groups have strong interpersonal relationships, which should be analyzed if we want to understand them (Harrison, 1999). For instance, Kirchler, Rodler, Holzl, and Meier (2001) have emphasized the private atmosphere between intimate couples and the importance of decision outcomes. Moreover, the fact that the members of the couple may not be easily replaced by new members is the main factor that affects decision-making in couples and therefore makes it different from decision-making

in less intimate (secondary) groups. Another characteristic that distinguishes couples from secondary groups is that they make decisions in a rather inconsistent way, with the discussions of the main issues having a quite unstructured character (Kirchler et al., 2001).

Obviously, the real-world decision-making processes which take place in couples, have several features that may not be explicitly considered by the above presented descriptions of individual or (larger) group decision-making. Consider the following situations:

Scenario 1(a): Maria and Tom are a young couple from UK who are currently planning their vacations. Maria likes relaxed holidays and really wants to spend several weeks of their vacation on Bora Bora Island. Tom would rather go for active holidays, as he has always been an adventure seeker. The budget and time available for vacations make it impossible for them to have more than one vacation during the upcoming year. After considering Maria's preference, Tom overrides his own preference and decides to spend his vacations with Maria.

1 (b) When on Bora Bora, Tom and Maria are offered a surprise tour around the island by their travel agency. They may choose to go by yacht or by helicopter. Tom wants to go by yacht, while Maria often gets seasick, and prefers the helicopter view. Despite of this, Maria decides to go on the yacht with Tom.

Scenario 2: Tom and Maria are aboard a yacht in the Pacific Ocean. A sudden fire on board has damaged the boat and most of the equipment. The boat is now sinking slowly. They do not know where they are because the navigation equipment is damaged, and both they and the crew have been quite busy getting the fire under control. They were also able to send emergency signals before the radio equipment was destroyed, but they do not know if the signals were picked up by anyone. They have a rubber boat with oars large enough to carry both them and the crew as well as the equipment they choose. In his pockets, Tom has a pack of cigarettes and some matches. To increase their chances of survival, Tom

and Maria can pick fifteen items that are still intact and undamaged after the fire and bring them on the rubber boat. With the yacht slowly sinking under their feet, Tom and Mari must make their priorities and choose the items they think will be most helpful.

While these scenarios are imaginary, they are on a more abstract level examples of real-life choice situations couples may typically encounter. When I speak of decision-making in this thesis, it is situations like these I refer to. The choice situations which I investigate in this thesis, are complex, the stakes are oftentimes high, and the consequences of making the wrong choice are likely to be significant (Orasanu & Connolly, 1993). Furthermore, ill- structured problems, uncertain environment dynamics, competing goals, time pressure, multiple players, action/feedback loops, and group goals and norms represent the main challenges of real-life decision-making (Orasanu & Connolly, 1993). Emphasizing the complexity of decisions made in couples, most of these challenges are depicted in scenarios 1 and 2. For example, Tom and Maria knew nothing about the problem they faced on board the burning yacht, and their decisions are guided by the developing situation. Decisions they are about to make are based on incomplete information in a rapidly changing environment under significant time pressure. Decisions from scenario 1 (a and b) may be more characterized by ill-defined or competing values and goals. While both Maria and Tom want to go on vacation together, their preferences for travel were different. Also, Maria would wish to join Tom on board the yacht, but the fear of getting seasick made her hesitant to do so. Finally, both scenarios are characterized by the importance of their outcomes to Tom and Maria.

2.2 Consumption decisions in families and couples

Purchase related decision-making in close relationships received its attention in the consumer research literature around 1970s, when Davis (1976) first investigated household decisions made by couples. Since then, many variables have been studied in the contexts of family and

couple consumption decision-making, and most of these are related to the general model of family decision-making introduced by Buss and Schaninger (1983). This model consists of antecedent conditions such as demographic characteristics of respondents and allocation of tasks by the spouses, individual attitudes expressed by means of gender role norms and life style values, situational factors such as number of alternatives and decision risk, and process factors which affect process outcome related to decision behavior and marital satisfaction (Assar & Bobinski, 1991). The role of children and adolescent-parent interaction in family decision-making (Palan & Wilkes, 1997) and family life cycle stages of couples have also been investigated in this regard (Shannon et al., 2020).

It must be emphasized that one of the most studied variables in the context of purchase decision-making in couples is power/marital roles (Webster & Reiss, 2001; Rojas-de Gracia & Alarcón-Urbistondo, 2016). The earliest studies on couple decision-making identified eight choice areas and a decision-maker in each case (Blood & Wolfe, 1960). Later research moved the focus to the power relations within households, investigating by whom, how and why a decision was made (Mottiar & Quinn, 2004). The studies focusing on power processes and outcomes have been guided by one of four antecedents: sex-role orientation, least-interested partner hypothesis, involvement, and resource theory (Webster & Reiss, 2001). The resource theory originally introduced by Blood & Wolfe (1960) has been used as the base for the major part of studies on decision-making in couples, as it postulates that the most powerful spouse takes the most decisions in the family.

For a number of reasons, the resource theory might not be sufficient to explain decision-making in couples today. Theories of “power” and “roles” were developed in the context of traditional couples, which may not, for instance, apply to cohabiting couples these days (Webster & Reiss, 2001). Social and demographic changes in the Western world over the last decades have made both partners more equal in intra-relationship decision-making. As women’s participation in the work force has

increased, and the number of dual-earner couples is substantially outnumbering single-earner couples, the theory of joint decision-making becomes much more relevant than it was a few decades ago (Hammer, Allen, & Grigsby, 1997). Moving from “who decides?” into a direction of “how do couples decide?” is therefore timely. For instance, Webster and Reiss (2001) suggested that decision-making measured by power influence (who decides) is not sufficient to capture the entire process, and some researchers have emphasized the importance of relationship factors in couple decision-making.

An example here would be the study of Decrop and Snelders (2005) who distinguish between four major types of contextual influence in vacation decision-making processes. They pinpoint that decisions are influenced by environmental (e.g. culture, social network), personal (e.g. age, family situation, personality), interpersonal (e.g. distribution of roles, group cohesion, level of communication), and situational factors (e.g. side projects, availability, emotions and moods), and that environmental factors are structural elements that encompass all other factors.

Decrop & Snelders (2005) argue that these contextual influences differ across individuals and primary and secondary groups, and that couples are least dependent on context, because interpersonal constraints are limited between two people, while in families interpersonal and personal factors as well as situational contextual factors relating to more people come into play. They also pinpoint that groups of friends are most dependent on context, because contextual influences can vary significantly across group members. It seems that the complexity of factors which influence decision-making processes in couples and secondary groups is well recognized by scientific community. However, it is also likely that the existing theory on decision-making cannot grasp all the complexity of choice processes modern couples go through.

This is not meant to question the importance of “classic” theory on decision-making, but rather to meet the changes that have happened in

our society. In order to gain a broader understanding of complex decisions made in couples, we would benefit from the entire approach to the investigation being revised. Firstly, variables related to interpersonal ties investigated in previous research have shown to be beneficial to group performance (Jehn & Shah, 1997). Thus, it is necessary to move from studying already well-explored variables in relation to a huge variety of products and services in purchase decisions, to investigating the role of interpersonal factors. The fact that relationships between couples are made up of a complex set of conversations, interactions, exchanges, and negotiations needs to be paid more attention to (Gelles, 1995). For instance, Kozak (2010) has pinpointed the importance of studying emotional ties or the level of relationships satisfaction, also known as dyadic adjustment (Hunsley, Best, Lefebvre, & Vito, 2001), as a variable that may influence decision-making processes. At the same time, interpersonal factors such as group cohesion, communication, and congruence may affect how couples make decisions (Zvonkovic, Greaves, Schmiede, & Hall, 1996).

Secondly, when making complex decisions modern couples work together, implying that the nature of decision-making has an egalitarian character. This means that a couple as a unit of analysis would give us entirely new insights compared to research based mainly on individual members who give self-reports of their perceived influence on decisions (Smith et al., 2017). Finally, existing research is overrepresented by choice processes of university students working on relatively simple tasks. Accepting the fact that reasoning made under simple tasks may not be applicable to complex decision-making situations is equally important (Orasanu & Connolly, 1993). To summarize, I also agree with Orasanu & Connolly (1993) who suggest that a broader range of research methods may be needed to capture phenomenon at different levels of complexity.

2.3 Objectives and structure of the thesis

The overarching objective of this thesis is to contribute to the existing knowledge on couples' decision-making in relation to complex choice situations. Three research aims address the lack of current knowledge in the area of couples' decision-making and highlight the contribution of this thesis.

First, concentrating on couples as a unit of analysis, my research seeks to gain an understanding of how couples work together in situations where a decision is made together, and not being “delegated” to one of the partners. Here, I intended to move away from the concepts of “power” and “marital roles” which have been the focus of scientific research for several decades (Rojas-de Gracia & Alarcón-Urbistondo, 2016). This is mainly because the theories of “power” and “roles” were developed in the context of traditional couples, which may not, for instance, apply to cohabiting couples these days (Webster & Reiss, 2001). Taking into consideration such social changes, my goal here is to investigate concepts that, at present, have received little attention in relation to complex decisions made in couples.

In general, research in the area of collaboration and shared decision-making has identified several context specific factors that may affect collaboration in secondary groups, but these factors may be context specific (Politi & Street, 2011; Kapucu & Garayev, 2011).

The circumstance that existing research on collaborative decision-making in couples is in its infancy and only touches the surface of the potential for our understanding of the phenomenon (Queen et al., 2015), I aimed to identify which interpersonal factors within a couple guide decision-making in complex choice situations.

The second major aim of my project was motivated by findings from its first part. The model presented in Study 1 has incorporated concepts that, thus far, have received little to no attention in research on how couples

make decisions together. However, the theoretical model I have suggested was based on inductive reasoning. Thus, my aim here was to empirically test the conceptual model on a wider population of individuals in close relationships to gain a better insight on how interpersonal factors discovered in Study 1 shape decision-making in primary groups. In particular, I aimed to test whether such factors as shared experiences, flexibility, engagement, role exchange, and partner's support affect the perception of decision-making collaboration among partners.

Furthermore, research on choices within secondary groups has shown that group decision-making can be compromised by a number of factors, including limited group communications caused by members who lack communication skills or are shy (Chen, Lawson, Gordon, & McIntosh, 1996), or by limited time working together (Watson, Michaelson, & Sharp, 1991). Conversely, decision performance may be improved by increased duration and involvement of members in a decision-making group (Chen et al., 1996). If parallels between secondary groups and couples may be drawn, similar factors would be crucial for the quality of decision-making in couples as well. Thus, my third aim was to investigate whether groups with a longer history (couples) perform better when making decisions, compared to each of the partners individually, and compared to groups without this history. I aimed to explore whether performance on ill-structured tasks depends on the characteristics of the decision-making unit.

The succeeding parts of this thesis are structured as follows. Chapter 3 describes design and methodology. There I discuss the design choices, samples and data collection processes, and measurements I used in this research project. In chapter 4, I present the main results and briefly discuss key findings. Next, chapter 5 presents the main conclusion remarks, followed by chapter 6, where I discuss several limitations of my studies and theoretical/practical implications of the findings. Finally, the three papers which constitute the main part of this thesis are included.

Background

3 Design and methodology

To reach the aims of my research project, I employed a sequential exploratory design for the first two studies, as this design is well suited for areas in which little prior knowledge exists. It is also used when quantitative methods are secondary to qualitative methods (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Giddings & Grant, 2006). Accordingly, in my project, I used qualitative data to develop a theoretical model that encompasses interpersonal characteristics and how these are related to decision-making in couples.

Sequential exploratory design is not used in this research project to reflect the use of qualitative and quantitative methods within one study, but rather means that the data I collected and analyzed in the first phase of my research (qualitative data) was used to inform the next phases (quantitative data) of my research (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). In the subsequent paragraphs I would like to shortly discuss and account for the methodologies I had chosen for each paper to investigate decision-making in couples.

3.1 *Grounded theory and in-depth interviews*

Several reasons determined the choice of qualitative method in Study 1. First, the choice of a qualitative approach was influenced by the nature of the research questions. The aim of Study 1 was to understand which interpersonal factors within a couple influence decisions they make together.

Inspired by critical realism paradigm, I suggest that while reality cannot be known for sure, it may be described with truer or less true accounts (Oliver, 2012). Although my assessments of decision-making in couples may never fully reflect decision-making in these couples, or capture all the nuances of the factors that influence the way couples make decisions,

the search for the accounts that come closest to explaining what is real guided the choice of the qualitative design for this study.

Qualitative approaches enable an in depth understanding that would have been difficult to achieve with more quantitative measures (Straus & Corbin, 1990), and are applicable when examining interpersonal relationships or complex social interactions (Bryman, 1984). Based on such reasoning, I started the investigation of how couples make complex decisions together with the qualitative study, applying Grounded Theory Approach. In its turn, the main purpose of using the grounded theory approach is to develop theory (Khan, 2014).

Interestingly, some results of Study 1 are consistent with previous research in the area of decision-making, in particular in relation to decision reaching strategies. Consequently, the reader may wonder why the research problem could not be tackled by using quantitative approach? I further argue that the Grounded Theory approach chosen is justified by the fact that we do not have considerable prior knowledge on how decision-making in couples is driven by interpersonal factors. As I describe in Study 1, I have identified differences in the strategies couples use, when compared to, for example, Bronner and the Hoog's (2008) study. Such discovery from my side would not be possible without a deeper discussion with interview participants.

Unlike quantitative research, studies based on Grounded Theory do not have any certain measurements. It is the researcher's own interpretation and insight into what the data is reflecting that is important (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). To collect the data, in-depth interviews with Norwegian couples were conducted. According to Boyce and Neale (2006) in-depth interviews are useful when one wants to explore new issues or wants more detailed information on person's behavior and thoughts. While conducting in-depth interviews my initial research question was broad and open to allow for more response possibilities from the couples I interviewed, followed by more narrowed questions.

Couples in my study were interviewed together. However, to make the choice of the unit of analysis for Paper 1 was not an easy task. This is mainly because both interviewing couples together and individually would have its pros and cons. My choice was justified by the purpose of the study, which was to build a theoretical model that can explain some of the mechanisms of decision-making in couples. I believe that interviewing them together gives us more information on the process than interviewing them individually. When being interviewed individually, I believe that respondents would be more prone to social desirability bias, and answer what they think is “correct” or what puts them in a good light. By having the partner present, I argue that respondents are less inclined to falsehood, but I also see that they might under communicate extremes. In conclusion, I believe that the choice of interviewing them together was most beneficial.

Validity

In Study 1, which is qualitative, a large amount of coding was necessary to infer from the utterances in the interviews the abstract concepts I have presented in Table 1. Here, inter-coder reliability was crucial in the evaluation of validity of the results. In order to address this issue two researchers were present during the interviews. Further, the data was coded by both researchers independently, following methodological instructions for Grounded Theory (Straus & Corbin, 1990). All emerging concepts have been discussed and supported by “similar” statements from new interviews, ensuring consistency of our study. Such an approach helped us to increase the trustworthiness of the qualitative Study 1.

Also, the generalizability of a qualitative Paper 1 was not meant to be based on explicit sampling from a certain population to which the results could be extended, but on development of theory that could be extended to other cases as well.

3.2 *Survey and regression analysis*

Study 2 of the thesis builds on the model proposed in Study 1 and adds to the understanding of which factors influence decision-making in couples. The choice of the quantitative approach (survey method) at this stage was motivated by an intention to empirically test the model and hypothesis outlined in Study 1, and to generalize my findings to a larger population (Savage & Burrows, 2007).

Although the survey method in marketing research has been criticized as a somewhat poor instrument due to the advantages of routine transactional data over survey data (Savage & Burrows, 2007), I believe that the choice of using this approach is well justified. This is mainly due to the limits of transactional data in relation to the nature of the variables I intended to measure (e.g. flexibility, engagement, partner support) and due to the sample requirements, I set (people in close relationships).

To measure my dependent and independent variables, I developed and adopted scales from other areas of social science. Due to the similarity of the constructs developed in Study 1 and already existing constructs in the area of collaboration and group decision-making, some scales were adapted, while other were developed specifically for Study 2. The process of scale development took few stages (Carpenter, 2018). The scales were developed following the literature review in the area and conceptual definitions I proposed. I developed/adapted conceptual definitions, providing clarity to the ambiguous concepts. I then adopted the measurements of shared experiences, behavioral flexibility, engagement, and partner's support from well-established scales and modified them to fit the research at hand. The items for role exchange and collaboration scales were self-developed, based on their conceptual definitions. In Study 2, I measured all variables with multi-item scales, designed as five-point Likert type statements, ranging from totally agree (5) to totally disagree (1). This process, including the full list of items, is more thoroughly described in my second study.

To investigate the relationships between the dependent and independent variables, I have chosen to use Multivariate Regression Analysis. While Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) could be used to analyze the relationships between the variables in Study 2, there are two main reasons for not using SEM in this study. The first is that SEM would require a larger sample size than I could have, considering somewhat sensitive area of my questionnaire, time, and resources limitations. The second is that using SEM with such a small sample size requires quite extensive knowledge on the intricacies of how fit measures are affected by small sample sizes. Consequently, I found it methodologically safer to employ standard multiple regression analysis.

Validity

Also in quantitative research the importance of validity has long been recognized (Campbell, 1957) and up to 50 different threats to external and internal validity that may occur at the different stages of the research process have been identified (Onwuegbuzie, 2003). The issues of measurement validity were central for Study 2, as measures developed were based on the concepts from Study 1. “Valid measurement is achieved when scores meaningfully capture the ideas contained in the corresponding concept (Adcock & Collier, 2001, p. 530), turning face validity into one of the main issues in survey development. To address this issue, all scales were subject to a face validity check and a pre-test.

Before starting the data collection, I have conducted pretest to receive feedback useful for the survey and the items. As a part of a pretest, short conversations with the pretest participants helped me to refine the questions by identifying confusing, leading or ambiguous items. This was done with the purpose to reduce measurement error and increase question accuracy (Carpenter, 2018). Following the pretest, instructions, statements and the questions have been edited based on the feedback from our respondents and on expert feedback.

Finally, a pilot test was conducted on a smaller sample of 25 individuals, who fulfilled the requirements mandatory for the target respondents. Quantitative data analysis (EFA) was done with the purpose to identify how data fall around each factor and identify skipped questions. More detailed development of all the scales is presented in Study 2.

3.3 Experiment

Accordingly, the choice of the quantitative approach (experimental method) in Study 3 was influenced by the nature of my research questions. I aimed to test several hypotheses, and to discover whether the characteristics of the decision-making unit (individuals/couple/random groups of two) influence the quality of decisions made on ill-structured problems. Additionally, I wanted to investigate whether time-pressure and task preparation affect the decision quality of individuals and couples.

While some researchers maintain that the best way to understand complex phenomena is by breaking it down into smaller components in order to get an understanding of how those function, I tend to support Orasanu & Connolly (1993), who claim that complex world is not solely aggregation of the simple. Accordingly, certain task solution processes may only be activated in complex settings. Naturally, conducting my experiment outside the “laboratory” would be rather challenging. I therefore believe, that the way my experiment was designed and conducted was the closest possible approximation to a realistic decision-making situation in couples and groups.

To provide a measure of decision quality, I employed the Lost at Sea survival task, which yields a solution that can be calculated quantitatively (Callaway, Marriott, & Esser, 1985; Nemiroff & Pasmore, 2001). The problem requires groups to rank the order of fifteen items available to them, which they can take with them in a rubber life raft that they occupy as a result of abandoning their larger vessel. “The quality of

the decision is indexed by the discrepancy score of the rankings by survival experts and subjects such that the lower the score the better the quality of the decision on a scale of zero (excellent, no discrepancy) to 112 (poor, total discrepancy)” (Chen et al., 1996). The purpose of this study was to check how couples perform on ill-structured problem tasks, compared to individuals and random groups, and an exercise that enables an evaluation of decision outcome was needed. “The lost at sea” problem is one such task and was therefore chosen.

Validity

Finally, several threats to internal validity of my third study must be discussed. Firstly, the issue of diffusion of treatment or contamination (Neuman, 2013). This concerns any event that could affect the performance of our experiment participants. In our case, the responses of the new group of couples could have been influenced if they got/were told the “correct” answers to the problem-solving task. To avoid this, no couples were given the list of “correct” responses before all the scheduled groups had participated in Study 3. Next, validity issue related to “selection” must be discussed. It may be that only more happy and adjusted couples agreed to participate in this study. However, this may be just a speculation, but is nevertheless worth mentioning in retrospect.

Consequently, external validity is always an issue in experimental research (Bracht & Glass, 1968). Can the findings of this study be applied to the same real-world decision-making situation? Will Tom and Maria still collaborate better together than they would as individuals? Will Maria get seasick and leave the decision to her “adventure used” partner Tom? Will other factors, like fear and stress, for example, influence the decision-making of Tom and Maria? I believe so. I definitely support the idea that “moving the case from the world to the mind “cleans it up” in certain ways and allows it to be isolated from the network of events in which it takes part” (Gendler, 2014, p. 16). And of course, thinking about a situation is not the same as confronting a

situation (Gendler, 2014). However, the “real” couples who participated in this study were faced with the “real” decision-making situation, as opposed to oftentimes-used imaginary scenarios of making decisions (Gendler, 2004). This significantly increases external validity of this study. In the light of that, I assume that the findings of this research may apply to similar decision-making situations couples make in everyday life, where the influence of multiple other factors would be limited.

3.4 Data collection and sample

Data collection was one of the most engaging, although challenging and time-consuming parts of this project. As this thesis incorporates three different designs (Study 1-explorative, Study 2-descriptive, and Study 3-experimental), sample participants and the data collection needed to be carefully planned, considering the objectives and specifics of each separate study. My overall thesis sample involved couples (Study 1 and Study 3), individuals in close relationships (Study 2), and additionally random groups of two individuals (Study 3).

For this thesis I have used nonprobability sampling techniques: purposive (Study 1) and convenience samplings (Study 2 and Study 3). The choice of my nonrandom sampling technique was primarily motivated both by my research objectives and by certain practical issues related to the project (time frame and resources availability). Whereas in Study 1 I aimed to achieve the depth of understanding of the phenomenon at hand, in Study 2 and Study 3 my goals were to gain the breadth of understanding of the research questions. Consequently, I did not aim to generalize from the sample to the entire population.

To fit my research aims, purposive sampling puts main emphasis on saturation (understanding of the phenomenon by collecting units until the amount of new information ends), while convenience sampling is used to reach certain level of generalizability. Furthermore, convenience sampling is used when members of the population meet certain project

criteria such as easy accessibility, willingness to participate in the study, and geographic proximity, while purposive sampling gives us possibility to reach well-informed and knowledgeable participants (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

Couples I chose to recruit for Study 1 and 3 had to fulfill certain inclusion criteria, such as being in close relationship for a minimum of one year and having experience with making complex decisions together. Another major challenge was related to the specifics of the research design (Study 1 and Study 3), requiring both partners being present during the data collection (interviews and experiments). This issue was solved by giving research participants the possibility to choose from a list of possible interview/experiment dates and times.

To recruit research participants, different organizations were approached, where members do pro bono work to raise funds for the organization (football teams, sport clubs, music bands, etc.). Based on the sampling criteria, our contact person in the organizations invited all respondents from the parents of the children in the club/adult members and their partners to participate in the project. The ones willing to participate in this project put themselves on the list from which we “randomly” choose whom to include. The incentive to participate in the data collection was that the University would pay the organization of which the research participants were members. In total, the samples included 9 couples (Study 1), 112 individuals in close relationships (Study 2), 74 couples and 16 random groups of two (Study 3). Study participants originated from different geographic areas of a larger region in Norway and varied with regard to their background, age, job, income level, and relationship lengths. As for gender, most couples consisted of fifty per cent males/females, with a few exceptions in Study 3.

As sampling in qualitative and quantitative studies has different purposes and may proceed differently (Neuman, 2013), more detailed sample

descriptions and the data collection procedures may be found in each of the three papers at the end of this thesis.

Finally, due to the origin of our sampling couples (limited geographic area), the results of this research may have certain cultural limitations. It is also possible that the three studies have methodological limitations in relation to sampling bias towards more happy couples, meaning that less adjusted couples refrained from participation in this research.

4 Results and contributions

The overall objective of this thesis was to contribute to the existing knowledge on couples' decision-making in relation to complex choice situations. Three studies were conducted to address my research goals.

4.1 *Exploring interpersonal constructs (and relationships) in complex vacation-related decisions among couples*

The aim of Study 1, with the title “Working it out together: a suggested model for vacation-related decision-making in couples”, was to identify key interpersonal factors of couples' decision-making, presented in Table 1, and to incorporate these into a conceptual model of decision-making in couples (Figure 1).

Table 1 Categories, subcategories, and dimensions of couple's DM in tourism

Category	Subcategory	Dimensions	Explanation
Decision Reaching Strategies	Democratic	Negotiation	A dialog between two people to reach a decision from which both parties would benefit.
		Compromise	Finding a solution that fits both parties.
		Partner's Approval	Partner's acceptance of an act or a decision.
	Monocratic	Concession	A voluntary act or an agreement to something that goes against someone's will.
		Persuasion	An act of convincing a partner to take a decision he/she is not motivated to take.
		Decision avoidance/postponement	Repeated periodic discussions of an issue,

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			which do not result in a decision.
Relationship attributes	Given attributes	Togetheress	Warm atmosphere, emotional understanding, closeness, friendship.
		Equality	Both partners having equal right to influence a decision outcome.
		Commonalities	Similar interest, values, matching personality types.
	Acquired attributes	Trust	Positive withdrawal from a decision or when being able to predict partner's decision.
		Shared experiences	Joint activities, which have resulted in certain knowledge that is applied in future decisions.
		Relation maturity (history)	Using time spent together while taking decisions.
Interpersonal communication	Casual	Conversations	Expressing openly one's needs, preferences, exchanging ideas.
		Talks	Similar to conversations but have more shallow nature.
	Goal directed	Discussions	Conversations, which are prearranged and longer in duration, with the purpose to reach an agreement.
Process involvement	Individual (low involvement)	Initiative taking	Coming up with an idea or a solution, bringing up a question to decide on.
		Role taking	Taking an active/independent part in decision-making.
	Reciprocal (high involvement)	Meeting needs	Considering partner's preferences, taste and mental/physical state when making decisions.
		Partners support	Give necessary assistance in terms of time, emotions.
		Engagement	Having an "honest" interest in decision related issue problem.
		Role exchange	Sharing different tasks during decision making interchangeably.

As the reader may see from the table, the coding process led to identification of four categories of factors, which were found to influence vacation related decisions in couples. In particular, the results of my study demonstrate that to reach a decision couples use a number of decision reaching strategies, the choice of which may depend on relationship attributes of the couple, their way of communication, and by their involvement into a decision-making process. I also suggest that the choice of decision reaching strategies may influence decision process satisfaction (Figure 1).

It should be mentioned that the results of my first study are in line with more general decision-making literature. For example, such constructs as engagement and role exchange have long been recognized as important drivers of decision-making processes, both in primary and in secondary groups. Table 2 presents references to the same/parallel constructs from decision-making literature, as developed in Study 1. The reader may see that some of the constructs are rooted in well-established consumer and marketing research, whereas other constructs may originate from such areas as medical shared decision-making, collaboration, and organizational decision-making. This demonstrates that vacation related decisions in couples incorporate the complexity similar to the decisions made in above mentioned contexts. This also means that the constructs which I have identified in relation to decision-making in couples may be important in other, understudied decision-making areas.

The findings of Study 1 are also in line with the theory presented in the background of my thesis. For example, the construct of marital roles was still found to be an important construct in Scandinavian context these days. However, compared to several decades ago, it has a somewhat different shape. Traditional gender roles seem to be replaced by the concept of role exchange, meaning that both partners participate in decision-making, based on their decision related skills and knowledge, rather than on traditional gender roles (Webster & Reiss, 2001).

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Table 2 Developed versus parallel constructs in (consumer) DM theory

<i>Developed constructs</i>	<i>Parallel constructs in (consumer) decision-making literature</i>
Trust	Kim, D. J., Ferrin, D. L., & Rao, H. R. (2008). A trust-based consumer decision-making model in electronic commerce: The role of trust, perceived risk, and their antecedents. <i>Decision Support Systems</i> , 44(2), 544-564.
Engagement	Hollebeek, L. (2011). Exploring consumer brand engagement: definition and themes. <i>Journal of Strategic Marketing</i> , 19(7), 555-573 Ladin, K., Lin, N., Hahn, E., Zhang, G., Koch-Weser, S., & Weiner, D. E. (2017). Engagement in decision-making and patient satisfaction: a qualitative study of older patients' perceptions of dialysis initiation and modality decisions. <i>Nephrology Dialysis Transplantation</i> , 32(8), 1394-1401. Xiao, L., Bechara, A., Palmer, P. H., Trinidad, D. R., Wei, Y., Jia, Y., & Johnson, C. A. (2011). Parent-child engagement in decision-making and the development of adolescent affective decision capacity and binge-drinking. <i>Personality and Individual Differences</i> , 51(3), 285-292.
Equality /Togetherness	Acharya, D. R., Bell, J. S., Simkhada, P., Van Teijlingen, E. R., & Regmi, P. R. (2010). Women's autonomy in household decision-making: a demographic study in Nepal. <i>Reproductive Health</i> , 7(15). Kumwenda, M., Munthali, A., Phiri, M., Mwale, D., Gutteberg, T., MacPherson, E., Theobald, S., Corbett, L., & Desmond, N. (2014). Factors shaping initial decision-making to self-test amongst cohabiting couples in urban Blantyre, Malawi. <i>AIDS and Behavior</i> , 18(4), 396-404.
Commonalities	Hartas, D. (2004). Teacher and speech-language therapist collaboration: being equal and achieving a common goal? <i>Child Language Teaching and Therapy</i> , 20(1), 33-54.
Interpersonal communication	Beaulieu, M. D., Haggerty, J. L., Beaulieu, C., Bouharaoui, F., Lévesque, J. F., Pineault, R., Burge, F., & Santor, D. A. (2011). Interpersonal communication from the patient perspective: comparison of primary healthcare evaluation instruments. <i>Healthcare Policy</i> , 7, 108-123.

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Role taking/Role exchange	<p>Davis, H. L. (1970). Dimensions of marital roles in consumer decision making. <i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>, 7(2), 168-177.</p> <p>Davis, H. L., & Rigaux, B. P. (1974). Perception of marital roles in decision processes. <i>Journal of Consumer Research</i>, 1(1), 51-62.</p> <p>Ford, J. B., LaTour, M. S., & Henthorne, T. L. (1995). Perception of marital roles in purchase decision processes: a cross-cultural study. <i>Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science</i>, 23(2), 120-131.</p>
Initiativ taking	<p>Kushida, S., Hiramoto, T., & Yamakawa, Y. (2016). Patients' practices for taking the initiative in decision-making in outpatient psychiatric consultations. <i>Communication and Medicine</i>, 13(2), 169-184.</p>
Flexibility	<p>Wright, P. D., & Brethauer, K. M. (2010). Strategies for addressing the nursing shortage: Coordinated decision making and workforce flexibility. <i>Decision Sciences</i>, 41(2), 373-401.</p>
Shared experiences	<p>Mayhorn, C. B., & McLaughlin, A. C. (2014). Warning the world of extreme events: A global perspective on risk communication for natural and technological disaster. <i>Safety Science</i>, 61, 43-50.</p>

Besides, the results of my study demonstrate that when making vacation related decisions most of the couples use democratic strategies, while some apply a combination of democratic and monocratic decision reaching strategies. While most of the couples who participated in my study could be described as rather democratic, the presence of some monocratic strategies was observed as well.

One example of a monocratic strategy couples use is persuasion, described as an act of convincing a partner to take a decision he or she is not motivated to take. The same construct was identified by Palan and

Wilkes (1997), in their study of adolescent-parent interaction in family decision-making. Another example of a monocratic strategy would be concession, also known as an influencer of post decision satisfaction in primary and secondary groups (Aribarg, Arora, & Bodur, 2002).

Furthermore, I have not managed to identify previous studies exploring the interpersonal factors, I have classified as “relationship attributes” and “process involvement”. While such factors have been somewhat explored in organizational and medical decision-making contexts, their role in the area of complex decisions in couples is still unclear.

Even if it may seem that many of the factors identified in this study are well-established concepts from the area of decision-making in primary and secondary groups, one could not take for granted that these same factors would be found to be important in relation to consumer decisions made in Norwegian couples. With this study we may support this theory.

The conceptual model in Study 1 is built by applying a paradigm involving context, antecedent conditions, and interactional strategies, following Strauss and Corbin (1990). The model presents only the discovered categories and subcategories, and for more detailed explanations and dimensions of each subcategory the reader may refer to the Table 1. The model gives the reader an illustration of mechanisms within decision-making in close relationship, but without regard to the various steps of a traditional decision-making process. To summarize, the conceptual model of couple decision-making did not aim to describe a decision-making process but was intended to present the propositions in a more structured way. The model solely incorporates the interpersonal factors, which are suggested to influence decision-making strategies without regard to the various phases of a traditional decision-making process.

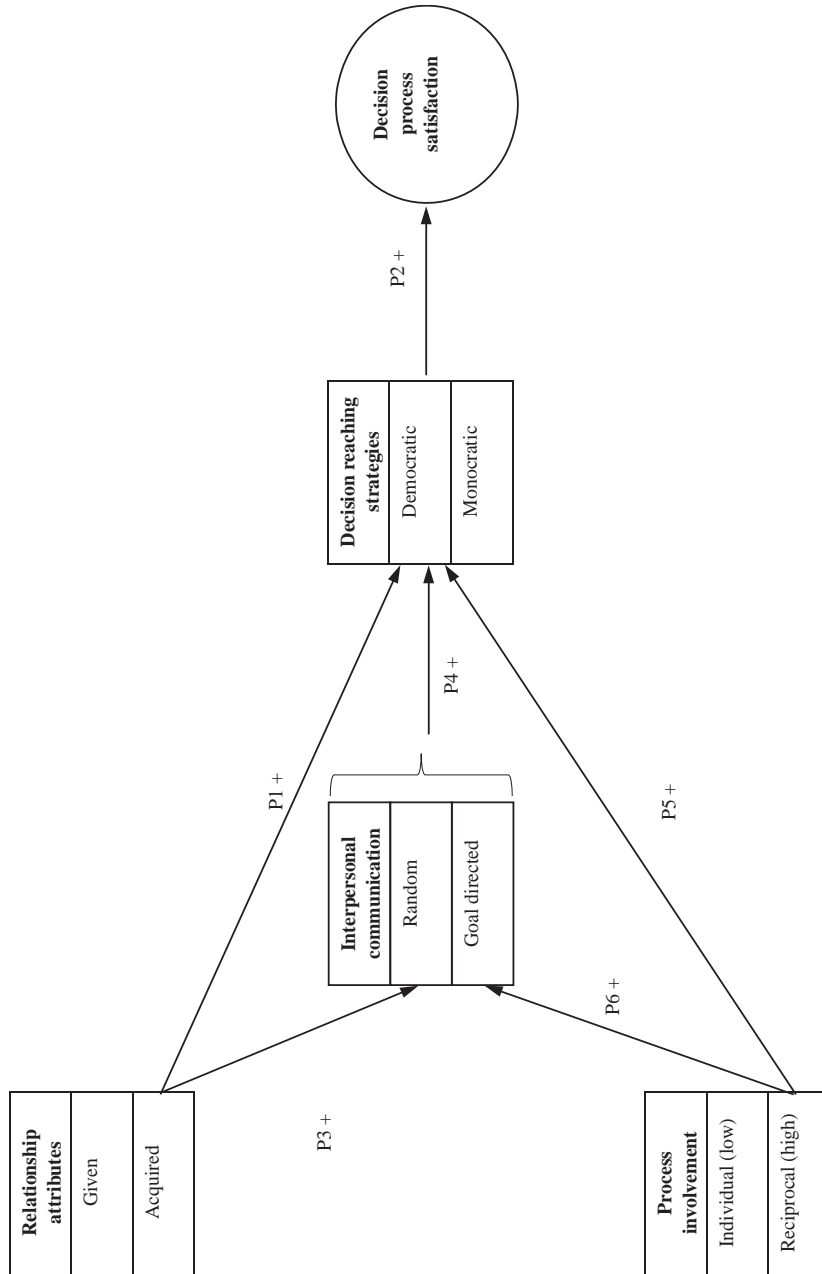


Figure 2 Suggested conceptual model of couple DM

In Study 1, I suggested that relationship attributes and process involvement in relation to the decision strategies couples use (Figure 1) produce new insights into the theory of decision-making in couples. Finally, the results indicated that it is important for couples to make “good” decisions, turning satisfaction with the decision process into a central outcome variable.

4.2 Exploring collaborative decision-making among couples in close relationships

To get further empirical support of my findings from Study 1, five variables from the categories of relationship attributes and process involvement (see Table 1) were selected to be tested on a wider population of Norwegian individuals in close relationships.

The factors tested in Study 2 were selected from the model developed in Study 1 and based on the existing theory in the area of collaborative and shared decision-making, however in relation to more secondary type of groups. This means that to detect factors similar to those discovered in Study 1, I made a review of the literature on collaborative/shared decision-making in various areas (e.g. Politi & Street, 2011; Hara, Solomon, Kim, & Sonnenwald, 2003). Informed by Table 2, my line of thinking was based on the idea that there might be certain similarities in collaboration among individuals in primary and more secondary types of groups. The constructs, parallel to those I selected for this study, are well established in the above-mentioned areas of collaboration and shared decision-making. For instance, Hara et al. (2003) compares collaboration to a marriage, as they identify the factors related to mutual efforts of the group to make things work, as very important for a successful collaboration. Among all, such variables as flexibility, equal use of power, history of collaboration, commitment, mutual agreement on a choice, and shared responsibility for success informed my choice of factors for Study 2 (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; Politi & Street, 2011). Drawing a parallel to my study, such variables as

shared experiences, flexibility, engagement, role exchange, and partner support are selected for the conceptual model I present in Study 2. I suggest that my approach is justified by the fact that current knowledge on collaborative decision-making in couples is in its early stage with our understanding of the phenomenon being rather limited (Queen et al., 2015). Consequently, the selection of factors tested in Study 2 was based on the literature review on collaboration in primary and secondary groups, rather than on existing theoretical models.

Consequently, at this point, my aim was to collect the data from individuals in close relationships on their perceptions of shared experiences, flexibility, engagement, role exchange, and partner's support, and to investigate their effect on decision-making collaboration in close relationships, as presented in Figure 3.

It must be mentioned that drawing on the literature related to collaboration, I have chosen to rename the concept of "meeting needs" as "behavioral flexibility". This choice was mainly done to avoid any possible confusion with already existing concepts in the wider area of collaborative decision-making. Also, in my second study, I relate to the concept of "democratic" decision-making from Study 1 as "collaborative" decision-making, due to the similarity among the conceptual definition presented in Table 1 and general definition of collaboration as described in Study 2.

The results of the survey, I conducted, demonstrate that all factors, but one (role exchange), positively affect partner's perception of collaboration when making decisions with their significant others. Study 2 also indicates that during complex choice situations collaboration is a central driver of decision process satisfaction. The main contribution of Study 2 is that it extends the existing knowledge on collaborative decision-making in couples in a number of ways. Firstly, it demonstrates that interpersonal variables affect the perception of collaboration among individuals in close relationships. Secondly, the results of this study are

in line with theoretical and empirical arguments in other areas of collaborative decision-making. My findings suggest that collaboration among consumer couples requires a certain degree of flexibility, engagement, partner's support, and availability of shared experiences. This is parallel to decision-making areas of, for instance, medical and scientific collaboration. Although innovative, it is not surprising, considering the fact that these may be the basic constructs required for a successful interaction among people. Interestingly, the results of my study demonstrate that flexibility and shared experiences are the two strongest predictors among four found to be significant, with the highest Beta values.

On the first sight surprising, role exchange was not found to affect the perception of collaboration among partners. However, given it a second thought, roles can be more central to the decisions made by one of the partners, rather than during joint problem solving.

Finally, Study 2 indicates that during complex choice situations collaboration is a central driver of decision process satisfaction, suggesting that complex choice encounters of collaborative nature may be more engaging for both partners, making decision-making process more fruitful. To further empirically test the findings from Study 1 and 2, I conducted several experiments, presented in the following part of this chapter.

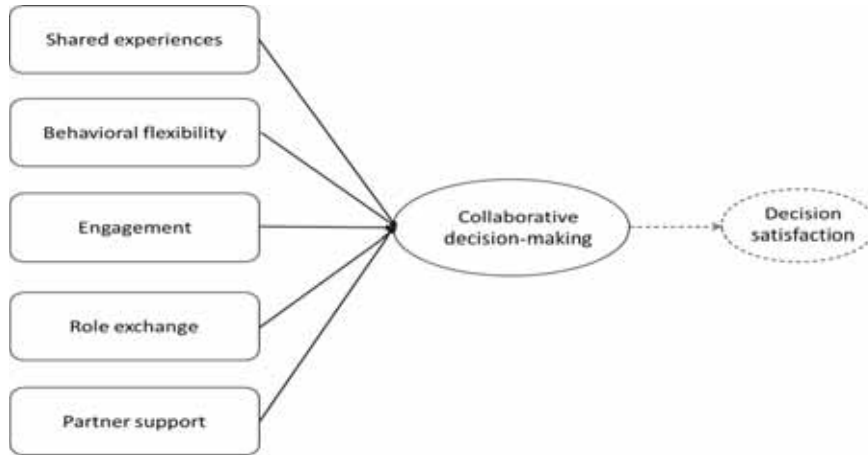


Figure 3 Conceptual model of relationship antecedents on CDM

4.3 Differences and similarities in problem solving performance between couples and individuals

Study 3 with the title “Ill-structured, but structurable decision problems: The performance of couples versus individuals and random groups” examines the differences in performance on ill-structured decision problem among couples and randomly assigned groups, as opposed to their members’ individual decision scores. In this study, I also investigate the performance of couples on the same decision task but under time pressure.

The results presented in the charts below indicate that in no time restriction Condition 1 (Figure 4), the subjects performed better as a couple and were able to release the full potential of the two individuals who constitute the decision-making unit. However, in Condition 3 (Figure 6), under the time pressure, couples were unable to reach a better solution than their average individual solution, nor was the full potential of the best partner in the group utilized.

Unlike couples, random groups were not able to perform better as a group than as individuals, nor were they able to set the full potential of the best decision-maker of the group (Figure 5). No significant difference was found between couples who first solve a problem individually, and then meet to solve it together and couples who do not solve the problem individually first.

Based on the above presented findings, it may be concluded that couples benefit from their shared experiences and transactive memory, and therefore outperform random groups and individuals. Also, higher performance on the decision-making task made by couples together may be explained by experience of collaboration among both partners. Conversely, random groups of two do not have a prior collaboration experience in team working and they lack the intra group factors present in couples.

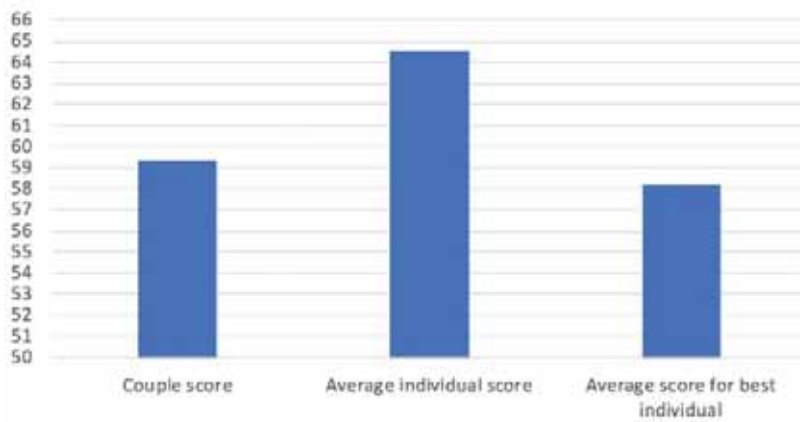


Figure 4 Condition 1: No time restriction

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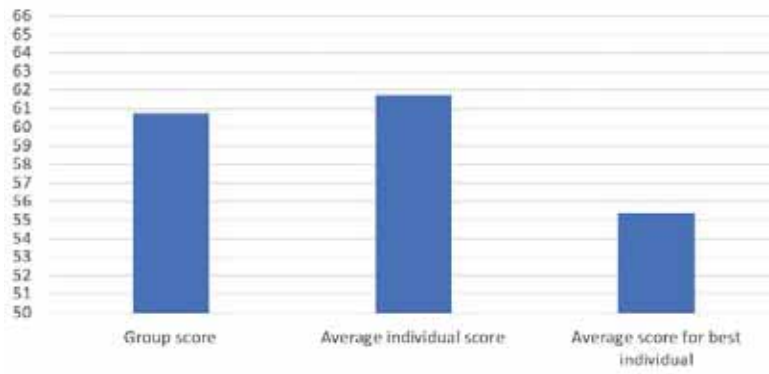


Figure 5 Condition 2: Random groups (not couples)

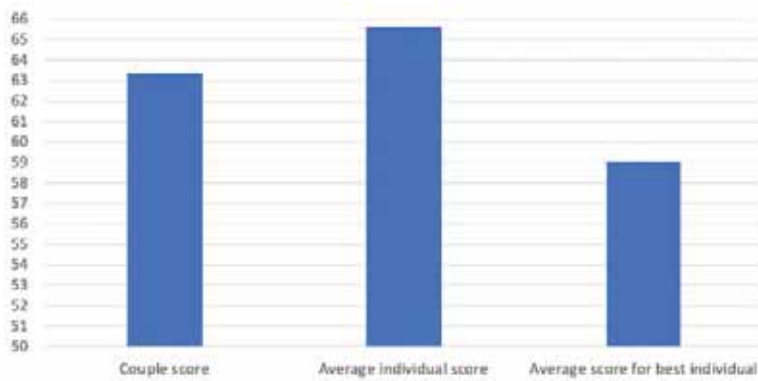


Figure 6 Condition 3: Time pressure

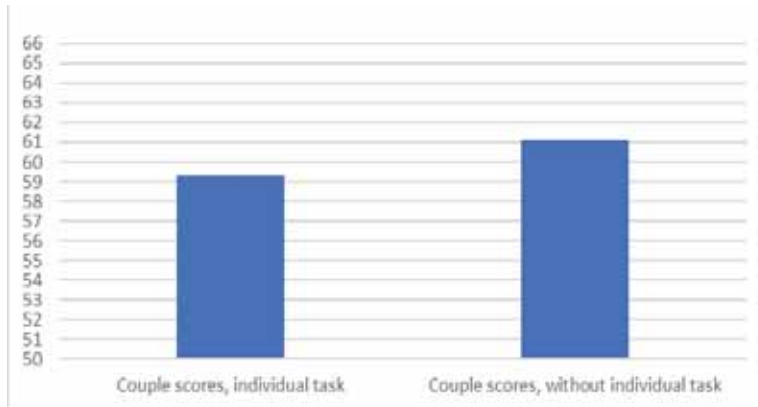


Figure 7 Condition 4

Interestingly, the findings demonstrate that, when facing time pressure, couples no longer perform better than the partners do individually, and the best individual score is significantly better than that of a couple.

Overall, the results suggest that intra group factors discussed in this study affect the performance on ill-structured decisions.

More broadly, the findings of Study 3 may be relevant in relation to “emergency” decisions couples may encounter on the daily basis, such as the ones which may bring economic loss or those related to health issues. Such decisions are oftentimes characterized by time pressure, lack of necessary information, and importance of consequences of such choices. Under such circumstances, the final decision may be delegated to the partner with more knowledge on decision-making situation, while under no stress (time pressure) choice, better decisions may be reached by both partners collaborating. For tourism research, the results of my study may reflect the way travelling couples make complex consumer decisions when being in previously unknown settings and cultures.

5 Concluding remarks

The overarching aim of this research was to contribute to the existing knowledge on couple's decision-making in situations of complex choices. My goal was reached by examining Norwegian participants, combining three different research methodologies (interview, survey, and experiment), all dependent on the objectives of each of the three studies. To capture the complexity of the research problem, this research project was based on the review of group decision-making and consumer decision-making theory, including clarifications from the literature on psychology and sociology. While my research is exploratory in nature, it exhibits some interesting findings.

I believe, I have extended the knowledge of how couples make decisions these days, and which role interpersonal factors play in their decision-making process. Applying Grounded Theory (Study 1), I have identified several categories of factors (decision reaching strategies, relationship attributes, interpersonal communication, and process involvement) which affect decision-making in couples. Most of these factors are consistent with broader literature on decision-making and collaboration. However, only a few of the factors (mainly decision-reaching strategies) have been investigated in relation to consumer decision-making in couple in existing research.

Consequently, study 2 was designed to empirically test the conceptual model, suggested in Study 1, on a wider population of individuals in close relationships. The results of Study 2 have demonstrated that flexibility and shared experiences are the two strongest predictors among four factors found to be significant (shared experiences, flexibility, engagement, partner support) in relation to decision-making collaboration in close relationships, confirming my propositions from Study 1.

Concluding remarks

And finally, the results of the Study 3, designed to empirically support the main findings of Study 1 and 2, suggests that couples as a decision-making unit benefit from their shared experiences, and therefore outperforms both individuals and random groups, when task specific knowledge is held constant.

I hope that my findings inform and inspire research on decision-making in other primary and secondary groups, such as, for instance, families with children or groups of friends. Still other interpersonal factors may affect choice processes in these groups. Also, in our rapidly changing society, the way consumers make decisions may be a lot less “static” process than it was even a decade ago. Undoubtedly, more research in this area is needed.

6 Implications, limitations, and future research

The findings reported in the previous chapters have a number of theoretical and practical implications.

This research adds significantly to the existing body of knowledge on couple decision-making theory in a number of important ways. Firstly, the theoretical model, suggested in Study 1, has incorporated the interpersonal factors that thus far received little to no attention in relation to complex vacation related decisions made in couples, compared to other well-studied situational, personal, and influence/roles variables. With regard to consumer couples, these factors may explain why both partners choose democratic or monocratic strategies when making complex choices. Consequently, the results of this study may fill in the gaps where, for instance, hedonic theory is lacking in its explanatory power of purchase decision-making in close relationships, and in particular, in situations where partners have similar attributes and characteristics (e.g., resources, level of commitment) (Webster & Reiss, 2001).

For marketing, the results add to the current theory by explaining how one of the largest in number purchasing units arrive at making a buying decision. Finally, successful marketing of services and products requires that companies match its offerings to the market segments. This process of market segmentation involves breaking down the total market into differentiated sub-groups for which special marketing strategies are developed (Yankelovich & Meer, 2006). In this regard, further examination of decision-making processes of, for instance, “non-traditional” couples may be beneficial. Also, when the content of an advertisement is tailored to “the right” consumers, consumers are more likely to pay attention. At the end, the decision whether to engage with the content only takes several seconds (Sullivan, 2018).

Although this research enhances our knowledge of the antecedents of decision-making collaboration in consumer couples, there are other areas that would benefit from this research.

Overall, the results of my research demonstrate that decision-making process in couples these days is a joint process, which has a more collaborative character. I would hope that the findings of my studies may also inform other research fields. For example, in the light of latest events related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, my findings mean that deciding whether to use coronavirus tracking apps, which treatment to choose, and how to handle daily routines during a pandemic may be a joint couple's decision as well, and that such decisions may depend on couple's relationship attributes, process involvement, and interpersonal communication. However, such propositions need further investigation. Also, the findings from Study 3, regarding unstructured decisions in the condition of stress (time pressure) may be of interest for future research. Concentrating more on decisions made by consumer couples (with and without children) under the situations of high uncertainty and risk would be beneficial for tourism industry, among all.

It might be interesting to investigate the role of other relationship variables (e.g. initiative taking, commonalities, togetherness) introduced in Study 1, in relation to decision-making in couples and other types of primary (e.g. same-sex relationship) and secondary groups (e.g. family and friends), and in the context of various choice situations.

Alike all research, my studies have a number of limitations. These are more detailly described in my Studies 1, 2 and 3, and here I would like to discuss some of the most central ones.

As for my research I have sampled Norwegian couples, the findings of these studies may not apply to consumer couples from other cultures, in particular those with larger power distance, high masculinity, and gender-based expectations. More research is needed on investigating the role of interpersonal factors and the way they affect decision-

making/collaboration in primary groups in other geographic areas than Norway. In my research, there is also a chance of sampling bias towards more adjusted couples, due to the possibility that less adjusted couples would not choose to participate in this study. Although this is just a speculation, a study with a larger and random sample would further validate my results.

The lack of previous research related to the influence of interpersonal factors on collaborative decision-making in couples may be considered one of the limitations of this study. Consequently, the results of my studies are still exploratory, in a number of ways. Future research could pay more attention to further investigation of interpersonal factors among different couples, applying models of interpersonal variables/interaction from psychology to decisions of various complexity and those made in different consumption contexts.

Finally, more research is needed to state with certainty that couples benefit from their shared experiences from previous problem-solving situations and therefore outperform both individuals and random groups, as concluded in Study 3. For example, more experiments could be conducted comparing couples with long and short relationship history and their collaboration practices.

Implications, limitations, and future research

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List of papers

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PAPER 1

Koval, O., & Hansen, H. (2019). Working it out together: a suggested model for vacation-related decision-making in couples. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 19(4-5), 354-370.

PAPER 2

Koval, O., & Hansen, H. (2019). It takes two to tango: Antecedents to collaborative decision-making in couples. Manuscript submitted for publication.

PAPER 3

Koval, O., & Hansen, H. (2020). Ill-structured, but structurable decision problems: The performance of couples versus individuals and random groups. Manuscript submitted for publication.