



## International Marketing Review

Households in international marketing research: Vienna Diary Technique (VDT) as a method to investigate decision dynamics

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### Article information:

To cite this document:

Elfriede Penz Erich Kirchler , (2016), "Households in international marketing research", International Marketing Review, Vol. 33 Iss 3 pp. 432 - 453

Permanent link to this document:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/IMR-01-2015-0007>

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# Households in international marketing research

## Vienna Diary Technique (VDT) as a method to investigate decision dynamics

Received 14 January 2015  
Revised 22 June 2015  
8 September 2015  
Accepted 21 September 2015

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to respond to the call of alternative methodologies for studying household dynamics and aims to contribute to method development in international marketing research.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Based on the Viennese Diary Study, a methodology was developed to study Vietnamese middle-class partners' decision making. This allows for dyadic analyses and keeping track of the decision and mutual influence history in an emerging market.

**Findings** – The methodology proved suitable to be used in a transitional economy, which is characterized by specific cultural aspects, such as the embeddedness of decisions in close relationships and traditional role specialization.

**Research limitations/implications** – While the diary method is time and resource-costly with rather small sample size, it allows for detailed insight into everyday decision making. Further research might want to extend participation in the method to the extended family, which is of high importance in collectivistic cultures.

**Originality/value** – Since partners in a household independently reported their perceptions and behaviours during decision processes each day, the methodology allows for dyadic analyses and keeping track of everyday decision making. In addition, the role in decision making of each spouse can be analysed.

**Keywords** Vietnam, Methodology, Diary method, Dyadic analysis, Family life

**Paper type** Research paper

### Introduction

When making purchases in the private household, often several individuals are contributing to the decision making process. A household forms a complex social system, whose dynamics are defined by the structure of the relationship, the characteristics of the individuals, and a social, physical and cultural context. Each part in the social system, i.e. primarily parents and their children interacts with one another and a pattern of a household emerges (Dörner, 1989). Households are also sites of cooperation where there is often negotiation of conflicting interests (Burgoyne and Kirchler, 2008). Analysing interactions of partners in close relationships and over time decision making is vital to understanding markets and the effect of marketing on the household (Burgoyne and Kirchler, 2008). A household, and not individuals, is the



needed unit of analysis for gaining insights into decision dynamics, as the family is an important consuming and decision making unit in marketing and consumer behaviour (Commuri and Gentry, 2000).

In past research, family role structure and its impact on purchases have been studied within different international contexts, covering the USA and Europe but spreading also to countries outside the West (e.g. Yavas *et al.*, 1994). While these studies have provided important contributions for studying purchasing decision roles and outcomes of decisions at an international level, there is a lack of research on the process of decisions and influences, i.e. the dynamics of decision making within private households (see Commuri and Gentry, 2000), which requires a dyadic and longitudinal rather than singular and cross-sectional research design. Additionally, for international researchers to theorize it is vital to establish the universality of household decision dynamics by studying the phenomenon in multiple contexts (e.g. Yavas *et al.*, 1994).

Yet, households are difficult to study because of their high degree of intimacy and privacy (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Kirchler *et al.*, 2001). In close relationships, complex patterns of interaction develop over a short period of time, which can be difficult to capture for an external observer. The complexity of households therefore requires a holistic methodological perspective to fully understand the dynamics. Decisions may happen concurrently in the stream of everyday activities and present patterns of interaction are partly a result of earlier experiences. The structure and logic of past and current experiences are the basis of expectations, intentions and plans for the future (e.g. Eagly and Chaiken, 1993; Schwarz, 2004). Research into everyday processes between partners in the private household is also problematic because being asked to provide information about one's behaviour often does not include close attention to one's actions and reactions (e.g. Maki and McClintock, 1983; Murphy *et al.*, 1982).

There is a lack of methods that allow a standardized longitudinal investigation of such dynamics at the international level. So far, household panel surveys overcome this partly by offering longitudinal observations of households, yet, they mainly allow for a macro/aggregated view of the outcome of decisions (e.g. Longhi and Nandi, 2014). Qualitative research, on the other hand, offers subjective insights but lack a comparative, standardized way of data collection in the international context (Zimmerman and Szenberg, 2000). Questionnaire surveys are by far the most often used method in international marketing to study cross-cultural decision making in households. Their focus is mainly cross-sectional, concentrating on single respondents within a household and studying the outcome rather than the processes of decisions and influencing (Commuri and Gentry, 2000; Lackman and Lanasa, 1993).

In order to facilitate and standardize data collection (by respecting equivalence issues in international marketing (Salzberger and Sinkovics, 2006) and balancing emic/etic aspects (Berry, 1989)), the use of survey items, sampling multiple individuals in a household over a long-time period, in different cultural contexts might offer such detailed yet standardized outcome.

In international marketing research so far hardly any research method offers all that. The goal of this paper is to present the Vienna Diary Technique (VDT) as a method to investigate decision dynamics within households with regard to economic decisions and outline its unique position on the continuum of methods ranging from panel surveys to qualitative methods.

The research reported here responds to the call of alternative methodologies for studying household dynamics and aims to contribute to method development in international marketing research. In particular the research aims first, at applying the

diary technique for studying partners' decision making processes within a household. Applying the diary technique, wife and husband independently reported each day their perceptions and behaviour during decision processes by filling in the structured diary. The method allows for dyadic analyses and keeping track of the decision and mutual influence history. In addition, the role in decision making of each spouse can be analysed.

Second, due to a lack of appropriate methods in international marketing research to collect information about everyday processes the diary method is suggested for international marketing research. In an exemplary case, the diary technique is applied in an Asian market, Vietnam, over the period of three months. Asian consumers become more affluent and wealthy; thus, market studies in socialist countries identify high market potential (Nguyen *et al.*, 2009). However, so far little is known about household decision dynamics in Asian markets over time. It is important to gain more insights because close relationships matter when it comes to purchase decisions in Asian culture.

From a method point of view, the input (instrument, measurement) as well as the output (type of results) level with regard to household decision making is framed in this research (see Figure 1) and particular attention is given to what instruments and measurements were employed by past research and what results they offer with regard to household decision making.

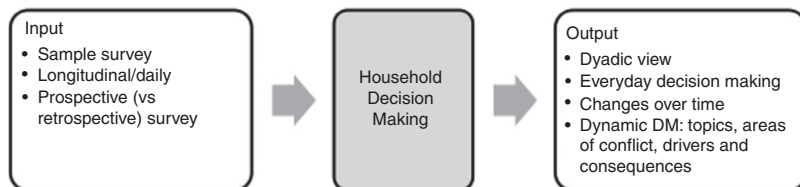
The paper starts with a literature review including an overview of decision making in close relationships, conflicts and disagreements. Based on this conceptual background, the discussion of appropriate methods for studying household decision making dynamics follows. In both sections, the reference to the international marketing context is discussed. A subsequent section in particular discusses the VDT and presents an exemplary case study including the description about the diary method in Vietnam.

## Conceptual background

### *Decision making in close relationships*

Decision making in everyday situations is embedded in relationships, along with a variety of different problems that require solving simultaneously over the different phases of decision making (Eckenrode and Bolger, 1997). Everyday decision making deviates from normative models (Ouellette and Wood, 1998; Weick, 1971), for instance, partners in a household can have different preferences, which results in a conflict (Deutsch, 2006; Lackman and Lanasa, 1993). Moreover, households differ cross-culturally in terms of size and composition, stages of people's lives, and socio-economic and economic influences, which impacts decision making and buying behaviour (De Mooij, 2011).

Decisions about everyday items relate to goods, such as food, which are usually purchased regularly and consumed within a short period of time. When rarely used goods are bought, the family generally has no routine programme to direct the decision



**Figure 1.**  
Method frame of  
household decision  
making

making process, and often lengthy decision making processes are required before a sensible choice can be made and existing disagreements between the family members are resolved. The more people within the shared household there are, who are affected by the decision, the more likely they will join in the decision making process and put forward their own interests (e.g. Commuri and Gentry, 2000; Hsiung and Bagozzi, 2003; Tinson and Nancarrow, 2005). For instance, in nuclear (individualistic cultures) compared to extended (collectivistic) families, less (and different) members are involved in decision making. In addition, differences between households with respect to product usage and ownership can also be explained by culture (De Mooij, 2011). Research on decision making processes in the household with young females and their employment in Java and Taiwan showed that power relations and struggles between genders and generations should be taken into account. It was shown that Javanese daughters might seek factory employment against parents' wishes, Taiwanese daughters may be obliged to submit to parental decisions and work for years in order to contribute income (Wolf, 1990). In general, households are shaped by their set of beliefs about family life that support the sharing of individual social and economic resources within the household (Kibria, 1994).

Close relationships can be described along three dimensions, i.e. emotional aspects (the structure of emotions, friendliness or harmony within the relationship), dominance relations (the structure of power or dominance) and the involvement of the partners (Hinde, 1997; Kirchler, 1989). Especially the dimensions harmony and power help to understand decision making processes. Harmony consists of a bundle of past experiences of the partners, the associated feelings and the accumulated emotional value. Power can be seen as a manifest and/or potential control over the behaviour of others, as intentional or unintentional actions, as a process or an outcome of social interactions (Cromwell and Olsen, 1975; Falbo and Peplau, 1980; Segrin and Flora, 2011). The partners' involvement is an additional factor in decision making situations. The interested partner usually gathers information about the problem being addressed and assimilates it. The lower the level of interest is in a decision, the lower the time to devote it to the current problem. The interested partner establishes a basis of power by spending time on the problem, and develops some competence, which the other partner has not (Commuri and Gentry, 2000). In addition to influences stemming from personal aspects, cultural aspects such as individualism/collectivism and power distance impact the decision making, for instance which partner in a relationship has more power (De Mooij, 2011).

Interactions in close relationships happen through an exchange of material values, feelings and ideas. Following exchange theories (Crisp and Turner, 2010; Thibaut and Kelley, 1991) people take rational decisions and evaluate social relationships for the profit which they bring. Social contacts are also based on the principle of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), which means that costs and benefits received from a partner are answered by either punishing or rewarding the partner. In exchange relationships, conflicts result from situations where the equity rule is broken (Clark *et al.*, 1986). This occurs, for example, if one partner underestimates the contributions made by the other, overestimates their own contribution, and regards the partner's costs as too low and their own costs as too high.

Evidence from cross-cultural research following Triandis *et al.* (1988) research (Triandis, 1995) demonstrates significant differences in reciprocity across cultural types (Buchan *et al.*, 2002). Collectively oriented individuals show higher reciprocity and do not easily take advantage from other group members compared to individually oriented people, who see relationships as transitory.

The process of interaction in close relationships follows different rules than in economic relationships. The happier the partners are, the more likely it is that they will spontaneously act to please each other, and the less likely they are to subject their joint actions to the principles of doing business and to consider the costs of their actions. Egoistic desires diminish and are superseded by shared desires (Kirchler, 1988).

#### *Conflicts and disagreements*

Conflicts are conscious disagreements or discussions about partners' incongruent desires (Commuri and Gentry, 2000; Fincham and Beach, 1999). Whilst conflicts about the same topic can repeatedly be picked up by the partners, be explored and then postponed, a disagreement is concluded by a decision. Cultural role expectations theory (Davis, 1976) contends that the potential ability of one spouse to influence the other in purchase decisions is determined by cultural norms and values, which are mediated internally by cultural expectations, attitudes or perceptions that spouses hold about the appropriate roles of husbands and wives in the family (Makgosa, 2010).

It is assumed that most joint purchasing decisions in private households are preceded by disagreements (Kwai-Choi Lee and Collins, 2000; Spiro, 1983). Partners often report the conflict situation differently (Klein and Milardo, 1993, 2000). If partners have different opinions but are pursuing the same goals, they are often not aware of any conflict. They discuss their points of view, and in the most favourable case they reach their shared goal. However, if different goals are being pursued and there are value conflicts, with partners wanting to convince each other or seeking to negotiate some advantage for themselves, then it is more likely that they will be aware of the conflict (Kirchler, 1990; Lackman and Lanasa, 1993).

Three types of conflicts occur in decisions in the private household, i.e. value, probability and distributional conflicts (Brandstätter, 1987). Most of the time decision making in private households contains aspects of two or all three conflict types to varying degrees (Kirchler *et al.*, 2001). The first type, value conflicts, exists if there are fundamental differences in goals between the partners. Purchasing decisions present a value conflict if for example one partner wishes to buy ecologically friendly products whilst the other rejects the purchase, not on the grounds of the quality of the product but because of doubts, e.g. about the effectiveness of such products to protect the environment. Partners perceive the symbolic aspects of products differently. Value conflicts are genuine conflict situations, in which partners try to convince each other of the advantages of their own point of view, using tactics to convince and influence each other (Kirchler, 1990). The second type of conflicts, probability conflicts, relates to judgements about true objective contents and possibilities for making something happen. A judgement as to the probabilities or the material facts is necessary if partners agree about the social significance of an item and, for example, have agreed that they want an ecologically friendly item but are finding the decision difficult because they rate the various alternative products differently in terms of quality, or because they have different views on the price-utility relationship. In this situation, the partners are not trying to influence each other, but experience an objective disagreement about varying information. The third type, distributional conflicts, exists if the discussion revolves around the division of costs and benefits. Even if both partners are convinced that a particular product represents the optimal alternative and is desirable, one partner may still argue against the purchase on the grounds that the product largely benefits the other partner or would mainly be used by them. There is a distributional problem if the costs and benefits of a decision are distributed asymmetrically. The partners will then try to reach a compromise using their negotiating skills.

From an international marketing perspective, most research of household decision making repeat, replicate or draw from the seminal work by Davis and Rigaux (1974), who studied the partner's influence on a variety of product choices over several decision making phases (Belch *et al.*, 1985; Green *et al.*, 1983; Mühlbacher *et al.*, 2009; Na *et al.*, 1998, 2003; Penz and Kirchler, 2012; Yang *et al.*, 2006; Yavas *et al.*, 1994). Studies differ over product and economic decisions, variables and countries (Western and non-Western) covered (Ganesh, 1997). They include mainly a dyadic view but lack a dynamic view of decision making, because the outcome (who influences whom in what product categories in which stages of the process) and not the process itself were studied. Some of cross-cultural research is building on Rodman's (1972) theory of resources in cultural contexts. Based on his typology, four main marital power relationships could be identified (e.g. Green *et al.*, 1983; Yavas *et al.*, 1994) and used as interpretation for differences in household decision making.

Face, i.e. an individual's claimed sense of positive image in the context of social interaction, was found to be an explanatory mechanism for the relationship between culture and conflict-management style (Oetzel and Ting-Toomey, 2003). Conflict style, i.e. an overall picture of a person's communication orientation towards a conflict, is a combination of traits (e.g. cultural background and personality) and states (e.g. situation). Members of individualistic cultures tend to use more dominating conflict strategies, more substantive, outcome-oriented strategies (i.e. integrating) and fewer avoiding conflict strategies than members of collectivistic cultures. Also, members of individualistic cultures have a greater concern for self-face and lesser concern for other-face than members of collectivistic cultures (Ting-Toomey and Kurogi, 1998).

#### *Methods for studying household decision making*

*Limitation of traditional research methods.* As outlined in the introduction, to study everyday events in close relationships, adequate methods are required. Diary techniques offer a number of advantages over traditional procedures. We argue that methods that allow a standardized longitudinal investigation of such dynamics at the international level are limited. By means of household panel surveys (e.g. Longhi and Nandi, 2014), qualitative research (Zimmerman and Szenberg, 2000) and questionnaire surveys mainly cross-sectional analyses of individual' decision outcomes rather than dynamic processes are conducted (Commuri and Gentry, 2000; Lackman and Lanasa, 1993). In order to record a shared reality, it is necessary to ask all those involved in sharing it.

Dyadic perspectives are important because some aspects of the intimate sphere are taboo areas (Baxter and Wilmot, 1985), and the degree of emotional interdependence, the intensity of feelings, the intimacy between the partners and the secret codes of communication, which they have developed over time, need to be considered accordingly. There are also different tendencies to provide socially desirable answers. Research on phenomena, such as the exercise of power in a partnership, or dominance in decision making situations could result in distorted evaluations both by oneself and by another person. Social desirability and social stereotypes lead to divergent information being provided by partners, but they pretend that they agreed. If social stereotypes suggest that the man buys the car and the woman is allowed to choose the colour, for example, what has been reported is drawn from jointly shared prejudices about gender roles (Belch *et al.*, 1985; Commuri and Gentry, 2000, 2005; Ekström and Hjort, 2010; Meier-Pesti and Penz, 2008).



Diaries offer more accurate (i.e. more true to life and more precise) information about the use of inexpensive and habitually bought products than questionnaires (Hu and Bruning, 1988). It is probable that in retrospect special events are recalled more often than routine actions. According to the availability heuristic, in estimating the frequency or the probability of one or more events, judgements are formed on the basis of the difficulty or ease with which information can be recalled or generated from memory. The availability heuristic can lead to misjudgements and over-estimation of the frequency of notable events (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974). Eventually, divergence arises because of the relative unimportance of everyday events being reported. Decisions in the private household are often routine actions, everyday family business, needing neither much time nor much attention, which is why they are neither perceived precisely nor adequately reconstructed in the memory. In discussions about expensive, durable, prestige products, which are of significance for all members of the private household, partners are more likely to agree in their recalled information than if the product involved is cheap (Granbois and Summers, 1975).

Another limitation of traditional research methods is the selection of a single respondent in a household (Corfman and Lehmann, 1987). Particularly in studies of purchasing behaviour in private households interviews are often conducted with one partner, occasionally with both and rarely also with children, asking about a specific area of expenditure. In these designs, it is assumed that close relationships can be reduced to a single person providing information about the household's activities. Research has shown that reconstruction of a shared reality varies considerably, both between adults and between adults and children (Davis, 1970; Kim and Lee, 1997; Kirchler, 1989). Partners' accounts of their shared experiences often differ significantly (Shanteau and Troutman, 1990; Venkatesh, 1990). Information provided by one partner about the behaviour of the other is generally unreliable (Park, 1982). Partners differ not only in their recall of past decision making situations, but even a current situation may be perceived differently, and often inaccurately, by them. Where partners are asked to assess the current disposition of their partner, they are often not able to do so. It can therefore be assumed that although men and women both participate in reaching a shared decision, they neither perceive shared experiences, nor reconstruct and report the events in the same way (Kirchler, 1989). Another explanation is the "false consensus effect", which means that partners mistakenly think that their partner would also behave in a similar fashion (Kirchler, 1999; Kirchler and Berti, 1996). It seems to be difficult to recall and "reconstruct" mundane events and people distort their account to strengthen their own self-esteem. For instance, in a study about shared conflicts it was found that in each case the other partner was blamed for initiating the conflict (Schütz, 1999).

These results are noteworthy because some researchers point out critically that only one partner from a couple was interviewed in cross-cultural research even when the limitations were known (see, e.g. Ganesh, 1997; Green *et al.*, 1983) or suggestions to improve the sample frame were provided (e.g. Commuri and Gentry, 2000). For instance, Commuri and Gentry (2000), Lackman and Lanasa (1993) and Yavas *et al.* (1994) provide comprehensive reviews of research on family decision making and avenues for further research. The design of some empirical examples is described in Table I. We conclude that there is a lack of research using dyadic views, longitudinal time frames and sample from multiple countries.

Sample frame	Single country	International/several countries
Examples for single respondent design	Single respondent/longitudinal/panel survey: RAND American Panel (coupled respondents); no apparent use of dyads, periodically conducted (Fonseca <i>et al.</i> , 2012): USA Single respondent/longitudinal/qualitative methods: Household decision making; one adult per household mixed-method approach over 3 months (Pooley <i>et al.</i> , 2011): UK	Single respondent/cross-sectional/questionnaire survey: Family purchasing roles; wives (USA, France, The Netherlands, Venezuela, Gabon) (Green <i>et al.</i> , 1983)
Examples for dyadic respondent design	Dyads/longitudinal/questionnaire survey: Influence of adults in decision making; both partners in couples; two time points (MA Belch and Willis, 2002): USA Dyads/longitudinal/qualitative methods: Family decision making models; joint depth interviews; two time points (within 48 hours) (Ruth and Commuri, 1998): India Work-family balance and decision making; 24 dual-earner couples over 28 consecutive days (Radcliffe, 2013): UK Dyads/cross-sectional/questionnaire survey: Family purchase; family dyads (Yang <i>et al.</i> , 2006): Singapore Sex role orientation; both partners in couples (Qualls, 1987): USA	

**Table I.**  
Examples of  
research on family  
decision making

*Diaries as means of recording everyday decision making in private households.* From these considerations, it would seem that neither observation procedures nor questionnaires about past events are appropriate methods of recording everyday life in the private home. The lack of ecological validity, the problems with different recall of mundane events, errors of judgement attributable to the mood of the participants at the time of recording, and problems associated with the design of the questionnaire – all these can be reduced by using the diary procedure. Diaries, which require the recording of experiences at the time when these experiences have just been lived through, also offer the possibility of studying processes and not simply to record data from compressed experiences. It may further be hypothesized that the repeated registration of experiences in everyday life will result in a steady increase in the attentiveness of those taking part, with the result that the reports become more reliable. The accuracy of predictions also increases if aggregated data from several different recording times is available (Epstein, 1986).

The following will provide a description of time-sampling diaries and events diaries, and propose a suitable method for recording everyday decisions between couples.

In household studies, diaries have been used to study couples' use of time (Hornik, 1982; Robinson *et al.*, 1977). They have also successfully been used to record interaction processes between partners (Auhagen, 1987, 1991; Brandstätter and Wagner, 1994; Hinde, 1997; Montgomery and Duck, 1993).

Brandstätter (1987) designed a time-sampling diary for measuring mood. Participants recorded their current mood, stated the causes of their feelings and briefly noted the objective features of the situation, such as location, activity in progress, and persons present. In a modified form the diary is suitable to study everyday life in families (Kirchler, 1988). The design helps to capture a fragment of memory than pre-structuring individual life. Diary entries are made several times a day, at randomly scheduled times, and over an extended period. Participants themselves carry out the classificatory content analysis of the diary entries, following appropriate training. This ensures complete confidentiality.

The diary provides insight into the nature, frequency, and course of development of the state of participants' feelings, into the nature and frequency of everyday events, and their influence on feelings. It also provides information about activities and social contacts. The random distribution of the set times for recording data during the 24 hours of a day, and the extension of the recording period over several weeks, enables a typical pattern of everyday life in the couple's relationship to be constructed.

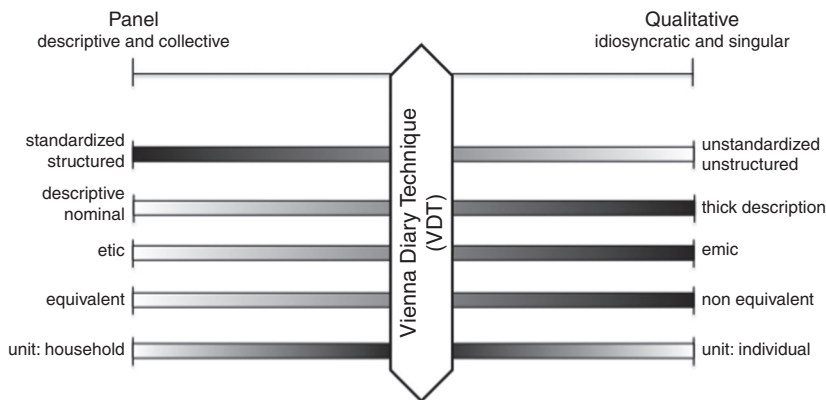
In addition, an events diary was used alongside the couples' time-sampling diary (Kirchler, 1988). The couples were instructed to fill in the events diary in the evening on a daily basis. It is common, particularly in the study of everyday experiences, to ask for data to be recorded after a particular time interval, often days, but sometimes even weeks or months (Stone *et al.*, 1991). The events diary made it possible to analyse the specific purchasing experiences within a certain period from the point of view of both partners.

The time-sampling diary and the (retrospective) events diary have many advantages over other methods. They study relationship phenomena while they are actually taking place or can still vividly be recalled. This avoids or strongly reduces errors of recollection. The participants completed it in their own private domain. The events recorded are studied in the context of everyday life and the flow of events, not removed from it. This method records contacts with different people, as well as activities taking place in locations outside the private sphere. Partnership experiences, such as purchasing decisions are captured within the context of social events. The fact that the partners are asked to record their entries simultaneously takes account of the partnership as a single entity. Lastly, the method provides for entries to be made several times a day over an extended period of time. The need to study processes is thus met.

The VDT is an events diary to record decision making by couples and was designed by Kirchler (1995). Figure 2 illustrates the advantages of the VDT compared to panel survey and qualitative research. It is described in more detail in the next section.

*The VDT.* In the Vienna Diary Study, 40 couples kept a diary over a period of 12 months (Kirchler *et al.*, 2001). Since both partners reported on the same situations independently, the degree of congruence between their answers can be measured.

Various means were used to recruit couples to participate in the Vienna Diary Study (advertisements in local press, flyers at adult evening classes and kindergartens and direct personal contacts through the project team). Participants were informed about the study, its aims and the keeping of the diary. The couples lived in a shared home and had at least one child of school age. The first reason for selecting couples with one or more dependent children was to ensure a relatively homogeneous sample faced with



**Figure 2.** Positioning of VDT among panel survey and qualitative research

comparable family tasks. Also, couples with children were chosen because they represent the prototypical family, and because the frequency of conflict is usually high in the stages of the family life cycle where there are dependent children (Gelles, 1995).

Each selected couple was introduced to a personal assistant who was available to answer questions during the entire course of the study. The assistant's task was to maintain regular contact with the couples by telephone and by visiting, to collect the completed diary sheets and distribute new ones. They were also responsible for providing constant encouragement to the couples to keep their diaries conscientiously.

Keeping of the diary began after a two-day period of practice and familiarization. Two weeks after the start of diary record-keeping, the assistants made a personal visit to the couples to clarify any remaining questions. Each couple received the diary, consisting of a set of diary question sheets. Each partner individually was given a box with a small opening through which to insert the completed sheets. This was to preserve the confidentiality of the diary entries, even at home. A few minutes a day were required to complete the diary sheets.

A variety of strategies was applied to motivate the couples to maintain their diary record-keeping over the period of a year. The project team sent a number of letters to the couples, in addition to maintaining telephone and personal contact, for example to draw attention to errors in the entries. Joint meetings were also organized, at which partial results were presented, or lectures held by experts about a topic agreed with the couples, such as aggression in schools. Financial reimbursement of 726 Euro per couple was provided as an additional incentive to participate in the study.

Table II provides an overview of the method and the application in international marketing research.

The validity of the diary was assessed from the subjective experiences described. In addition, values for reliability and validity were calculated. Only variables for which data were available for each and everyday were used to measure the reliability of the diary method.

The reliability of the decisions diary was assessed using four questions on the current quality of the relationship (well-being, strength, freedom) and contribution to relationship. The correlations between mean of answers from different time points (year, months, weeks, days) and from men and women were calculated (see Table III). The average value for the four items (relationship well-being, strength, freedom,

	Description of the method	Application in international marketing research
Instrument	Prospective survey 2 pages including structured questions about: General information about decision situation (whether they had spoken with one another, how long; how long they were together, what they had spoken about and whether they had had different opinions) If a conflict was reported, they indicated: how long the conversation about the issue had lasted, where they were, what they were doing, who else was present Further aspects: how much specialist knowledge each person had about the conflictual issue, how important the issue was to both partners; the extent to which the conversation was objective and emotional; how much influence and how much benefit each partner derived from the discussion reporting the type of conflict (value, probability or distributional conflict) and what tactics both partners used to influence the other Open questions on content of conflict theme	Determine the social structure of household and everyday decision making If necessary, adapt items to reflect decision dynamics in focal country (Back)Translate questions and check answer format If necessary, adapt wording and answer format
Participants	Dyads: 46 Austrian couples (with children) Men/females fill in their diary sheets independently	According to household structure: dyadic/triadic or extended structure Facilitate independent filling-in (provide collection boxes, assistants)
Time frame	Longitudinal survey: over 12 months Frequency of data collection: daily	At least 3 months of data collection on a daily basis If possible use technology to facilitate data collection Describe time context of data collection in the chosen country: seasonal holidays, other events
Sampling frame	Recruitment of participants: snowballing, convenience sampling Monetary incentive Data collection phase: administration of diary sheets and motivation of participants	Establish balance between convenience and random sampling Determine comparability of sampling in international marketing: choose same sample as in parallel sample Provide incentives and research assistants for supporting participants

**Table II.**  
The Vienna Diary Technique: description of the method and application in international marketing research

contribution to relationship) on days of odd and even number was calculated for each person. A high correlation indicates that the characteristic concerned has been reliably recorded. The reliability for even and uneven weeks and months was determined. The mean of the answers on the three relationship items in the first half of the year and the second half was calculated for each person ( $r = 0.85$ ). To arrive at a more detailed assessment of data stability, the entries were grouped into monthly intervals. The entries for each 30-day period were averaged for each person, to yield 12 indices per person on

well-being, strength and freedom in the relationship and for contribution to partnership (ranging between  $r = 0.40$  and  $r = 0.96$ ). There was a high correlation between the average data for consecutive months (ranging between  $r = 0.79$  and  $0.92$ ). The final investigation into the stability of the data was made on a consecutive day basis (correlations between data on well-being, strength, freedom and contributions to the partnerships on consecutive days; range between  $r = 0.27$  and  $r = 0.41$ ). It can be concluded that, for the four criteria examined, the diary exhibits high satisfactory characteristics, with high odd-even reliability figures ( $r = 0.95-0.99$ ) and a high level of stability. Correlations between the entries for the current day and those for previous days at greater distance were considerably lower ( $r = 0.27$ ) than for consecutive days ( $r = 0.41$ ). This indicates stability, and also an adequate degree of variability in the data entries.

Validity was operationalized as agreement between the entries in an additional questionnaire and in the diary study. The constructs dominance, satisfaction and the degree of influence in subject areas were examined. Dominance was studied by first examining the difference between the general strength in the relationship, derived from the diary, and the dominance index from the questionnaire. Next, the relation between the strength in the relationship on conflict days and the dominance index was calculated per couple. Finally, the relation between the partners' entries on the distribution of influence in conflicts and the dominance index was examined. With respect to dominance, it can be concluded that there is only a weak correlation between the current strength in the relationship and the dominance index from the questionnaires. The correlation between distribution of influence and respective data from the questionnaires is adequate. Satisfaction was studied by examining the connection between well-being in the relationship and the satisfaction index from the relevant questionnaire. Also satisfaction with the outcome of the conflict was examined (see Table IV).

The findings show that there are correlations between the diary data and those in the questionnaire. The Vienna Diary Study appears suitable for recording the complex events of couples' everyday life. Participants' subjective experiences of the diary were positive, the results of data analyses relating to missing values, recording of conflicts, etc. are good, and the reliability and validity of the diary appear sufficiently high.

Disadvantages of the Vienna Diary and diaries in general lay in the enormous effort in convincing people to participate for a longer period of time, in organizing large and representative samples, in data handling procedures and statistical analyses of diary entries. Change of participants' behaviour due to diary keeping and increased attention

	Stability of data	Reliability
Quality of the relationship	First half – second half of year	$r = 0.95-0.99$ (odd-even days/weeks/
Well-being	$r = 0.85$	months)
Strength	Monthly interval	$r = 0.27-0.41$ (consecutive days)
Freedom	$r = 0.40-0.96$	
	$r = 0.79-0.92$ (consecutive months)	
Contribution to partnership	$r = 0.19-0.87$ (women)	
	$r = 0.80$ (men)	
	$r = 0.57-0.87$ (consecutive months)	

Source: Kirchler *et al.* (2001)

**Table III.**  
Stability and  
reliability of data  
from VDT

**Table IV.**  
Validity of VDT

Validity	Correlation
<i>Dominance</i>	
General strength <sup>a</sup>	$r = 0.33$
Strength in the relationship <sup>a</sup>	$r = 0.31$
General strength – strength in relationship <sup>b</sup>	$r = 0.27$
Degree of influence <sup>a</sup>	$r = 0.53$
Dominance value for couple (yearly average) – degree of influence <sup>b</sup>	$r = 0.45$
Satisfaction <sup>a</sup>	$r = 0.60$
Satisfaction with the outcome of conflicts – relationship quality <sup>b</sup>	$r = 0.44$

**Notes:** <sup>a</sup>Agreement diary study/additional questionnaire; <sup>b</sup>within diary agreement  
**Source:** Kirchler *et al.* (2001)

has frequently been a critical argument against diaries but has not been observed in the present study.

The Vienna Diary Study provided a large quantity of data giving insight into decision making processes in private households.

### Exemplary case: using the VDT in Vietnam

In order to demonstrate the applicability of the VDT in a country other than the country where the instrument was developed, Vietnam was selected. The main reason is the growing interest of marketing in middle-class consumers in emerging countries and their decision making, in particular decision dynamics in the household.

#### *Country background*

In Vietnam, there is considerable exchange within the household. A concern for family members and the long-term interests of the family are more important than individual interests and reflect traditional societal values, which includes aspects such as harmony, emphasis on collective aims, respect for authority, hierarchical relationships and carefulness (Le and Jolibert, 2001; Nguyen *et al.*, 2009).

The high degree of collectivism induces people to behave similarly to others and, therefore, the Vietnamese as a collectivistic society have a preference for products that reflect a certain social image and are proof of the affiliation to a specific group (Li and Su, 2007).

Consumers tend to spend money on expensive products, such as luxury goods, cars, furniture, and high-end technology (Khanh and Hau, 2007; Tambyah *et al.*, 2009). The middle class in urban areas is increasingly affluent (Cohen, 2004; Euromonitor International, 2008, 2010), which changes individuals' consumption, i.e. a change in demand for basic household durables to a higher demand for computers, mobile phones and white goods, which are more expensive. While economic and consumption habits change rapidly, middle-class families appear to preserve their traditional influence patterns in purchase decisions (Penz and Kirchler, 2012).

Aims of research using the diary technique are to find out in what topic areas conflicts arise, how they are perceived emotionally, how they impact on the relationship quality and what tactics couples apply to settle conflicts. With regard to the dynamics of decisions, it is also interesting to see whether past decisions influence following decisions, i.e. whether balance in influence between partners is established. The methodology as developed in the Vienna Diary Study (Kirchler *et al.*, 2001) was applied

and adapted where necessary. In the following the instrument, the procedure and the sample are described. In a subsequent section, some findings are presented. The main focus is to show the applicability of the method as well as major learnings in order to demonstrate the usefulness of the methodology in international marketing research.

### *Instrument adaptation*

Similar to the Viennese Diary the event diary consisted of two diary questions sheets. The first set of questions related to whether couples talked to each other, what issues they talked about, whether there was (dis)agreement and how they felt. The overall feeling about the partnership and who contributed more to the partnership were included as well. The second set of questions related to a specific conflict that was reported. For the conflict, couples independently reported descriptive information (where they were, who was with them, how long the conversation took, etc.) as well as perceptual information about who had more knowledge and influence on the topic, how important the topic was, whether a decision was derived, etc. In addition, couples had to choose from a list of tactics the one they applied in the conflict themselves and the partner (Kirchler *et al.*, 2001). This allows studying the subjective perception within the couple.

Decisions and respective conflicts on economic issues (saving and spending money) were asked for. This helped to focus on a specific area of decision making. Another adaptation refers to the reporting of applied tactics: while in the Viennese Diary Study a series of applied tactics in a conflict could be reported, a pre-test with Vietnamese respondents showed that this proved to be too difficult and therefore only one owns tactic as well as the partner's tactic were asked for.

The diary sheets were available in Vietnamese (translation and back-translation).

### *Sample and procedure*

Participating couples in the study were asked to fill in the diary everyday for three months (92 days). This procedure is different to the Viennese Diary Study in which couples participated for 12 months. Since the stability of the data was reported as good, a short data collection time proves economical.

Each partner filled in the diary question sheets on his/her own in the absence of the interviewer. Although usually considerable exchange takes place between couples in collectivistic cultures, such as Vietnam, this procedure was preferred over joint reporting to avoid direct influence, socially desirable answers and exercising of power from a dominant partner. In addition, in order to reduce respondent bias, i.e. providing answers that please the interviewer, respondents were asked to fill in the diary question sheets alone (Kumar, 2000).

The couples were approached by a local researcher and received detailed explanation of the procedure. They were paid US\$80 per month for participating, which corresponds to an average monthly salary. A few minutes per day were required to complete the diary sheets.

Overall, a total of 52 middle-class couples (104 individuals) living in Hanoi, Vietnam participated over the entire period of 92 days[1]. The average participating couple had lived together with one to two children (mean 1.79). Their level of education was above national average. Women were on average 44 years, men 48 years old. Both partners in the couple were working.

Because of the cultural idiosyncrasies and language, two interpreters and 12 supervisors assisted the principal researcher in the data collection and supervision of



the participating couples. This additional group helped in selecting information-rich cases in Vietnam and provided access using their personal networks and snowballing. Grounds for selecting the supervisors were additional language (German, English), social skills and motivation to go through a general training (criterion sampling) (Patton, 2002). German-speaking teachers and students of the Goethe-Institute and English-speaking students in Hanoi were selected as supervisors. Their training consisted of a detailed discussion of each question of the diary sheets and recommendations how to deal with possible questions by the respondents. The supervisors also checked the material; they filled in the data sheets themselves for one week as part of the pre-test and the training. Each supervisor managed the data collection of about five households each. They also received US\$80.

Households were selected together with the supervisors. In a first meeting, all selected couples met with the supervisors and had the chance to get to know each other and learn more about the study. They had the opportunity to ask questions and get familiar with the procedure.

Enough diary sheets for a week were handed in. The supervisors on a daily basis collected each partner's diary sheets. The principal researcher met with the supervisors every other day to collect the diary sheets and again once a month to exchange experiences and discuss open questions. Communication via telephone and e-mails between the principal researcher and the supervisors was rather frequent at the beginning of data collection. It was also necessary for the principal researcher to visit families in the beginning. At the end of the data collection, all couples and supervisors were invited to dinner and had a lively exchange of experiences.

Overall, the time between recruiting of supervisors and final dinner was nine months; data collection started in month five and ended in month nine.

#### *Descriptive overview of Vietnamese decision dynamics*

On average, couples spend about six hours together and they talked to each other for about 50 minutes per day. Couples have similar evaluations of contentment with the outcome of their talks (2.13 and 2.14, which is rather low); the fairness of both the decision process as well as the outcome of the decision is perceived more positively by men, but overall both partners seem to perceive the outcome as fair (for more details see Table V).

Couples discussed primarily topics on children, consumption expenditures and work. They agreed on most topics and reported related feelings were average to good. Overall, men felt better, more powerful and much freer than women in the partnership (see Table VI). Men also indicated that their wives invested more into the partnership than they did. When asked about how many decisions were made autonomously, men reported that 6.2 per cent and females 6.5 per cent of their decisions were made without the partner.

With respect to conflicting issues, participants reported 3,682 conflicts, which took place mainly at home and lasted for about half an hour. Often discussed conflicts related to expenditures for the household (e.g. appliances: 25.8 per cent), children (e.g. education: 22.2 per cent), food (e.g. groceries: 16.9 per cent), personal goods (e.g. clothing: 15.9 per cent), luxury goods (e.g. travel: 14.7 per cent) and for family/friends (e.g. gifts: 4.3 per cent).

#### **Discussion**

This paper aimed at presenting a method that allows studying partners' decision making processes within a household. Applying the diary technique, wife and husband independently reported each day their perceptions and behaviours during decision

**Table V.**  
Description  
of Vietnamese  
VDT data

Variables	Couple	According to wife	According to husband
Time together <sup>a</sup>	289	290	287
Talk <sup>a</sup>	49.59	49.9	49.27
Contentment with outcome <sup>b</sup>	2.14	2.13	2.14
<i>Perceived fairness of</i>			
Decision making <sup>c</sup>	5.68	5.62	5.75
Result <sup>c</sup>	5.88	5.87	5.9
<i>Percentage of reported conflict about (expenditure on)</i>			
Household	25.8	25.8	25.8
Children	22.2	22.3	22.2
Work	0.2	0.2	0.3
Personal expenses	15.9	15.8	15.9
Food	16.9	17.2	16.5
Luxury goods/investments	14.7	14.5	15.0
Family/friends	4.3	4.2	4.4

**Notes:** <sup>a</sup>Min per day; <sup>b</sup>1 = not at all, 7 = totally; <sup>c</sup>1 = unfair, 7 = fair

Affective dimension	Husband	Wife
1 = Bad, 7 = good	$M = 6.01$ (SD = 1.4)	$M = 5.94$ (SD = 1.4)
1 = Weak, 7 = strong	$M = 6.04$ (SD = 1.4)	$M = 5.97$ (SD = 1.4)
1 = Unfree, 7 = free	$M = 5.90$ (SD = 1.4)	$M = 5.82$ (SD = 1.5)

**Table VI.**  
Feelings regarding  
relationship –  
Vietnamese  
VDT data

**Note:** A seven-point scale was used

processes by filling in the structured diary. The methodology allows for dyadic analyses and keeping track of the decision and mutual influence history. In addition, the role in decision making of each spouse can be analysed. Based on the seminal Viennese Diary Study, the methodology was applied in the context of Vietnam, an example for an emerging market that is characterized by increasing spending power of middle-class consumers. The methodological contribution of this paper thus is to present the diary technique as a method that can be applied in a collectivistic culture, such as Vietnam. The instrument is able to capture culturally diverse decision dynamics in a non-Western context that differs in terms of household structure, decision making and conflict resolution. Reactions from respondents at the end of data collection confirmed the ease of use of the instrument and its function for reflection of everyday decision making.

Results need to be interpreted along the Vietnamese cultural context, which is a masculine-dominated culture, and losing face is an important issue. In this context, the low number of reported autonomous decisions in the Vietnamese study is interesting: Both partners perceived only about 6 per cent of their decisions to be made without the partner. Decisions done only by, for instance the wife does not fall into an autonomous decision but a joint one. This raises interesting further avenues for research. For instance, members in a household might implicitly consider the partner's interests because of cultural values or at least do not realize their own responsibility in the decision. In this respect, the concept of autonomous decision making seems to be unsuitable because even if personal interests prevail, the family's interests are more relevant.

Tansuhaj and Foxman (1990) complain that children are often left out of research into families. Having moved from the study of one person to the interviewing and observation of dyads or pairs, research should also acknowledge triads or the extended family in cultures where they matter. Data from the Vietnamese Diary Study show that topics about children are highly discussed, and that they are present in every second conflict; however, little is known about their influence in the decision making process. For instance, couples reported that they hardly were involved in initiating the conflict.

However, a major disadvantage and possible limitation refers to the small sample size. Such a disadvantage is accepted when the events to be recorded are detailed ones that normally pass almost unnoticed in the routine of everyday life.

An avenue for further research would be to consider replication as a next logical step in applying the VDT: repeated longitudinal designs allow observation due to changes within the household (members, topics, etc.) and helps to validate the instrument. The replication-with-extension research is considered a valuable vehicle for discovering empirical generalizations (Hubbard and Murray, 2002).

#### Note

1. Almost one third (19 couples, 38 individuals) quit their participation due to time constraints and lack of motivation within the first week. Research assistants explained that these couples were interested in the information stage but when they realized the effort of keeping their diaries they quit. The drop-out sample was mixed in terms of age (ranging from 25 to 60 years), most of the individuals had a university degree.

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