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**MANAGEMENT IN WOOD SCIENCE PROGRAMME**

**CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR ANALYSIS METHODS AND THEIR APPLICATION**  
**POSSIBILITIES ON THE FURNITURE MARKET WHILE CREATING CUSTOMER**  
**ORIENTATED STRATEGIES**

**PhD thesis installment**

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## **Topicality of the theme**

We have seen an unprecedented increase of consumption in developed countries. [KOPÁTSY 1992, TÖRŐCSIK 2007]. Nowadays consumption has become a determinant means of self-expression. The identity creating role of the post in production has been replaced by the way of spending accessible earnings i.e. consumption [SOLOMON et al. 2010]. In the 1990s the attention of Hungarian researchers was turned towards customer behaviour researches and studies about lifestyle were put into the foreground as well. The customer behaviour model designed for the durable goods market was created to assist the effective marketing strategy planning of small and medium-sized furniture manufacturing business enterprises.

## **Basic hypotheses of the research**

1. A model based on family decisions may be set up in connection with furniture purchase – included in purchases of durable goods - and this model concerns the correlations between individual roles and family decisions<sup>1</sup>.
2. Furniture purchase and use can be categorised according to the theoretical categories of purchase and consumption and this fact can be verified by a quantitative primary survey.
3. The segmentation of furniture purchasers according to life style can be carried out by cluster analysis based on a quantitative primary survey.
4. General customer behaviour trends can be observed on the market and can be verified by a quantitative primary survey on a large sample thus a furniture market trend-research system has to be set up to assist company strategy planning.

## **The result of the theoretical research**

The thesis surveys the theoretical frames of consumption and purchase, customer behaviour models significant for the topic, the methods and importance of trend research in the cognition of customer behaviour and the theory and practice of life style based segmentation models.

The result of the research is an innovative customer behaviour model that can be applied on the market of durable goods, is based on the role of individuals in making family decisions and is verified by the analyses of the mechanisms of furniture acquisitions.

The model seizes the following factors in a novel way:

- Complex environmental stimuli affect members of families (men, women, and children) as individual decision making elements.
- In this model, according to behaviour trends, children are also involved in purchase decisions since they affect them.

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<sup>1</sup> My work does not concern the organizational market.

- The male, female members and children in a family are directed into each period of purchase decisions by an optional type of relation, which signals that certain members take part in decision making to a different degree in line with the male-female-child roles characteristic to the given society.<sup>2</sup>
- The relationship between individuals determines the family character of decision making and the roles of individuals in decision making are unravelled. It is an important part of our model to analyse which periods of decision making do individual family members take part in and with what intensity. The abrupt blue arrow signals this in Figure 1 – introducing the model -, it shows the optional relationship of individuals with the different decision making periods (problem recognition- information search – evaluation – purchase – use – follow-up evaluation).
- The *experience effect* impacts each family member, the results appear in the consumer habitus of the next decision making.
- The model takes into account that *international environment* also affects the process of decision making.

### **Verification of the theoretical model by primary research**

According to the research problem raised (verification of the customer behaviour model - elaborated in theory - in practice on the furniture market) the aim of the primary research:

1. During analysing the elements of the impersonal environment on furniture purchases, the analysis of the validity of customer behaviour trends on the furniture market,
2. life style based segmentation on the furniture market.
3. the analysis of the family character of the furniture purchase decisions in the individual periods of the decision making process (problem recognition, information search, decision, purchase) and the mapping of family roles (man-woman-child).
4. categorization of furniture use and purchase according to the theoretical categories of consumption and purchase.

### **The methodology of the research**

The method of research is a descriptive, quantitative, personal interview based on a structured questionnaire. Our aim was to obtain statistically valid, quantifiable data on a sample representing Hungarian furniture purchasers, the population of the research.

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<sup>2</sup> TÖRŐCSIK [2006] emphasizes in the section about “new men” that the “*gay*” category has to be handled separately due to their growing presence in society and markets since fighting discrimination in different fields resulted in the appearance of a man type that can be determined as a consumer segment. In my thesis I put aside this category and concentrated on the classical man-woman-child(ren) form of families.

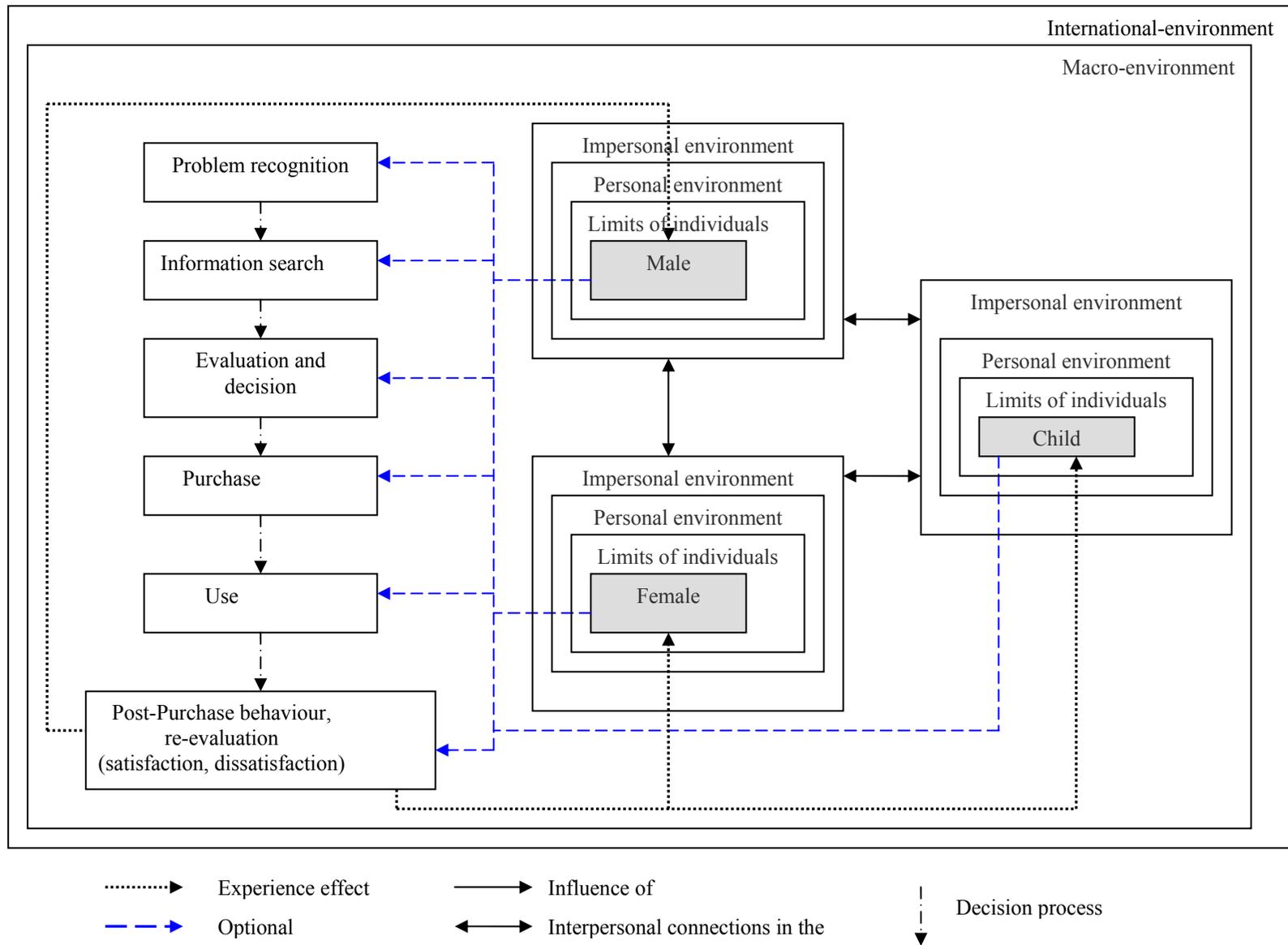


Figure 1. Customer behaviour model on the market of durable goods – the author's model

The *necessity* of the primary, descriptive and quantitative method is *verified* because:

- it tests customer behaviour models of other authors using a wide sample, among Hungarian furniture purchasers, in a statistically represented way. One of the research aims is to verify the extent to which general trends concern the furniture market.
- Another aim was to describe the characteristics of the market and the description of customer groups. Individual customer segments can be well set up and described using this research method.
- A further aim was the analysis of given aspects of the decision making process (male-female roles) and previous testable research results had been used to do this.

While elaborating the research method we aimed at assembling a questionnaire that is appropriate for conducting multi-level cross-section and cohort analyses.

According to the aim of the research the *target group* of the research: furniture purchasers who are planning to buy furniture in the next two years, who take part in the decision making process in the family and who do not work in the fields of wood industry, furniture manufacture, furniture trade, furniture design or inner architecture.

We used quota sampling. Sample size was 1300 persons. Assembling the quota was done based on a preliminary omnibus survey of 1054 people in which we used the basic demographical data – significant for the topic – of people planning to buy furniture in the next two years as the basis of the quota. These were: type of settlement, gender, and age group. In keeping with the regional quota (Budapest, western Hungary, and eastern Hungary) the distribution of respondents followed national rates. According to the omnibus survey of 1054 people 18.8% of the Hungarian population was planning to buy furniture at the time of the interview. The interviews were conducted in the summer of 2009 on neutral spots (streets).

### **Hypotheses tested during the research and the results of the analysis**

**H1. In the category of life style – defined as a factor of customer habitus – furniture purchaser segments can be differentiated according to modern and traditional value orientation (home décor style groups).**

KAPITÁNY-KAPITÁNY [1995] talks about “middle-class – individualistic” and “conventional – traditional” value trends in his work, these categories, from a different approach, have the same features as the modern-traditional value orientation.

Segmentation according to values is widespread in segmentation models based on life style. The analysis of the role of values was confirmed by LAZER (1971) who stated that lifestyle is the result of factors like resources, culture, *values*, rules, punishments and symbols. Several models introduced in

the chapter about former life style researches choose values determining a certain area for the bases of their segmentation.<sup>3</sup>

The method of the hypothesis analysis: k-mean cluster analysis.

In my work, first I had to determine the variables that can be the bases for the cluster formation. The modern and traditional furniture purchase and usage values chosen according to value orientation are included in Table 1.

Segmentation was carried out according to attitude statements determined by basic values. The difference in marketing characteristics between groups were analysed by variance analysis. The groups described in detail in the dissertation are summarised by Figure 2.

<b>modernity</b>	<b>tradition</b>
Self-expression, the individual is in the centre (colour, form, design, fashion, brand products, tailored to person). Flat as the source of joy.	Functionality in furniture use (long endurance, manufacturing precision, cleanness and order as basic value).
Furnishing principle: 'feel comfortable', sacrifices time, and goes into details.	Functionality in home décor.
Provoke positive reaction from the social environment by self-expression. This means fear/risk at decision making. Mutual presence of confidence and fear.	Provoking positive reaction from the social environment by correspondence, adjustment to others.
Chosen relationships are higher valued, more frequent guest; public spaces are created in accordance with this.	Less guests.
Changes, rearrangements are typical.	Continuity, rearrangements are not typical.
Eclectic home décor (memorabilia from the past together with modern objects in one space).	Respect tradition in home décor, influenced by average standards, mediocre principle, follows uniform style determined by tradition.
The role of the Internet, virtual objects, pictures.	Written text, personal communication.
Flexible pace of life (workplaces run into one another).	Considerate, slow pace of life.
Self-expression penetrates working areas.	Strict functionality (kitchen, pantry, workshop).
Search for experiences is characteristic for lifestyle.	Aspiring safety in lifestyle.
Critical approach, need for authenticity.	
<b>Basic value:</b> <i>joy, self-centred, measures own success through acknowledgement of others.</i>	<b>Basic value:</b> <i>belonging somewhere, rules, norms, authority</i>

Table 1. Modern and traditional values

<sup>3</sup> In the Gallup model groups were identified in the traditional – modern and individualistic – social values determined frame. Life Style Inspiration model segments according to life pace and value orientation. SINUS milieu model groups according to basic value orientation, everyday activities, general attitudes and everyday aesthetics.

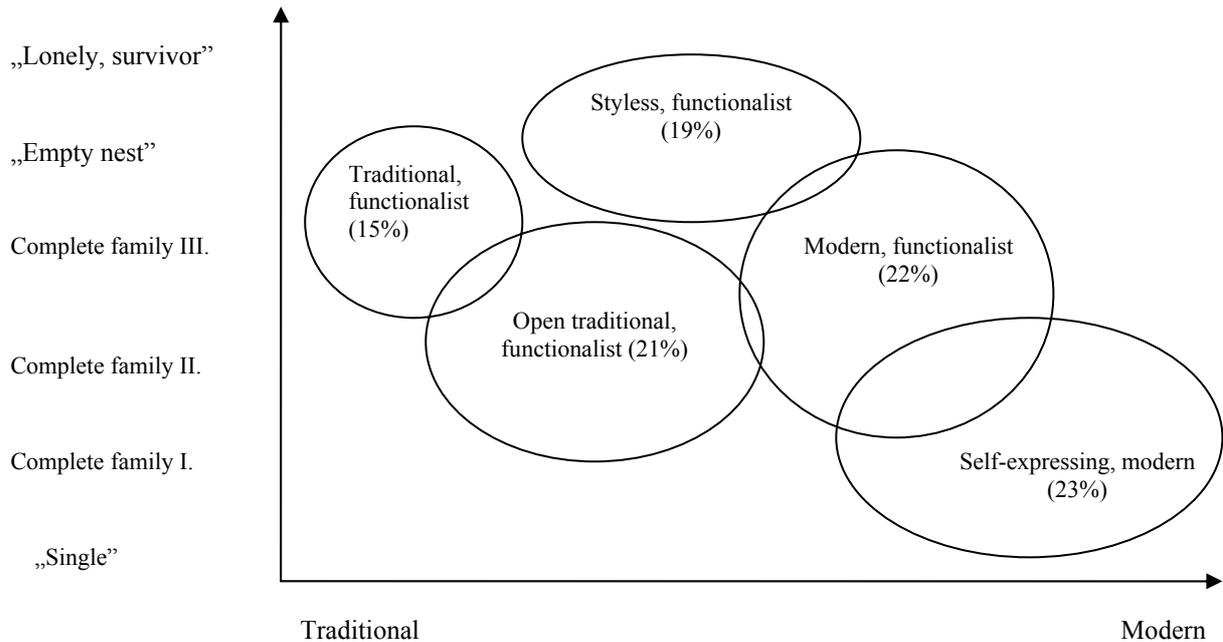


Figure 2. Home décor style groups

## H2. Nowadays we can observe emotional (symbolic) self-expression in the effect of furniture use on home décor.

TÖRŐCSIK [2007] describes that in the case of emotional (symbolic) self-expression the aim of consumption is directed outwards, the consumer expects a positive reaction from the social environment. The consumer wishes to get a positive effect from the environment in a way that he or she can express his or her own personality.

The analysis of the hypothesis was done, on the one hand, by factor analysis. The aim of the factor analysis is to find those latent and independent dimensions (factors) that the listed, supposed factors can explain. Supposed dimensions were the aspects of functionality (technical) and emotions (self-expression).

Two factors arose as the result of the research:

1. The first factor including: lifespan, manufacture precision and guarantee time. This can be a *factor of "technological functionality"* assumed at the starting point.
2. The second *factor* can be "self-expression" or "*emotions*" in which brands and fashion are included.

The analysis of the dimensions – the results of factoring – shows that emotional aspects appear, they are emphatic during furniture purchase but the number of variables must be reduced considerably. Thus further attitudes had to be analysed in the thesis.

The hypothesis was verified with the statement that the role of design is not strong enough compared to that of functionality. However, nowadays we can observe the effect of emotional (symbolic) self-expressing furniture use on home décor.

### **H3. Furniture purchase is experience oriented, result-centred purchase when products provide the experience by assisting the customer in self-expression.**

The experiences gained during shopping have determining roles in experience-orientated purchases. They may originate from the circumstances of the purchase [SCHMITZ, 2005] or the habitus of the customer [WEINBERG, 1992].

The attitude statements evaluated on a Likert scale served as points of reference during hypothesis analysis. According to these, process-centred experience shopping occurred on a medium level in connection with furniture purchases. Before accepting results unconditionally, we have to examine that to what extent is task-orientation, the reciprocal pole of experience-orientation, present in decisions about furniture purchase.

Analysed were:

- the effect of outer compulsions, and
- compromise shopping which can be noticed when we confront the questions about the price-quality relations of the primary research with the chapters about the amounts of money customers are willing to spend on furniture.

So the hypothesis was rejected. Furniture purchase is not an *experience-oriented, result-centred* purchase when the *experience is provided by the product* by assisting *customers' self-expression*. Buying furniture in Hungary is a task-oriented activity, accomplishing a task is more emphasised than experiences during acquisitions. This is verified by outer compulsions and the limitedness of needs by possibilities.

### **H4. The following consumer behaviour trends are valid on the furniture market among the general trends defined as elements of the impersonal customer environment:**

#### **H4.a. Furniture purchasers need personally tailored products affected by ego-trend originating from modern values.**

The trend discovered by the TREND INSPIRATION research group in 2008 is infinity, it suggests that the need for personally tailored products have become commonplace. The determinant factor of this trend is exhibitionism since everything can become a tool of self expression. This refers back to *ego-trend* (TÖRÖCSIK 2006) which means putting the individual into the foreground and the need for

personally tailored product (tailored to person). HORX (2000) also states that in the next social era, the knowledge-economy, individualism will become the centre element.

The analysis of variables measured on a scale of importance was the method of the research.

The hypothesis was accepted. The effects of ego-trend, derived from modern values, can be observed in decisions about furniture purchase which can be noticed in the need for uniqueness and for personally tailored products.

**H4.b. Price is still a very important factor during decisions about furniture purchase but the trend of raising the value of social responsibility, environmental protection and human health can be noticed. Thus the need for “cheap-eco” products will be expected to appear on the furniture market (“eco” meaning the appearance of the commitment to the protection of people and their environment).**

“Eco” means the commitment for the protection of both people and their environment. According to KAPITÁNY-KAPITÁNY (2000) one of the values of the ' individualistic – middle-class' value trend is that the need for individual integrity and thus dehumanization seemed to be one of the key questions at the turn of the century. The first part of the hypothesis originates from the statements of PAKAINÉ et al. (2007) which say that price is the first or second and most important aspect of choice in most furniture categories. Researchers found price-sensitivity in the case of decisions about furniture purchase in 2007 as well. According to the researchers of TREND INSPIRATION (2010) eco product will become characteristically cheaper along with future improvements, cheap-eco products will appear, resulting in the appearance of the cheaper versions of previous products and of eco products designed with the aim of cheapness.

Applied methodology: factor analysis, measuring attitude statements on scales of agreement and measuring variables on a scale of importance, and their analysis.

The hypothesis was accepted, the appearance of the need for “cheap-eco” products is expected (“eco” meaning the appearance of the commitment to the protection of people and their environment), since price is still an important factor in decisions about furniture purchase and the trend of raising the value of social responsibility, environmental protection and human health can be noticed. The phenomenon of taking environmental (natural and human) issues into consideration when making decisions about furniture purchase can be observed in the case of price-sensitive customers.

**H4.c. Cheap design trend can be observed on the furniture market besides price-sensitivity, so characteristic for decisions about furniture purchase.**

**Cheap design** trend means the democratization of design according to the TREND INSPIRATION research group (2009) but this process began earlier. The harmony of beauty, aesthetics and practicality used to be defined as a requirement towards more expensive products representing higher quality. They signalled in 2009 that appropriate design is obligatory even for medium-market products. Along with these trend, customers would like more imaginative, more beautiful products for lower prices.

Applied methodology: measuring attitude statements on scales of agreement and measuring variables on a scale of importance, and their analysis.

The hypothesis was accepted, besides price-sensitivity, so characteristic for decisions about furniture purchase, cheap design trends also have *raison d'être* on the furniture market. Form/design turned out to be an important factor for respondents showing price-sensitivity justn like in the whole sample.

**H4.d. Personal type of information sources have greater influence on decisions about furniture purchase. This comes along with the appearance of a trend signalling the increase in the need for locality.**

According to TÖRŐCSIK (2006) the search for **authenticity** occurs as the counter-trend of pleasure search in connection with customer expectations where credibility is in the foreground and finding a trustworthy manufacturer and its store requires great awareness and commitment from the customer.

TREND INSPIRATION research group determined that the need for *credibility* – because of the uncertainty created - was a result of the economic crisis in 2009. This meant that companies were obliged to become transparent while the need for products coming from authentic sources and available in a small circle had increased. Alongside with these, *locality* was placed in the foreground. Products made locally became more popular since the nearer the manufacturer is geographically the more creditable he or she is for the consumer. According to our verified hypothesis, personal information sources are observably higher rated on the furniture market.

Applied methodology: measuring variables on a scale of importance, their analysis, comparison in pairs.

The hypothesis was accepted: personal type of information sources have greater influence on decisions about furniture purchase which comes along with the appearance of a trend signalling increase in the need for locality.

**H4.e. Counselling, personal connections are more important for women when gathering information in the process of making decisions about furniture purchase. Men rely more on written documents during purchases than on the competence of the shop assistant.**

TÖRŐCSIK (2006) describes the need for counselling as a general behaviour trend characteristic for our time which signals that customers entrust certain decisions they have little knowledge about to experts. As for the differences in customer behaviour of men and women, he signals that men rely more on written documents than on the expertise of the shop assistant during purchases.

According to PAKAINÉ (1997) the role of shop assistant is dominant in making furniture purchase decisions, appropriately trained people can determine the decision making process since consumers need tangible help and counselling when making decisions about furniture purchase.

Applied methodology: variance analysis.

The hypothesis was rejected. Furniture purchase is an area that needs counselling, personal information source, independent from gender. The hypothesis that men rely more on written documents than on the expertise of the shop assistant was not verified.

**H4.f. A “middle-class – individualistic” value trend has spread in flat uses. This trend, beyond the basic functionality of the “conventional – traditional” value trend, puts the individual in the foreground.**

KAPITÁNY-KAPITÁNY [2000] conceptualizes that the appearance of self-expression in home décor is characteristic for the “middle-class – individualistic” value trend. This, on the one hand, serves the needs of a society that turns outwards and seeks the acknowledgement of others to prove their own successfulness but, on the other hand, it serves the needs of the individual as well.

The shift between the two value trends became multitudinous in the 1960s in Hungary and in a certain way that resulted in mixed forms. The two value trends mixed and gradually shifted towards the individualistic value trend.

Applied methodology: k-mean cluster analysis introduced in the section about hypothesis H1.

The hypothesis was accepted. It was verified during segmentation that the “middle-class – individualistic” home décor value trend has spread among furniture purchasers. Two groups – the ‘self-expressing modern’ (23%) and the “modern functionalist” (22%) can be characterised by this value trend making up for 45% of furniture purchasers.

**H5. The roles in the purchase process sections (problem origination, information gathering, and purchase) can be well separated according to gender (male-female). The role of women is determinant in the problem origination, information gathering and decision periods of the furniture purchase process.**

According to the changes in the roles of the genders, the more and more self-conscious female customers expect to be treated as partners. A new category, the „home manager”, has occurred besides the category of carrier women [TÖRÖCSIK 2006. page 69]: she organises the household, gathers information before the purchase decisions of her family, manages the family sources and raises children. All these can mean a temporary quit from the world of work. TÖRÖCSIK [2006] writes that the expectations towards men have also changed in the last couple of years but in the contrary way. The purchases of men are more expedient, they prefer gathering information before the purchase, not during it.

According to PAKAINÉ [1997] women are more initiative than men during furniture acquisition. They have an active role in need-recognition, they usually pay more attention to the furniture of the flat but information gathering and choice are common family decisions while the role of men becomes stronger during purchase.

Applied methodology: frequency of mentioning according to the roles of individual family members in the decision making process (problem recognition, information gathering, decision, purchase)

The hypothesis was accepted. Male and female roles are separated in the periods of decision making processes in families. Problem recognition is a female, acquisition is a male role, and information gathering and decision making are common activities. The role of children can be observed according to general behaviour trends, mainly in the period of problem recognition.

### **The theses of the thesis**

In the following I am summarising the theses of my thesis as the result of primary (hypothesis analysis) and theoretical research:

**T1.** Furniture purchases – a type of durable goods purchase – is characterised by a family character and environmental stimuli (especially life style and behaviour trends) affecting the family members as individuals were verified.

**T2.** Furniture purchase is a *task-oriented* purchase type. Nowadays emotional (symbolic, self-expressing) furniture use can be observed. As a result of this the task of furniture industry marketing is to shift task-orientation, affecting decisions significantly, towards experience-orientation.

**T3.** The *segments* of furniture purchasers (home décor style groups) can be differentiated using *life style* based segmentation. Segmentation can be carried out along *family life cycle* and *modern/traditional value orientation*. The segmentation model and methodology introduced in my thesis can assist this process.

**T4.** General consumer behaviour models are valid on the furniture market as well, so trends revealed by others have to be verified. Furthermore, we need to plan and introduce a research system consisting of multiple modules, revealing and applying methods, monitoring trends unique for the furniture market.

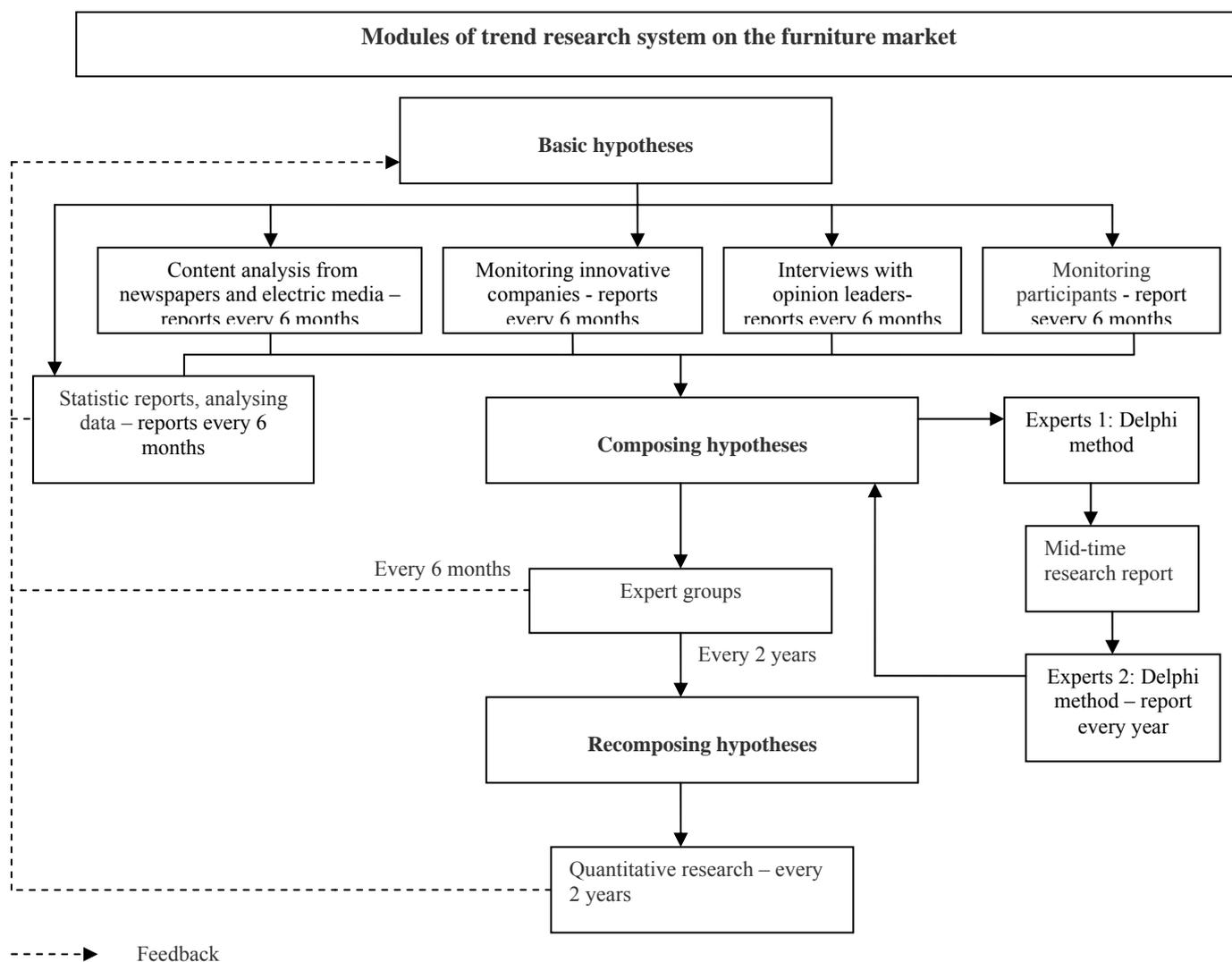
**T5.** Furniture purchase is a decision with family character when the effects members of a family have on the different periods of the purchase process differ according to gender. New male, female and child roles are observable in today's society and verified quantitatively in decisions about furniture purchases.

#### **Possible further directions of research**

The necessity of trend research (T4) is verified by the research result that justified the presence of several general behaviour trends – observable on various markets, revealed by others – on the furniture market. Thesis number 4 (T4) states that it is necessary to introduce a research system consisting of multiple modules focusing on the furniture market which, besides monitoring general trends, reveals specialities characteristic for the furniture market and uses quantitative methods. This thesis makes a suggestion about this as shown in Figure 3.

The author is planning to continue her research work in the following areas:

- elaborating the consumer behaviour model worked out in the thesis, determining the effects of marketing activities – as members of the impersonal environment – not analysed in this work as well as determining the research methods of roles reference groups – as members of the closer social environment - and opinion leaders play in decisions about furniture purchase and measuring their effects possibly with primary research.
- The aim of the work was to create a consumer behaviour model that is valid on the market of durable goods since its validity on the furniture market is founded. It is necessary to analyse this from the aspect of further markets and to prove the assumptions of the model.
- The detailed elaboration of the modules of the trend research system on the furniture market and the determination of the research methodology in further detail.
- The analyses of the data of the primary research (mapping the possibilities of an analysis according to furniture types).



Research aim: revealing trends on the furniture market, constant monitoring, analysing the validity of general behaviour trends

Figure 3. The plan of the trend research system on the furniture market

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