

IDENTIFYING CRITERIA OF CONSUMER AWARENESS: A PILOT STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This article describes the development of a theoretical model from which certain criteria of consumer awareness were identified and tested in an empirical study involving a cross-cultural sample of 436 consumers. Results revealed five criteria of consumer awareness viz bargain hunting, general consumer knowledge, product knowledge, information search and price consciousness. These criteria differed across socio-economic race groups in terms of their importance. The implications of the findings for furthering the consumer movement in South Africa and follow-up research in the field are also discussed.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie artikel beskryf die ontwikkeling van 'n teoretiese model waaruit sekere kriteria van verbruikersbewustheid geïdentifiseer en getoets is in 'n empiriese studie op 'n tussen-kulturele steekproef van 436 verbruikers. Die bevindinge toon vyf kriteria van verbruikersbewustheid nl. winskopie-jagter, algemene verbruikerskennis, produk-kennis, inligtinginwinning en prysbewustheid. Hierdie kriteria het verskil tussen sosio-ekonomiese rasse-groepe ten opsigte van belangrikheid. Implikasies van die bevindinge vir die bevordering van die verbruikersbeweging in Suid-Afrika en voortgesette navorsing in die veld word ook bespreek.

Consumer awareness or consumerism has recently been described as the voicing of consumer discontent and the taking of corrective action. It can also be viewed as a low intensity social movement, which seeks to augment the rights and power of the buyers versus those of the sellers (Maynes, 1990). The concept of a low intensity social movement refers to its widespread but nonintense support. In terms of their own economic situation consumers tend to put everything connected with their jobs or profession first, that is the producers' interest. Only after the producers' interest is attended to, do they pay attention to their own consumer related problems.

It could be expected that South Africa's high inflation rate, poor economic growth rate and mounting unemployment would result a higher degree of consumer awareness. This however is not the case as consumer awareness among a large proportion of the population appears to be still lacking. Many low-income consumers are unsophisticated in the market, especially with regard to credit purchases or contracts.

Consumers are also finding it increasingly difficult to protect themselves from dangerous products, deception and economic exploitation. Many of these problems are transient, non repeating and in seeking correction consumers are amateurs, having to rely on their own knowledge and experience, while facing professionals, competent in the newest business methods and technologies (Weyers, 1990).

Research regarding complaint behaviour has shown that con-

sumer and retailer perceptions of actions that are taken in the buying situation, may differ. These differences could indicate possible causes of consumer frustration (Rousseau, 1987). Many consumers, for example, fear that when they return a product to the seller there will be disagreement about the seller's responsibility regarding the product (Du Plessis, 1990).

Apart from being rooted in dissatisfaction, consumer awareness may also evolve from preventative action. Many consumers who are consumer oriented or consumer aware, ensure that they are well informed prior to buying a product or service or prior to entering into a complex business transaction. They engage in a prepurchase information search by doing comparative shopping and familiarizing themselves with the conditions of the sale. Their buying behaviour could be described as high involvement decision making. Such behaviour may be contrasted with low involvement decision making where consumers do little information search, represent a passive audience for advertising and often buy on impulse or for variety seeking, especially in the case of fast moving packaged goods and food items (Assael, 1987).

In order to measure the concept of consumer awareness, certain criteria need to be established. These criteria may be derived from a broad general hypothetical model, typifying a typical consumer aware person in three phases of the purchase cycle. The following model was constructed as a basis for formulating criteria and deducing constructs of consumer awareness for testing in an empirical study.

Phases in the purchase cycle	Pre-purchase	Purchase	Post-purchase
Criteria for consumer awareness.	Awareness of rights. Active information search. High product involvement. Risk perception in decision making.	High price awareness. Tendency to bargain hunt. Extensive product evaluation and inspection. Sensitive to environmental issues in consumption.	Willingness to redress complaints. Awareness of channels for complaint handling. Consult consumer organizations on problems experienced. Active involvement in consumer affairs.

FIGURE 1: MODEL OF CONSUMER AWARENESS

Conceptual foundation:

The model depicted in figure 1 is derived from research and theory aimed at identifying objective general characteristics of consumer aware shoppers that set them apart from the consumer unaware shoppers. The basic assumption is that consumers vary in their sensitivity to product and service performance and in the level and type of response that these consumers will make. Andreasen (1985) reports that consumers will vary in (i) their loyalty to an organization and its offerings (ii) individual preferences for quality (iii) abilities to detect quality differences in product categories and (iv) their perceptions of the cost and benefits to be derived from taking action when product service dissatisfaction occurs. For example, research on physician and medical care by the author showed that an elite of quality-conscious consumers would be most sensitive to service quality and likely to "police" the market. The study also supported the prediction that most quality conscious and potentially vocal consumers would exercise an "exit" or leave option when dissatisfaction occurred, leaving sellers of medical services to deal with a relatively voiceless mass of consumers.

Research further supports the assumption that consumer awareness is closely linked to active information search. Bourgeois and Barnes (1979), after a thorough review of the literature and their own empirical research, found that consumerists (consumer aware individuals) are frequent readers of national and international sections of newspapers which tend to be more negative to advertising and less exposed to broadcast media. As a result of their greater consumer knowledge they tend to be opinion leaders and also interested in other social issues such as women's rights, politics and environmental protection. Biehal (1983) states that a consumer's inherent cognitive ability, acquired problem solving skills, degree of involvement in the choice situation and personality and demographic characteristics may all affect information search. Not only are consumer aware individuals generally better informed, but they are also better educated, earn higher incomes, are in a higher social class and are more active in formal organizations. They also tend to be more liberal and politically committed than other groups. These socially conscious consumers are people who are not only concerned with their own personal satisfactions, but also buy with some consideration of the social and environmental well being of others (Engel & Blackwell, 1982).

Aaker and Day (1982) state that an informed consumer is a protected consumer. They found that subscribers to Consumer Reports were well equipped to use any additional information regarding products and services. They were part of an educational and income elite and were information sensitive, in general, and consumer information sensitive, in particular. These consumer aware persons were rational buyers, using more utilitarian, performance related choice criteria in their shopping. Aaker and Day (1982) state that low income buyers, on the other hand, have the greatest need for protection or assistance in making more informed choices. They were, however, more likely to lack the characteristics of consumer awareness that would allow them to take advantage of the information. Consumer unaware shoppers, in many instances, represent low income consumers who are ignorant of the benefits of comparative shopping. These people lack the education and knowledge necessary to choose the best buy, even if it were available. The authors add that the young, old and poor are the most disadvantaged, vulnerable groups in society.

Active information search in the pre-purchase stage implies that the purchase is important to the consumer. Such purchases described as high involvement are also closely tied to the consumer's ego and self-image. They involve some risk for the consumer i.e. financial risk in the case of highly priced items and social risk where product choices are important for the acceptance by peer groups. Psychological risk may also occur where a wrong decision might cause some concern and anxiety for the purchaser (Assael, 1978). Consumer aware persons generally can be expected to be more alert to the risk in-

involved in consumer decision-making because they are better informed shoppers.

Assael (1978) reports that greater price awareness occurs among advantaged consumers. A possible reason for this may be their access to more accurate price information and a greater willingness to process such information. One study found that consumers most likely to take advantage of price deals are higher income consumers with cars. In addition, a study by Gabor and Granger (1964) found that more prices were misperceived by the lower income and the less educated respondents. The exception was some of the very poor who were more aware of prices. Although these lower income, less educated shoppers may be more price sensitive, it did not result in their taking advantage of lower prices and special offers. This may be due to restricted resources (no car and limited storage space) and limited information on prices and deals.

Consumer awareness may also be linked to a tendency for bargain hunting. One study found that the major reason why some customers could obtain the same item for a lower price was their knowledge and bargaining strength. The latter is often a function of a high need for achievement, less tolerance of others and an efficient dominant person (Assael, 1987). Extensive product evaluation and inspection may also be associated with consumer awareness in the sense that these people are more critical, set high performance standards and are less tolerant of shortcomings due to problems experienced in the past (Rousseau, 1987).

Consumers willing to redress complaints tend to have more education, income, self-confidence and independence. They are also more confident in the business system than those who do not complain. With regard to the channels for handling complaints one study found that 80 percent of complaints were presented to retailers while less than 10 percent were directed to the manufacturer (Hawkins, Best & Coney, 1989). In another study Rousseau (1988) compared consumers' and retailers' perceptions of product failure and found that manufacturers were held responsible for malfunctioning in almost 50 percent of the cases reported.

In another study reported by Hawkins, Best and Coney (1986) it was found that non-complainers were unaware of available avenues for complaints. These people either felt powerless to act or did not consider complaining worthy of the effort. Compared to complainers, they tended to have lower incomes, to be less educated and to be older. A number of personality characteristics also serve to differentiate complainers from non-complainers: close minded, dogmatic consumers have a higher propensity to complain. Greater self-confidence also corresponds with a greater degree of complaint behaviour while the more powerless a consumer feels, the less likely he or she is to take complaint action.

The major social issues directly related to consumerism are environmental protection, protection of minorities and protection of health and safety (Walters & Bergiel, 1989). Research by Mitchell (1983) on life style typologies in America identified a consumer segment that was concerned with societal issues such as conservation and consumerism. These consumers, typified as transformers, were well educated, prosperous and liberal. They considered non-material aspects of life to be more important than material ones. A similar study conducted in South Africa revealed that a small segment of consumers could be described as holding similar values and life styles. They tended to have a social and moral conscience and were deeply concerned about societal and health issues (Rousseau, 1990). From the above discussion it may therefore be assumed that a consumer aware person would be sensitive to environmental issues, perceiving the consumer movement to reach further than simply redressing concerns of personal dissatisfaction.

Other factors which may relate to consumer awareness are consumer perceptions of interpersonal equity and satisfaction

with transactions. Oliver and Swan (1989) found that the equity dimensions they studied (fairness and preference) appeared to be largely dependent on buyer outcomes. Generally, perceptions of high outcomes were found to be related to high levels of fairness and preference, suggesting a self-centered and asymmetric buyer perspective. Andreassen (1984) investigated the effect of stress on dissatisfaction with products brought and services received. This however did not necessarily lead to changes in consumption patterns. No relationship between levels of stress and amount of change in consumption patterns were found. One could therefore not conclude that consumers under stress would be more inclined to switch brands or to complain when dissatisfaction occurred. In the service industry a recent study by Bitner, Booms and Tetreault (1990) revealed that a large proportion of dissatisfactory encounters with hotels, restaurants and airlines were related to the employees' inability or unwillingness to respond in service failure situations. It found that it was not so much the quality of the care service or failure to address a special need, that caused dissatisfaction but rather the attitude of the service employees. Incidents of service failure are remembered in terms of how employees responded to them.

If consumer complaints received and monitored by the SA Consumer Council are taken as a barometer of consumer awareness in South Africa, it seems clear that quality of service is a prominent area of consumer dissatisfaction. For example, during 1989 almost 50 percent of all complaints related to housing improvements, vehicle service and parts and repairs to electrical household appliances (Markman & Vorhies, 1990). Surveys conducted by Rousseau (1987, 1988), amongst housewives in Port Elizabeth indicated that household appliances were a major failure category. A substantial number of complaints were received from middle-aged females in the middle to upper income and residential areas of Port Elizabeth. A more recent study aimed at measuring consumer awareness among housewives in Port Elizabeth (Rousseau, 1990) showed that only a few respondents in the sample expressed product dissatisfaction or were aware of the channels for addressing complaints. It also seemed as though housewives were unaware of their basic rights as well as consumer organizations at their disposal for assisting them in exercising these rights. A qualitative study carried out by Corporate Research Consultancy for the S.A. Consumer Council revealed similar results. Focus group interviews with housewives and opinion leaders in Johannesburg showed that the South African consumer was unaware of his responsibilities and rights because he had never been properly informed. Opinion leaders labelled the average South African consumer as apathetic and unwilling to redress complaints or gather information prior to purchase (Klerck & White, 1990).

Although the studies quoted above were carried out on relatively small and often unrepresentative samples, thus reflecting largely the perceptions of token groups, they do point towards a disturbing trend of underlying ignorance and uninvolvement in consumer affairs. There is a need for a more substantial investigation to test consumer awareness amongst a broad section of the South African population. The purpose of this study is to fulfill that need.

METHOD

Developing the questionnaire:

The above literature review served as a basis for developing a theoretical model of consumer awareness. From the model six potential criteria of consumer awareness were deduced. These are information search, price consciousness, bargain hunting, product knowledge, complaint handling and general consumer knowledge. All these criteria fell within the boundaries of three broad phases of the purchase cycle viz pre-purchase and post-purchase behaviour as illustrated in the model. A questionnaire consisting of forty two items was then constructed for the testing of the six criteria of consumer awareness. The following propositions were made:

- (i) Consumer awareness in South Africa manifests itself within three phases of the purchase cycle namely pre-purchase behaviour, purchase behaviour and post-purchase behaviour.
- (ii) Consumer awareness within these broad phases can be further described in terms of six basic criteria namely information search, price consciousness, bargain hunting, product knowledge, complaint handling and general consumer knowledge.
- (iii) Demographic characteristics of consumers will differ on each of the identified criteria derived from the model thus indicating various levels of consumer awareness.

In developing the questionnaire each of the six criteria mentioned above were clearly defined whereafter items for the measurement of the construct consumer awareness, were formulated. Approximately seventeen items were generated to represent each criteria of the construct.

A panel of ten judges (five experts on consumer affairs from the S.A. Consumer Council and five from the National Consumer Union) assessed the content validity of each item. The judges used a three point rating scale developed by Lawshe (1975) to determine the extent of overlap between items in the questionnaire and the construct domain. Lawshe's C.V.R. was then calculated for each item in the questionnaire. Items were eliminated if the C.V.R. failed to meet statistical significance as determined from a table presented by Lawshe. From the retained items the mean C.V.R. value was then computed. A minimum C.V.R. value for ten subject matter experts is 0,62. Forty two items met this criteria. This technique for determining content validity is widely applied. Carrier et al (1990) compared Lawshe's content validation strategy to a criterion related one and found modest correlations between validity values for an interview guide used to select applicants with prior insurance sales experience.

A reliability study employing Cronbach's co-efficient alpha was performed on the item sample in addition to factor analysis as the former procedure is traditionally preferred. Reliability alpha co-efficients in the order of 0,85, 0,84 and 0,78 were obtained on three of the factors identified from the factor analysis. Low alpha scores were obtained on the other two factors, (0,45 and 0,52) which may be ascribed to the fact that only two and three items respectively, obtained loadings in excess of 0,50. It should be kept in mind that factor analysis per se, is an indication of reliability and that all items are used in performing factor analysis whilst only items with high loadings were used for calculating Cronbach's co-efficient alphas.

Sample:

A stratified random sample (N = 436) was drawn from all the population groups in Port Elizabeth. The sample was stratified according to income distribution in various residential areas. The sample distribution as reflected in table 1(a) shows a more or less equal division amongst all the population groups. It was felt, however, that if the sample was divided proportionally according to racial figures for the area, 67 percent of the questionnaires would have had to be completed by black respondents while 16 percent would be completed by whites and 17 percent by coloureds and Indians. This would not reflect a true picture of consumer awareness among Port Elizabeth consumers' because the white and coloured respondents would not be truly represented, based on their disposable income. Table 1(b) reflects the descriptive statistics of the 436 usable questionnaires analysed in the study.

TABEL 1A
SAMPLE BASED ON INCOME DISTRIBUTION IN VARIOUS RESIDENTIAL AREAS OF PORT ELIZABETH

Population group	Upper income		Residential area		Lower income	
		(N)	Middle income	(N)		(N)
Blacks	Motherwell (NU 5 & 6)	12	Motherwell (NU 2 & 3)	13	Shanty Town	10
	Fordville	15	Zwide	10	New Brighton	13
	Kwamagxaki	15	Kwazakele	15	New Brighton	20
			New Brighton	15	Silverton	15
			Zwide	10		
Total N = 163	Subtotals	42		63		58
Coloured		(N)		(N)		(N)
	Gelvanpark	12	Gelvandale	19	Bloemendal	15
	Gelvandale	3	Salt Lake	21	Korsten	7
	Hillside	3	Bethelsdorp	4	Arcadia	2
	Malibar	6	West End	14	Chatty	1
	Parkside	2	Schauderville	11	Windvogel	1
	Beverley	2	Rosendale	3	Helenvale	2
	Salt Lake	1	Heath Park	1		
Total N = 130	Subtotal	29		73		28
White	Summerstrand	10	Mount Pleasant	12	Forest Hill	10
	Humewood	10	Lorraine	10	Algoa Park	10
	Walmer	10	Charlo	10	Sidwell	17
	Mill Park	12	Providentia	12	Holland Park	5
			Coleen Glen	8		
			Newton Park	9		
			Bluewaterbay	2		
Total N = 147	Subtotal	42		63		42

TABLE 1B
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS: THE SAMPLE

Household Size	N		Income		Age		Education		Race		Sex						
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%					
1	29	6,7	R-700	80	18,3	-25 yrs	62	14,2	No school	32	7,4	Black	163	37,4	Male	179	41,0
2	64	14,7	701-1999	148	34,0	26-40	180	41,3	Pre-school	39	8,9	Coloured	127	29,1	Female	257	59,0
3	76	17,4	2000-3999	115	26,4	41-55	150	34,4	High school	178	40,8	White	146	33,5			
4	102	23,4	4000+	93	21,3	56-70	44	10,1	College/Tech	126	28,9						
5	165	37,8							University	61	14,0						

TOTAL N = 436

Five post-graduate industrial psychology students acted as field workers in the white and coloured residential areas. Two experienced black social workers carried out field work in the black townships. The questionnaire was available in both English and Afrikaans. Households in residential areas were chosen on a basis of equal and unequal street numbers which were rotated consecutively. Only one respondent per household, either a husband or wife completed the questionnaire. Respondents from the selected households completed questionnaires in the presence of field workers who visited each home personally so as to ensure that the procedure was understood. Respondents were asked to rate each of the forty two items in the questionnaire on a six point Likert type scale ranging from agree completely to disagree completely. Demographic information was also obtained from respondents regarding household size, income, age, education and sex.

Data analysis:

Data analysis employed the computer program BMDP4M (Frane, Jenrich & Samson, 1985) to perform factor analysis. In order to extract initial factors the method of principle com-

ponent analysis was performed. The resulting initial factor matrix was then rotated by means of the direct quartimin method in order to allow for possible inter-correlations between the factors. This application yielded five factors listed in table 2. Only those items with eigen-values higher than one were retained in the factor analysis and factor loadings higher than 0,50 are reported in the table.

The BMDP program 1D was then used to calculate mean factor scores for the various race groups (table 3) as well as for the other demographic variables (table 5). In order to test the statistical significance of the factor score differences between the various race groups the BMDP program 1V was used to perform an analysis of variance (ANOVA), the results of which are reflected in table 4. Finally the BMDP program 4F was used to investigate the relationship between race groups and other demographic variables. Chi-square tests were employed to test the significance of these relationships. BMDP2V was then used to perform a multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) to investigate which of the demographic variables significantly influenced the various factors. These results are shown in table 6.

TABLE 2
OBLIQUE ROTATED FACTOR MATRIX: MEASURES OF CONSUMER AWARENESS

Criterion	Factor 1 (Bargain hunting)	Factor 2 (General consumer)	Factor 3 (Product knowledge)	Factor 4 (Information Search)	Factor 5 (Price conscious)
Question:					
8 Check newspapers and magazines for specials before deciding where to shop.	0,64				
16 Check newspapers for bargains	0,76				
17 Investigate "specials" advertised on radio and TV	0,76				
18 Compare prices at various shops to take advantage of lowest priced items	0,69				
19 Always buy specials, even when not needed right away	0,62				
20 Search for bargains at sales and auctions	0,72				
21 Use coupons for obtaining the best deal	0,67				
23 Keep a watch on the media for the latest information on new products.	0,62				
34 Consumers are entitled to full explanations for malfunctioning merchandise		0,57			
35 Consumer Council is the best body to inform when dissatisfied with a product or service		0,59			
36 S.A. consumers unaware of their legitimate rights		0,67			
37 More attention should be paid to consumer awareness programmes in school education		0,65			
38 Too few consumers' subscribe to "S.A. Consumer"		0,84			
39 S.A. consumers unaware of the laws available to protect their rights		0,72			
40 S.A. Consumer organizations deserve better support from consumers		0,68			
25 Checking expiry dates on perishable food items is essential for ensuring fresh produce			0,79		
26 Look for guarantee on expensive products before deciding on the purchase			0,80		
27 Share product information with friends and relatives			0,62		
28 Product knowledge is one's best guarantee against exploitation			0,59		
3 Consult brochures and pamphlets for information before buying durable goods				0,57	
4 Seeking information from relatives and friends prior to making a final choice is a good idea				0,71	
6 Sales staff can be an important source of product information				0,58	
12 Choosing no-name brands is the best way to beat inflation					0,74
13 Price is the most important factor in choosing an item					0,76
Eigen values	5,84	3,49	1,54	1,24	1,16
% of total variance (Total 55,40)	24,35	14,56	6,46	5,20	4,83

RESULTS:

Table 2 shows the five factors that were extracted from the factor analysis. The first factor which explained 24,35 percent of the variance contains criteria with factor loadings in excess of 0,60 which relates to the tendency for bargain hunting. Factor two explains 14,56 percent of the total variance and contains criteria

larger than 0,55 which relates to general consumer knowledge. Factor three focuses on product knowledge and explains 6,46 percent of the variance. The fourth factor explained 5,20 percent of the variance and includes criteria which relates to information search. The fifth factor referred to price consciousness and explained 4,83 percent of the total variance.

TABLE 3
MATRIX OF FACTOR MEAN SCORES BY RACE GROUPS

Race	Group	N	Factor 1		Factor 2		Factor 3		Factor 4		Factor 5	
			\bar{X}	S	\bar{X}	S	\bar{X}	S	\bar{X}	S	\bar{X}	S
Black	Low	58	-0,28	0,96	0,27	1,07	0,35	1,21	0,27	1,13	-0,18	1,01
	Middle	63	-0,12	0,77	0,35	1,04	0,59	1,30	0,27	0,94	-0,18	0,98
	Upper	42	-0,06	0,80	0,01	1,04	0,03	0,87	0,29	0,92	0,47	1,01
Coloured	Low	28	-0,09	0,86	0,27	1,11	-0,05	0,78	-0,22	0,92	0,38	1,04
	Middle	71	-0,37	1,05	0,09	1,09	0,02	1,06	-0,06	0,98	-0,18	0,90
	Upper	28	-0,19	0,80	-0,14	0,79	-0,43	0,60	-0,10	0,80	0,21	1,17
White	Low	42	-0,01	1,27	-0,50	0,63	-0,47	0,69	-0,28	1,10	-0,38	0,86
	Middle	62	0,61	0,88	-0,21	0,88	-0,31	0,57	-0,08	0,96	0,00	0,98
	Upper	42	0,57	0,93	-0,34	0,76	-0,20	0,64	-0,34	0,88	0,35	0,82
Total N		436										

Table 3 shows a matrix of factor mean scores by race/socio-economic groups. In the table a low score indicates a positive response while a high score indicates a negative response. (The six point rating scale used in the questionnaire comprised of verbal anchor points ranging from agree completely to disagree completely.) From the table it may be inferred that all the race groups except the middle and upper income whites are bargain hunters. Black and coloured respondents obtained low scores indicating that they agreed more with the statements on bargain hunting than did middle and upper income whites. For factor 2, all white respondent groups as well as upper income coloured group agreed more with the statements indicating general consumer knowledge. All the black

as well as lower and middle income coloured groups tended to disagree with the statements indicating less general consumer knowledge.

Mean factor scores on the third factor were lower for all the white groups as well as for lower and upper income coloured groups indicating greater product knowledge. Regarding factor 4, it seems as though all the coloured and white groups are inclined to do more information search prior to purchase than do the black respondents. Low mean factor scores on factor 5, indicates that all the low income groups of the various race groups are more price conscious than the higher income, black, coloured and white respondents.

TABLE 4
DIAGONAL MATRIX OF ANOVA T TEST SCORES FOR TESTING FACTOR SCORE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RACE GROUPS

		Black Low	Black Middle	Black High	Coloured Low	Coloured Middle	Coloured High	White Low	White Middle
Black Middle Factor	1	0,9300							
	2	0,4344							
	3	1,4022							
	4	0,0092							
	5	-0,0231							
Black High Factor	1	1,1187	0,2883						
	2	-1,3206	-1,7400						
	3	-1,7004	-3,0104**						
	4	0,1153	0,1089						
	5	3,3368**	3,4149**						
Coloured Low Factor	1	0,8771	0,1435	-0,1017					
	2	0,0187	-0,3291	1,1144					
	3	-1,8906	-3,0389**	-0,3711					
	4	-2,2181	-2,2547*	-2,1879					
	5	2,5605*	2,6127*	-0,3560					
Coloured Middle Factor	1	-0,5811	-1,5720	-1,6927	-1,3653				
	2	-1,0539	-1,5344	0,4163	-0,8551				
	3	-1,9784	-3,4973**	-0,0290	0,3804				
	4	-1,9582	-2,0121	-1,9005	0,7342				
	5	-0,0014	0,0228	-3,4743**	-2,6415*				
Coloured High Factor	1	0,3990	-0,3409	-0,5527	-0,4117	0,8723			
	2	-1,8860	-2,2589*	-0,6822	-1,6400	-1,1090			
	3	-3,6512**	-4,8227**	-2,0317	-1,5159	-2,1959			
	4	-1,6751	-1,7045	-1,6757	0,4676	-0,1742			
	5	1,7722	1,8141	-1,0995	-0,6787	1,8286			
White Low Factor	1	1,3838	0,5580	0,2462	0,3220	1,9687	0,7729		
	2	-3,9718**	-4,4366**	-2,4616*	-3,3161**	-3,1758**	-1,5195		
	3	-4,3241**	-5,6789**	-2,4360*	-1,8078	-2,7018*	-0,1472		
	4	-2,7897*	-2,8458**	-2,6973*	-0,2246	-1,1232	-0,7368		
	5	-1,0497	-1,0466	-4,0728**	-3,2868**	-1,0913	-2,5434*		
White Middle Factor	1	5,1909**	4,3547**	3,6107**	3,2782**	6,0470**	3,7614**	3,3419**	
	2	-2,7872*	-3,2881**	-1,2089	-2,2551*	-1,8561	-0,3300	1,4790	
	3	-3,8931**	-5,4018**	-1,8347**	-1,2127	-2,0769	0,5667	0,8253	
	4	-2,0293	-2,0815	-1,9718	0,6137	-0,1387	0,0649	0,9734	
	5	1,0318	1,0771	-2,4398*	-1,7600	1,0858	-0,9633	2,0074	
White High Factor	1	4,4670**	3,6939**	3,1089**	2,8824*	5,1777**	3,3333**	2,8627**	-0,2161
	2	-3,1464**	-3,5971**	-1,6952	-2,6306*	-2,3167*	-0,8341	0,7663	-0,6422
	3	-2,9496**	-4,2809**	-1,1598	-0,6663	-1,2712	0,9943	1,2762	0,5702
	4	-3,1323**	-3,1942	-3,0153**	-0,5090	-1,4796	-1,0212	-0,3180	-1,3206
	5	2,7318*	2,7996*	-0,5617	-0,1464	2,8446**	0,5970	3,5111**	1,8264

* P < 0,0250 ** P < 0,0050

Table 4 displays factor score differences between various race groups in the sample. With regard to factor 1 the table shows that the white middle and upper income groups differed significantly with all the other groups on bargain hunting. From table 3 it was inferred that all other groups except the white middle and upper income groups tended to do bargain hunting. With regard to factor 2, all the black groups as well as the low and middle income coloured groups differed from one another on general consumer knowledge. From table 3 it could be inferred that these differences could be accounted for by a lack of general consumer knowledge. Black lower and middle income groups and the coloured lower income group showed the least general consumer knowledge (they obtained the highest scores indicating disagreement with the statements of the questionnaire.)

With regard to factor 3, (product knowledge) table 4 shows significant differences between all the groups except the coloured low and high income groups as well as white low and middle income groups. From table 3 it can be inferred that all the black income groups as well as the coloured mid-

dle income group had less product knowledge than the coloured low and high income groups and all the white income groups. The black middle and low income groups showed the least product knowledge. Regarding factor 4 (information search) table 4 shows that significant differences were observed between (i) black low and white low income groups, (ii) between black middle and coloured low and white low income groups and (iii) between black high and white low and white high income groups. All the black groups did less information search in comparison to the other groups from which they differed. Black high income respondents did the least information search. (See table 3).

Significant differences between all the groups except the white middle and high income groups were found for factor 5 (price consciousness). Table 4 shows that all the remaining groups differed one way or another (i.e. black low differed from black high, coloured low, white high). An interesting observation from table 3 is that white low income respondents were the most price conscious groups.

TABLE 5
MATRIX OF FACTOR MEAN SCORES FOR HOUSEHOLD SIZE, INCOME, AGE, EDUCATION AND SEX

	N	Factor 1		Factor 2		Factor 3		Factor 4		Factor 5	
		\bar{X}	S	\bar{X}	S	\bar{X}	S	\bar{X}	S	\bar{X}	S
Household size 1	29	0,26	1,08	0,00	1,08	0,11	0,98	0,24	1,26	-0,28	1,00
2	64	0,07	1,04	-0,04	0,95	-0,22	0,73	-0,09	0,93	0,14	1,05
3	76	0,02	1,11	-0,24	0,85	-0,07	1,01	-0,04	1,05	-0,21	0,88
4	102	0,03	0,91	0,06	1,07	0,10	1,08	-0,06	0,98	0,13	0,99
5+	165	-0,10	0,96	0,08	1,00	0,03	1,02	0,05	0,96	0,00	1,01
Income R - 700	80	-0,36	0,94	0,03	1,03	0,04	1,09	0,15	1,08	-0,24	1,00
R 701-1 999	148	-0,16	0,94	0,13	1,08	0,14	1,13	0,06	1,00	-0,18	0,97
R2 000-3 999	115	0,12	1,04	0,06	0,94	0,01	0,95	-0,04	0,93	0,18	0,97
R4 000+	93	0,42	0,92	-0,32	0,81	-0,28	0,63	-0,18	0,97	0,27	0,96
Age -25 yrs	62	0,05	0,91	0,00	0,86	-0,19	0,76	-0,17	0,91	0,04	0,99
26-40	180	0,04	0,91	0,05	1,06	0,09	1,05	0,04	0,98	0,00	0,98
41-55	150	-0,04	1,07	-0,03	1,00	0,03	1,01	0,07	1,02	-0,01	1,01
56-70	44	-0,12	1,19	-0,10	0,92	-0,21	1,00	-0,18	1,05	-0,02	1,05
Education Pre-school	39	-0,22	1,00	0,15	1,11	0,48	1,21	0,17	1,09	-0,09	0,91
High school	178	-0,14	0,95	0,20	1,04	0,10	1,04	0,13	0,94	-0,12	1,02
College/Tech	126	-0,03	1,01	-0,14	1,00	-0,15	0,97	-0,20	1,00	0,09	1,02
University	61	0,27	0,93	-0,23	0,73	-0,18	0,76	0,22	0,94	0,13	0,93
Sex - Male	179	0,00	0,95	0,19	1,10	0,19	1,09	0,02	0,96	0,07	1,04
Female	248	-0,04	1,01	-0,13	0,89	-0,15	0,90	-0,04	1,00	-0,04	0,97
Total N	436										

Table 5 displays factor mean scores for other demographic variables obtained from the sample. From the table can be seen that respondents in the lower income groups, with a household size of five or more are more inclined to bargain hunt (factor one). Older people also tend to look out more for bargains. Males as well as respondents with a university education tend to do less bargain hunting. It also seems as though general consumer knowledge (factor two) is higher amongst upper income groups in the older age bracket and amongst

respondents with a college, technicon or university education. The same pattern emerged for product knowledge (factor three). With regard to information search (factor four) it seems as though respondents in the higher income groups as well as young and older respondents viewed information search as an important factor in buying decisions. Price awareness (factor five) seems to be high amongst the lower income and older respondents.

TABLE 6
MULTIPLE ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE (MANOVA) OF DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES INFLUENCING FACTOR SCORES

Demographic variables	Factor 1			Factor 2			Factor 3			Factor 4			Factor 5		
	F	df	p.	F	df	p.	F	df	p.	F	df	p.	F	df	p.
Sex	0,95	1	0,3297	8,62	1	0,0035	8,47	1	0,0038	0,21	1	0,6503	0,66	1	0,4155
Income	2,81	3	0,0395	1,42	3	0,2359	2,29	3	0,0781	0,23	3	0,8720	2,15	3	0,0933
Education	0,18	2	0,8319	2,50	2	0,0832	2,11	2	0,1224	0,98	2	0,3770	0,44	2	0,6426
Race score	2,37	8	0,0167	2,29	8	0,0212	5,38	8	0,0000	1,89	8	0,0596	1,74	8	0,0884

Error

381

N = 436

Table 6 reflects which of the above demographic factors significantly influenced factor scores. It can thus be seen that income and race significantly influenced bargain hunting (factor one). For general consumer knowledge (factor two) sex, education and race significantly influenced factor scores. On factor three (product knowledge) sex, income and race influenced factor scores significantly. From table 5 it can be deduced that females have more general consumer and product knowledge than males (factors two and three). Only race significantly influenced factor scores for information search (factor four) and income and race significantly influenced price consciousness (factor five).

Pearson's chi-square tests were also performed to investigate the relationship between the various race groups and the demographic variables, discussed above. In all these tests highly significant differences were found. Results were as follows:

Between race and

- (i) household size $\chi^2 = 108,90$ (32) $p < 0,00001$
- (ii) income $\chi^2 = 422,17$ (24) $p < 0,00001$
- (iii) age $\chi^2 = 90,31$ (24) $p < 0,00001$
- (iv) education $\chi^2 = 184,99$ (24) $p < 0,0000$
- (v) sex $\chi^2 = 25,63$ (8) $p < 0,0012$

Proposition testing:

From the empirical data discussed above it is clear that the propositions formulated to investigate consumer awareness can be accepted in the case of proposition 3 and partially accepted in the case of proposition 2. Regarding proposition three the study clearly showed that demographic characteristics, especially race/socio-economic characteristics differed significantly on each of the identified criteria or factors which emerged from the empirical analysis. This could be an indication of various levels of consumer awareness. Regarding proposition two the factor analysis produced five instead of six factors indicating a possible overlap of items in the questionnaire. Many of the items dealing with complaint handling were taken up in factor 2 (general consumer knowledge).

In the case of proposition 1, it must be noted that an empirical testing of the theoretical model did not fall within the scope of this study. The theoretical model merely served as a point of departure for establishing potential criteria of consumer awareness. Nevertheless the fact that the five factors which emerged from the empirical analysis do represent phases of the purchase cycle, gives tentative support to this rather premature proposition stated in the pilot study.

CONCLUSION:

In this study five valid criteria were identified which may serve as a guideline for investigating consumer awareness amongst the South African population. These criteria differed across socio-economic race group regarding their importance as (i) a means of obtaining a better deal in buying transactions and (ii) an aid in protecting the rights of consumers. Bargain hunting was regarded by all except white middle and upper income groups as a means of obtaining value for money. Price consciousness featured prominently amongst the lower income groups with the white low income group being the most price sensitive. These results support the literature stating that lower income, less educated shoppers may be more price sensitive. However, bargain hunting which also features prominently amongst all the lower income groups, may be caused more by financial constraints than by knowledge and a need for achievement, as was suggested by the literature.

General consumer knowledge was regarded as an important means for redressing complaints by white consumer groups and upper income coloureds. Product knowledge was also seen by all the white groups and the upper income coloureds as a preventative measure against being exploited in the market. These findings support the literature stating that a willingness to redress complaints can be linked to income and education. It seems though, that awareness of these factors (general consumer and product knowledge) as well as the im-

portance of pre-purchase information search are lacking amongst the black consumer groups.

Further analysis of the data revealed that other demographic variables such as sex and education might also influence these criteria of consumer awareness. It seems as though females have more general consumer and product knowledge than males and that education influenced general consumer knowledge.

Despite the limitations of this pilot study which includes a small regionally based sample, a questionnaire available only in English and Afrikaans and moderate reliability scores, tentative conclusions can be drawn. It seems clear from the study that there is a serious need for more consumer education, especially amongst the lower socio-economic groups in South Africa. More guidance should be given to consumers on **how** to obtain product knowledge, **where** to search for information and **when** to exercise their legitimate rights.

Secondly, the emphasis on bargain hunting and price consciousness by many respondents highlights the poor economic conditions in which many South African consumers live today. Attempts to save more through price comparisons seems to be the consumers' only weapon against the inflation spiral. The media and retail outlets could therefore assist consumers by providing accurate price information. There is also a serious need for more research in the field of consumer awareness. Such research should be aimed at establishing the accuracy of the identified criteria revealed by this study as well as determining new criteria so that an overall predictive measure of consumer awareness can be formulated.

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