

MEASURING IDENTIFIED CRITERIA OF CONSUMER AWARENESS FOR VARIOUS DEMOGRAPHIC CATEGORIES AMONGST TWO INDEPENDENT SAMPLES

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ABSTRACT

This article describes the measurement and comparison of different levels of consumer awareness observed in an empirical investigation involving two independent samples of consumers. A questionnaire developed and validated in a pilot study was administered to a national and regional based sample involving 558 and 300 respondents respectively. Different levels of consumer awareness emerged for the two sample populations. Respondents from the national sample scored higher on bargain hunting and price consciousness while those from the regional sample scored higher on general consumer knowledge, product knowledge and information search. These differences in consumer awareness could be caused by consumer education.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie artikel beskryf die meting en vergelyking van verskillende vlakke van verbruikersbewustheid soos waar-geneem in 'n empiriese ondersoek waarby twee onafhanklike steekproewe betrokke was. 'n Vraelys ontwikkel en getoets in 'n loodstudie is geadminestrer op 'n nasionale en streeksteekproef basis waarby 558 en 300 respon-dente onderskeidelik betrokke was. Verskillende vlakke van verbruikersbewustheid het na vore getree in die twee steekproewe. Respondente uit die nasionale steekproef behaal hoër tellings op winskopiejaagting en prysbewustheid terwyl respondente uit die streeksteekproef hoër tellings behaal op algemene verbruikerskennis, produk-kennis en inligtinginwinning. Hierdie verskille in verbruikersbewustheid kan veroorsaak word deur verbruikersopvoeding.

Consumer awareness can be described as the extent or alertness of individual consumers of their rights and responsibilities in the market place. These rights include the right to be informed, the right to choose from alternatives, the right to be heard (ie. to redress), the right to safety and health in the consumption of products and the right to a clean environment (Du Plessis, Rousseau & Blem, 1990). Consumer awareness is the direct outflow of consumerism which comprises a set of activities of independent consumer organizations and consumer activists, designed to protect consumer rights in the process of exchange (Assael, 1987).

Consumer awareness world wide is on the increase. Six hundred delegates from seventy countries attended the International Organization of Consumer Union Conference held in Hong Kong during July 1991. At this conference a resolution was passed to increase international commitment to consumer education awareness at the United Nations (Cronje, 1991).

In South Africa the consumer movement is gaining momentum due to the unacceptable rise in the consumer price index for food, the high inflation rate, poor economic growth rate and mounting unemployment. In many instances the consumer movement has been politicized in the form of consumer boycotts and Trade Union Actions ie. regarding the introduction of VAT. Complaint rates dealt with by the Consumer Council are also on the increase. During 1991, 46 180 complaints were handled by the Council of which most arose out of problems with time sharing, shortterm insurance and housing (Stafford, 1992). On the other hand many low income consumers are unsophisticated in the market place and unaware of their rights and responsibilities.

Rousseau (1991a) investigated consumer awareness amongst the South African population. The author identified five criter-

ia of the construct viz. bargain hunting, price consciousness, general consumer knowledge, product knowledge and information search. Results showed different levels of consumer awareness for various socio-economic race groups in terms of the identified criteria. Low income groups scored high on bargain hunting and price consciousness but low on product knowledge and general consumer knowledge. Information search was also lacking amongst black consumer groups. The author concludes that there is a serious need for more consumer education in South Africa.

Cole & Gaeth (1990) investigated consumers' ability to use nutritional information in breakfast cereal choice tasks. The authors found that in two experiments older subjects performed less accurately and took longer to process nutritional information than did younger respondents. However, after training to criterion such as circling relevant information prior to making a decision, or assigning different weights to product attributes, elderly subjects became as accurate as unaided younger adults. Thus the value of consumer education programmes are stressed by the authors to enhance the cognitive and perceptual skills of elderly and disadvantaged consumers.

In another study by Moorman (1990) on the effects of consumer characteristics such as motivation and familiarity as well as the effect of stimulus characteristics (eg. information format and content) on the utilization of product information, the role of consumer education is once more emphasized. The authors warn that familiarity with product information breeds the illusion of being more informed than one really is and, therefore reduces enduring motivation for further information processing. The authors suggest that multiple educational programmes need to be developed to meet consumers differing needs. For example since reference information failed to alter processing for consumers with low education levels, consumer educators should target consumers with high to moderate education levels with information remedies, while utilizing information and education remedies to meet the needs of uneducated consumers. More generally both education and information approaches may be necessary for consumers un-

* Within-group differences for the two samples are not discussed in detail as this analysis focus mainly on a global overview of the data.

familiar with a product, while only information is necessary when familiarity can be assured amongst the target population.

Soberon-Ferrer & Dardis (1991) investigated various determinants of household expenditure on services. The authors found significant differences between families with full-time and part-time working wives on expenditures such as child care, frozen and pre-prepared food and total services. Households with women who had some tertiary education spent more on domestic services and personal care than other households. In general, higher levels of education were associated with higher levels of time saving, low cost services that address both the time and income constraints of working wives. These results provide some support for the greater efficiency in consumption in families where the wife has a higher level of education.

From the above it may be inferred that education may be an important demographic variable, influencing various levels of consumer awareness. Another variable which may influence consumer awareness especially with regard to price consciousness and bargain hunting, is income. Gabor & Granger (1964) found that more prices were misperceived by lower income and less educated respondents. The exception was some very poor who were more aware of prices.

More recently Dickson & Sawyer (1990) in a study on price knowledge found that more than half of 570 respondents could not correctly name the price of a grocery item immediately after it was placed in the shopping trolley. Of 232 shoppers who purchased a special priced item, more than half were unaware that the price was reduced. Respondents from a low income less educated community were significantly less accurate in their price estimates than shoppers from high income residential white suburbs.

Urbany & Dickson (1991) further investigated price estimation amongst female grocery shoppers and found that regular buyers reported price standards more certain and accurately than did occasional buyers. The authors drew their sample for middle income respondents. Both these studies however conclude that consumers in the United States consistently display poor knowledge of grocery prices over time.

Though no specific research has been done in South Africa on accuracy of price recall ability, studies do show that income influences price awareness. Rousseau (1991a) found that price consciousness and bargain hunting featured prominently amongst lower income groups with the white low income group being the most price sensitive. In another study carried out amongst middle income white housewives in Port Elizabeth (Rousseau 1991b) the author reported that price consciousness were high amongst all respondents. It thus seems as though low to middle income consumers in South Africa are most price conscious. These findings however could result from financial constraints rather than price knowledge, bearing in mind the poor economic conditions prevailing in the country.

As part of an ongoing research programme to confirm previously identified factors of consumer awareness and to further investigate the role of various demographic variables (ie. education, age and income) on the construct, a comparative analysis was made between two independent samples drawn from the study. Stated more explicitly the present study aims at (i) providing confirmatory evidence of five factors of consumer awareness (ii) clarifying the role of various demographic variables on these factors by comparing levels of consumer awareness amongst two consumer groups.

The following propositions were set:

- (i) Consumer awareness can be described in terms of five basic factors viz. bargain hunting, general consumer knowledge, product knowledge, information search and price consciousness.

- (ii) Exposure to consumer education reduces the effect of other demographic variables on the identified factors of consumer awareness.
- (iii) Exposure to consumer education enhances factor scores relevant to consumer awareness.

METHOD

A questionnaire developed and used in a pilot study was refined by reducing items from 35 to 25 (five items per factor) retaining items with the highest loadings.

A reliability study employing Cronbach's coefficient 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 0,78, 0,73 and 0,70 were obtained on three of the factors identified from the factor analysis. Although relatively low alpha scores were obtained on the other two factors, (0,64 and 0,67 respectively) an overall score of 0,72 were obtained for the total item sample. Nunnally (1978) states that in the early stages of research on predictor tests one saves time and energy by working with instruments that have only modest reliability, for which purposes reliabilities of 0,70 will suffice.

Samples

Sample A, hereafter referred to as the national sample, was a stratified random sample (N=588), drawn from all the population groups in South Africa. The sample was stratified according to income distribution in various residential areas of major cities in the four provinces of South Africa.

Sample B, hereafter referred to as the regional sample comprised of female delegates (N=300), attending a Transvaal Agricultural Union Conference in Pretoria. They represented Northern, Western, Eastern Transvaal as well as the PWV area.

Respondents in both samples were more or less equally distributed in either the four provinces in South Africa or four regions in the Transvaal. Most of the respondents in both samples rated themselves as falling into the middle income and middle age brackets. (See tables 2a & b).

Procedure

National sample

Field work was carried out by employees at the various regional offices of the South African Consumer Council. All the fieldworkers were properly briefed on sample selection and interview procedures prior to entering the field. Households in residential areas of Pretoria, Cape Town, Durban and Bloemfontein 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 which took on average, five minutes to complete. Respondents from the selected households completed questionnaires in the presence of field workers who visited each home personally to ensure that the procedure was understood. Respondents were asked to rate each of the twenty five items in the questionnaire on a six point Likert type scale ranging from disagree completely to agree completely. Demographic information was also obtained from respondents regarding household size, income, age, education and sex.

Regional sample

Respondents were requested to fill in questionnaires as part of a group orientation session on the first day of the conference. Care was taken that respondents do not interact with one another while completing questionnaires. Field workers handed out and collected completed questionnaires at the end of the work session. Conference proceedings started only after this session, so delegates could not have been influenced in their responses by papers delivered at the conference. Respondents in both samples completed the same questionnaire which was available in Afrikaans and English.

Data analysis

For data analysis the computer program BMDP4M (Frane Jenrich & Samson 1985) was employed to perform confirmatory factor analysis for each of the previously identified factors. The method of principal component analysis was used with direct quartimin rotation. Based on the principle that only factors with eigenvalues larger than one need to be retained, factor analysis confirmed the existence of the previously identified five factors with no further sub-divisions into secondary components. For each of the five consumer awareness factors, factor analysis confirmed that the applicable items had significant loadings. Furthermore, factor analysis confirmed that all items previously selected for the measurement of consumer awareness factors, could be used for this purpose due to all factor loadings being significant. (See table 1)

The B.M.D.P. program I.D. was then used to calculate mean factor scores for the various demographic variables. These results are shown in table 2. Program 2V was subsequently used to perform multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) to investigate which of the demographic variables significantly influenced the various factors. These results are shown in table 3. To test the statistical significance of factor score differences between the various demographic groups one way analysis of variance (ANOVA program IV) was performed, the results of which are also summarized in table 2. Finally T tests were performed (program 3 D1) on the mean factor scores for various factors in both samples to compare levels of consumer awareness. These results are reported in table 4.

TABLE 1
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)
Items					
1. I check the newspapers each week for bargains.	0,77				
2. When I see a "special" advertised on TV or the radio I always investigate it.	0,75				
3. I always shop at more than one store to compare prices and take advantage of the lowest priced item.	0,75				
4. I like searching for bargains at seasonal sales or auctions.	0,73				
5. I always buy with coupons to obtain the best deal.	0,68				
6. Consumers in S.A. are not aware of their legitimate rights when it comes to doing business or engage in shopping.		0,68			
7. More attention should be paid to consumer awareness programmes in school education.		0,61			
8. Too few consumers in S.A. subscribe to the "S.A. Consumer."		0,74			
9. South African consumers are not always aware of the laws available to protect their rights.		0,80			
10. Consumer organizations in S.A. deserve better support from consumers.		0,65			
11. Checking expiry dates on perishable food items is essential for ensuring fresh produce.			0,69		
12. I always look for a guarantee on expensive products before deciding on the purchase.			0,73		
13. It is important to share product information with friends and relatives.			0,70		
14. Product knowledge is one's best guardian against exploitation.			0,77		
15. I keep a watch on the media for new products and services that may be useful to me.			0,55		
16. I always consult brochures and pamphlets for information before buying durable goods.				0,74	
17. Seeking information from relatives and friends prior to making a final choice is always a good idea.				0,62	
18. Sales staff can be an important source of product information.				0,51	
19. Before purchasing a particular product I usually compare various brands to choose the best.				0,63	
20. I usually read newspaper advertisements for obtaining product information prior to purchase.				0,71	
21. Choosing "no-name brands" is a good way to beat inflation.					0,55
22. Price is the most important factor to me in choosing an item.					0,63
23. When a product is offered at a discount price I am more tempted to buy it.					0,74
24. Before deciding where to go shopping, I usually try to find out whether any specials are being offered.					0,76
25. I always compare prices of similar products on display in the store.					0,62
Eigen values	2,72	2,45	2,40	2,10	2,21
% of total variance per factor	54,38	48,90	48,10	42,00	44,20
N = 858					

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the five factors that were extracted from the factor analysis. The first factor which explained 54,38 percent of the variance contains items with factor loadings in excess of 0,68 which relates to the tendency for bargain hunting. Factor two explains 48,90 percent of the total variance and contains items

larger than 0,61 which relates to general consumer knowledge. Factor three focuses on product knowledge and explains 48,10 percent of the variance. The fourth factor explained 42,00 percent of the variance and includes items which relate to information search. The fifth factor referred to price consciousness and explained 44,20 percent of the total variance.

TABLE 2(a): MATRIX OF FACTOR MEAN SCORES FOR HOUSEHOLD SIZE, INCOME, AGE, EDUCATION AND SEX IN NATIONAL SAMPLE

	N	Factor 1 (Bargain hunting)		Factor 2 (General Consumer knowledge)		Factor 3 (Product knowledge)		Factor 4 (Information search)		Factor 5 (Price conscious)	
		\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD
Household size 1	51	3,95a!	1,55	5,30	0,91	5,34	0,88	4,82	1,05	4,38a	1,23
2	108	4,24	1,42	5,41	0,75	5,36	0,73	4,90	0,90	4,51b	1,03
3 to 4	259	4,44b	1,26	5,39	0,80	5,44	0,63	4,95	0,95	4,72c	1,00
5+	140	4,40c	1,14	5,39	0,75	5,52	0,68	4,88	0,90	4,80d	1,03
Income per month											
Low (R1000)	120	4,55d	1,21	5,27	0,85	5,43	0,75	5,00a	0,99	4,78e	1,15
Middle (R1001-5000)	382	4,32	1,32	5,43	0,72	5,45	0,64	4,93b	0,90	4,69f	0,98
Upper (R5001)	56	4,08e	1,29	5,28	1,02	5,31	0,83	4,58c	1,00	4,25g	1,10
Age -25 yrs	94	4,35	1,23	5,22a	0,90	5,35	0,63	4,79	0,83	4,46	1,06
26-40	292	4,32	1,32	5,46b	0,66	5,47	0,63	4,95	0,91	4,72	0,97
41-55	142	4,38	1,31	5,41c	0,77	5,47	0,67	4,95	0,98	4,67	1,12
56-70+	30	4,36	1,21	5,02d	1,33	5,19	1,26	4,66	1,18	4,78	1,21
Education Primary school	57	4,61	1,28	5,20	1,01	5,31a	0,93	5,07	1,05	5,00h	1,02
High school	258	4,27	1,36	5,39	0,77	5,52b	0,60	4,95	0,90	4,76i	1,01
Tertiary	243	4,36	1,23	5,43	0,75	5,39c	0,68	4,84	0,94	4,49j	1,05
Sex - Male	193	4,32	1,32	5,37	0,86	5,40	0,77	4,86	1,00	4,65	1,06
Female	363	4,37	1,28	5,39	0,75	5,46	0,64	4,94	0,88	4,68	1,03
Total N =	558										
Total X & SD		4,34	1,30	5,38	0,79	5,43	0,69	4,91	0,93	4,67	1,04
		a&b p. =0,0157*		a&b p. =0,0134*		a&b p. =0,0094**		a&c p. =0,0059**		a&c p. =0,0364**	
		a&c p. =0,0341*		b&d p. =0,0035**		b&c p. =0,0261*		b&c p. =0,0098**		a&d p. =0,0157*	
		d&e p. =0,0251*		c&d p. =0,117*						b&d p. =0,0325*	
										e&g p. =0,0016**	
										f&g p. =0,0030**	
										h&j p. =0,0009**	
										i&j p. =0,0031**	

! Lower case letters indicate summary of groups that differ significantly according to ANOVA T-Tests: (* p<0,05; ** p<0,01)

TABLE 2(b): MATRIX OF FACTOR MEAN SCORES FOR HOUSEHOLD SIZE, INCOME, AGE, EDUCATION AND SEX IN REGIONAL SAMPLE

	N	Factor 1 (Bargain hunting)		Factor 2 (General Consumer knowledge)		Factor 3 (Product knowledge)		Factor 4 (Information search)		Factor 5 (Price conscious)	
		\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD
Household size 1	13	3,93	1,09	5,27	1,06	5,26	0,97	5,15	0,42	4,86	0,70
2	61	3,56	1,54	5,58	0,65	5,48	0,74	4,89	0,96	4,10	1,28
3 to 4	137	3,76	1,21	5,51	0,58	5,64	0,43	5,08	0,74	4,43	1,02
5+	89	3,47	1,23	5,42	0,71	5,57	0,51	4,96	0,79	4,30	1,11
Income per month											
Low (R1000)	43	3,74	1,18	5,42	0,77	5,38	0,72	5,00	0,86	4,25	1,23
Middle (R1001-5000)	190	3,69	1,27	5,48	0,65	5,59	0,56	5,00	0,83	4,38	1,08
Upper (R5001)	67	3,42	1,38	5,54	0,60	5,63	0,44	5,02	0,64	4,30	1,08
Age -25 yrs	3	5,06	0,11	5,13	0,83	5,33	0,80	5,53	0,64	4,53	1,50
26-40	115	3,46	1,16	5,47	0,64	5,57	0,60	4,98	0,76	4,30	1,11
41-55	135	3,76	1,25	5,45	0,69	5,61	0,48	5,05	0,75	4,44	1,05
56-70+	47	3,65	1,63	5,65	0,59	5,47	0,67	4,91	0,98	4,18	1,20
Education Primary school	21	4,01	1,28	5,53	0,84	5,60	0,75	4,94	0,96	4,66	1,10
High school	122	3,71	1,29	5,42	0,69	5,44b!	0,66	4,84b	0,90	4,25	1,14
Tertiary	157	3,54	1,28	5,53	0,61	5,67c	0,42	5,14c	0,64	4,37	1,07
Sex - Male	4	3,30	1,97	5,60	0,46	5,50	0,57	4,25	1,07	3,90	0,73
Female	296	3,64	1,28	5,48	0,66	5,57	0,56	5,02	0,79	4,35	1,11
Total N =	300										
Total X & SD		3,64	1,29	5,49	0,66	5,57	0,56	5,01	0,79	4,35	1,10
						b&c p. =0,0007**		b&c p. =0,0015**			

! Lower case letters indicate summary of groups that differ significantly according to ANOVA T-Tests: (* p<0,05; ** p<0,01)

Tables 2a & b show matrixes of factor mean scores for demographic categories on the five factors identified in both samples. From these tables it can be seen that respondents in both groups differed with regard to total mean factor scores on the various factors. Within-group differences for various demographic categories on each of the five identified factors in both samples are also reported.

Table 3a & b show which of the above demographic characteristics significantly influence factor scores while tables 2a & b also indicate which within-group factor mean score differences for various demographic characteristics are significant.*

From table 3(a) it can be seen that for the national sample household size and income significantly influence factor one; age significantly influences factor two; education influences factor three; income influences factor four and household size, income and education play a role in factor five. From table 3(b) it is apparent that for the regional sample only education significantly influences factors three and four. It may therefore be inferred on inspection from the tables that the national sample is a much less homogeneous sample, compared to the regional sample in terms of factors of consumer awareness.

**TABLE 3(a):
MULTIPLE ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE(MANOVA) OF DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES INFLUENCING FACTOR SCORES IN NATIONAL SAMPLE**

Demographic variables	Factor 1 (Bargain hunting)			Factor 2 (General Consumer knowledge)			Factor 3 (Product knowledge)			Factor 4 (Information search)			Factor 5 (Price conscious)		
	F	df	p.	F	df	p.	F	df	p.	F	df	p.	F	df	p.
Household size	2,85	3	0,0368	0,07	3	0,9752	1,33	3	0,2627	0,35	3	0,7875	2,99	3	0,0306
Income	3,18	2	0,0426	0,89	2	0,4129	1,07	2	0,3453	3,49	2	0,0312	4,43	2	0,0123
Age	0,06	3	0,9812	3,40	3	0,0175	1,68	3	0,1704	1,38	3	0,2478	1,36	3	0,2536
Education	1,16	2	0,3145	0,84	2	0,4340	4,19	2	0,0157	0,76	2	0,4662	4,39	2	0,0128
Sex	0,18	1	0,6736	0,04	1	0,8460	0,60	1	0,4390	1,65	1	0,1990	0,25	1	0,6205
Error	544														

**TABLE 3(b):
MULTIPLE ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE(MANOVA) OF DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES INFLUENCING FACTOR SCORES IN REGIONAL SAMPLE**

Demographic variables	Factor 1 (Bargain hunting)			Factor 2 (General Consumer knowledge)			Factor 3 (Product knowledge)			Factor 4 (Information search)			Factor 5 (Price conscious)		
	F	df	p.	F	df	p.	F	df	p.	F	df	p.	F	df	p.
Household size	1,00	3	0,3924	1,23	3	0,2992	1,57	3	0,1963	1,08	3	0,3582	2,26	3	0,0814
Income	0,86	2	0,4228	0,14	2	0,8670	0,99	2	0,3711	0,05	2	0,9514	0,19	2	0,8293
Age	2,31	3	0,0768	1,43	3	0,2351	1,10	3	0,9600	0,92	3	0,4299	0,87	3	0,4588
Education	1,47	2	0,2308	0,71	2	0,4903	4,40	2	0,0132	5,67	2	0,0038	1,57	2	0,2108
Sex															
Error	289														

Table 4 summarizes total mean factor scores for both samples taken from tables 2 a & b and indicates which of these differences are significant. As can be inferred from table 4, respondents from the national sample obtained significantly higher factor mean scores on bargain hunting and price consciousness (factors one and five) than did respondents from the regional sample. With regard to general consumer knowledge, product knowledge and information search (factors two, three and four) respondents from the regional sample obtained higher mean factor scores than did those from the national sample. In the case of general consumer knowledge and product knowledge these differences were significant. Bargain hunting and price consciousness thus featured prominently amongst the national sample while general consumer knowledge, product knowledge and information search were more salient amongst the regional sample.

**TABLE 4
COMPARATIVE MEAN FACTOR SCORES FOR TWO SAMPLES**

N	National sample 588		Regional sample 300		T test	p-value
	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD		
Factor 1	4,34	1,30	3,64	1,29	7,59	0,0000**
Factor 2	5,38	0,79	5,49	0,66	-2,04	0,0422*
Factor 3	5,43	0,69	5,57	0,56	-3,11	0,0019**
Factor 4	4,91	0,93	5,01	0,79	-1,61	0,1074
Factor 5	4,67	1,04	4,34	1,10	4,21	0,0000**

* p<0,05
** p<0,01

A possible explanation for the higher mean factor scores observed in the regional sample for general consumer knowledge and product knowledge may be the presumption that these respondents have a higher level of consumer education, resulting in a higher level of consumer awareness.

On the other hand, respondents in the national sample were less homogeneous in terms of the consumer awareness factors, as was revealed by MANOVA analysis. These respondents represent the general public who may not be as informed on agricultural products and other associated consumer issues. However they do experience the hardships of the current poor economic conditions and thus are more price conscious and willing to bargain hunt.

One may reason further that if consumer education is a determining factor causing higher levels of consumer awareness amongst the regional sample, then a consumer educational intervention would enhance consumer awareness. Such an assumption would support the literature stating that educational programmes would enhance the cognitive and perceptual skills of disadvantaged consumers (Cole & Gaeth, 1990). Consumer educational programmes could further serve as counselling sessions where buyers needs for informational or educational remedies could be gauged, as suggested in the literature (Moorman, 1990).

A further confirmation of the importance of consumer education in enhancing consumer awareness is that apart from scholastic and tertiary education, none of the other demographic variables significantly influences the various consumer awareness factors. Regardless of the socio-economic background of respondents, it therefore seems that consumer education could play an important role in improving the general level of consumer awareness.

Although this study does not focus on a detail analysis of within-group differences for the two samples as shown in tables 2a & b, it is interesting to note that these differences occurred more frequently in the national sample than in the regional sample. Significant differences were observed in seventeen instances between various demographic categories ranging over all five factors in the national sample whilst this occurred in only two instances on two factors in the regional sample. This observation is further proof of the homogeneity of the regional sample, suggesting that respondents were less likely to differ on consumer awareness factors.

Proposition testing

From the empirical data discussed above it is clear that the study provides substantial support for two of the propositions tested and holds partial support for the third proposition. Regarding proposition one the results confirm the existence of five valid criteria of consumer awareness, identified in a pilot study. With regard to proposition two, MANOVA analysis confirmed that exposure to consumer education reduces the effect of other demographic variables such as age, income, household size, on the identified factors of consumer awareness. In the case of the third proposition results indicate that exposure to consumer education enhanced three of the factor scores (general consumer knowledge, product knowledge and information search) relevant to consumer awareness.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study confirmed the existence of five valid criteria or factors of consumer awareness. Different levels of consumer awareness were measured in terms of the identified factors amongst two independent samples. These differences manifested in higher factor scores being observed on three of the identified criteria of consumer awareness, amongst one of the samples.

Multiple analysis of variance revealed that respondents in this particular sample were more homogeneous in terms of the identified factors of consumer awareness. Only one demo-

graphic variable viz. education significantly influenced factor scores. It was thus suspected that consumer education could have lead to the higher level of consumer awareness. A major implication of this assumption is that an educational intervention would enhance consumer awareness.

Analysis of the data showed that exposure to consumer education reduces the effect of other demographic variables on the identified factors of consumer awareness. Results also provided tentative support for the proposition that exposure to consumer education aggravates factor scores relevant to consumer awareness.

A major limitation of these findings is that they are based on two samples which although drawn independently, were not designed specifically to test the influence of education on consumer awareness. The study merely aimed at measuring identified criteria of consumer awareness for various demographic categories amongst the two independent samples. It was therefore a coincidence that one of the samples consisted exclusively of white female respondents while the other was stratified according to income distribution on a national, cross-cultural basis.

More stringent proof of the role of consumer education would therefore be necessary before any conclusive findings can be made. Such an investigation would involve a control and experimental group with pre and post intervention testing. Despite these limitations in sample composition and experimental design, results of the study do emphasize the need for more consumer education in South Africa. This should be a crucial goal of all consumer organizations endeavouring to enhance consumer awareness amongst the general public. Consumer education programmes should stress the personal benefits of using and the negative consequences of failing to use the available information so that target groups are willing to expend the extra effort required.

The way in which general consumer and product knowledge is presented influences who will be able to use such information effectively. Hence consumer educators need to understand explicitly the cognitive and perceptual skills of their target audiences as suggested in the literature. Visual material, practical demonstrations in simulated buying environments and role playing sessions may prove to be more suitable than printed material and formal lectures in enhancing the accuracy of product choice tasks for many unsophisticated and disadvantaged consumers.

Future research should focus on developing efficient tuition methods for consumer educational programmes to be used in a new South Africa. The impact of such methods on consumer educational programmes would result in higher levels of consumer awareness.

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