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MEASURING CONSUMER AWARENESS IN ZIMBABWE

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OPSOMMING

Hierdie artikel beskryf die meting en vergelyking van verskillende vlakke van verbruikersbewustheid soos waargeneem in 'n empiriese ondersoek in Zimbabwe. Die bevindinge bevestig die bestaan van vyf faktore van verbruikersbewustheid nl. winskopie-jagter, algemene verbruikerskennis, produkkennis, inligtinginwinning en prysbewustheid. Verskillende vlakke van verbruikersbewustheid tree na vore uit die steekproef. Hierdie verskille kan toegeskryf word aan demografiese veranderlikes soos opvoeding, ouderdom, inkome en gebied. Bevindinge van die studie dui verder daarop dat die itemskaal ontwikkel vir die meting van verbruikersbewustheid in Suid-Afrika toegepas kan word in Zimbabwe.

ABSTRACT

This article describes the measurement and comparison of different levels of consumer awareness observed in an empirical investigation in Zimbabwe. The findings confirm the existence of five factors of consumer awareness viz, bargain hunting, general consumer knowledge, product knowledge, information search and price consciousness. Different levels of consumer awareness emerged from the sample. These differences can be attributed to demographic variables such as education, age, income and area. The results of the study further suggest that the item scale developed for measuring consumer awareness in South Africa is applicable in Zimbabwe.

Consumer awareness has been described as the extent or alertness of individual consumers of their rights and responsibilities in the market place. Consumer rights are defined by the International Organization of Consumer Unions as the right to satisfaction of basic needs, the right to safety, the right to be informed, the right to choose, the right to be heard, the right to redress, the right to consumer education and the right to a healthy environment (Meyer, 1992). Consumer responsibilities entails the ability to form independent opinions regarding ones own consumption behaviour which can be argued for and acted upon. This implies acquiring knowledge and skills to make responsible choices which will benefit both the individual consumer and society. It also involves awareness of perceived risks associated with purchase decisions such as financial risks i.e. unaffordable products, physical risks i.e. unsafe or unhealthy products and ecological risks, that is products which are hazardous to the environment. (Van der Hammen & Van Rijn van Alkemade, 1990).

Consumer awareness manifests itself in five distinguishable characteristics according to Rousseau and Venter. These authors constructed a theoretical model of the construct based on a literature review. From this model five potential characteristics of consumer awareness were identified and empirically tested in a pilot study (Rousseau 1991). Follow-up studies (Rousseau & Venter 1992(a); Rousseau & Venter 1992(b)) confirmed five factors of consumer awareness viz bargain hunting, general consumer knowledge, product knowledge, information search and price consciousness. Research findings further indicated different levels of consumer awareness for the sample populations. One study (Rousseau 1992(a)) revealed that bargain hunting, differed significantly between low and upper income groups with low income groups being the greatest bargain hunters. Another study (Rousseau & Venter 1992(b)) showed that respondents from a national sample scored higher on bargain hunting and price consciousness while those from a regional sample scored higher on general consumer knowledge, product knowledge and information search. These differences in levels of consumer awareness as measured by the identified factors of the construct, suggest that it could be attributed to demographic variables of which education seemed to be the most important. The authors concluded that there was a serious need for consumer education in South Africa and that the levels of consumer awareness measured in the reported studies, could serve as a guideline for developing such consumer education programmes.

During 1993 the research has been extended to Bophuthatswana where a rural sample of 630 respondents completed the same questionnaire used in the previous studies. Although the result of this study once more confirmed the existence of the five factors of consumer awareness identified in previous research, the factor structure varied somewhat. Only eighteen of the twenty five items from the original questionnaire loaded on the five factors. This may be due to a different interpretation and association of the questionnaire by respondents in Bophuthatswana in comparison to those in South Africa. Results of the study demonstrated how cautious researches should be when applying measuring instruments developed and validated for a specific population, with groups not so familiar with the issues at stake. The scales developed and used amongst urban cross-cultural samples in South Africa does not work in a similar manner when applied to a predominantly rural environment. The study further revealed that education and location were the only two demographic variables influencing factors of consumer awereness. (Rousseau & Venter 1993).

Most consumer behaviour theories and constructs have been developed and tested exclusively in the United States. Theories of involvement, risk perception and pre-purchase information search laid the foundation for constructing a model of consumer awareness. The construct "consumer awareness" further evolved from literature on consumerism, consumer rights and protection which also originated in the United States. The construct consumer awareness derived from these theories has so far only been applied and confirmed in South Africa and Bophuthatswana. Thus, whether the theory, construct, measures and relationship among the factors of consumer awareness are culturally bound, is unknown. Although many researchers have called for the examination of the applicability of consumer behaviour theories to other countries and cultures (Albaum & Peterson 1984, Hui & Triandis 1985, Lee and Green (1991) few studies have actually done so. There is a need for testing models cross-nationally because all too often researchers have assumed that models, constructs and measuring instruments developed in one country are relevant to other countries without actual validation of model constructs and linkages. This assumption can lead to invalid cross-

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national inferences. (Durvasula, Andrews, Lysonski & Netemeyer 1993).

In the Bophuthatswana study a number of items used in the measuring instrument proved to be irrelevant. This was ascribed to the fact that the questionnaire was originally developed and validated for administration amongst urban populations only. The Bophuthatswana sample was mainly rural. Situational determinants such as absence of shopping centres, schools and illiteracy amongst rural respondents may therefore have caused certain items to be irrelevant or interpreted differently in comparison to urban respondents. No proof however exist that more deep seated cultural differences between South African and Bophuthatswana respondents may have caused a different factorial structure in the two studies. Applying the same instrument on a urban sample in a foreign country such as Zimbabwe will shed light on this issue. It would in fact show whether the instrument is culture free when applied cross-nationally.

Research evidence from consumer awareness studies carried out recently in South Africa suggest that education is an important demographic variable influencing levels of consumer awareness. The assumption that consumer education is a vital link in increasing consumer awareness is further supported by other researchers. Cole and Gaeth (1990) and Cole and Balasubramanian (1993) investigated consumer's ability to use nutritional information in breakfast cereal choice tasks. The authors conclude from both these studies that consumer educational programmes would enhance the cognitive and perceptual skills of elderly and disadvantaged consumers. It is further suggested that consumer educational effort should not only inform consumers of the need for using label information on packaging but also emphasize the benefits of writing down key pieces of information prior to making a choice. The authors suggest that visual symbols be used on product packages in addition to verbal text to convey nutritional information.

In another study by Moorman (1990) the effects of consumer characteristics on the utilization of product information were researched. Once more the role of consumer education is emphasized. The author suggest that multiple educational programmes need to be developed to meet consumers' different needs for information. For example both education and information approaches may be necessary for consumers unfamiliar with the nutrient value of food products, while only information is necessary when familiarity can be assumed amongst a target population.

Hutchinson and Alba (1991) investigated situational determinants of learning simple rules for classifying products and examining prices. The authors conclude that consumers tend to rely on a small subset of available information, making them prone to being influenced by a single misleading claim. Consumers are therefore at considerable risk to being misled by any particular selling proposition if not educated to learn product knowledge and investigate new items in a holistic manner so that all information has at least some impact on the final decision. Often consumers attention is guided away from important differences among products by advertising, packaging and their own brand loyalties. Thus their beliefs are formed to a significant extent by irrelevant information that they should ignore.

Consumer organizations are increasingly becoming aware of the power of organized business to influence and manupulate consumer decision making through exploitive marketing and promotional activities. In many developing countries consumers are unsophisticated and ignorant regarding their basic rights as consumers. They are also uninformed about the quality and safety of the goods and services that suppliers are selling to them. Furthermore, they are seldom aware of the extent to which production techniques in their countries are degrading the environment, and the ways in which these technologies and the products of these technologies affect their health. (Rousseau 1993) Therefore, consumer organizations world wide consider education to be one of their main activities. It is perceived to be one of consumers' basic rights and a means of enhancing overall consumer awareness (Westendorp 1992).

In Africa a large number of consumer organizations have emerged recently. Many, if not most, are educating and informing people on how to satisfy their basic needs with the little money they have to spend – for example by recognising and avoiding shoddy and inferior goods or by asserting themselves to obtain redress when needed. The benefits of consumer education, not only for individuals but for countries as a whole, were stressed at a regional Consumer Education Workshop for the rural population, held in Mauritius during August 1993. At this workshop strategies were developed for addressing the educational and protection needs of rural consumers in different African environments (Van Ommeren 1993). The need for consumer research as a basis for drafting appropriate new consumer educational programmes was also emphasized by various countries.

Consumer awareness and education in Zimbabwe received a new thrust in the early 1990s as a result of the government's Economic Structural Adjustment Programme. The programme was introduced to revitalize the economy by creating competition and removing all controls from the market. The sudden introduction of a free market system implied that consumers now had to exercise their rights effectively and protect themselves against unscrupulous businessmen. A national intensive consumer education project was launched in April 1992 by the Consumer Council of Zimbabwe to inform and educate consumers at grass-roots level. The target community was marginalized urban and rural consumers. The project sponsored by the International Organization of Consumer Unions succeeded in reaching rural consumers via NGOs, urban consumers via regional workshops and a broad spectrum of the general public via the electronic media as well as educational literature (Mukwena 1993).

Follow-up strategies involve lobbying for the introduction of consumer education in the formal curriculum at primary school level as well as intensifying adult education through Consumer Clubs to effect attitude change quickly. As part of an international research programme to measure consumer awareness in various African countries as a basis for consumer educational programmes, this study was conducted in Zimbabwe with the cooperation of the Zimbabwe Consumer Council. Two main goals were set (i) To measure previously identified factors of consumer awareness and (ii) investigate the role of various demographic variables (i.e. education, age, income) on the construct. It is hoped that this information in addition to serving as a guideline for educational programmes in Zimbabwe, will confirm the model of consumer awareness developed in South Africa and test the suitability of the measuring instrument for cross-national application.

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) Demographic characteristics of consumers (i.e. age, income, education, location, gender) may differ on each of the identified criteria of the consumer awareness, indicating varying levels of the construct.

METHOD

A questionnaire developed and used in previous studies (Rousseau & Venter 1992, Rousseau & Venter 1993) consisting of 25 items (five items per factor) were administered to an urban sample drawn from two major cities in Zimbabwe.

To determine whether the five factors previously identified, can be calculated accurately and reliably using the original 25 items, item analyses were performed for each of the factors individually. The analyses were performed to:

(i) determine whether any items should be excluded – this was done by means of principal component factor analysis and item versus scale-minus-item correlations;

(ii) test the reliability of factors by means of Gronbach's coefficient alpha.

One way analyses of variance were used determine the statistical significance of differences in factor scores between various levels of demographic variables.

Multiple analyses of variance were used to identify those demographic variables that significantly influence factor scores.

Sample: A stratified random sample (N=256) was drawn from Harare and Bulawayo. The sample was stratified according to income distribution in various residential areas of these two cities. Harare is the capital of Zimbabwe and the largest city in the country with a population of one million. The greatest percentage of Harare residents are employed in industries such as manufacturing, mining, agriculture and civil service. Most of the mining houses and financial institutions have their headquarters in Harare.

Bulawayo, the second largest city in the country has a population of over half a million. It is the administrative, commercial and industrial capital of Matabeleland. Most residents are employed in a large variety of commercial and industrial establishments. Other main employers are the National Railways of Zimbabwe which has its headquarters in the city and the Cold Storage Commission abattoir which serves the surrounding agricultural districts.

Table one shows a demographic profile of the sample population. From the table it can be seen that most of the respondents were representative of larger households (3 to 5 persons), falling in the middle aged and middle income categories with a high school or tertiary education.

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS: THE SAMPLE

Area	N	%	Household size	N	%	Age	N	%	Education	N	%	Income	N	%	Gender	N	%
Harare	132	51,6	1	26	10,2	-25	39	15,2	Preschool	62	24,2	Lower	110	43,0	Male	162	63,3
Bulawayo	124	48,4	2	28	10,9	26-40	160	62,5	High School	92	35,9	Middle	127	49,6	Female	94	36,7
			3-4	108	42,2	41-55	49	19,1	Tertiary	102	39,8	Upper	19	7,4			
			5+	94	36,7	56-70	8	3,1									

Total N=256

Procedure

Field work was carried out by the research division of the Consumer Council of Zimbabwe. All the fieldworkers were properly briefed on sample selection and interview procedures prior to entering the field. Households in the various 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 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 agree completely to disagree completely. Field workers explained to respondents that there was no right or wrong answers to the questions in the questionnaire. The only answer which was important was the one which gave a true reflection of how the respondent felt about the question. The questionnaire was printed in English. Fieldworkers however translated questions into the vernacular where respondents had difficulty in understanding the statements. Demographic information was also obtained from respondents regarding household size, income, age, education and gender.

Data analysis

Data analysis employed the computer program BMDP 4M (Frane Jenrich & Samson 1985) to perform factor analysis on the item sample. The method of principal component analysis was used with direct quartimin rotation. Based on the principle that only factors with eight-values larger than one needs 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. (See Table 2(a)). Furthermore factor analysis confirmed that all items previously selected for the measurement of consumer awereness factors in South Africa, could be used for this purpose in Zimbabwe, due to all factor loadings being significant.

The BMDP program 8D was used to calculate item versus scale-minus-item Pearson Product Moment correlations.

Cronbachs' coefficients alpha were calculated to determine reliability of the various scales.

The BMDP program 1D was then used to calculate mean factor scores for the various demographic variables. These results are shown in table 3. 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 4. To test the statistical significance of factor score differences between the various demographic groups, one way analysis of variance (ANOVA program 1V) was performed, the results of which are also summarized in Table 3.

RESULTS

Table 2a shows the five factors that were extracted from the factor analysis. The first factor explained 36,74 percent of the variance and contains items with factor loadings in excess of 0,45 which relates to the tendency to bargain hunt. Factor two explains 42,26 percent of the total variance and contains items with factor loadings larger than 0,56 which relates to general consumer knowledge. Factor three focuses on information search and explains 42,05 percent of the variance reflecting items with factor loadings in excess of 0,55. The fourth factor explained 38,89 percent of the variance and includes items which relate to product knowledge. The fifth factor referred to price consciousness and explained 35,56 percent of the variance. The Cronbach's coefficients alpha ranging from 0,59 to 0,73 are acceptable.

Table 2b shows the item versus scale-minus-item Pearson Product moment correlations. From this table can be seen that all correlations exceed the 99 percent confidence level critical value of 0,145. This indicates that all correlations can be regarded as statistical significant and that all items should be retained for calculating factor scores.

TABLE 2(a)
OBLIGUE ROTATED FACTOR MATRIX: MEASURES OF CONSUMER AWARENESS

Item	Criterion	Factor 1 Bargain Hunting	Factor 2 General consumer knowledge	Factor 3 Product knowledge	Factor 4 Information Search	Factor 5 Price consciousness
1	I check newspapers each week for bargains	0,75				
2	When I see a "special" advertised on TV or the radio I always follow it up.	0,55				
3	I always shop at more than one store to compare prices and take advantage of the lowest priced item.	0,45				
4	I like searching for bargains at seasonal sales or auctions.	0,61				
5	I always buy with coupons to obtain the best deal.	0,64				
6	Consumers in Zimbabwe are not aware of their legitimate rights when it comes to doing business or engage in shopping.		0,74			
7	More attention should be paid to consumer awareness programmes in school education.		0,56			
8	Too few consumers' in Zimbabwe read consumer articles in newspapers and magazines.		0,68			
9	Zimbabwe consumers are not aware of the laws available to protect their consumer rights.		0,68			
10	Consumer organizations in Zimbabwe deserve better support from consumers.		0,57			
11	Checking expiry dates on perishable food items is essential for ensuring fresh produce.			0,60		
12	I always look for a guarantee on expensive products before deciding on the purchase.			0,69		
13	It is important to share product information with friends and relatives.			0,77		
14	Product knowledge is one's best guardian against exploitation.			0,59		
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.				0,66	
17	Seeking information from relatives and friends prior to making a final choice is always a good idea.				0,61	
18	Sales staff can be an important source of product information.				0,59	
19	Before purchasing a particular product I usually compare various brands to choose the best.				0,61	
20	I usually read newspaper advertisements for obtaining product information prior to purchase.				0,64	
21	Choosing "no-name brands" is a good way to beat inflation.					0,50
22	Price is the most important factor to me in choosing an item.					0,62
23	When a product is offered at a discount price I am more tempted to buy it.					0,73
24	Before deciding where to go shopping, I usually try to find out whether any specials are being offered.					0,68
25	I always compare prices of similar products on display in the store.					0,39
	Percentage of total variance explained	36,74	42,26	42,05	38,89	35,56
	Cronbach's coefficient alpha	0,69	0,59	0,60	0,65	0,73

N = 256

TABLE 2(b)
ITEM VS SCALE-MINUS-ITEM CORRELATIONS

Factor 1 Bargain hunting Knowledge		Factor 2 General Consumer		Factor 3 Product Knowledge		Factor 4 Information Search		Factor 5 Price Consciousness	
Item	Correlation	Item	Correlation	Item	Correlation	Item	Correlation	Item	Correlation
1	0,4536	6	0,5062	11	0,3611	16	0,3914	21	0,2362
2	0,2671	7	0,3305	12	0,4553	17	0,3502	22	0,3151
3	0,2151	8	0,4424	13	0,5305	18	0,3347	23	0,4129
4	0,3265	9	0,4448	14	0,3351	19	0,3495	24	0,3627
5	0,3499	10	0,3446	15	0,3309	20	0,3778	25	0,1596

Table 3 shows matrices of factor mean scores for demographic variables obtained from the sample. In the table a low score indicates a negative response while a high score indicates a positive response. (The six point rating scale used in the questionnaire comprised of verbal anchor points ranging from agree completely to disagree completely.) From Table 3 it can be seen that respondents from larger households in the lower income category were the biggest bargain hunters. They were mainly males with a high school education and representative of the age group 56-70 years.

With regards to factor two it seems that general consumer knowledge were highest amongst upper income single households in the young age bracket with a tertiary education. They were mostly females. Information search (factor three) obtained the highest score amongst lower income male respondents with a primary school education. They were mainly representative of the age bracket 26-40 years and of households consisting of two people.

Product knowledge (factor four) featured most prominently amongst female respondents with a tertiary education. They represented consumers in the middle to upper income categories, older and from larger households. Price consciousness (factor five) were highest amongst lower income, middle aged respondents with only a primary school education.

Table 3 further indicates that respondents from Harare obtained higher mean factor scores on general consumer knowledge, product knowledge and price consciousness than those from Bulawayo while respondents from Bulawayo obtained higher scores on bargain hunting and information search.

TABLE 3
MATRIX OF FACTOR MEAN SCORES FOR HOUSEHOLD SIZE, INCOME, AGE, EDUCATION AND SEX.

		Factor 1 Bargain hunting		Factor 2 General consumer knowledge		Factor 3 Information search		Factor 4 Product knowledge		Factor 5 Price consciousness	
	N	X	SD	X	SD	X	SD	X	SD	X	SD
Household size 1	26	4,28	1,03	5,34	0,70	4,41	1,08	5,05	0,88	4,34	0,88
2	28	3,94	0,95	5,21	0,76	4,68	0,93	5,03	0,69	4,78	0,94
3-4	108	4,20	1,05	5,00	0,97	4,47	1,00	5,01	0,98	4,51	0,98
5	94	4,31	0,98	5,27	0,80	4,37	1,00	5,08	0,94	4,62	0,98
Income per month											
Low (R<1 000)	110	4,34	0,96	4,89a	0,89	4,56	0,98	4,84a	0,99	4,73a	0,90
Middle (R1 000-5 000)	127	4,14	1,03	5,31b	0,82	4,34	1,02	5,20b	0,84	4,48b	0,96
Upper (R5 000>)	19	4,09	1,18	5,71c	0,38	4,48	1,04	5,20	0,83	4,16c	1,15
Age – 25 yrs	39	4,32a	0,86	5,24	0,83	4,35	1,04	5,04	0,78	4,35	1,03
26-40	160	4,27b	0,96	5,14	0,86	4,57a	0,98	5,06	0,92	4,63	0,93
41-55	49	3,90c	1,17	5,14	0,97	4,10b	1,02	4,96	1,06	4,53	1,05
56-70+	8	4,70d	1,07	5,18	0,46	4,55	0,77	5,22	0,76	4,37	0,77
Education Primary	62	4,23	1,01	4,74d	0,95	4,52	0,94	4,60c	1,02	4,92d	0,81
High School	92	4,35	0,89	5,09e	0,92	4,51	1,07	5,03d	0,95	4,57e	1,02
Tertiary	102	4,10	1,10	5,47f	0,62	4,34	0,98	5,33e	0,71	4,34f	0,94
Gender Male	162	4,30	1,02	5,11	0,87	4,48	1,04	4,99	0,98	4,59	0,96
Female	94	4,09	1,00	5,24	0,86	4,39	0,93	5,14	0,81	4,51	0,98
Are Bulawayo	124	4,23	0,98	5,05	0,92	4,48	0,95	4,91f	0,98	4,52	0,99
Harare	132	4,21	1,04	5,25	0,80	4,42	1,05	5,17g	0,84	4,60	0,95
Total X % S.D.	256	4,22	1,01	5,16	0,87	4,45	1,00	5,04	0,92	4,56	0,96
		a&c p=0,0522		a&b p=0,0001**		a&b p=0,0036**		a&b p=0,0028**		a&b p=0,0423*	
		b&c p=0,0226*		a&c p=0,0001**				c&d p=0,0035**		a&c p=0,0166*	
		c&d p=0,0370*		b&c p=0,0527				c&e p=0,0000**		d&e p=0,0251*	
				d&e p=0,0102**				d&e p=0,0171*		d&f p=0,0002**	
				d&f p=0,0000**				f&g p=0,0204*			
				e&f p=0,0017**							

Lower case letters indicate summary of groups that differ significantly according to ANOVA T-tests.
*p<0,05
**p<0,01)

TABLE 4
MULTIPLE ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE (MAMOVA) OF DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES INFLUENCING CONSUMER WARENESS FACTOR SCORES

Demographic variables	Factor 1 Bargain hunting			Factor 2 General consumer knowledge			Factor 3 Information search			Factor 4 Product knowledge			Factor 5 Price consciousness		
	F	df	p	F	df	p	F	df	p	F	df	p	F	df	p
Household size	1,62	3	0,1847	1,88	3	0,1331	0,71	3	0,5486	0,03	3	0,9937	1,64	3	0,1812
Income	0,62	2	0,5381	4,05	2	0,0186*	0,56	2	0,5742	0,09	2	0,9175	1,29	2	0,2764
Age	2,93	3	0,0341*	0,57	3	0,6325	3,08	3	0,0282*	0,27	3	0,8451	1,53	3	0,2079
Education	0,86	2	0,4236	4,20	2	0,0160*	0,38	2	0,6812	6,68	2	0,0015**	4,16	2	0,0167*
Sex	1,68	1	0,1960	0,24	1	0,6254	0,03	1	0,8637	0,09	1	0,7583	0,08	1	0,7736
Area	0,06	1	0,8048	3,57	1	0,0600	0,19	1	0,6667	4,49	1	0,0351*	0,35	1	0,5524
Error	243														

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

Table 4 shows which of the following demographic variables significantly influences factor scores while Table 3 also indicates which factor score differences between the various demographic categories are significant. From Table 4 can be seen that four demographic variables (income, age, education and area) significantly influences factor scores. Income significantly influences factor two (general consumer knowledge), age significantly influences factors one and three (bargain hunting and information search), education significantly influences factors two, four and five (general consumer knowledge, product knowledge and price consciousness) while area significantly influences factor four (product knowledge).

With regard to general consumer knowledge Table 3 shows significant differences between low and middle income groups, low and upper income groups and middle and upper income groups. Significant differences were also observed between respondents with a primary and secondary school education, a primary and tertiary education and those with a secondary and tertiary education. Consumers with a primary school education and low income obtained the lowest mean score on general consumer knowledge.

With regard to bargain hunting significant differences were observed between respondents in various age groups. Table 3 shows significant differences between respondents in the age brackets under 25 and 41-55 years, 26-40 and 41-55 years, 41-55 and 56-70 years. With regard to information search table 3 further shows significant differences between respondents in the age brackets 26-40 years and 41-55 years. Respondents in the age group 41-55 years were the least inclined to bargain hunt and search for information.

As far as product knowledge is concerned Table 3 indicates significant differences between low and middle income groups, between respondents with a primary and secondary school education, a primary school and tertiary education, and a secondary school and tertiary education. A significant difference was also observed between the mean score for product knowledge by respondents in Bulawayo compared to those in Harare. Product knowledge was lowest among respondents with a primary school education, a low income and living in Bulawayo.

For price consciousness Table 3 shows significant differences between respondents with low and middle income and between low and upper income categories. Significant differences were also observed for respondents with a primary school and secondary school education and those with a primary school and tertiary education on price consciousness. Upper income respondents with a tertiary education were least price conscious.

Proposition testing

From the empirical data discussed above it is clear that the propositions formulated to investigate consumer awareness in Zimbabwe can be accepted in both cases. Regarding proposition one the acceptable factor loadings and Cronbach's coefficients alpha confirm the existence of five valid criteria or factors of consumer awareness identified in previous studies (Rousseau & Venter 1992 a & b). Although items 3 and 25 obtained relatively low factor loadings compared to the other items they were not excluded from the factor matrix as the scores fell within the acceptable norm range.

In the case of proposition two the study clearly showed that demographic characteristics (such as income, age, education and area) significantly influenced the identified criteria of consumer awareness which emerged from the empirical analysis. Furthermore, demographic groups within these categories differed significantly from one another on the various factors. This can be an indication of various levels of consumer awareness. The empirical results of this study further suggest that the model of consumer awareness developed and tested in South Africa by means of a twenty five item questionnaire is applicable in Zimbabwe and may be used there in extended surveys in other areas of the country.

CONCLUSION

As the consumer movement in Africa gains momentum and African countries become commercially more integrated, investigation of the applicability of consumer awareness theory cross-nationally becomes paramount. Many researchers have argued for cross-cultural research that attempts to establish the generalizability of various theoretical relationships (Lee & Green 1991, Netemeyer et al, 1991). The primary objective of our study was to measure previously identified factors of consumer awareness in Zimbabwe and to investigate the role of various demographic variables on the construct. The study used the framework of a theoretical model developed in South Africa and a twenty five item questionnaire, validated for testing the model.

The study confirmed the existence of five factors of consumer awareness viz. bargain hunting, general consumer knowledge, information search, product knowledge and price consciousness. *Different levels of consumer awareness emerged from the sample.* These differences may be ascribed to demographic variables such as education, age, income and area.

With regard to education respondents with a primary, secondary and tertiary education differed significantly on general consumer knowledge, product knowledge and price consciousness. Consumers with a tertiary education obtained the

highest mean factor scores on general consumer knowledge and product knowledge. These results support the findings of previous studies (Westendorp 1992, Rousseau & Venter 1992, Rousseau & Venter 1993) suggesting that educational levels may enhance consumer awareness. Respondents with a primary school education were most price conscious. This finding also confirms a previous conclusion from the literature (Rousseau & Venter 1993).

With reference to age, respondents in various age groups differed significantly on bargain hunting and information search. Results showed that middle aged respondents (between the ages 41-55 years) were the least inclined to bargain hunt and search for information. These results tentatively support suggestions by Cole & Gaeth 1990, and Cole & Balasubramanian 1993 that consumer education programs should focus on all age groups including elderly and disadvantage consumers.

With regard to income and area significant differences were observed between respondents in various income groups on general consumer knowledge and between respondents in Harare and Bulawayo on product knowledge, respectively. The results suggest that general consumer knowledge is highest amongst upper income respondents and product knowledge highest amongst those living in Harare. These differences may be due to higher levels of literacy amongst upper income groups and Harare being the main centre of the Consumer Council of Zimbabwe.

Results of the study confirm that the twenty five item questionnaire developed and used in previous studies in South Africa and Bophuthatswana may be applied for measuring consumer awareness in Zimbabwe. Two restrictions of the measuring instrument however, need to be taken into account namely, its applicability primarily to urban samples and its use with respondents familiar with English only.

A major limitation of the study is sample size. Though we aimed at obtaining a larger sample which would have included respondents from two other main centres, Gwero and Masvingo, data were not obtained from these areas due to postal delays and administrative problems. Furthermore, although we aimed at receiving a sample representative of various socio economic groups the data reflected in table 1 may not be verifiable with the true profile of the population in these two cities. We were however, assured that the samples were drawn according to instructions outlined in the procedure.

Despite these shortcomings results of the study confirm various theoretical relationships between consumer awareness theory cross-nationally. Concurrent factors of the construct emerged from the empirical results. Demographic variables pertaining to different levels of consumer awareness were consistent across countries. Findings suggest that education, age and income are major variables influencing consumer awareness in both Zimbabwe and South Africa. This implies that regional workshops should target consumers from various school levels, age and income groups. Such educational workshops should focus mainly on enhancing levels of general consumer knowledge, product knowledge and information search activities as suggested in the literature (Moorman 1990). Consumer rights, redress procedures and the advantages of comparative shopping, product inspections and label reading should form the basic content of workshops.

In conclusion this study represents a first step in testing consumer awareness theory cross-nationally. It is hoped that the results of the study will stress the importance of consumer education in African countries and encourage businesses who are planning to penetrate African markets to get involved in consumer education through sponsorship and affirmative action programs. Consumer oriented businesses are aware that contributing to consumer education and training is a long term investment which pays dividends through well informed, protected, satisfied and loyal clients. It is therefore the route to follow for progressive potential market leaders.

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