

# A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER AWARENESS IN SOUTH AFRICA DURING 1992 AND 1994: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (R.D.P.)

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## OPSOMMING

Hierdie artikel beskryf die meting en vergelyking van verskillende vlakke van verbruikersbewustheid in 'n empiriese studie uitgevoer in Suid-Afrika gedurende 1994. Die rol van verskeie demografiese faktore op die konstruksie word ondersoek, die resultate vergelyk met die van 'n vorige studie en die implikasies daarvan ontleed in terme van die Heropbou en Ontwikkelingsprogram (HOP) deur die Regering van Nasionale Eenheid ingestel. Bevindinge bevestig die betroubaarheid van die instrument om die vyf faktore van verbruikersbewustheid soos geïdentifiseer in vorige studies, te meet. Verskeie vlakke van verbruikersbewustheid het na vore getree uit die steekproef. Hierdie verskille kan toegeskryf word aan demografiese faktore soos huishouding grootte, inkome, opvoedingspeil en woongebied. Bevindinge suggereer verder dat vlakke van verbruikersbewustheid verander het sedert 1992, volgens gebied. Hierdie veranderinge impliseer 'n behoefte om verbruikersopvoeding in die HOP in te sluit, sou die regering vlakke van verbruikersbewustheid in die land wil verhoog.

## ABSTRACT

This article describes the measurement and comparison of different levels of consumer awareness in an empirical study carried out in South Africa during 1994. The study investigates the role of various demographic variables on the construct, compares the results with those of a previous study and analyses the implications of the findings for the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), launched by the Government of National Unity. Findings confirm the reliability of the instrument to measure the five factors of consumer awareness identified in previous studies. Different levels of consumer awareness emerged from the sample. These differences can be attributed to demographic variables such as household size, income, education and area. Findings further suggest that levels of consumer awareness have changed by area since 1992. These changes imply a need for consumer education to be incorporated into the RDP, should the government wish to enhance levels of consumer awareness in the country.

South Africa has recently gone through a major political transformation process from a minority government to a true democracy. The events leading up to the country's first democratic election in April 1994 resulted in economic uncertainty impacting on consumers spending patterns. Since the election moderate stability has set in. Business and consumer confidence has been restored despite ongoing labour unrest and strikes. Greater economic activity is expected for 1995 as the political transformation process stabilises and the Reconstruction and Development Process gets implemented.

An observation of the economic indicators (consumer price index and food inflation) shows a steady decrease since 1992. The inflation rate (consumer price index for all items) dropped from 16,2 percent in January 1992 to its lowest rate of 7,1 percent in April 1994 on a monthly basis. Since then however, it has started to increase again to 9,9 percent in November 1994.

Food inflation still remained high during 1992 and only started declining on a monthly basis since the beginning of 1993. It reached a low of 2,4 percent in September of that year but has since risen once more to 18,9 percent in November 1994 (Central Statistics, 1994). These figures indicate that many consumers are still reeling under the blows of the recession and high unemployment figures.

A closer look at complaint statistics compiled by the Consumer Council and based on telephone and written complaints received by them, show that although complaints have increased from 41547 during 1990/91 to 60570 during 1993/94, the percentage increase on an annual base, has levelled off.

For the period 1991/92 the increase was 25,4 percent over the same period in the previous year. For 1992/93 the percentage increase was 12,7 percent compared to the previous year and for 1993/94 the figure has dropped to a 3,0 percent increase (Consumer Council, 1994).

This trend of a reduced increase in complaint rates may have a variety of causes. It may indicate that levels of consumer awareness have changed and that consumers are now more aware of their rights and responsibilities in the market place. They therefore behave more vigilantly and make fewer errors in the buying environment. Fewer complaints by consumers may however also signal that sellers have become more consumer oriented and client centred in the stiff competitive market where dealers have to compete for the consumer's money in a restricted economy. Dealers therefore make sure that consumers are satisfied and understand how to use the products bought before they leave the store. A decline in complaints received by the Consumer Council may also reflect a trend that more stores are creating their own facilities for handling consumer complaints, hence fewer complaints reach the Council.

From the above it is apparent that major political and economical transformations have taken place during the past two years. These changes may influence previous research findings on the state of consumer awareness<sup>1)</sup> in South Africa. It is therefore advisable to replicate the surveys conducted by Rousseau and Venter in 1992. (Rousseau and Venter, 1992 a&b). Results obtained in this way will ensure that the latest information will serve as a basis for consumer education programmes as part of the RDP. Replication of consumer research in the literature is apparently still rare. According to William Wells (1993) the validity of many studies is uncertain and one-shot studies of more or less willing subject populations are still in vogue. The hallmark of reliability is replication. In a sample of 1120 empirical papers from major marketing

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<sup>1)</sup> *The construct "consumer awareness" refers to the alertness of individual consumers of their rights and responsibilities in the market place (Meyer, 1992).*

journals, Hubbard and Armstrong (1991) found no exact replications and only twenty extensions of earlier work.

In consumer research, findings are not contributions to knowledge until their boundaries have been ascertained and reconfirmed outside. According to McGrath and Brinberg (1983) researchers seldom deliberately set out to search for boundaries of their findings. They rarely systematically search for a range of limits to their theories in order to counter spurious generalizations. When however, such disconfirmations are encountered, it is generally regarded as negative findings to be explained away. The authors stress that generalizations can only be made once the range and limitations of findings have been ascertained and reconfirmed outside.

Although the research on consumer awareness in South Africa has been replicated in several follow-up studies (Rousseau & Venter, 1993; Rousseau and Venter, 1994) these studies were executed in different environments and with different sample populations. The survey carried out in 1993 focused mainly on the rural population in the former Bophuthatswana while the 1994 study was executed amongst urban consumers in Harare and Bulawayo (Zimbabwe). All these studies however confirmed the five factors of consumer awareness identified in the original research carried out in South Africa (Rousseau & Venter, 1992 a&b). These factors were bargain hunting, general consumer knowledge, product knowledge, information search and price consciousness. Different levels of consumer awareness for the various sample populations were further observed in all these studies. These differences can be attributed to demographic variables such as education, age, income and area.

The primary motivation for replicating the study in South Africa is thus not so much to test the theory upon which the original model of consumer awareness is based but rather to monitor whether levels of consumer awareness in South Africa have changed since the previous surveys in 1992.

Research evidence from consumer awareness studies carried out in Southern Africa suggest that education is an important demographic variable influencing levels of consumer awareness. One study (Rousseau & Venter, 1992(a)) revealed that education played a significant role in respondents' level of product knowledge. Another study (Rousseau & Venter, 1992(b)) showed that only one demographic variable, education, significantly influenced all factor scores.

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 Balasubramaniam (1993) investigated consumers' ability to use nutritional information in breakfast cereal choice tasks. The authors conclude from both studies that consumer educational programmes would enhance the cognitive and perceptual skills of elderly and disadvantaged consumers.

In another study on consumers' preventative health behaviours by Moorman and Matulich (1993) the authors suggest that health information programmes targeting older consumers should disseminate information through health professionals to reinforce their current high health maintenance behaviour. The findings of the study indicate that health knowledge and health motivation produce the highest health behaviour levels. Hence the importance of health education is stressed once more.

Reinstein (1991) reports in a study on self-medication conducted in Singapore that the practice of self-medication increases with the years of formal education. Other studies carried out in the United States and Australia have also shown that the better educated and more affluent sectors of the population tend to use more self-medication products than the poorer sectors of the population.

The role of consumer education as an important variable in enhancing levels of consumer awareness is further widely recognised amongst researchers focusing on disadvantaged

communities and marginalised consumers. Research amongst Australia's indigenous peoples, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders revealed an urgent need for consumer education (Sabic, 1994). In another study on the adaptation experiences of Mexican immigrants in the United States Penaloza (1994) identified educational institutions and the media as major acculturation agents. The author states that schools and English language media were predominant sources of informants' contact with American culture. Through experiential trial-and-error learning experiences, informants adopted to the new environment in the United States.

Ogbu (1992) further proposes that the minority learner will do well in those cultures in which they are voluntary immigrants as opposed to involuntary minorities brought into a majority culture against their will. Cultural values and orientation obviously play a strong role in motivating or inhibiting the learner in a school setting as studies of African-American families have shown (Gallagher, 1994).

From the above overview it may be assumed that consumer education programmes, founded on recent empirical evidence of the state of consumer awareness in South Africa as well as on the experience of educational researchers in other parts of the world, is crucial for successful implementation of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). A central objective of the RDP is to improve the quality of life of all South Africans, and in particular the most poor and marginalized sections of the community. Although no special mention is made of consumer education in this African National Congress (1994) policy document, formal school and adult basic education represents a crucial step in the reconstruction and development of the society (RDP 1994). To this effect, it is believed that consumer education can play a major role in contributing to the full development of the individual and society.

The main goals of the new study is (i) to measure previously identified factors of consumer awareness, (ii) investigate the role of various demographic variables on the construct, (iii) compare the results with those of previous studies and (iv) analyse the implications of the findings for the RDP programme, launched by the Government of National Unity.

The following propositions were set:

- (i) The item scale developed and tested in previous research for measuring consumer awareness according to five factors (bargain hunting, general consumer knowledge, product knowledge, information search and price consciousness) is a reliable instrument.
- (ii) The identified factors of consumer awareness may differ according to demographic characteristics of consumers (ie age, income, education, area and gender) which implies various levels of the construct.

## METHOD

A questionnaire developed and used in previous studies (Rousseau & Venter, 1992 a & b) consisting of 25 items (five per factor) were administered to an urban sample drawn from major cities in South Africa in the new study.

To determine whether the five factors previously identified, can be calculated accurately and reliably using the original 25 items, Cronbach's coefficient alpha was calculated for each of the five factors. One way analyses of variance were used to determine the statistical significance of differences in factor mean scores between various levels of demographic variables. Analyses of variance were used to identify those demographic variables significantly related to factor scores.

### Sample

A stratified random sample (N = 400) was drawn from all population groups in South Africa. The sample was stratified according to income distribution in various residential areas of Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and Bloemfontein.

**TABLE 1**  
**DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS; THE SAMPLE**

Area	Household size		Age		Education		Income		Gender								
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%							
Johannesburg	100	25,0	1	42	10,5	-25	45	11,2	Preschool	40	10,0	Lower	54	13,5	Male	162	40,5
Cape Town	106	26,5	2	79	19,7	26-40	164	41,0	High School	140	35,0	Middle	262	65,5	Female	238	59,5
Durban	102	25,5	3-4	192	48,0	41-55	145	36,2	Tertiary	220	55,0	Upper	84	21,0			
Bloemfontein	92	23,0	5+	87	21,7	56-70+	46	11,5									

Total N=400

The sample distribution as reflected in table 1 shows a more or less equal representation from the four cities with the exception of Bloemfontein, (the smallest city) which is slightly under-represented.

#### Procedure

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 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 the respondents that there was no right or wrong answer to the questions in the questionnaire. The only answer which was important was the one which gave a true reflection of how the respondents felt about the question. Demographic information was also obtained from respondents regarding household size, income, age, education and gender.

#### Data analysis

For analysis purposes the computer program BMDP 4M (Frane Jenrich & Samson 1985) was employed to calculate Cronbach's coefficient alpha to determine the reliability of the five scales. Reliability coefficients in the order of 0,85 were observed on factor 1 (bargain hunting) and 0,78 respectively on factors 2, 4 and 5 (general consumer knowledge information search and price consciousness). Factor 3 (product knowledge) obtained a alpha score of 0,66.

The BMDP program 1D was then used to calculate mean factor scores for the various levels of the demographic variables. These results are shown in table 2. Program 2V was subsequently used to perform analysis of variance (ANOVA) to investigate which of the demographic variables are significantly related to 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 7D) was performed, the results of which are summarized in table 2. Scheffe's method was used to test for significant differences between individual levels of the various demographic variables.

In order to compare factor mean scores observed in 1992 with those of the new study analyses of variance were performed on the combined data. Simple t-tests to test differences between 1992 and 1994 factor scores were inappropriate due to disparity of the biographical composition of the two samples. Hence analyses of variance were used to compare the data. Table 4 summarises the analyses for all areas individually and globally.

## RESULTS

#### The new study

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics obtained from the sample in the new study. The five factors shown in the table are those identified and confirmed in previous studies (Rousseau & Venter 1992 a & b). Statistics are presented for the total sample and for various categories of the demographic variables. 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 2 it can be seen that respondents from larger households in the lower income category were the biggest bargain hunters. They were mainly older consumers with a primary school education. With regards to factor two it seems that general consumer knowledge were highest among middle to upper income respondents with a high school or tertiary education. They were mostly females. Information search (factor three) obtained the highest score amongst middle to upper income respondents with a high school or tertiary education. They were mainly older respondents representing a household size of three to four people.

Product knowledge (factor four) featured most prominently amongst female respondents with a high school or tertiary education. They represented consumers in the upper income and younger age group. Price consciousness (factor five) were highest amongst respondents in the low to middle income categories and older age brackets. They were mainly females.

Table 2 further indicates that respondents from Johannesburg scored the highest on bargain hunting, information search and price consciousness while respondents from Cape Town scored highest on general consumer knowledge and product knowledge.

Table 3 shows which of the following demographic variables are significantly related to factor scores while table 2 also indicates which factor score differences between the various demographic categories are significant. From table 3 can be seen that the demographic variables, household size, income, age, education and area are significantly related to factor scores. Household size is significantly related to bargain hunting, information search and product knowledge. Income is significantly related to general consumer knowledge while age is significantly related to information search. Education is significantly related to general consumer knowledge. Differences with regard to area were highly significant for all factors.

With regard to bargain hunting table 2 shows that respondents representing households of two obtained a significantly higher mean score than those representing households of three to four. Respondents from Johannesburg scored significantly higher than those from Cape Town and Durban.

With regard to general consumer knowledge, significant differences were observed between respondents from various





As far as information search is concerned, table 2 shows significant higher mean scores for respondents from households of three to four people than those of households of five or more. Respondents from Johannesburg significantly out scored those from Durban as well as those from Bloemfontein. Respondents from Bloemfontein did the least information search while those from Johannesburg did the most.

For product knowledge, respondents from low income categories were observed to have a significantly lower mean score than those from the middle and upper income categories. Respondents from Bloemfontein scored significantly lower than respondents from the other centres ie Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. With regards to price

consciousness the only significant differences found were based on area. Respondents from Johannesburg scored significantly higher than respondents from Durban which were the least price conscious.

Disregarding the biographical variables, table 2 reveals that respondents scored best on general consumer knowledge (5,30) and product knowledge (5,22), which can both be regarded as satisfactory, and worst on bargain hunting (4,16). Using the magnitude of the overall factor mean scores as a guideline to prioritise the emphasis in programmes to improve levels of consumer awareness, it is clear that the main effort should be to educate consumers about the benefits of price consciousness and information search.

**TABLE 4**  
**SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE ON FACTOR SCORE DIFFERENCES BY AREA**  
**(1992-1994)**

Area	Factor 1 Bargain hunting			Factor 2 General consumer knowledge			Factor 3 Information search			Factor 4 Product knowledge			Factor 5 Price consciousness									
	1992		1994	1992		1994	1992		1994	1992		1994	1992		1994							
	n	$\bar{x}$	SD	n	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD						
Johannesburg	175	4,39	1,40	100	4,71	1,23	5,48	0,60	5,23	1,02	4,78	1,00	5,12	0,83	5,48	0,54	5,30	0,75	4,50	1,05	4,97	1,06
	<b>(F=1,30 p. 0,2546)<sup>a</sup></b>			<b>(F=1,19 p. 0,2767)</b>			<b>(F=6,66 p. 0,0104*)</b>			<b>(F=4,04 p. 0,0454*)</b>			<b>(F=8,87 p. 0,0030**)</b>									
Cape Town	169	4,0	1,20	106	4,00	1,58	5,40	0,82	5,60	0,52	4,89	0,90	4,91	1,12	5,39	0,71	5,37	0,69	4,65	0,94	4,59	1,25
	<b>(F=0,89 p. 0,3474)</b>			<b>(F=3,89 p. 0,0497*)</b>			<b>(F=0,26 p. 0,6114)</b>			<b>(F=0,23 p. 0,6325)</b>			<b>(F=0,09 p. 0,7625)</b>									
Durban	126	4,65	1,08	102	3,74	1,39	5,42	0,72	5,26	0,77	5,03	0,86	4,61	1,15	5,58	0,60	5,26	0,77	4,78	1,03	4,38	1,14
	<b>(F=23,80 p. 0,000**)</b>			<b>(F=1,49 p. 0,2235)</b>			<b>(F=10,56 p. 0,0013**)</b>			<b>(F=11,22 p. 0,0010**)</b>			<b>(F=5,42 p. 0,0209*)</b>									
Bloemfontein	88	4,45	1,41	92	4,21	1,05	5,10	1,04	5,08	0,56	5,02	0,94	4,57	0,74	5,21	0,93	4,91	0,52	4,87	1,17	4,66	0,68
	<b>(F=2,90 p. 0,0707)</b>			<b>(F=0,21 p. 0,6504)</b>			<b>(F=15,12 p. 0,0000**)</b>			<b>(F=3,26 p. 0,0727)</b>			<b>(F=0,70 p. 0,4050)</b>									
All areas	558	4,34	1,30	400	4,16	1,38	5,38	0,79	5,31	0,80	4,91	0,93	4,81	1,01	4,43	0,69	5,22	0,71	4,67	1,04	4,65	1,08
	<b>(F=3,29 p. 0,0698)</b>			<b>(F=0,73 p. 0,3932)</b>			<b>(F=1,89 p. 0,1687)</b>			<b>(F=13,98 p. 0,0000**)</b>			<b>(F=1,89 p. 0,41687)</b>									

<sup>a</sup> ANOVA results indicated in brackets

<sup>df</sup> = 1 in all cases

(\* p<0,05; \*\* p<0,01)

### The comparative study

Table 4 summarises the results of five analyses of variances (one for each factor) that were performed per area, individually and globally, to determine whether the factor mean scores obtained in the 1994 survey differ significantly from those obtained in the 1992 survey. As was previously explained, simple t-tests between 1992 and 1994 factor scores were regarded as inappropriate due to disparity of the biographical composition of the two samples and therefore ANOVA analyses were used to compare the data. The ANOVA F scores and corresponding p values reported in square brackets are those for the survey year. Statistics for all other biographical variables are omitted for clarity purposes as these variables were extensively analysed in tables 2 and 3.

From the table it appears that in the Johannesburg area, information search, product knowledge and price consciousness differed significantly between 1992 and 1994. Information search and price consciousness increased significantly while product knowledge decreased significantly. In Cape Town general consumer knowledge showed a significant decrease in 1994 when compared to 1992. In Durban a significant decrease in bargain hunting, information search, product knowledge and price consciousness occur when the data is compared for the two periods. In Bloemfontein a significant decrease in information search is observed for 1994. Comparing all areas for the two periods, product knowledge is the only factor which shows a significant increase.

### Proposition testing

From the empirical data discussed above it is clear that the propositions formulated to investigate consumer awareness in South Africa can be accepted. Regarding proposition one, Cronbach's coefficients alpha confirms that the item scale can be used as a reliable instrument for measuring the previously identified five factors of consumer awareness.

In the case of proposition two, the new study clearly showed that demographic characteristics such as household size, income, age, education and area are significantly related to the identified criteria or factors of consumer awareness. 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 comparative analysis of the empirical results emerging from the two studies carried out in 1992 and 1994 reveal that changes occurred between factor mean scores for the two periods relating to various areas, individually and globally. These changes suggest that levels of consumer awareness may differ over time and between area.

### CONCLUSION

South Africa has during the past two years experienced major political and economical transformations. The purpose of this

investigation was to determine the possible influence of these changes on levels of consumer awareness in the country. Execution implied the replication of a study carried out in 1992 in order to compare results with that of the new study. Although the research methodology employed in the follow-up study is similar to that used in the original study it was not possible to match the 1992 sample with regards to the biographical composition. These differences were however taken into account in the analyses comparing consumer awareness levels for the two periods. Despite these shortcomings it was hoped that the new study would provide updated information on the current state of consumer awareness in the country.

Results of the new study showed that different levels of consumer awareness emerged from the sample. These differences may be ascribed to demographic variables such as household size, income, education and area. Various household sizes differed significantly with regard to bargain hunting, general consumer knowledge and information search. Income categories differed significantly on general consumer knowledge and product knowledge. Respondents representing various education levels differed significantly on general consumer knowledge while those from various areas differed significantly on all five factors of consumer awareness.

Findings of the new study suggest that large discrepancies exist between levels of consumer awareness in different urban centres of the country. In Johannesburg for instance, bargain hunting, information search and price consciousness were higher than in all other centres. Likewise general consumer knowledge and product knowledge were the highest in Cape Town. Respondents from Bloemfontein scored the lowest on general consumer knowledge, product knowledge and information search while those from Durban were the least price conscious and did the least bargain hunting.

Speculation about the reasons for these differences observed, fall beyond the scope of this investigation. What is important, however, is that the differences indicate which urban areas are in the greatest need for consumer information and education. The findings further indicate the topics which need special attention are bargain hunting, price consciousness and information search.

Results of the comparative analysis of factor mean scores for 1992 and 1994 further reveal increases and decreases in levels of consumer awareness in various urban areas. The decreasing trend for all factor mean scores in Durban and Bloemfontein for instance, stresses the need for more intensified consumer educational programmes in these areas. Such programmes should focus on issues like bargain hunting, information search and product knowledge. On the other hand the significant increase in product knowledge, price consciousness and information search in Johannesburg as well as the improvements in general consumer knowledge in Cape Town show that consumers are becoming more aware of their rights and responsibilities in these cities.

An inspection of comparative mean factor scores globally for all areas in table 4 shows a marginal decrease on all factors with the exception of factor four (product knowledge) where a significant increase occurs. This overall trend implies that consumer information and education needs to be seriously addressed by the authorities. If it is further taken into account that this study was limited to urban areas where consumer organisations are based one may assume that levels of consumer awareness might even be lower in rural areas.

It therefore seems logical to assume that if basic education forms a major component of the RDP and consumer education is regarded in the literature as a vital link in enhancing levels of consumer awareness (Rousseau & Venter, 1992 a & b); Cole & Gaeth (1992); Cole & Balasubramanian (1993); Sabic (1994) then consumer organisations have a major role to play in the RDP. Consumer organisations should get involved in the RDP

through sharing their knowledge and expertise in the development of consumer education programmes. The findings of this study may serve as a guideline in designing such programmes.

The literature reported in this study (Sabic, 1994; Penaloza, 1994) shows similar needs for consumer education amongst marginalized and poorer sectors of communities in other parts of the world. Government agencies and NGOs should tap the knowledge and experience of these sources in their efforts to enhance consumer awareness and improve the quality of life of all South Africans.

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