

## DIFFERENCES IN TEEN-AGE CONSUMER ACTIONS RELATED TO EMPLOYMENT, SEX, AND CONSUMER COURSES

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Over 30 million teen-agers, between 13 and 19 years of age, spend an estimated \$35 billion per year (an average of \$1200 per teen ager) [1]. Stampfl [2] identified common consumer characteristics of the adolescent stage of the consumer life cycle from the literature. Teen-age consumers were characterized as having the basic needs provided by parents with luxuries increasingly provided through part-time work. They are susceptible to peer pressures to conform, have limited product knowledge, and limited understanding of the marketplace. Typical products and services purchased by adolescent consumers are records, bicycles, personal care products, clothes, and sporting goods. Typical marketplace problems are identifying product differences, understanding the value of money, illicit markets such as drugs, and shoplifting temptations. While this overview gives a general picture of adolescent consumers, there is a great deal of variation in the teen-age stage of the consumer life cycle. Community values and culture, demographic differences, economic conditions, and consumer education courses are but a few of the factors that influence the consumer actions of teen-agers.

A two-part consumer action survey was developed to gather demographic data and information concerning consumer actions of teen-age consumers. Consumer education teachers from home economics, business education, economics, and social studies served as a panel of judges for content validity of the instrument to classes in their schools. Factor analysis produced twelve factors. Demographic data were compared to the factor scores using analysis of variance procedures with factor scores as the criterion variables.

A total of 439 students from nine Iowa high schools completed the survey. The students were enrolled in business education/economics, home economics and non-consumer related classes. Ten of the students were married; 174 were male and 265 were female. The mean age of the sample was 16.4 years and the mean grade level was 10.6. This non-random sample of students was representative of the students enrolled in classes taught by the teachers who participated in the survey.

A major hypothesis of this study was that there would be no difference in consumer actions: 1) of students who were employed and those who were not employed; 2) of male and female students; and 3) of students enrolled in home economics, con-

sumer education/economics, business education, or non-consumer related classes.

**Employment.** Students were asked if they were presently employed. Forty percent, or 175 of the 439 students indicated they were employed. Eight students were employed over 30 hours per week, 103 were employed 15 to 30 hours per week, and 65 were employed less than 15 hours per week.

The employed students were asked the purpose of their earned incomes. Eight-three percent of the employed students listed spending money as a purpose of their earnings. Other purposes were: recreation (77 percent), clothing (71 percent), personal care items (53 percent), lunches (23 percent), car payments (19 percent), and all living expenses (7.4 percent). Thirty-two percent indicated that they used some of their earnings in other areas such as gas for cars, savings, and "support for a drug habit."

There were no significant differences between employed students and non-employed students; however, the employed students in this sample were slightly more likely to use convenience in market place choice, return defective items, conserve energy, plan ahead before shopping and spending, and were less cost conscious.

**Sex.** There were significant differences between males and females in several consumer action areas. Female students were less likely to shop at the nearest store because of convenience without considering price or quality, were more likely to use labels for pre- and post-purchase information, and were more likely to plan ahead before shopping and spending their money. Male students were more likely to read periodicals such as **Consumer Reports** for general information and before buying major purchases, use pre-purchase information such as warranties, and to return defective items.

**Consumer Education Course.** Consumer education concepts are taught in home economics and business classes in addition to classes devoted entirely to consumer education/economics content. Students enrolled in home economics classes were less likely to buy on impulse than students enrolled in consumer economics, business or non-consumer related courses. Consumer economics and home economics students were less likely to consider convenience of the store above price and quality and students enrolled in consumer education courses were more likely to use pre-purchase information such as warranties and reading contracts and use label information than were students enrolled in the other areas.

**Summary and Conclusions.** A two-part consumer action survey was used to develop a profile of consumer actions of a sample of 439 Iowa teen-age consumers. Over one-third of the teen-agers surveyed were employed part-time to earn money for a variety of purposes. There were no significant differences in consumer actions between employed and non-employed students; however, there were significant differences between the sexes. Female students were more concerned with price and quality than convenience of the store, planned ahead before shopping and spending, and used labels for information. Male students were more likely to read consumer periodicals, use pre-purchase information such as warranties, and return defective items.

Students enrolled in home economics classes were less likely to be impulse buyers than other students. Home economics and consumer education students were more concerned with price and quality than convenience and consumer education students were more likely to use pre-purchase information such as warranties and label information than students enrolled in other areas.

Knowledge of teen-age buying practices and consumer actions is of interest to consumer education teachers. This information is helpful in planning a relevant and meaningful consumer education curriculum; however, consumer education teachers usually have little objective information about the consumer actions of the teen-agers in their classes. Teachers should be cognizant of the demographic factors that affect the consumer actions of their students. Through the use of consumer surveys, teachers can better understand the consumer actions of the students enrolled in their classes. Pre- and post-evaluations using such assessment devices can provide evidence that consumer education classes are making a difference in the consumer actions of students.

#### REFERENCES

1. Miller, R. L. **Economic Issues for Consumers**, 3rd Ed. Saint Paul, MN.: West Publishing Co., 1981.
2. Stampfl, R. W. "The Consumer Life Cycle." **The Journal of Consumer Affairs**, 12, 209-219, 1978.

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#### BOOK REVIEW

Aaker, David A. and George S. Day, editors, **Consumerism: Search for the Consumer Interest**, Fourth Edition, New York: Free Press, 1982, 500 pp. \$12.95 in paperback.

The fourth edition of **Consumerism** is a collection of 42 articles taken from multiple sources. Four sections have been added to this edition, and half of the selections are new. The

contributors, ranging from marketers to consumer advocates and consumer economists, present a diversity of views to provide thoughtful reading to those interested in wrestling with issues central to the consumer's interest.

The book, divided into 7 major sections, starts with an assessment of the current state of consumerism. Is the recent emphasis on decreased government regulation and a conservative political climate indicative of a decline in consumerism as a societal force? The authors seem to think not, although they anticipate changes in direction, issues, and approaches.

Section II called "Perspectives on Consumerism" includes both historical and current perspectives. In one article, Philip Kotler questions some traditional marketing axioms in light of recent changes in our economic environment. He challenges marketers to consider their objective as maximizing the quality of life rather than maximizing consumption. With this new objective, they would have to take into account the social costs of production and consumption.

The next sections of the book are organized around the prepurchase, purchase and postpurchase phases of transactions. The prepurchase section includes articles on voluntary consumer information programs, disclosure requirements, and advertising. Two interesting articles in the purchase section deal with demarketing, or reducing consumption. This is an important topic considering our renewed awareness of the scarcity of resources.

Both business and government's responses to consumerism comprise the themes of the book's final section. Some of the complexities of government regulation are highlighted by four articles from varying viewpoints. For instance, Peter Schuck stresses the often important differences between the actual effects of implementing a regulatory program and the well-intentioned original objectives of the program. Joan Claybrook in "Crying Wolf" is critical of the traditional business opposition to government regulations.

The book could serve as a basic text for a college course. It would also be useful background material for high school teachers who desire to keep abreast of controversies and developments in the consumer area. The book makes a real contribution by dealing with many problems from several points of view so that students and teachers come to realize that the term, consumerism, incorporates a multitude of topics surrounded by complex issues.

*(Reviewed by Dr. Rosemary Walker, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.)*