

of the consumer's interest, since industry has to have efficient prices to compete successfully with firms elsewhere.

The experiences of many low-income countries have proven that when prices are the product of political pressures, the consumer ultimately is hurt. This is particularly true in the case of food in the developing world. Urban consumers demand low food prices and their political leaders respond by regulating food prices below what the market would determine. The problem that evolves is that farmers do not supply enough food because of the low prices. The by-products of this are food shortages and hunger.

One position is that politicians and interest groups should ensure that the government has the capacity to regulate utilities efficiently. In Illinois, the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) is charged with this task. Studies indicate that they have not had the staff to do the best possible job [2]. Thus, investments in ICC are quite important if utility rate regulation is to be efficient. Once again, the long-run interest of the consumer is not necessarily in lower prices, although this may seem to be an attractive option in the short-run.

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#### EXAMINING ATTITUDES TOWARD CONSUMER ISSUES

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Often students, administrators, and the public assume that consumer education deals only with good buymanship. However, con-

sumer educators strive to assist students in identifying important economic, political and social issues which relate to their role as responsible consumers. Lee [4] argues that consumer educators have the responsibility to include content on values, citizen responsibilities, and our economic system along with consideration of moral issues in our curriculum. An effective approach to illustrating the broad range of issues encompassed by consumer education is to administer an attitude survey at the beginning of the course and use the results to initiate discussion of pertinent issues.

### PROBLEM STATEMENT AND PROCEDURES

Because previous research [2, 3, 5, 6] has shown that consumers, consumer advocates, and business representatives often disagree on consumer issues, there existed a need for an instrument for assessing attitudes toward these issues. The purpose of developing a consumer issues scale was to provide a useful research and teaching tool for measuring attitudes toward enduring consumer issues.

In view of these concerns the specific objectives of this study were:

1. to develop a consumer issues attitude scale,
2. to establish the internal consistency reliability and the criterion related validity of the scores on the instrument, and
3. to determine whether consumer advocates, business representatives and consumers held different views on these issues.

The first step was to identify significant consumer concepts central to the consumer interest. Thus, a description framework of the consumer interest was developed based on a review of literature. The framework consisted of seven categories: Safety and Protection, Choice, Consumer Voice, Information, Redress, Consumer Education, and Public Policy. Content validity of the framework was affirmed by a jury of nine university faculty familiar with the field of consumer education and members of a state consumer education organization.

To develop the attitude scale, 150 issue statements (some adapted from previous studies [2, 3, 5]) were selected. Preliminary analysis using the jury of state consumer education association

members reduced this number to 73 for the pilot study. To avoid response bias, approximately half of the preliminary issue statements were worded to reflect a "pro-consumer" viewpoint; agreement with the item would likely reflect an attitude consistent with that of a consumer advocate. The remaining statements were written to reflect a diametrically opposed view. The direction of each statement was subjected to verification in the pilot study. These statements were pretested with a sample of 25 consumer advocates, 55 business representatives, and 100 consumers who ranked the statements as to importance and degree of agreement on two 5-point Likert scales. Scores on each item ranged from one-to-five points for importance and for agreement. The rating scale for agreement was reversed for negatively phrased statements.

Group membership was the criterion used to evaluate the validity of the scores on each statement. Crosstabulation of responses to the agreement scale with group membership and the chi square test of independence were used to evaluate the criterion related validity of the scores on the subscales. Data were analyzed using Pearson product moment correlation coefficients, one way analysis of variance, plotting of the item reliability indexes, and Cronbach's alpha. Items that were not contributing to internal consistency reliability and criterion related validity or that had low importance ratings were revised or eliminated from the instrument.

The revised instrument consisted of 51 issue statements and a 5-point Likert scale for expressing the strength of agreement with each statement. Final data were collected from a convenience sample of 101 consumer advocates representing each state and the District of Columbia, 150 business representatives who were corporate officers of a random sample of Fortune 500 companies, and a random sample of 250 consumers living in a northeastern state.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The overall response rate was 61.1%. Pearson subscale to total score correlations for the 51 items ranged from .72 to .94. Alpha values for the seven subscales ranged from .45 to .93. Item analysis revealed that two issue statements did not contribute to the reliability and validity of the subscale scores and were deleted from the instrument. The final version of the Consumer Issues Attitude Inventory consisted of 49 statements.

A one way ANOVA revealed significant differences (.05 level) between pairs of group means on all seven subscales. The Scheffe test indicated that all three groups were different in their attitudes on the Choice, Consumer Voice, Redress, and Consumer Education subscales. Mean scores of advocates differed from those of consumers on the Safety and Protection, Information, and Public Policy subscales. The business representatives had the lowest mean scores on each subscale while consumer advocates had the highest mean scores on all subscales except Information. Consumers scored highest on Information but the difference in mean scores compared with advocates was not significant at the .05 level.

Mean scores of business representatives differed from advocates on all seven subscales, thus confirming the criterion related validity of the scores on the subscales. The same relationship among group mean scores also held true for total scores on the attitude scale. Based on a scoring system of 1-5 for each statement, the mean total scores were: consumer advocates 3.91, consumers 3.70, and business representatives 2.51.

No clear relationships were evident between mean attitude scores of the consumer group based on sex or age. However, the scores of high income consumers (\$40,000 or more) differed from those of low and moderate income consumers. Mean attitude scores of consumers were related to education; persons with a post baccalaureate education expressed attitudes more consistent with those of the business sample.

Not surprisingly, the business respondents expressed strong support for freedom of choice in the marketplace and less government regulation. Advocates and consumers alike strongly supported government's role in protecting consumer health and safety. Consumers and advocates strongly agreed that businesses often do not listen to consumers. While the business group overwhelmingly disagreed that more consumer protection agencies are needed, advocates and consumers strongly supported the proposal. With respect to redress, advocates expressed the strongest support for more consumer complaint resolution mechanisms while the business group was least supportive of such proposals. Fully one-fourth of the business sample was uncertain whether existing complaint handling procedures were adequate. Advocates and consumers did not agree that it was easy to get consumer complaints resolved. The business

group agreed that "consumer education should be substituted for more government regulation," while advocates and consumers were divided on this issue.

### SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CONSUMER EDUCATION TEACHERS

To summarize, the business representatives expressed attitudes toward consumer issues which were consistently different from those of consumer advocates and consumers. They were least supportive of activities and policies designed to promote the interests of consumers while advocates were most supportive of such actions. Business executives expressed different attitudes toward energy, environmental and social welfare issues compared to advocates and consumers.

The following conclusions were drawn from this study:

1. The internal consistency reliability of the scores on the Consumer Issues Attitude Inventory was confirmed.
2. The criterion related validity of the scores on the Consumer Issues Attitude Inventory was confirmed.

With respect to the attitudes expressed by the three respondent groups, these conclusions were made:

1. The business respondents were least supportive of actions to promote the consumer interest.
2. The attitudes of consumers were similar to those of advocates on most issues.
3. Of all the categories of the consumer interest, consumers were most concerned with the right to information.
4. Attitudes of the consumers toward consumer issues appeared to be unrelated to sex and age, but may vary with income and educational level.

The Consumer Issues Attitude Inventory (CIAI) can be used to determine the extent of attitude change in a pre- and post-test research design with consumer education classes. The teacher could administer the CIAI at the start of a course to obtain a profile of the students' attitudes and to generate class discussion. By comparing student scores to mean the scores of the three reference groups, the teacher can assess the general attitudes of the class.

Although a specific objective of consumer education should not be to change the attitudes of the students [1], evidence of such

change at the end of a course might be interpreted to indicate that students were challenged to examine the opinions they had when they started the class. Bonnice [1] cautions that attempts to change student attitudes should be approached carefully. "It is not the role of the consumer educator to engage in brainwashing or to espouse a particular point of view." According to Bonnice, "one of the goals of an effective consumer education program is to encourage students to explore all sides of an issue."

Teachers could use the CIAI in its 49 item, 7 subscale form or administer selected subscales. While the issue statements were designed to represent enduring issues that would not become dated quickly, teachers might select a few current topics and write issue statements of their own. Students could develop statements based on the model of the CIAI to focus on issues most salient to them. Like the CIAI, the instrument should be designed with an approximately even split between positive and negative statements.

Students could use the instrument to solicit opinions from fellow students, community leaders, business executives and legislators. By sharing the results of a consumer attitude survey with key decision makers, the students could convey their ideas on issues to persons with the power to initiate change.

Educators working with adult groups could adapt these suggestions to suit their objectives. Such groups are often concerned with improving situations in the local community. By developing and administering a consumer issue survey geared to local needs, recommendations could be offered to public officials and consumer action groups. Results could be disseminated through the local media and students could be encouraged to write news articles and press releases to share their findings.

The value of the CIAI and any surveys based on this model is in encouraging discussion of differing viewpoints. Such an instrument would be an appropriate way to introduce students to the study of different economic ideologies. By comparing their responses to those of the consumer advocates, business representatives and consumers, each student can develop a frame of reference for examining their own economic ideology.

The value of the CIAI for the teacher is in having access to a model instrument where the reliability and validity of the scores have been established. The objective of the teacher should not be to influence the attitudes of the students toward a particular point of view,

but to challenge the students to examine their own attitudes and the basis for them.

Copies of the survey instrument are available from the author, Department of Home Economics and Consumer Education, Utah State University, Logan, UT 84322.

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## NATIONAL CONSUMERS WEEK

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