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PRINT MEDIA SOURCES AND TOPICS FOR USE BY CONSUMER EDUCATION TEACHERS

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Consumer educators have come to rely on many resources to supplement traditional textbooks. They have found this necessary as social forces and events frequently change the "landscape" of the traditional course content. Questions remain, however, about the extent to supplement the text materials and the best sources for such materials.

Of the sources of supplementary materials, however, the print media has the greatest impact on the content of the consumer course. This occurs because the volume of resources available to the instructor is almost limitless. It eventually becomes necessary for the consumer educator to sort through the many possible sources of print media such as magazines and newspapers and select those that are most helpful and cost efficient. The instructor must also determine which topics to expand upon and how much time should be devoted to topics based upon a combination of text and print media material.

Problem Statement and Procedures

The problem of the study was to determine the print media sources and topics which best assist the teacher in supplementing a consumer education course.

In further defining the problem, the following major purposes were established:

1. What print media topics have emerged/changed to impact consumer education content?
2. Which print media resources are best in supplementing specific topics within consumer education?

A list of 17 consumer education topics was developed based upon research conducted by Uhl (1970), and Graf (1975). These topics were selected to best represent those normally associated with consumer courses.

Print media selected for this study came from newspaper and magazine articles retained by the author over a five-year period covering the second quarter of 1980 through the first quarter of 1985. Table 1 shows the sources of print media, the number of articles from each source, and the percent of the total found in each source.

TABLE 1.
SOURCES OF PRINT MEDIA AND QUANTITY OF ARTICLES

Name of Media Source	Number of Articles	Percent of Total
U.S. News and World Report	246	19.7
Changing Times	220	17.6
State Newspapers ¹	181	14.5
Miscellaneous Publications ²	177	14.2
Money	137	11.0
Business Week	129	10.3
National Newspapers ³	98	7.9
Forbes	59	4.7
Totals	1247	99.9

¹Rockford Register Star, Chicago Tribune

²Consumer Reports, Consumer Views, Motor Trend, New York, Atlantic, and articles from "occasional reading"

³Wall Street Journal, New York Times

The topic coverage for the five-year study was done by counting the number of words in each article each year. The number of words devoted to each topic was totaled. Each topic total was divided by the grand total of all words counted for that year and computed as a percent of the annual total. This procedure is similar to that used by John Naisbitt to make assumptions in his book MEGATRENDS. Naisbitt developed his research based largely on reading the newspapers of cities larger than 100,000 and all capital cities. His staff sorted hard news stories into 13 categories and then 200 subcategories. The stories related to each topic and subtopic were counted by lines. The Naisbitt data was used to predict trends.

The data in this study was used to reflect five-year topic emphasis and to identify the best sources of print media for each topic identified. The amount of print media coverage devoted to each topic was computed by adding the percentage coverage of that topic each year to each subsequent year to obtain an average. For example, 4.5% of print media words were devoted to the topic "The Economy" for the first year (second quarter of 1980 through the first quarter of 1981). During the second year this topic contained 6.2%, the third year 8.0%, the fourth year 20.9%, and the fifth year 9.3%. The average of these years is 9.8%. Each of the 17 topics was averaged in this manner.

The major sources of the topic word counts were also tabulated. The total words were calculated for each of the 17 topics, as were the total number of articles, the average article length, and the sources where articles were most frequently found.

Findings

Table 2 shows the average number of words devoted to each of 17 consumer topics over a five-year period from the second quarter of 1980 through the first quarter of 1985. The topics are listed in descending order of coverage in selected print media.

The topics of Investments, The Economy, Social/Health/Disability Insurance, Taxation, Government Regulation, Consumer Trends/Demographics, Life Insurance, Savings, and Money Management have gained in coverage from year one to year five. The topics, Property/Casualty Insurance, Buymanship, Consumer Law, Housing, Consumer Credit, Banking, Food Shopping, and Automobiles lost word coverage during the five-year period.

TABLE 2.
PRINT MEDIA TOPIC AVERAGE FOR CONSUMER EDUCATION
SUBJECT MATTER FROM SECOND QUARTER,
1980 THROUGH FIRST QUARTER, 1985

Name of Topic	Percentage Coverage
Money Management	10.9
Housing	10.0
The Economy	9.8
Investments	9.8
Taxation	8.4
Banking	8.3
Automobiles	6.7
Social/Health/Disability Insurance	6.6
Consumer Law	5.1
Consumer Credit	4.9
Government Regulation	3.3
Savings	3.3
Life Insurance	3.0
Consumer Trends/Demographics	2.8
Food Shopping	2.8
Property/Casualty Insurance	2.4
Buymanship	1.9

Conclusions

1. Traditional consumer topics such as buymanship, consumer law, housing, consumer credit, banking, food shopping, and automobiles have lost in share of print media coverage.

2. Societal topics such as the economy, social insurance, taxation, government regulation, and consumer trends/demographics have gained in share of print media coverage.

3. Print media coverage tends to reflect the supplementary rather than the basics when topics are presented. This coverage accents the new and different rather than the history or basic principles of a topic.

4. The volume of print media devoted to a topic may reflect positive or negative discussion about an event, regulation or decision. The teacher is left to draw upon past events related to a topic to explain current media coverage.

5. Print media cost to the teacher need not be excessive. Magazines and newspapers which lead in volume of consumer coverage are often moderately priced.

6. State newspapers are an important factor in adding a local dimension to topic coverage.

7. Certain publications are more specialized and add significantly to supplementary materials for teachers. For example, MONEY magazine is prominent in "Investment" and "Money Management" topics.

Implications For Consumer Educators

The consumer education course must change to reflect global issues and their effect on consumers. The Monetary Reform Act of 1980, the reduction of inflation and unemployment, and the emphasis on a world economy have all impacted on consumer education content. Consumers must constantly be taught to look over their shoulders before and after making earning/spending/saving decisions. Supplementary print media assists the teacher in incorporating change (social and economic) into the course. These materials purchased by the teacher or organization may be selected without subscribing to everything and spending great amounts of money. Materials may be selected with specificity depending upon course content. For most teachers and students print media spending is money well invested.

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