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A SHORT TEST OF CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING STYLES

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Consumer educators have a need for methods to characterize the particular decision-making styles that individuals use when making purchases. This can help us understand the varied approaches consumers use, educate consumers on the decision-making approaches they pursue, and develop educational and informational strategies that improve these approaches.

Background and Statement of the Problem

A **consumer decision-making style** is defined as a mental orientation characterizing a consumer's approach to making consumer choices. A consumer's style has cognitive and affective characteristics, for example quality consciousness and fashion consciousness. In essence, it is a basic consumer personality, analagous to the concept of personality in psychology.

Our problem was to develop a short, yet relatively complete instrument which would measure fundamental characteristics of

consumer decision-making styles. Previous literature suggested a variety of approaches might be used, for example the psychographic and lifestyle approach to consumer choices, the consumer typology approach, and the consumer characteristics approach [1,2,5,7,8,9,10]. Similarly, consumer economics literature also identifies fundamental consumer decision-making characteristics [3,4]. That literature focuses on specific consumer acts ranging from rational shopping and quality consciousness to impulsiveness and information overload in decision-making. Thus, the characterization of consumer decision-making styles is multi-faceted, yet the literature does identify fundamental characteristics that are keys to consumer decision-making.

Based on review of the literature, we identified eight characteristics as being among the most basic mental characteristics of consumer decision-making. These were the basis for developing a **Consumer Styles Inventory** [6]. This Inventory measured the following eight characteristics: (1) **Perfectionistic, High Quality Conscious Consumer**, a characteristic measuring the degree to which a consumer searches carefully and systematically for the best quality in products; (2) **Brand Conscious, Price Equals Quality Consumer**, or one measuring a consumer's orientation to buying the more expensive, well-known brands; (3) **Novelty and Fashion Conscious Consumer**, a characteristic identifying consumers who appear to like new and innovative products and gain excitement from seeking out new things; (4) **Recreational and Shopping Conscious Consumer**, a characteristic measuring the extent to which a consumer finds shopping a pleasant activity and shops just for the fun of it; (5) **Price Conscious "Value for Money" Consumer**, a characteristic identifying those with particularly high consciousness of sale prices and lower prices in general; (6) **Impulsive, Careless Consumer**, one identifying those who tend to buy on the spur of the moment and appear unconcerned how much they spend or getting "best buys"; (7) **Confused by Overchoice Consumer**, or those consumers perceiving too many brands and stores from which to choose, experiencing information overload in the market; and (8) **Habitual Brand Loyal Consumer**, a characteristic indicating consumers who have favorite brands and stores, who have formed habits in choosing these repetitively.

Procedure

A **Consumer Styles Inventory** measuring the eight mental characteristics of decision-making was designed. Each characteristic

was measured by six Likert scaled items. Items were on a 1 to 5 point scale with ratings of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" as end points. The instrument was administered to 482 high school home economics students in 29 classrooms of five high schools in Tucson, Arizona. The high schools included urban, suburban and rural locations and broadly represented the socioeconomic and cultural groups of the area. The results of the test were factor analyzed, and the eight characteristics of consumer decision-making were validated. Details on this are reported elsewhere [6].

The short test which we have developed based on that research uses only the top two items on each factor, which are the best two items measuring each of the consumer style characteristics. Based on the factor analysis results, we constructed the short-form test of the **Consumer Styles Inventory**. The short-form test is shown completely in Exhibit 1, and is a one page test including 16 Likert scaled items.

EXHIBIT 1

YOUR CONSUMER CHOICES

This page contains statements on different interests and priorities some consumers have. Please read each statement, and **circle** the number indicating how much you agree or disagree with the statement as a **description of you**.

STATEMENTS	IN BETWEEN				
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	
1. Getting very good quality is very important to me	1	2	3	4	5
2. The well-known national brands are best for me	1	2	3	4	5
3. I usually have one or more outfits of the very newest style	1	2	3	4	5
4. Shopping is a pleasant activity to me	1	2	3	4	5
5. I buy as much as possible at "sale" prices	1	2	3	4	5
6. I should plan my shopping more carefully than I do	1	2	3	4	5
7. There are so many brands to choose from that often I feel confused	1	2	3	4	5

STATEMENTS	IN BETWEEN				
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE		AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
8. I have favorite brands I buy over and over	1	2	3	4	5
9. When it comes to purchasing products, I try to get the very best or perfect choice	1	2	3	4	5
10. The more expensive brands are usually my choices	1	2	3	4	5
11. I keep my wardrobe up-to-date with the changing fashions	1	2	3	4	5
12. Going shopping is one of the enjoyable activities of my life	1	2	3	4	5
13. The lower price products are usually my choice	1	2	3	4	5
14. I am impulsive when shopping	1	2	3	4	5
15. Sometimes it's hard to choose which stores to shop	1	2	3	4	5
16. Once I find a product or brand I like, I stick with it	1	2	3	4	5

This short test assessing the eight consumer decision-making characteristics can be easily administered and scored in a classroom setting. Exhibit 2 shows the method for scoring the test for the eight characteristics. Students should first complete the test independently and then be given the scoring sheet (Exhibit 2). They then simply fill in their answers to each of the 16 questions. For example, to measure the perfectionistic and high quality conscious consumer characteristic, students write in the numbers to questions 1 and 9, and add these together for their total score. The scores range from 2 to 10, thus placing the score on a familiar scale that students can readily understand (note that 0 and 1 responses are purposely left out in order to eliminate the potential negative implications such "low" scores could have to some students).

EXHIBIT 2
CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING STYLES INVENTORY

Scoring Summary

Directions: Add your scores for items on **YOUR CONSUMER CHOICES:**

Perfectionistic Consumer	= 1._____ + 9._____ = _____
Brand Conscious Consumer	= 2._____ + 10._____ = _____
Fashion Conscious Consumer	= 3._____ + 11._____ = _____
Recreational Shopping Conscious Consumer	= 4._____ + 12._____ = _____
Price-Value Conscious Consumer	= 5._____ + 13._____ = _____
Impulsive Consumer	= 6._____ + 14._____ = _____
Confused by Overchoice Consumer	= 7._____ + 15._____ = _____
Habitual-Brand Loyal Consumer	= 8._____ + 16._____ = _____

Scoring Interpretation

Scores of 9-10 = You are **HIGH** on this consumer characteristic.

Scores of 6-8 = You are **MODERATE** to **AVERAGE** on this consumer characteristic.

Scores of 2-5 = You are **LOW** on this consumer characteristic.

Students will find these data give them interesting insight into their decision-making styles, and in many cases some surprises and eye-opening may be expected. In general, we consider a score of 9 to 10 to indicate an individual is high on that characteristic; this requires a person to have scored a 5 on at least 1 of the two measures (the highest score on that measure), plus a 4 on the other. Similarly, a moderate or average score would be in the range of 6 to 8, which suggests that an individual agrees to some extent that they possess that characteristic, but not strongly so. Finally, a score of 5 or lower indicates a person is relatively low on that characteristic.

TABLE 1

PERCENT OF STUDENTS SCORING HIGH, MODERATE, AND LOW ON EIGHT CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING CHARACTERISTICS

CONSUMER CHARACTERISTICS	PERCENT SCORING—		
	High (9-10)	Moderate (6-8)	Low (2-5)
Perfectionistic Consumer	31%	63%	6%
Brand Conscious Consumer	11	58	31
Fashion Conscious Consumer	15	57	28
Recreational Shopping Conscious Consumer	20	54	26
Price-Value Conscious Consumer	11	68	21
Impulsive Consumer	8	61	31
Confused by Overchoice Consumer	7	65	28
Habitual-Brand Loyal Consumer	16	65	19

Students also find it interesting to compare their results to other students. Therefore, we present the data of Table 1, which summarizes the percentage of 482 high school students in the Tucson area who scored high, medium, and low on each characteristic. We have found that many students score in the average range on most characteristics, but will have several characteristics on which they score particularly high or low. High scores (9-10) should be especially noted because they are likely dominant characteristics of choice-making in many situations (although certainly not all situations, for a person is probably never high in every situation). The findings of Table 1 are also interesting in themselves, although they may not be representative of all high school populations. For example, the data indicate that approximately 31% of high school students consider themselves

perfectionistic and high quality conscious (recall that these are home economics students and are educated to be quality conscious). A moderate proportion of students consider themselves high in recreational shopping consciousness (20%), habitual-brand loyal choices (16%), and fashion consciousness (15%). Other characteristics have a lower percent of high scores, with perhaps one in ten students scoring high. As the table shows, the majority of students, perhaps one-half to two-thirds, score in the moderate or average range on each characteristic, while 20 to 30 percent score low on each characteristic. Note that a low score on some characteristics is considered desirable, for instance the impulsive and confused by overchoice consumer characteristics. Other consumer characteristics are also thought by some educators to potentially lead to negative behaviors, such as brand consciousness and habitual brand loyal behavior. However, these buying strategies may be based on positive experiences and should not necessarily be considered non-functional ways of making consumer choices.

Implications For Consumer Education

This research has developed a short-form **Consumer Styles Inventory** for easy application by classroom teachers. We believe this is a useful, and enjoyable activity to be applied in high school classrooms and other educational settings as well. Tests of this sort are not available in consumer education, yet they have real value in helping students understand the priorities and characteristics they bring to their decision-making. Helping students understand these special priorities and styles of decision-making can help students in many ways. Particularly if students are helped to understand their decision-making characteristics, they will likely be more receptive of efforts to educate them in improved decision-making approaches, which is the goal of consumer education. Furthermore, if teachers know their students' decision-making styles, they can develop complementary classroom teaching strategies appropriate to the goals of consumer education. Ultimately this will help us develop consumer education that is based on positive understanding of particular characteristics consumers bring to their decisions. Thus, the overall process of consumer education will be enhanced.

In conclusion, we recommend that educators administer the **Consumer Styles Inventory** in their classes and discuss results with students in class. Educators might also consider tabulating the overall results of the test for their classes, so students can see where

they stand in comparison to other students. A format similar to Table 1 may be helpful for this. The students we have in our high school classrooms are eager to consume, are conscious of their experiences, and need to better understand the consumer decision-making styles they are pursuing. Classroom applications of these measures will help students to gain these understandings while they are still learning their consumer styles, and thus help them improve or redefine their purchasing styles to better reflect their personal interests and goals.

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