

**MESSAGES TO CONSUMERS CONVEYED
BY WOMEN'S MAGAZINES**

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The influence of magazines on consumer behavior, particularly that of women, has been widely recognized. In his study of American magazines, Wood [9] declared that the magazine is one of four major forces affecting and controlling national public opinion. Magazines, together with newspapers, radio and television, provide consumers with information about goods and services. Since consumer educators endeavor to promote the wise use of consumer resources, it is useful for them to understand the messages that are conveyed through the influential media of our society.

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND PROCEDURES

Communications scholars and practitioners know that "the data of communications are prime social data" [1]. Members of society who have been raised in an environment of constant exposure to media are increasingly influenced by mass media messages. The marketing industry is based on the ability to predict what messages will sell products; however, the profit incentive requires that the results of marketing research be closely guarded. Consumers are strongly affected by the messages conveyed by magazines [8]. In order to control the decision-making process, the consumer must comprehend the underlying purposes of those messages.

The goal of this study was to define the messages that are conveyed to consumers by magazines. In American families, the wife and mother has traditionally decided on and made most household purchases [6]. Further, food preparation, a task performed predominantly by women [6], has long been a primary function of the home and represents a common denominator over time and across cultures. Therefore, this study focused on the messages related to food which were directed toward women by women's magazines. Two magazines were analyzed in this study: *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping*. These were chosen to represent consumer/general interest magazines directed specifically to women [7]. Both are included in the "Big Three" of women's service magazines [7] and have consistently been among the top five women's magazines in circulation throughout the 20th century [4]. Content analysis was the logical method for such a study since it is uniquely applicable to print communication [2]. The study examined messages in food-related articles and advertising from the close of World War II to the present. A systematic sample of each magazine was used with examinations made

every third year. To compensate for seasonal variations, one month from each season was selected. Fifty-six issues yielded 1,072 advertisements and 183 articles over the 40-year period under study. Since the study attempted no explanation of cause and effect, validity was straightforward. Coding reliability was tested by employing an independent researcher in a pilot study. Coding agreement between the independent researcher and the primary researcher was 98.3%, suggesting a high degree of reliability.

Both manifest content (actual word counts) and latent content (assessing the message of illustrations and layout) were analyzed. Messages were classified into eighteen general categories; frequencies were used to describe the sample in detail, while the chi-square test of independence was used to analyze the statistical significance of changes in messages over time.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Each of the 1,255 cases contained one major message. In addition 725 cases (57.8%) also contained a secondary message, and 160 cases (12.7%) contained a tertiary message. Of the eighteen messages defined, each of thirteen appeared in fewer than 7% of the cases. Not unexpectedly, taste and visual appeal was by far the most frequent message, accounting for 38.4% of the major messages conveyed over the 40-year period (Figure 1). Therefore, in order to more accurately examine the changes in the messages conveyed, taste and visual appeal, along with the thirteen messages represented by less than 7% of the cases, were removed from the chi-square test. Four messages remained: (1) convenience and versatility, (2) nutrition, (3) quality, and (4) expertise (Figure 2). These isolated messages were cross-tabulated and examined for changes over time. At $\alpha = .05$, no statistically significant difference in the distribution of messages was found. Nevertheless, changes in society over time were readily apparent. Although the messages themselves remained constant, their presentations were geared to technological orientations, economic conditions, and, most conspicuously, gender role expectations.

Figure 1. Total Percent Representations of Major Messages Between 1947 and 1986.

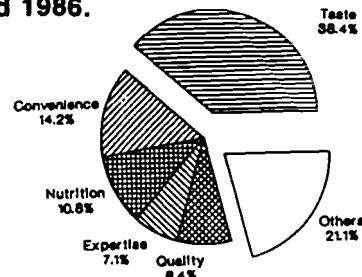
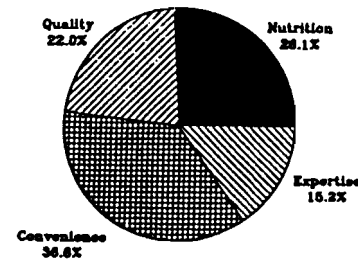


Figure 2. Total Percent Representations of Isolated Major Messages Between 1947 and 1986



One consistently predominant message was "convenience and versatility". Prior to the mid-1970s, advertisements and articles offered convenience with an implication of guilt for using time-saving products; by the 1980s convenience foods were routinely offered without excuse.

"Nutrition" was another predominant message throughout the time period. In the 1940s and 1950s, words such as "wholesome" and "nourishing" were common, and were associated with such things as butter (as opposed to margarine), soups, and "pure" white bread. By the 1970s and 1980s technical words such as "cholesterol" and "Vitamin A" together with numbers reflecting grams and Recommended Daily Allowances were given, reflecting an improved understanding of nutrition, and, perhaps, more sophisticated and technically oriented consumers. Even so, there was no statistically significant differences in the frequencies of whole grain products, fish, and fresh fruits and vegetables as opposed to white breads, red meat, and highly processed foods.

Perceptions related to the role of women changed over time. Articles and advertisements prior to the mid-'60s reflected the traditional role of women. For example, an advertisement in the June, 1950 issue of *Ladies' Home Journal* [page 8] proclaimed, "When a man marries, he expects his wife to make a cake as marvelously as his mother." From the mid-'60s on, however, advertising in particular showed a measurable degree of change [5]. By the 1980s, articles and advertisements in women's magazines began to address the growing frustrations women felt over their dual responsibilities of home and career. Where earlier focus was on women performing all food preparation duties, later articles and advertisements sometimes pictured men and children participating in food preparation activities.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CONSUMER EDUCATORS

This study was conducted to define the messages related specifically to food preparation that are conveyed by women's magazines to women as consumers and to describe the change in those messages over time. No statistically significant change in the distribution of the messages conveyed from year to year was found. However, changes in society were reflected by presentations of the same messages modified to technological orientations, economic conditions, and gender role expectations. These findings have some particularly meaningful implications for consumer educators:

1. The presentations of messages employed by marketers to sell food products have remained relatively consistent since 1947. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that consumer education curriculum which utilizes knowledge of the messages isolated by this study will have long range application.

2. The messages conveyed by women's magazine articles are generally the same messages conveyed by advertisements in those same magazines. Consumer education curricula should include the information that non-commercial sections of magazines are not necessarily independent of the influence of marketing.

3. The presentations of messages by articles and advertisements in women's magazines reflect shifting cultural views of women's roles.

A useful classroom exercise for students would be an analysis of the messages conveyed by articles and advertisements in various magazines of specific interest to students. Comparisons and conclusions made among the students would provide pertinent examples of the strategies employed by marketers.

If the findings specific to the study of food-related advertisements and articles in women's magazines can be generalized to a broad cross-section of products and media by further research, consumer educators will have a powerful tool in assisting consumers in analyzing media messages. Recognition that certain basic messages are overlaid with technological orientations, reflections of economic conditions and gender role expectations can lead, through effective consumer education, to more objective consumer decision-making.

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NUTRITION PROFILE OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Few people today would question the importance of good nutrition as a major component of a healthy lifestyle. The electronic media and the popular press frequently feature items related to nutrition. Nutrition education is included within most elementary and secondary curricula. Nutrition-related issues are frequent topics of conversation among friends and acquaintances. A tremendous amount of nutritional information is available on food packages. With all of the attention paid to nutrition by the schools, the public, and the press, one might assume that those who appear to be so interested in and informed about nutrition would follow sound nutritional practices. This study was designed to examine the nutritional habits of one segment of the adult population which has been exposed to society's strong awareness of the importance of good nutrition: college students. This segment of our adult population is the most likely to have recently been exposed to nutrition education within the schools.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to develop a nutritional profile for college students to determine to what extent their food choices provid-