

A STRATEGY FOR TEACHING CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING

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In today's high-tech society, teachers face the challenge of holding the interest of students accustomed to sophisticated advertising, professional television programming, and computerized video games. One way to stimulate enthusiasm in students is to use a technique already familiar to them -- the TV game show. The purpose of this paper is to describe a game show method for teaching consumer decision-making. Teacher background information is presented first, and is followed by a list of rules for the game, *The Decision Maker*.

Teacher Background Information

Consumer decision-making is a process of evaluation in the choice or resolution of alternatives [4]. Many factors, both internal and environmental, influence the consumer and help shape decision-making behavior. Individual personalities, perceptions, learning, and attitudes affect the consumer's choices in the marketplace [8]. The consumer is routinely influenced by the social environment, including contact with family and peers, cultural influences, financial constraints, and marketplace advertising [7,8]. At times, the consumer is presented so much information that overload is the result [1,5].

Decision-making in the marketplace becomes necessary when physical or emotional needs become sufficiently strong for the consumer to relieve them [3,8]. Exactly how consumers make purchase decisions, however, varies from one individual to another [6]. Decision-making styles of consumers may vary from no planning at all to formalized, integrated consumer strategies [8]. Strategies used by consumers during their marketplace information search may include such tactics as optimizing, satisficing, random search, step-by-step methods, or trial and error [4].

Consumers may use several techniques in their decision-making process. Intuitive decision-making is an approach helpful to some individuals, for it bypasses the conscious steps of decision-making. Some consumers may choose a simplification or heuristic process that allows them to adapt their capabilities to the potentially complex choices they must make [4].

Three types of decision-making are often used by families when they act as consumers. Accommodation occurs when family members agree by accepting the desire of the dominant family member. Consensual decision-making occurs when all family members agree and equally commit to the decision; consensus is rare as family members may not perceive problems in the same way. De facto decisions tend to result from lack of disagreement rather than active agreement [4].

After a decision has been made, the consumer is able to evaluate the purchase in a postpurchase assessment process. Postpurchase assessment is always based on new information [8]. When results differ from expectations, the consumer experiences some degree of dissatisfaction [2,8]. At this point, the consumer rationalizes the purchase by emphasizing the positive aspects and deemphasizing the negative features. If results equal or exceed expectations, the consumer experiences satisfaction [8]. In either case, the experience gained as a result of the purchase process can be used when making decisions in the future [4,8].

Game: The Decision Maker

The format and rules are similar to that of the popular TV game show, *Jeopardy*.

Assemble the following materials:

1. One playing board (see Appendix B)
2. Host question cards (see Figure 1)
3. Player information cards (see Appendix A)
4. Game money
5. Player bell

Rules of the game:

1. Players will consist of two teams of two players each, one assistant, and a host (may be student or instructor).
2. Each player will be given a set of player information cards.

Question: Too much information
Answer: What is OVERLOAD?

Figure 1. Example of a host question card

3. Each question will be phrased in the form of an answer, i.e., "Too much information."
4. Each answer must be phrased in the form of a question, i.e., "What is overload?"

The play:

1. Toss of a coin determines which team will start the game.
2. Either player from the starting team may begin play by selecting a category and dollar amount from the board.
3. Assistant uncovers "question" as the host reads the same question from the host question card (see Figure 1). The information on the host question cards is taken from player information cards.
4. Any player from either team may ring the bell to indicate desire to answer the question.
5. The first player to ring the bell will be asked to answer the question. Players may refer to player information cards at any time during the game.
6. Players will be warned one time if they fail to phrase the answer in the form of a question. Any subsequent error of this type will be considered an incorrect answer.
7. A player who successfully answers a question will be awarded the dollar amount specified on the board for that answer. The assistant will then present the game money.
8. Two *daily doubles* will appear on the board during the course of play. Any player who successfully answers the *daily double* will be awarded double the dollar amount specified for that answer.
9. Play continues until all questions on the board have been answered. Winning team is the team with the most money at the end of the game.

Suggestions for assembly of playing board (see Figure 1):

Board may be constructed from two poster boards, one light and one dark. Boards are stapled together, dark board on top, after dark board is constructed with appropriate cutouts to display questions on the light board. Cutout pieces are labeled with money amounts and attached with velcro to the light colored board in the appropriate places. A question is entered in each cutout space by writing directly on the light colored board. (Questions for the playing board come from the player information cards.) Category names are placed at the top of each column.

Implications For Consumer Educators

Helping students of any age learn skills involved in informed decision-making is a challenge to consumer educators. The game show method offers a teaching technique that stimulates enthusiasm and increases comprehension of the subject matter. In addition, this approach also affords an opportunity to reinforce important skills which can enhance students' personal development. Such skills include learning to be a team player, following directions, adhering to rules, and making decisions. An added bonus is that students find that learning can be fun.

The teaching method outlined in this article may be useful to secondary school teachers as well as to Cooperative Extension agents in their presentation of consumer decision-making information. The TV game show approach may be particularly helpful to Extension agents planning programs for 4-H participants and may also be adapted for use with other consumer education concepts.

References

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Appendix A

Player Information Cards

Decision Making

Accommodation - accepting desire of dominant person
Consensual - concludes with all family members committed to the decision
De Facto - don't disagree but don't actively agree
Heuristics - use of general principles to simplify the decision-making process
Intuitive Decision Making - undertakes action without real thought; based on inner sense or feeling

Information Search Strategy

Trial and Error - implements series of decisions; checks to see what works after each
Step-by-Step - progression through series of additive stages to final solution
Optimizing - solution sought to produce more satisfaction than any other solution
Random - lacks insight but has spontaneous or emergency interest in a response
Satisficing - selection of first alternative "good enough" to accomplish purpose

Environmental Influences

Business Influence - contact at store or advertising
Cultural Influence - beliefs developed over time by social systems
Family Influence - influence that comes from household members
Income Influence - financial constraints
Social Influence - influence from church, neighborhood, workplace or school

Internal Factors

Awareness - knowledge through the senses
Learning - change as a result of practice, experience, or intuition
Motive - impulse providing awareness of needs and reason to act on needs
Need - condition requiring relief; lacking something useful
Personality - characteristics that make each person different

Information Gathering

External Search - information from other sources including advertising, packaging, store displays, and product attributes
Internal Search - examines individual's/family's past experiences
Overload - too much information
Promotion - paid-for communications used by businesses to persuade consumers to buy their products
Habit - routine consumer behavior; little or no information gathering

Postpurchase Assessment

Dissatisfaction - what happens when results differ from expectations
Feedback - information gained during decision process and used for future decision making
New Information - experience gained as a result of the purchase
Rationalization - learning to live with a consumer decision by emphasizing positive aspects and deemphasizing the negative
Satisfaction - results equal or exceed expectations

APPENDIX B: THE

<i>Decision Making</i>	<i>Information Search Strategy</i>	<i>Environmental Influences</i>
\$100	\$100	\$100
\$200	\$200	\$200
\$300	\$300	\$300
\$400	\$400	\$400
\$500	\$500	\$500

ANSWERS BY

<i>Decision Making</i>	<i>Information Search Strategy</i>	<i>Environmental Influences</i>	
\$100	Accepts desire of dominant person	Lacks insight but has spontaneous or urgent interest in response	Financial constraints
\$200	Simplify decision-making process	Solution sought to produce the most satisfaction	Household member influences
\$300	All participants committed to the decision	<i>DD (Daily Double)</i> Choose first alternative "good enough" for purpose	Influences from church, neighborhood, school, or workplace
\$400	Based on inner sense or feeling	Progress through stages to final solution	<i>DD (Daily Double)</i> Beliefs developed over time by social system
\$500	Don't disagree but don't agree	Decision made by practice and checking	Contact at store or advertising

PLAYING BOARD

<i>Internal Factors</i>	<i>Information Gathering</i>	<i>Postpurchase Assessment</i>
\$100	\$100	\$100
\$200	\$200	\$200
\$300	\$300	\$300
\$400	\$400	\$400
\$500	\$500	\$500

CATEGORY

<i>Internal Factors</i>	<i>Information Gathering</i>	<i>Postpurchase Assessment</i>
Condition requiring relief	Too much information	Information gained and used later
Change as a result of practice, experience, or intuition	Routine consumer behavior	Results equal or exceed expectations
Characteristics that make each person different	Outside sources of information	Emphasizes the positive and deemphasizes the negative
Impulse providing awareness of needs and reason to act	Sources of information prior to purchase	What happens when results differ from expectations
Knowledge through the senses	Information from memory or experience	Experience gained as a result of the purchase