

RESOURCE MATERIALS FOR CONSUMER EDUCATION

Dr. Stewart Lee

Chairman, Department of Economics and Business Administration
Geneva College, Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania

Introduction and Outlines of Workshop

How does one evaluate consumer education resource materials?

The basic problem in a primitive or bare subsistence level economy has been the procurement of adequate food, clothing and shelter for mere survival. Thus, the energies of men have had to be directed toward that goal. Today in western civilization, and in more and more other areas of the world more and more persons are not only able to secure the basic food, clothing and shelter, but have been able to develop a surplus of funds which may be spent in one of many different ways as the individuals so desire. Additional funds for discretionary spending are now available to many people, but at the same time the proliferation and availability of vast scores of new products and services have almost overwhelmed the consumer both as to what to spend his money on, and how to decide what is the best buy among similar products or services that will meet his particular needs. Thus has developed the necessity for good, reliable sources of consumer information to guide the consumer through the labyrinth of the market place.

The basic problem confronting the consumer educator in choosing sources of consumer information is the same problem which confronts the consumer when he enters the market place - this is how to evaluate all that is available. The success or failure in the use of source materials will be dependent upon the degree of success in the evaluation of such material.

In evaluating materials the consumer educator has a limited number of choices. He can merely accept as reliable whatever consumer materials he becomes aware of; or he can reject all such materials as the prejudiced opinions of vested interests. The consumer educator who accepts either of these two alternatives will fail in his decision-making process in the market place.

The acceptance of the sources of consumer information should be based not only upon an intelligent, cautious, and skeptical evaluation of the material, but it should also be based upon as much information as one can find concerning both the writer and the organizations which are distributing such consumer information. We cannot be all-knowing in all areas, so we have to accept the judgment of other persons and other organizations many times.

I and the members of my family switched brands of toothpaste a few years ago when the American Dental Association's Council on Dental Therapeutics issued a statement recognizing Crest Toothpaste to be an effective anticaries dentifrice. I am in no

position to evaluate the effectiveness of dentrifrices, so I must follow a hit-or-miss policy, or have enough confidence in both my dentist and the American Dental Association to accept their judgment. This is the type of decision-making process we must all follow, if we are to have a degree of success in the market place.

I have been quite satisfied when I have written to a producer for specific information and prices for a product which I am interested in purchasing. When I was shopping for an automobile I wrote to the manufacturers for price and product information and was inundated with both useful specific price and specifications information, as well as advertising brochures. Again I would suggest that these materials of the producer be used with selectivity.

Consumer information is made available by government, business, and by private, non-business sources. The materials are available for the persons interested enough to seek them out and make use of them, but the availability of them means little if the consumer does not avail himself of these materials. If he does make use of them, it is essential that proper evaluative procedures are used.

Having available many sources of consumer information is vital to intelligent consumption, but the ability to analyze these materials critically is the basic prerequisite to their proper use.

Outline

1. An evaluation of audio-visual list, book list and periodical list.
2. An exhibit and discussion of examples of deceptive packaging.
3. A showing of a selected group of audio-visuals taken from the following:

BE A BETTER SHOPPER - 100 slides, color, about 90 minutes, 1967, price of \$20 includes slides, Leader's Guide, \$1.50, which includes all pictures and script, a set of Better Shopper Record Sheets, a Cost-Weight Table, and a "Be a Better Shopper" Bulletin. (Note: Also available in eight 27 min., video tapes and 16 mm. films). Cornell University, Mailing Room, Building 7, Research Park, Ithaca, New York, 14850.

THE EXPLOITED GENERATION - Filmstrip, color, 1969, with cassette or 12" record, 28-1/2 min., \$35.00. Guidance Associates, Harcourt, Brace, & World, Pleasantville, N.Y. 10570.

THE OWL WHO GAVE A HOOT - Consumer fraud, 15 min., color cartoon, 1967, free loan. Produced for Office of Economic Opportunity. May be purchased for \$40.52 including reel, can, and case from Consolidated Film Industries, 959 Seward St., Hollywood, Cal. 90038.

THE MONEY TREE - 20 min., color, movie, 1971, \$260.00, rental \$20 for 3 days. Aims Instructional Media Services, Inc., P.O. Box 1010, Hollywood, CA 90028.

TRUTH IN LENDING: INFORMATION FOR CONSUMERS - 14 min., filmstrip, 93 frames, 33-1/3 rpm 12 inch record, color, 1970, free loan, \$10 purchase. Federal Reserve Banks and Federal Reserve Branch Banks.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE - filmstrip, 57 frames, 33-1/3 rpm record, 13 min., color, 1971, \$5.00 to educators. Director of Educational Relations, Insurance Information Institute, 110 William St., New York, N.Y. 10038.

INSURANCE FOR THE HOME - filmstrip, 60 frames, 33-1/3 rpm record, 11-1/2 minutes, color, 1972, \$5.00. Director of Educational Relations, Insurance Information Institute, 110 William St., New York, N.Y. 10038.

CONSUMER SENSE - a ten-cassette series, 18-22 min. each, 1972, set of ten \$85.00 includes 30 student workbooks and teacher's guide with student response sheets. Coronet Instructional Films, 65 E. South Water St., Chicago, IL 60601.

4. Closing with a discussion of what is felt by the speaker to be the most important aspect of consumer education and that is an understanding of what is meant by and the implications of "patterns of consumer behavior," as illustrated in the following illustrations:

ARE THE WOMEN GUILTY?

The late Mrs. Walter Ferguson wrote in the New York WORLD TELEGRAM: "We hear that scientists are working to see if they can find out what is killing off so many men in the prime of life. That's a real easy one. It's the women.

We aren't doing it on purpose, of course. We love having mink coats, two air-conditioned cars, large houses with lovely gardens, stylish clothes and all the latest gadgets in the kitchen. It's killing the men to supply them. The pressure of getting 'things' for their women and gratifying their own material wants puts them in a rat race.

Looked at another way, it seems that men commit deliberate suicide as surely as if they put a gun to their heads. They have geared our economy to the wants of the American public which must be constantly increased.

The person who is satisfied with what he has is now regarded as a menace to industrial progress and the next thing to a moron. I doubt that the findings of scientists will help much in this tragic dilemma. At least, until the wives in this country decide they'd rather keep Papa than keep up with the Joneses."

I would like to close with this ode of George Santayana for your consideration. (Ode ii, 1923)

My heart rebels against my generation,
That talks of freedom and is slave to riches
And, toiling 'neath each day's ignoble burden,
Boasts of the morrow.

No space for noonday rest or midnight watches,
No purest joy of breathing under heaven!
Wretched themselves, they heap, to make them happy,
Many possessions.