

ADOLESCENT PURCHASING AGENTS: KEY PREDICTORS OF FREQUENT PURCHASERS

Jane P. Wayland, *Eastern Illinois University*
Barbara J. Coe, *University of North Texas*

As family structures change, adolescents are playing an increasingly important role as purchasing agents for the family unit. In an exploratory study of high school juniors and seniors, socioeconomic status, participation in household activities, family communication style, and adolescent independence are found to be predictive of adolescents who serve as frequent purchasing agents of grocery items for the family. Expanded research and strategy implications for marketers and retailers who wish to exploit this trend are examined.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, women have been the primary purchasing agents for the family unit. However, the emergence of women as a major part of the work force, as well as changes in family structure has lessened this role. In these cases, adolescents often assume a greater purchasing role for the family unit. It is estimated that adolescents are annually responsible for spending at least \$27 billion of family funds (Dunn 1992). Given that the majority of these purchases are groceries (Dunn 1992; *American Demographics* 1988), marketers and retailers may wish to consider whether adolescents should be specifically targeted as part of strategy development.

Studies have documented the trend toward utilizing adolescents as family purchasing agents for grocery items. Eighty percent of adolescents interviewed in a Rand study reported they were "heavily involved" in family food shopping (Sellers 1989). Teen-Age Research Unlimited (*Marketing News* 1987) found that half of the 1,079 female adolescents surveyed shopped for their families each week and 24 percent made brand decisions. Bogart (1989) reports that ten percent of adolescents surveyed indicated they planned household meals and did some of the grocery shopping. While the reported statistics differ, they do support the premise that adolescents are assuming more of a role in family purchasing.

These and other research efforts focus on determining if adolescents perform a purchasing role for the family. There has been less emphasis on conducting research designed to identify characteristics of families and their members which might serve as predictors of families where adolescents are likely to perform as purchasing agents. Such information could be of interest to marketers including retailers who want to determine the value of developing specific strategies to reach families where adolescents serve as purchasing agents. Increasing competition in the grocery industry and decreasing profit margins make the achievement of even a small advantage over competitors potentially profitable. Successful targeting of adolescents who are frequent purchasing agents could provide such an advantage.

Unlike previous studies that have only verified the trend of adolescent purchasing agents, this paper attempts to increase our understanding of these adolescents and provide a basis for further research. This paper reports the results of a study designed to 1) identify the characteristics of adolescents who act as purchasing agents for grocery items; 2) determine if there are characteristics which differentiate adolescents who frequently perform the purchasing role from those who perform it on an infrequent basis; and 3) determine if there are family characteristics which predict the involvement of adolescents as frequent purchasing agents for grocery items. Grocery items, as used in this study, includes all products normally sold in a retail grocery store.

Specific research questions addressed concern the family's influence and the individual characteristics of the adolescent are addressed. Is socioeconomic status a predictor of family units likely to have adolescents

The Journal of Marketing Management
Volume 3, Issue 1, pages 39-49
Copyright © 1993, The Midwest Marketing Association
All rights of reproduction in any form reserved

who perform as purchasing agents? Is family communication style a predictor of the units in which adolescents perform as purchasing agents? Is the extent of participation in family household tasks a predictor of family units in which adolescents perform as purchasing agents? Is the mother's employment outside the home a predictor of the adolescent's role as family purchasing agent? Is the adolescent's sense of independence a predictor of their role as a purchasing agent? Is the sex of the adolescent a predictor of their purchasing role? The paper concludes with suggestions for expanded research and strategy formulation.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO CHANGING PURCHASING ROLES

The purchasing responsibilities of adolescents can be attributed to several factors. These include 1) increase in the number of mothers employed in the work force (Dunn 1992; *BusinessWeek* 1991; Sellers 1989), 2) changes in family structure, (Dunn 1992; *BusinessWeek* 1991) and 3) increased independence of adolescents (Hauser 1986).

There was a significant increase in the number of working mothers in the work force between 1970 and 1990. Sixty-six percent of mothers with children six to seventeen years of age work, leading to time constraints within the family unit. In 1990, women represented 45 percent of the work force and are expected to fill 60 percent of the new jobs by the year 2000 (Deutschman 1991). For a majority of married women, working is a necessity. Real weekly earnings for workers declined 13 percent from 1973 to 1990. In most American households, two paychecks are necessary to support the family (Deutschman 1991).

Many studies have examined the strategies used by working women to alleviate time pressures (Cogel and Tasker 1982; Gray 1983; Nichols and Fox 1983; Lazer and Smallwood 1977; McCall 1977; Hoffman 1960). These studies conclude that a major strategy employed by working women is the use of husbands and children as labor substitutes for household activities such as shopping, house cleaning, and laundry. While husbands are typically the first family member to participate in the family shopping, adolescents also share in the responsibility.

The changing family structure in the United States also has affected the purchasing responsibilities of adolescents. A rising divorce rate, the resulting increase in the number of single parent households, and a decrease in the number of households exhibiting traditional

family structures has caused a shift in decision making and shopping activities within the family unit. In 1990, 24 percent of households with children under eighteen were headed by a single parent (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1991). In single parent families facing significant time constraints, adolescents have taken over more of the family shopping (Dunn 1992).

Adolescents are perceived to have more time than their parents and therefore are available to perform certain household duties. Moreover, many adolescents are becoming more independent at an earlier age. This is evidenced by car ownership, credit card usage, and part-time and summer employment (Hauser 1986). Adolescents with their own transportation are available to run errands and often have authority to use parents' credit cards. Monies earned from part-time and summer employment contribute to the development of experience as a shopper. This experience is accepted as evidence, by some parents, that adolescents can perform shopping duties for the family.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Much of the research in the area of adolescent consumer behavior focuses on consumer socialization and parent-child interaction and influences. These studies with the purchasing process literature contribute to an understanding of the potential role of the adolescent as a purchasing agent.

Purchasing as a Part of the Decision Process

It could be argued that adolescents are not decision makers but only purchasers of grocery items. By giving a shopping list to the adolescent, the parent instructs the act of purchasing without direct decision making by the adolescent. This view is short-sighted and underestimates the purchasing act as part of the purchase decision. The purchase step has not been as heavily researched as other parts of the decision-making process. The lack of focus on the actual purchase act may result, in part, from the perception that after determination of the outlet to be used, the purchase step becomes a simple transaction involving the acquisition of the product for cash or credit. However, in many situations, the product or brand selection may not be made until after the individual is in the store.

Problem recognition may begin at the store after visual prompting of products, special promotions, and store displays. According to one study, unplanned purchases account for more than half of all purchases (Agnew

1987). Park, Iyer, and Smith (1989) determined that one-third of the unplanned grocery purchases in their study were triggered by active processing of in-store information. This supports an earlier study that indicated point-of-purchase plays a major role in consumers' decision making (Quelch and Cannon-Boventre 1983). Substitutions are made when predetermined brands are not available or judged too expensive. Thus the decision process can begin and end in the act of purchasing.

Grocery-product marketers have long recognized the value of point-of-purchase and have recently integrated computer technology to push products. New strategies have included information stations with cooperative advertising, in-store coupon dispensers, the Sniff-Teaser that emits the product's scent into store aisles to gain customers' attention (Freeman and Dagnoli 1988) and VideOcart that uses a laptop computer screen mounted on the handle of the shopping cart that shows advertising along with an entertainment sequence (*Marketing News* 1988). In-store promotion is the fastest growing part of electronic marketing (Fahey 1990).

Unplanned purchases and substitutions support the view that the individual actually making purchases at the store should be considered an important decision maker, as well as, purchasing agent. An adolescent may be the decision maker and purchasing agent in planned as well as unplanned or substitute purchases for the family. This suggests that adolescents may represent a desirable target for marketing efforts by marketers and retailers.

Consumer Socialization of Adolescents

Socialization is the process of learning consumer-related skills, knowledge, and attitudes (Ward 1974). A conceptual model of consumer socialization developed by Moschis and Churchill (1979) suggested that consumer learning is a result of antecedents such as sex and social class and learning relationships that exist with parents or influences of the mass media.

Social Class and Shopping Independence: The influence of social class on consumption has been suggested by Ward (1974). Empirical studies suggest that social class is positively related to the acquisition of consumer skills (Moschis 1978; Moschis and Churchill 1978; and Moschis and Moore, 1978). Findings indicate that children in families of higher socioeconomic status have more opportunities for consumption and, therefore, may become socialized more rapidly than children

from families of lower socioeconomic status. Adolescents and children from higher socioeconomic families are better able to manage consumer finances (Moschis and Churchill 1978), possess greater knowledge of economic concepts (Williams 1970), are more aware of available brands in the marketplace, can more easily price products and services, show a better understanding of consumer-legal matters, and recognize socially desirable consumer role expectations (Moschis and Moore 1978). The differences in the skills of higher and lower socioeconomic adolescents suggest that adolescents from higher socioeconomic status families are more confident in the role of purchasing and may perform the role of family purchasing agent.

It is reasonable to assume that increased consumer skills will lead to greater shopping independence with little parental intervention. While studies indicate that adolescents do shop independently of their parents, adolescents from lower social class families exhibit greater independence (Moschis, Moore, and Stephens 1977). Lower levels of independence among adolescents from upper class families may reflect the tendency to be involved in products preferred by the parents which will enhance their social well being.

Family Communication: The family is the primary mechanism through which cultural and social class values are taught to children. Family communication, therefore, affects the socialization of children. According to Stone and Chaffee (1970), the two dimensions of family communication are (1) socio-orientation where parents frequently stress that their children avoid social conflict and defer to elders and (2) concept-orientation where the parents emphasize the consideration of all sides and the expression of one's opinion.

Using the two dimensions, McLeod and O'Keefe (1972) developed a typology of parent-child communication structures and patterns. Protective families (high socio-orientation and low concept-orientation) stress obedience and social harmony. Pluralistic families (high concept-orientation and low socio-orientation) encourage open communication with an emphasis on mutual respect and interests, and consensual families stress both socio- and concept-orientations. Laissez-faire families do not emphasize a socio- or concept-orientation in the family exhibiting little family communication. Moschis (1985) used this typology and set forth several propositions that suggest the manner in which family communication processes affect consumer learning. Moschis suggested that parental influence on the consumer behavior of their children is situation-specific and varies across products, the stage

in the decision process, and consumer characteristics. In a study of adolescent shopping behavior and family communication patterns, Moschis, Prahasto, and Mitchell (1986) found that children from families that use a pluralistic form of communication are the most competent consumers while the laissez-faire families seem to be the least competent. Carlson, Grossbart and Walsh (1990) determined that parents with a pluralistic communication style consider their children's opinions more than do parents with a protective or laissez faire communication style. It is also suggested that greater importance of co-shopping and concept-orientation reflects concern with children's development as consumers (Grossbart, Carlson, and Walsh 1991). Further research by Foxman, Tansuhaj, and Estrom (1989a) suggests that adolescents were found to have more influence on purchase decisions in concept-oriented family communication environments.

A review of the literature suggests that adolescents from families that have a pluralistic family communication style will exhibit more confidence in shopping and may more easily assume the role of family purchasing agent. Children from laissez-faire families exhibit the least consumer competence and, therefore, will have less confidence in the role of purchasing agent and may not often assume the role often.

Sex of the Adolescent: Research indicates there are differences between the sexes in the acquisition of consumer skills. Male adolescents appear to know more than their female counterparts about consumer matters such as knowledge of basic terms in economics, finance, real estate, and marketing, as well as knowledge of consumer legislation in the areas of unit pricing, bait advertising, code dating, and remedies available to consumers (Moschis and Churchill, 1978). Young people develop clear sex role perceptions (Moschis and Moore 1979) and shopping is viewed by some as a feminine role (McNeal 1969).

Both males and females acquire consumer skills and, therefore, are able to serve as family purchasing agents. Females may have more experience shopping, especially for grocery items, since this activity has traditionally been viewed as a female household task.

Participation in Household Activities

Adolescents typically participate in household tasks. A study by Cogel and Tasker (1982) reported that 88 percent of the respondent sample participated in at least one selected household task. The study indicated that the overall participation rate increased as the age

increased which was supported by Nichols and Fox (1983). As an adolescent becomes more responsible in the home, he or she may be allowed to do more important tasks such as family shopping which requires consumer knowledge and spending of family funds. Turner and Brandt (1978) determined that the development of consumer skills varied directly with the home responsibilities.

Influence of Adolescents on Purchasing Decisions

Recent studies of family decision making indicate the increasing influence of adolescents. Foxman, Tansuhaj, and Estrom (1989b) suggest that adolescents have influence on the purchase of a variety of products. They further conclude that the influence is greater for less-expensive products and products for the adolescent's personal use, such as food items and personal grooming products. The study supported earlier research (Belch, Belch, and Ceresino 1985) that indicated adolescents have the greatest amount of influence for products with which he/she is most involved. Adolescents showed the highest amount of influence on breakfast cereal and little influence on more-expensive consumer durables such as televisions and automobiles. In another study adolescents considered themselves influential in purchasing items for the family and themselves (Kim, Lee, and Hall 1991). These studies address the influence of the adolescent on the purchase decision but do not consider the adolescent's participation in actual purchases.

METHODOLOGY

The exploratory study, involving high school junior and senior students, was conducted in a city in the southwestern United States. Students enrolled in economics classes were asked by teachers during class to complete a written questionnaire. The age range of the students was sixteen through twenty which represents adolescents who have a driver's license and can be asked to shop independently of their parents. Because economics is required for graduation, a representative student sample was achieved. The procedure resulted in 305 usable questionnaires.

Measurement

Seven variables, drawn from previous socialization and family research, were chosen for the study. The dependent variable was the level of purchasing agent activity performed by the adolescents during the school year. Previous research of adolescent shopping behavior indicated that 70 percent of the adolescents

surveyed shop one or more hours on weekends while only 24 percent shopped 1 or more hours during the week (Tootelian and Gaedeke 1992). Therefore, for purposes of this study, frequent shoppers are defined as adolescents who serve as purchasing agents for their families four or more times per month. Infrequent shoppers are defined as adolescents who serve as purchasing agents for their families less than four times a month or never assume the role.

The independent variables were socioeconomic status of the family, adolescent purchasing independence, socio- and concept-oriented family communication factors, participation in household tasks, mother's employment outside the home and sex of the adolescent. Table 1 lists the variables and provides operational definitions for each. A discriminant analysis was used to investigate the differences between frequent and non-frequent adolescent family purchasing agents.

TABLE 1
DEPENDENT AND INDEPENDENT VARIABLES AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Dependent Variable	Operational Definition	Measurement
Purchasing Agent Activity	The degree to which an adolescent serves as the family purchasing agent.	The total number of times an adolescent shops for his family each month. A frequent shopper is defined as shopping four or more times per month
Independent Variables	Operational Definition	Measurement
Socioeconomic Status	The relative social and financial position of the family.	The occupation of the head-of-household using Duncan's Index (1961).
Family Communication		
Socio	The parent fosters harmonious relationships.	A 6 item, 5-point scale (Moschis et al. 1986). Reliability Coefficient=.77 <i>Item example: Your parents tell you what things you should or shouldn't buy.</i>
Concept	The parent assists the child to develop his own individual views.	A 6 item, 5-point scale (Moschis et al. 1986). Reliability Coefficient=.69 <i>Item example: Your parents say you should decide yourself how to spend your money.</i>
Purchasing Independence	The degree the adolescent shops and buys without parent intervention.	a 5 item, 5-point scale. Reliability Coefficient=.67 <i>Item example: I purchase clothing without my parents seeing them.</i>
Household Tasks	An indication of how often an adolescent participates in general household tasks.	The total number of household tasks the adolescent performs two or more times per week for the family.
Mother's Employment	Indicates if the mother is employed outside the home.	Respondents reported their mothers' occupation which was coded as working or nonworking.
Gender	Male or female.	Respondent self report.

RESULTS

Forty-seven percent of the sample were female and 53 percent were male. Seven percent were from single parent families and 71 percent had mothers who work outside the home. Sixty-nine percent of the respondents came from two-parent households in which both parents are employed. Demographic characteristics of the respondents grouped by shopping frequency are presented in Table 2.

A two-group discriminant analysis was conducted using the Mahalanobis stepwise procedure. The stepwise method is useful when considering a large number of variables. The procedure sequentially selects the next best discriminating variable at each step, thus eliminating variables that are not useful in discriminating the two groups (Hair, Anderson, and Tatham 1987). Since earlier research does not indicate the probabilities of membership across the two groups, a-priori probabilities of group membership were derived from the

respondent sample. A hold out sample of 37 respondents (fifteen percent of the total sample) was used to validate the model.

The discriminant analysis was significant ($p = .0008$) with five of the seven variables retained in the function. This suggests discriminating differences exist between frequent and infrequent shoppers. The variables were socioeconomic status, socio- and concept-oriented family communication, purchasing independence, and participation in household tasks. Mother's employment and the adolescent's sex were not significant and were dropped from the function. The structure matrix correlations for all independent variables, in order of their discriminating value, are presented in Table 3. Interpreted as factor loadings, the adolescent's participation in household tasks, the concept-dimension of family communication, and socioeconomic status were the three most discriminating variables between frequent and infrequent adolescent shoppers. Means and standard deviations for the independent variables are presented in Table 4.

TABLE 2
PROFILE OF STUDY RESPONDENTS
FREQUENT AND INFREQUENT PURCHASERS

Demographic Variables	Frequent Shoppers	Infrequent Shoppers
Age		
16	17.8%	12.6%
17	48.9%	58.1%
18	27.8%	21.9%
19-20	2.2%	3.3%
Sex		
Female	56.7%	49.8%
Male	41.1%	48.8%
Socioeconomic Status of the Family ^a		
Lower	45.6%	32.1%
Middle	26.6%	38.6%
Upper	27.8%	29.3%
Family Structure		
Single Parent	8.9%	5.6%
Traditional ^b	91.1%	94.4%
Work Status ^c		
Dual Career	70.7%	68.5%
Traditional	29.3%	31.5%

^aThe index measure was divided by three to produce the three status levels.

^bTraditional family structure is defined as a two parent household.

^cWork status of families are defined as dual career, both parents work, and traditional families, only the father works. Total traditional families: $n=82$ for frequent shoppers and $n=203$ for infrequent shoppers.

TABLE 3

**STRUCTURE LOADINGS BETWEEN
DISCRIMINATING VARIABLES AND THE
CANONICAL DISCRIMINANT FUNCTION**

Predictor Variables	Loading
Household Tasks	.66946*
Concept-Oriented Communication	.51492*
Socioeconomic Status	-.39217*
Purchasing Independence	.34502*
Socio-Oriented Communication	.27830*
Gender	-.25955
Mother's Employment	-.02515

*significant at $p < .002$

The procedure provided reasonable discrimination between the frequent and infrequent purchasers. The classification results for the respondent sample was 71.43 percent. This is well above the chance criterion of 57.22 percent. The hold out sample resulted in a correct classification of 82.05 percent thus supporting the validity of the analysis. Therefore, the variables used in the analysis effectively differentiate between adolescents who shop frequently for their families and those that do not.

Frequent shoppers had a higher degree of shopping independence, a pluralistic family communication pattern (high concept- and low socio- orientation), and performed more household activities than did infrequent shoppers. Based on prior research, it was expected that adolescents who shop frequently for grocery items would be from higher socioeconomic

status families. This was not supported. Frequent shoppers were from less socioeconomic advantaged families. No differences were found among frequent and infrequent adolescent shoppers based on sex or mother's employment outside the home.

DISCUSSION

The differences between adolescents who shop frequently and those that shop infrequently or who never perform this role can be of importance to strategists in grocery marketing and retailing. Lack of differences may also be important in strategy formulation.

Participation in Household Tasks

Participation in household tasks was the most discriminating variable between the adolescents classified as frequent purchasing agents and those classified as infrequent agents. Adolescents in the frequent agent category regularly performed an average of six different household activities per month as compared to an average of five for adolescents in the infrequent category. This may occur because families that need adolescent participation in shopping also require help in alleviating time pressures associated with other household activity areas. The performance of household activities by adolescents is not unusual. Cogel and Tasker (1982) reported that 88 percent of a respondent sample participated in at least one selected household task. In the current study, adolescents who shop frequently for their families performed more household tasks than infrequent shoppers. Adolescents appear to earn more responsibilities by successful participation in a variety of household activities including washing the dishes, doing the laundry, and house cleaning. The more responsible an adolescent becomes the more duties he or she may share. The current

**TABLE 4
MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR PREDICTOR VARIABLES**

Predictor Variables	Frequent Shoppers	Infrequent Shoppers
Socioeconomic Status	43.70 (25.74)	49.74 (24.84)
Family Communication		
Socio-oriented	2.51 (0.767)	2.39 (0.690)
Concept-oriented	3.19 (0.681)	2.98 (0.703)
Purchasing Independence	3.80 (0.690)	3.66 (0.665)
Household Tasks	6.40 (2.17)	5.54 (2.09)

findings support earlier research by Nichols and Fox (1983).

Activities performed by the adolescent may lead to an increased awareness of the products used by the family unit. Adolescents may become more sensitive to information about brands available for use in performing the activities they are assigned. This sensitivity may represent an opportunity for marketers to reinforce the adolescent's positive attitudes toward brands already in use by the family. Or, if the family or adolescent are dissatisfied with the current products, this may represent a communication opportunity for rival marketers. In the case of new product introductions, marketers may wish to direct some aspects of the marketing strategy toward adolescents who are frequent shoppers for the product category.

Family Communication Style

A pluralistic family communication style also differentiated frequent from non-frequent adolescent purchasing agents. The study findings support earlier research (Moschis, Prahasto, and Mitchell 1986) which found that children from families exhibiting this form of communication are the most competent consumers. Previous research further suggests that adolescents from families with this form of communication exhibit more confidence in their ability to shop and may assume the role of family purchasing agent. A pluralistic family communication style (low socio-orientation and high concept-orientation) helps the child to develop his or her own ideas with emphasis placed on mutuality of respects and interests. This independent thinking, combined with the acknowledgement of others' interests, is necessary if the child is to perform the role of purchasing agent for the family effectively.

Laissez faire family communication was evidenced among infrequent shoppers in the study. These results support the earlier research by Moschis, Prahasto, and Mitchell (1986) which suggested that adolescents from families with this type of communication are less competent as consumers than those from families with pluralistic communication. It is reasonable to assume that those with limited shopping experience will tend toward incompetence in the shopping function. These adolescents may not feel comfortable shopping and may not want to perform this role for the family.

Adolescent Independence and Socioeconomic Status

Among study respondents, shopping independence was exhibited more often by frequent adolescent shoppers.

This independence may be a function of the lower socioeconomic status of a majority of the frequent purchasing agents in the study. This relationship between independence and social class membership supports earlier research (Moschis, Moore, and Stephens 1977). Lower social class adolescent consumers, as they age, appear to acquire greater independence from family members in purchasing activities than adolescent consumers in other social classes.

The finding that a majority of adolescents in the study, who are frequent purchasing agents, come from lower socioeconomic status families represents a deviation from previous research. Findings from earlier research suggest that upper social class is positively related to the acquisition of consumer skills (Moschis 1978; Moschis and Churchill 1978; and Moschis and Moore 1978). Further, differences in the skills of higher and lower socioeconomic adolescents suggest that adolescents from higher socioeconomic families are more confident in the role of purchasing and may perform the role of purchasing agent (Williams 1970; Moschis and Moore 1978).

The current findings, linking the performance of a frequent purchasing agent role by adolescents and membership in a lower socioeconomic class families, may be the result of several factors. Adolescents from lower social class families have been found to exhibit greater shopping independence (Moschis, Moore, and Stephens 1977). As discussed earlier, independence was a significant differentiating factor between the frequent and infrequent shopper groups. Moreover, adolescents who participate in the household shopping function may do so because of parents' time constraints. While hours of work were not measured in the current study, parents in lower socioeconomic classes may often work longer hours in order to earn enough funds for the family's financial needs. There may be younger siblings who require care which will limit the amount of time the parent has available for shopping activities. Also, because grocery shopping has no social value, parents in higher socioeconomic classes may encourage their children to perform other activities to increase their social competence. Middle and upper class families often emphasize participation in extracurricular activities and more time spent on school work to insure the child achieves in areas that will be of greater perceived benefits. This would limit, in some cases, time available to serve as a purchasing agent for the family.

Sex of the Adolescent

The results of the study indicated no significant difference between frequent and infrequent adolescent

purchasing agents based on sex. This finding does not support earlier research in which females were more likely to be the family purchasing agent than males (Bogart 1989; McNeal 1969). Changes in traditional stereotypes, based on gender and the performance of different family activities, may explain the difference between current findings and those of earlier research. Changes in stereotypes have been recognized and incorporated by some grocery marketers in their strategies, especially those relating to advertising and sales promotion.

Mother's Employment

The mother's employment outside the home did not distinguish between adolescents who shop frequently for their families and those that do not perform this role. This does not support previous studies which indicate working women ask husbands and children to participate in household activities to alleviate time pressures. This factor may not have been significant in the current study for several reasons. The number of hours worked each week was not measured. Hours of work may have made a difference in the outcome of the analysis. Further, the longevity of current employment and the mother's view toward her own role in the family may have a greater influence than the actual employment of the mother. This area warrants further research.

EXPANDED RESEARCH AND STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

To secure a possible competitive advantage, national marketers of grocery items and retail grocery chains should consider pursuing research in their key markets to 1) validate predictive variables identified in the study; 2) confirm or reject the characteristics of the frequent adolescent purchasing agent; and 3) evaluate the importance of adolescent purchasing agents, and their family units, to the achievement of competitive advantage and increased profitability.

For the national marketer of grocery items, the strategy implications of targeting adolescent purchasing agents would be greatest in the promotional area. For markets in which the adolescent is viewed as important, a tie-in of some point-of-purchase promotions with the specialized advertising is worthy of consideration. In addition, occasional special promotions for the adolescent, in keeping with the overall image of the brand or brands, might be considered.

Strategy implications are greatest for grocery retailers. Personnel, pricing, promotion, and process management strategies are important decision areas for the retailer wishing to direct efforts toward adolescent purchasing agents. The retailer has the opportunity to exploit, through several strategies, the unique advantage of personal contact with the adolescent purchasing agent in the in-store setting.

While adolescent purchasing agents are not the major component of a retailer's customer base, they do represent current and future sources of profit. Proper treatment of the adolescent by store personnel can lead to the development of a consumer franchise, for the grocery chain, in the long run. Adolescents who do the grocery shopping for the family unit deserve the same courteous service as adult customers. Store personnel and management should be rewarded, through incentive programs, in recognition of their treatment of adolescents as valued customers. The expansion of the service ethic to include adolescent shoppers should be part of the ongoing training of in-store personnel and management.

If, as in the study results, adolescents in key markets are found to come predominantly from lower socioeconomic status families, there are implications for pricing strategy. Price may play a dominant role in the decision of such adolescents. Retailers can use this to their advantage. They may indicate price differences between their private label and national brands. In addition, prominent displays of sale items may be used to alert the adolescent to lower prices and encourage substitute purchases in the face of stockouts or to stimulate unplanned purchases.

There are several aspects of promotional strategy which could be used by the retailer to access the adolescent purchasing agent. On the local level, retailers should consider the use of public relations events to create store awareness among adolescents. The sponsorship of events for adolescents, such as athletic and academic competitions, pageants, and school activities, can be a cost effective means of increasing store awareness. Such events also have a spill-over effect on adults, especially parents. Families that exhibit a pluralistic family communication will talk about such events and discuss the implications of supporting retailers that sponsor such events. When the size of the market and budgets warrant, television may be utilized to increase store awareness, among adolescents, of in-store specials, and promotions. This would be a local strategy for units of the retail chain.

However, national advertising may be useful for grocery chains with wide geographic distribution.

Catering to the adolescent may require specific consideration in the design and implementation of process management strategies. Easing the restrictions on check cashing, as it relates to adolescents, is a possible modification of the process management strategy. Adolescents may need to complete a check that has been pre-signed. A special program through which parents register their signatures, drivers license, and other needed identification may make it easier for the adolescent to cash his/her parent's checks. As more and more

grocery retailers accept credit cards as a form of payment, a procedure making it easier for the adolescent to use a parent's credit card can create goodwill among adolescents and their parents.

In the environment of the 1990s, any competitive advantage which marketers and retailers can exploit may represent the difference between a profit and loss position. Given the shrinking margins in the grocery sector, retailers cannot afford to overlook the potential represented by the adolescent who performs as a frequent purchasing agent for the family unit.

REFERENCES

- Agnew, Joe (1987), "POP Displays are Becoming a Matter of Consumer Convenience," *Marketing News*, (October 9), 14, 16.
- American Demographics* (1988), "Teen Spenders," (June), 21.
- Belch, George E., Michael A. Belch, and Gayle Ceresino (1985), "Parental and Teenage Child Influences in Family Decision Making," *Journal of Business Research*, 13, 163-176.
- Bogart, Beth (1989), "Word of Mouth Travel Fastest," *Advertising Age*, (February 6), 6.
- BusinessWeek* (1991), "Getting 'Em While They're Young," (September 9), 94-95.
- Cogel, Frances L. and Grace E. Tasker (1982), "Children and Housework," *Family Relations*, 31 (July), 395-399.
- Carlson Les, Sanford Grossbart, and Ann Walsh (1990), "Mothers' Communication Orientation and Consumer Socialization Tendencies," *Journal of Advertising*, 19 (3), 27-38.
- Deutschman, Alan, (1991), "Pioneers of the New Balance," *Fortune*, (May 20), 60-68.
- Duncan, Otis D. (1961), "A Socioeconomic Index for All Occupations," in *Occupations and Social Status*, Albert J. Reiss, Jr. ed., New York: Free Press.
- Dunn, William (1992), "Hanging Out With American Youth," *American Demographics*, (February), 24-35.
- Fahey, Alison (1990), "Advertising Media Crowd Into Aisles," *Advertising Age*, (June 18), 18.
- Foxman, Ellen R., Patriya S. Tansuhaj, and Karin M. Estrom (1989a), "Adolescents' Influence in Family Purchase Decisions: A Socialization Perspective," *Journal of Business Research*, 18, 159-172.
- _____. (1989b), "Family Members' Perceptions of Adolescents' Influence in Family Decision Making," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15 (March), 482-491.
- Freeman, Laurie and Judann Dagnoli (1988), "Point-of-Purchase Rush is On," *Advertising Age*, (February 8), 47.
- Gray, Jane Dreyfus (1983), "The Married Professional Women: An Explanation of Her Role Conflicts and Coping Strategies," *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 17.3 (Summer), 235-253.
- Grossbart Sanford, Les Carlson, and Ann Walsh (1991), "Consumer Socialization and Frequency of Shopping with Children," *Journal of Academy of Marketing Science*, 19.3 (Summer), 155-163.
- Hair, Jr., Joseph F., Rolph E. Anderson, and Ronald L. Tatham (1987), *Multivariate Analysis*, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- Hauser, Grady (1986), "How Teenagers Spend the Family Dollar," *American Demographics*, (December), 9-11.
- Hoffman, Lois Wladis (1960), "Effects of the Employment of Women on Parental Power Relations and the Division of Household Tasks," *Marriage and Family Living*, (February), 27-35.
- Kim Chankon, Hanjoon Lee, and Katherine Hall (1991), "A Study of Adolescent's Power, Influence Strategy, and Influence on Family Purchase Decisions," in *Marketing Theory and Application*, 2, Terry L. Childers et al (ed), USA: American Marketing Association.
- Lazer, William and John E. Smallwood (1977), "The Changing Demographics of Women," *Journal of Marketing*, 14 (July), 14-22.
- Marketing News* (1988), "VideOcart Shopping Cart with Computer Screen Creates New Ad Medium That Also Gathers Data," 22 (May 9), 1-2.
- Marketing News* (1987), "If Both Parents are Breadwinners, Teenagers Often are the Bread Buyers," 21.4 (February 13), 5.
- McCall, Suzanne H. (1977), "Meet the Workwife," *Journal of Marketing*, 14, 55-65.
- McLeod, Jack M. and Garrett J. O'Keefe (1972), "The Socialization Perspective and Communication Behavior," in *Current Perspectives in Mass Communication Research*, F. G. Kline and P. J. Tichenor, eds. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- McNeal, James U. (1969), "An Exploratory Study of the Consumer Behavior of Children," in *Dimensions of Consumer Behavior*, James U. McNeal (ed.), New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Moore, Roy L. and George P. Moschis (1983), "Role of Mass Media and the Family in Development of Consumptive Norms," *Journalism Quarterly*, 60 (Spring), 67-73.

- Moschis, George P. (1978), "Teenage Responses to Retailing Stimuli," *Journal of Retailing*, 54, 80-93.
- _____. (1985), "The Role of Family Communication of Children and Adolescents," *Journal of Consumer Research*, (March), 898-913.
- _____. and Gilbert A. Churchill, Jr. (1979), "An Analysis of the Adolescent Consumer," *Journal of Marketing*, 43 (Summer), 40-48.
- _____. and Gilbert A. Churchill, Jr. (1978), "Consumer Socialization: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 15, 599-609.
- _____. and Roy L. Moore (1979), "Decision Making Among the Young: A Socialization Perspective," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 6 (September), 101-112.
- _____. and Roy L. Moore (1978), "An Analysis of the Acquisition of Some Consumer Competencies Among Adolescents," *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 12 (2), 276-91.
- _____. Roy L. Moore and Lowndes F. Stephens (1977), "Purchasing Patterns of Adolescent Consumers," *Journal of Retailing*, 53, 17-26.
- _____. Andjaer E. Prahasto, and Linda G. Mitchell (1986), "Family Communication Influences on the Development of Consumer Behavior: Some Additional Findings," in *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 13, Richard J. Lutz, ed. Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research.
- Nichols, Sharon Y. and Karen D. Fox (1983), "Buying Time and Saving Time: Strategies for Managing Household Production," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 10 (September), 197-208.
- Park Whan, Easwar S. Iyer, and Daniel C. Smith (1989), "The Effects of Situational Factors on In-Store Grocery Shopping Behavior: The Role of Store Environment and Time Available for Shopping," *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 15 (March), 422-433.
- Quelch, John A. and Kristina Cannon-Bonventre (1983), "Better Marketing at the Point of Purchase," *Harvard Business Review*, (November-December), 162-169.
- Sellers, Patricia (1989), "The ABC's of Marketing to Kids," *Fortune*, (May 8), 114-120.
- Stone, Vernon A. and Steven H. Chaffee (1970), "Family Communication Patterns and Source-Message Orientation," *Journalism Quarterly*, 47 (Summer), 239-246.
- Tootelian, Dennis H. and Ralph M. Gaedeke (1992), "The Teen Market: An Exploratory Analysis of Income, Spending, and Shopping Patterns," *The Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 9.4 (Fall), 35-44.
- Turner, Josephine and Jeanette Brandt (1978), "Development and Validation of a Simulated Market to Test Children for Selected Consumer Skills," *The Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 12.2 (Winter), 266-276.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census (1991), *Population Profile of the United States: 1991*, Current Population Reports, Series P-23, No. 173, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.
- Ward, Scott L. (1974), "Consumer Socialization," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 1 (September), 1-14.
- Williams, Joyce W. (1970), "A Gradient of the Economic Concepts of Elementary and School Children and Factors Associated with Cognition," *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 4 (Summer), 113-123.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Jane P. Wayland is Assistant Professor of Marketing in the Lumpkin College of Business and Applied Sciences at Eastern Illinois University.

Barbara J. Coe is Regents Professor of Marketing in the College of Business Administration at the University of North Texas.