

INFORMATION SEARCH AND MEDIA USAGE AMONGST ADOLESCENT SOWETONS

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OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie ondersoek die koopgedrag van Swart adolessente in Soweto ten einde onderliggende tendense wat verteenwoordigend van ander Swart stedelike tieners mag wees, te identifiseer. Spesifieke doelstellings sluit in die ondersoek van inligtinginwinningsaktiwiteite en mediagebruik by lekkergoedaankope onder Swart adolessente in Soweto. Data is ingewin van 'n steekproef van 641 skoliere met behulp van vraelyste. Bevindinge toon dat stedelike Swart adolessente relatief gesofistikeerde verbruikers is wat voorkeur verleen aan verbruikersdominante inligtingsbronne (vriende) hoewel markdominante bronne (T.V. advertensies) ook 'n belangrike rol speel. Die bevindinge beklemtoon ook die potensiele invloedsmag van opinieleiers in adolessente koopgedrag en die noodsaaklikheid om hulle in reklameveldtogte te bereik.

Adolescents constitute a large, specialized market segment for many goods and services: clothing, confectionery, cosmetics, jewellery, sporting goods, and many others. The adolescent is thus the target of intensive advertising and marketing promotions. The question arises as to how effective these campaigns are and what other sources of information adolescents consult prior to purchase. Do consumers of various age groups use different media sources to obtain information and do the importance of these sources differ by sex? How important are peer and family communication prior to purchase and does this vary by age? These are some of the questions addressed in this article.

Generally the media are being regarded as important sources of information for adolescent consumers. However, research findings suggest that the mass media rank relatively low compared to personal sources of information and seem to be preferred only for items where price, performance and social acceptance are of little concern (Gilkison, 1965; 1973; Moore and Stephens, 1975; Moschis, 1978; Moschis and Moore, 1979).

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The effect of television viewing on young people has been debated since the inception of television. Research has produced conflicting results. On the one hand, it has been mooted that adolescents learn socially desirable consumer behaviours and cognitions from television commercials (Moschis and Moore, 1978) which result in positive consumer socialization. Television advertisements could, for instance, show children how to brush their teeth properly by using a particular make of toothbrush. In contrast, exposure to television advertising has been found to be related to the development of non-rational consumer behaviour e.g. impulse purchases (Churchill and Moschis, 1979; Moschis and Moore, 1982).

Exposure to print advertising also seems to be important for the formation of adolescent brand preferences (Keiser, 1975; Moschis and Moore, 1979). The adolescent may become conscious of certain brands through advertising slogans which he reads in newspapers and magazines. This in turn, leads to identification of both advertised and non-advertised brands. Newspapers may be dispensers of the store-related information which makes young people aware of alternative retail outlets (Moschis, 1978). They also contribute to the development of current affairs knowledge, the ability to manage consumer finances, consumer activism, favourable attitudes toward prices (Moschis and Churchill, 1978), and the ability to predict prices accurately (Stephens and Moore, 1975).

Much controversy surrounds the relative influence of family, parents and peers on adolescent behaviour. Personal sources of information such as peers and family serve as salient dispensers of consumer information (Moore and Stephens, 1975). Ward and Wackman (1971) found communication to parents about consumption to be an important variable intervening between exposure to commercials and actual purchase. This is particularly true for older adolescents, although communication generally decreased with age.

Peers serve as an important source of information for adolescents. Peer orientation seems to increase with age, until it levels off towards the end of adolescence (Floyd and South, 1972). Research has also indicated that peer preferences influence the teenager at the product evaluation stage. Specifically, it appears that the more frequently the adolescent interacts with his peers about consumption matters, the greater the likelihood of his taking peer preferences into account when evaluating products (Moschis and Moore, 1979).

Due to the exploratory nature of this type of research in South Africa, the formulation of hypotheses specific to the black adolescent market was rather difficult. Research on pre-purchase information search by hypermarket shoppers in the Eastern Cape (Rousseau, 1981; 1983) did however show that buyers of small electrical appliances consulted consumer

dominated sources more frequently than market dominated sources. Consequently the following tentative hypotheses were set, based on these and other American research findings.

- H₁: Consumer dominated or personal information sources (family, peers) are more frequently consulted than market dominated or media sources (T.V., radio, newspaper and magazine advertisements) by black adolescents (Rousseau, 1983).
- H₂: Age is an important independent variable in determining media usage and effect on adolescent buying behaviour (Ward and Wackman, 1971).
- H₃: Female adolescents engage in information search more often than male adolescents (Moschis and Churchill, 1978).
- H₄: Age is negatively related to frequency of family and peer communication about consumption (Ward and Wackman, 1971).

METHOD

A sample of 641 black adolescents was randomly drawn from a list supplied by the Department of Education and Training. All respondents were high school-going teenagers.

The subjects were administered questionnaires concerning their consumption of confectionery products (sweets and chocolates). These products were chosen because of the size of the South African sweet market, and its relevance for adolescents.

The questionnaire was tested in a pilot study with two versions which differed semantically. A group of 22 black standard seven adolescents in Soweto was split in two matched halves and a different version administered to each. Criteria for determining the better version of the questionnaire and understanding of questions were non-response rate or number of spaces left blank.

Information search was measured by the extent to which respondents utilised various sources of consumer information, prior to purchasing five confectionery products. The sources outlined in the questionnaire were family, peers, siblings, T.V. and printed advertising. Family and peer communication about consumption were measured using 5-point Likert-Frequency Scales. There were four scales for each variable, preceded by a buffer item. The effects of advertising usage on buying behaviour were measured by four self-report 'yes-no' questions, relating to the four main media that is T.V., radio, magazines and newspapers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data were analysed by means of analysis of variance, ANOVA, (Scheffé, 1953). It should be noted that all the results are based on self-report questions and are thus open to bias and inaccuracy. Nevertheless it is felt that it gives an indication of the relative salience of these information sources, as perceived by black adolescents.

Figure 1 shows the source of information used by black adolescent sweet buyers. It is interesting to note that on average, consumer-dominated sources are used more frequently than market-dominated sources of information. Friends and peers seem to be regarded as the main source of product information. With regard to the media (market-dominated sources) television is regarded as having the greatest influence with 51 percent of respondents reporting that they had purchased a product because they had seen it on television.

Figure 2 shows the self-reported effects of various media on the confectionery buying behaviour of adolescents by age. It is evident that T.V. advertisements lose their effect, as teenage consumers grow older, but that the effect of radio, magazine and newspaper advertisements tend to increase with age. It is evident that on average, television advertisements are the most effective medium, followed by magazine, radio and newspaper advertisements.

Using a X^2 test, sex was analysed as an independent variable influencing the effect of advertising media on black adolescent sweet-buying behaviour. Males were generally more susceptible to the influence of media, especially for radio ($X^2 = 6,43$; $df = 1$; $p < 0,25$), magazines ($X^2 = 7,47$; $df = 1$; $p < ,01$), and newspapers ($X^2 = 10,62$; $df = 1$; $p < ,005$).

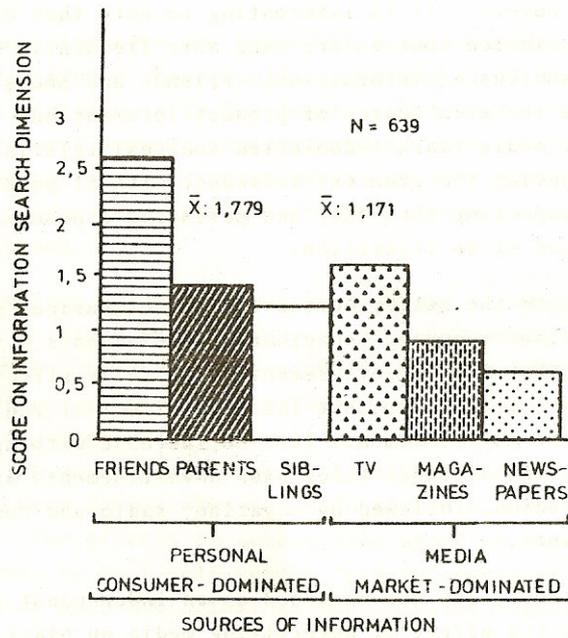


FIGURE 1: SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR BLACK ADOLESCENT SWEET BUYERS

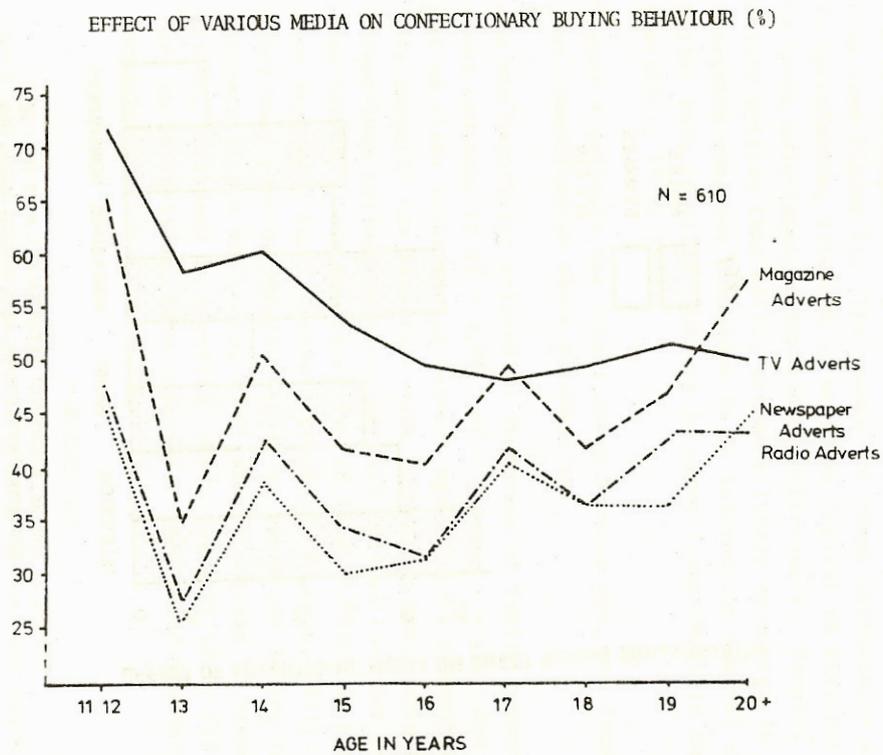
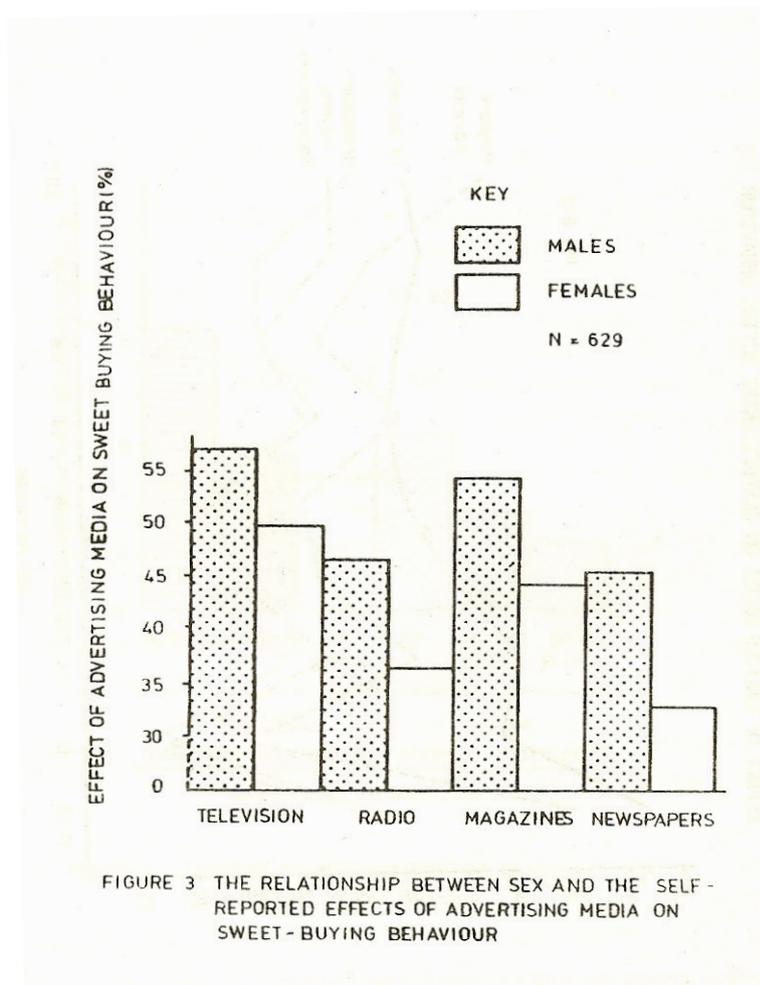


FIGURE 2 SELF-REPORTED EFFECTS OF VARIOUS MEDIA ON CONFECTIONERY BUYING BEHAVIOUR OF BLACK ADOLESCENTS BY AGE

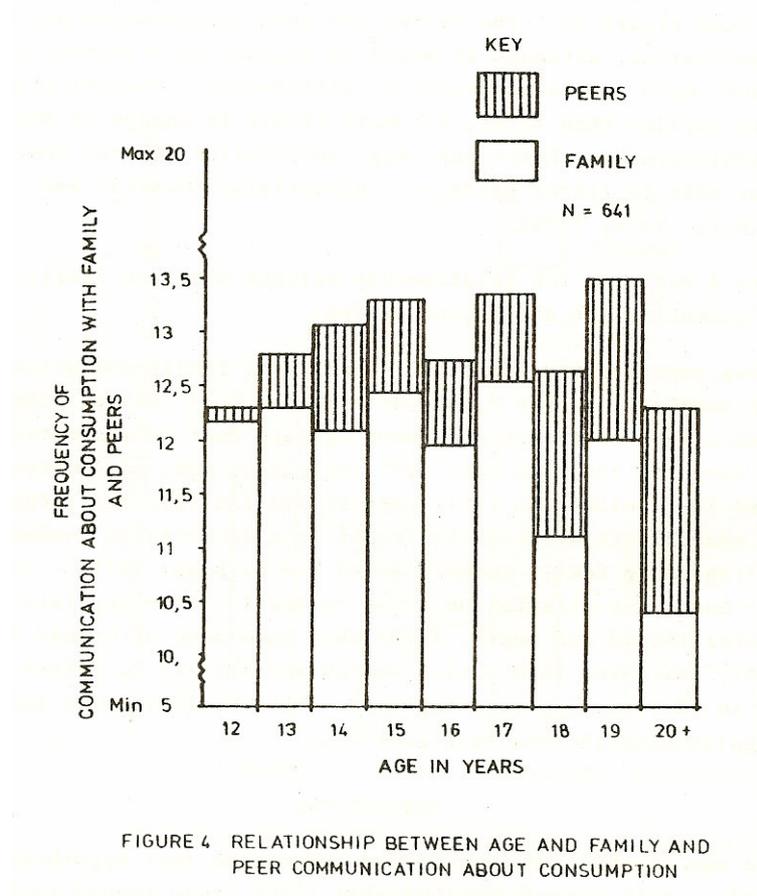


The difference between the sexes as regards television advertisements, although not significant, was also in the predicted direction (see Figure 3). The reason for these differences is open to speculation, although it would be logical to attribute them to basic male-female maturational differences. Females tend to mature earlier than males, are more likely to engage in socially desirable consumer behaviour (e.g. information search) and are better able to filter puffery in advertising (Moschis and Churchill, 1978; 1979).

Figure 4 reflects the relationship between age, and family and peer communication about consumption.

Age was negatively related to frequency of family communication about consumption ($F = 3,06$; $df = 8,621$; $p < ,01$) but there was no clear relationship between age and peer communication. This supports the view that with increasing age, adolescents become less reliant on their parents and families for information search. This manifests itself in a decrease in communication regarding family members (Ward and Wackman, 1971). On the other hand peer-orientation tends to level off during late adolescence (Floyd and South, 1972) when

knowledge of brands and prices, increased information search and ability to filter puffery in advertising, have improved. This would account for the irregular distribution in Figure 4.



CONCLUSIONS

There was significant support for two of the four hypotheses tested. With regard to hypothesis 1 the study showed that the media, being market-dominated sources of information, came second to personal or consumer dominated sources such as friends, parents and siblings. This highlights the importance of opinion leaders' role in experimenting with and adapting new brands in the market place.

There was tentative support for hypothesis 2 that age is an independent variable in influencing media effect on adolescent buying behaviour. There was statistical evidence for a negative relationship between television viewing and age ($F = 2,15$; $df = 8,592$; $p < ,05$). On the other hand, there was no statistical evidence of a positive relationship between age and radio, age and newspaper and age and media exposure, although Figure 2 would suggest this.

With regard to hypothesis 3 no statistical support could be found for the postulate that female adolescents engage in information search more often than male adolescents and judgement is thus reserved on this proposition. The study did however show significant sex differences in utilizing radio, magazine and newspapers as market dominated information sources.

Finally it was found that communication with family about consumption tapers off during adolescence (hypothesis 4); whereas communication with peers remain relatively constant. This finding once again points to the importance of friends and peers as potential opinion leaders.

The study has implications for marketers of products which are in demand in the teenage market segment. The purchasing power of the black adolescent is significant, and is likely to increase as the standard of living of the black community improves.

Marketers should take cognisance of the increasing sophistication of young black consumers. It is likely that black teenage opinion leaders can be reached via conventional media as well as the more unconventional outdoor media.

The consumer researcher may be well equipped to play an important advisory role in identifying and influencing these youngsters.

SUMMARY

This study investigates the buying behaviour of black adolescents in Soweto, with the aim of uncovering underlying trends which may be characteristic of other urban black teenagers. Specific objectives included investigating information search and media usage for confectionery products amongst black adolescents in Soweto. Data were gathered from a sample of 641 school children by means of administered questionnaires. Results indicate that urban black adolescents are relatively sophisticated consumers giving preference to consumer-dominated information sources (friends) though market-dominated sources (T.V. advertising) were also regarded as important. The findings also highlight the potential power of the influence of opinion leaders on adolescent buying behaviour as well as the importance of reaching them in advertising campaigns.

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