

PERCEPTION OF CONSUMER PROBLEMS AND CONCERNS RELATED TO
CONSUMER PROTECTION AND EDUCATION:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN AMERICAN AND EGYPTIAN
ACADEMIC COMMUNITIES

Tarek Aly El Badawy

(ABSTRACT)

The purpose of this study was to explore differences in the perceived consumer problems and concerns between American and Egyptian consumers, as measured by a composite score for perception of problems. The relationships between fourteen independent variables and perceived consumer problems of American and Egyptian consumers also were examined. The independent variables that were studied include: perceived adequacy of income, perceived improvement in living situations, expectations and experiences with products, attitudes toward government, attitudes toward business as consumer protection agencies, attitudes toward consumer education efforts, and demographic variables of gender, age, marital status, presence of children, family annual income, education level, employment status, and university position.

Specific objectives of this study were: (1) To determine if there are differences between American and Egyptian consumers in the following areas: perception of consumer problems; concerns related to price, quality, safety, labeling and information, and concerns about the environmental effects of products and their packaging; needs fulfillment related to perceived adequacy of income, needs fulfillment related to perceived improvement in living situations; expectations and experiences with products; attitudes toward consumer protection efforts by government; attitudes toward consumer protection efforts by business; and attitudes toward consumer education efforts. (2) To analyze relationships between perception of consumer problems and concerns and the following: needs fulfillment related to perceived income adequacy; needs fulfillment related to perceived improvement in living situations; expectations and experiences with products; attitudes toward consumer protection efforts by government; attitudes toward consumer protection efforts by business; and attitudes toward consumer education efforts. (3) To investigate the influence of demographic variables of gender, age,

marital status, presence of children, family annual income, education level, university position, and employment status on the perception of consumer problems and concerns.

Data were obtained through a questionnaire developed by the researcher. The questionnaire was first developed in English, and then translated into Arabic with a back translation check. The reliability of the instrument was tested with a test-retest procedure. A questionnaire, an explanatory cover letter, and a stamped self-addressed envelope, were mailed to 180 randomly selected respondents at Virginia Tech and Radford University. Graduate students assigned at Ain Shams University and Sadat Academy delivered the questionnaires personally to the 180 randomly selected respondents in both universities in Cairo. The completed questionnaires were collected within three weeks after delivery. There were 112 questionnaires returned from Virginia Tech and Radford University, of which 108 were acceptable for analysis (60%). There were 154 questionnaires returned from Egypt, of which 142 were acceptable for analysis (78.8%). Hence, a total of 250 responses were used in the data analysis for an overall return rate of 69.4%.

Procedures for statistical analysis involved eight phases including: the reliability analysis, frequency distribution, chi-square, factor analysis, the two-sample independent t-test, stepwise multiple regression, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and discriminant analysis.

Results revealed a statistically significant difference in the total score on consumer problems between the two samples. Also, results showed a significant difference in the total score on consumer concerns related to quality, safety, and labeling and information. However, the variables that were found to discriminate the two samples in order of importance were: perception of consumer problems, concerns for quality, concerns for labeling and information, concerns for safety, and concerns for price. The most important concern for all respondents was quality. The majority of the American respondents perceived that they had more adequacy of income and improvement in living situations than the Egyptian respondents. Also, they conveyed a positive attitude toward government regulations and business efforts to protect consumers' interests as opposed to the Egyptian respondents who conveyed a negative attitude toward the same aspects.