A Profile of Urban In-home Shoppers: The Other Half

Who are the in-home shoppers? This article looks at door-to-door selling from the customer side, and presents answers that differ from other recently reported work. It also examines personality characteristics of women who buy from door-to-door sales representatives versus those who do not.

A MODEST amount of research has been published on the in-home telephone and mail-order buyer; the latest such study was done by Gillett. Even though Gillett's research specifically excluded door-to-door selling, many of the results of this study are being compared with the Gillett findings. This study examines the characteristics of women who buy the major portion of their cosmetics from door-to-door saleswomen and compares them with women who buy most of their cosmetics from various types of retail stores. The characteristics studied include personality and sociodemographic variables.

Gillett's findings showed that mail, phone, and catalog buyers, when compared to nonhome buyers, were:
1. Not a "locked-in" group in terms of shopper difficulty in getting out to stores. None of the six demographic proxy measures of the locked-in shopping condition he examined was significantly related to in-home spending.
2. They were more affluent, better educated, and the household head had a higher occupational status.

Methodology

The present study surveyed buyers who purchase in two very different types of buying atmospheres: "Heavy in-home" cosmetic customers and "heavy in-store" cosmetic shoppers. Because the researchers were interested in testing extremes in an exploratory study, a random sample was not used. A judgment sample from Madison, Wisconsin (an urban metropolitan area of approximately 250,000) was employed. The sample, which does not include college coeds, was derived from a list of 600 housewives. Their names were obtained from a list of heavy users furnished by a door-to-door cosmetic firm and a local cosmetic firm. (An additional list containing sales prospects of the door-to-door firm was a second source of cosmetic users who were later classified according to heaviness of use and purchase source on the basis of their questionnaire responses.)

First a letter was sent to each subject, inviting her to participate in an experimental research project. She was asked to attend a group session at a neighborhood public school at one of four specified times to fill out a questionnaire. Each participant received $3 for her efforts. Thirty percent (207) of the individuals contacted responded.

The questionnaire was also mailed (again with the $3 offer) to 287 women randomly selected from those who did not come to the group sessions. (The entire non-response list of 483 was not used because of financial constraints.) The response rate was 50% (144). The cooperating cosmetic firm felt that the prime market for their products was among women in the 20- to 50-age group. Therefore, only the portion of the sample in the 20- through 49-age category was analyzed, yielding a total sample of 210. Women were classified as either "heavy in-home buyers" or "heavy in-store buyers" if they indicated buying over half of their cosmetics from either source. (The in-store buyers were also classified as to type of retail store.) Heavy in-home buyers numbered 136, and 113 were classified as heavy in-store customers.

Measuring Instruments

To measure the personality factor, the personal adjustment scale of the California Test of Personality (adult version, 1953 revised) was employed. This simple pencil and paper test, composed of yes-no questions, provided a total personal adjustment score as well as scores for each of the following components: Self-reliance, sense of personal worth, sense of personal freedom, feeling of belonging, freedom from withdrawing tendencies, and freedom from nervous symptoms. An additional questionnaire was administered with the CTP in order to measure the socioeconomic attributes.

Results and Discussion

It had been hypothesized that the heavy in-home customer would score lower in personal adjustment than the heavy in-store buyer. The hypothesis tested was that women who buy the majority of their cosmetics in the home would tend to be more shy and unsure of themselves and would have less self-reliance. It was believed that such a woman would not choose to buy her cosmetics in an impersonal retail outlet, rather she would prefer the security of her home in which to make such purchases; however, the evidence did not support this hypothesis. No significant difference was found between the two types of shoppers on this personality measure. The two types of buyers were also very similar in the amount of money they spent on cosmetics in the month preceding the survey. Forty-two percent of

2Same reference as footnote 1, at pp. 42-43.
the in-home buyers spent between five and ten dollars, and 15% were in the ten- to thirty-dollar range. This compares with 35% and 18% for these categories for the in-store buyers.

Table 1 presents the demographics of these two types of cosmetic buyers. The present study reveals the profile of the in-home buyer of cosmetics who purchases from a door-to-door saleswoman to be almost the opposite of the telephone and mail order in-home buyer reported by Gillett. Significant differences discussed below between the heavy in-home and heavy in-store buyers of cosmetics were found using a test for differences between proportions.\(^1\)

The first point where the present results seem to diverge from Gillett’s deals with the question: Does the in-home customer buy there because she is “locked in” at home? The results in Table 1 support the idea that the heavy, in-home cosmetic buyer is locked in at home, because she has more small children than the in-store buyer. In terms of children under 12, the comparison is 69% vs. 58% (\(p < .07\)) for these two groups. Gillett, however, could find no significant difference in family size.\(^5\) Table 1 also reveals that the heavy, in-home buyer has considerably less access to a car for daytime shopping. The difference between 77% and 89% is significant at .01. Gillett did not find any significant difference between the in-home and other shoppers in regard to the availability of private transportation for shopping.\(^6\)

Gillett also found that “in-home shoppers, particularly those spending above the mean, ranked significantly above other shoppers on family income level, shopper education level, and occupation of household head.”\(^7\) Again the present study shows the opposite to be true for women who buy most of their cosmetic needs from door-to-door saleswomen. Table 1 shows that about 45% of the heavy, in-home buyers have only four years or less of high school, compared to 34% of the in-store group (\(p < .05\)). Twenty-six percent of the latter have a college degree or better, compared with 10% for the in-home buyers (\(p < .01\)).

Although the findings concerning occupation of the household head and family income range were not significant at the 0.05 or 0.10 levels, it was felt that they are interesting enough to be presented here. Obviously, further research should be conducted on the relationship between these two important variables and in-home buyer behavior. The in-home customer was found to be more likely to be married to a blue collar/clerical worker—57% vs. 40% for the in-store group (\(p < .085\)). The in-store buyer, on the other hand, is more likely to be married to a professional worker—29% as compared to 12% for the in-home category (\(p < .02\)). In terms of family income, 68% of the in-home group have less than $15,000 income annually compared to 55% for in-store buyers (\(p < .04\)).

\(^2\)Same reference as footnote 1, p. 43.
\(^3\)Same reference as footnote 1, p. 42.
\(^4\)Same reference as footnote 1, p. 43.

About the Authors.

William H. Peters is visiting associate professor of business, Graduate School of Business, The University of Wisconsin.

Neil M. Ford is associate professor of business, Graduate School of Business, The University of Wisconsin.

The authors gratefully acknowledge the research assistance of Richard Berlet, marketing consultant with Lester B. Knight Associates.
The effects of education, occupation, and income in this study may be influenced by the attitude of door-to-door saleswomen toward women of a higher social class. If cosmetic saleswomen are, in fact, primarily from the lower-middle class, they may tend to limit their sales calls to women of their same social class, possibly because of shyness or lack of mutual interests. This hypothesis should be further investigated. In comparing these results with Gillett’s, one must remember that a highly personal product area was under study. Gillett, on the other hand, was apparently studying buyers of more staple, less individualized products of the type usually ordered from catalogues and by direct mail.

Respondents were also asked to identify the most important reason for buying cosmetics from their major source of supply. Over half of the drug store and in-home consumers ranked “more convenient” as their first choice; “better selection” was mentioned by over two-fifths of the department store customers. Discount store customers overwhelmingly ranked “less expensive” as their number one reason. Finally, “better quality” was more important to 47% of the specialty shop customers.

Concluding Comments

Based on a restricted study, a profile of in-home cosmetic customers has been presented which produced differences from a previously reported study by Gillett. The present study presented a profile of the woman who buys over half of her cosmetics in the home. Relative to the woman who buys over half of her cosmetics in a retail store, the heavy in-home buyer:

1. Has less access to a car for daytime shopping;
2. Tends to be less educated;
3. Is likely to have more children living at home;
4. Is more likely to have a family income under $15,000 annually; and
5. The chances are greater that the head of the house-hold will be a blue-collar worker, clerical employee, or a salesman rather than a professional.

The Measurement of Cognitive Dissonance:
Some Experimental Findings

Asking consumers how dissonant they were may measure their levels of anxiety and may produce invalid indices of cognitive dissonance. Subjects with high anxiety are likely to answer in such a way as to be classified as dissonant even when they did not experience cognitive dissonance.

MARKETING researchers have applied a variety of behavioral science theories in order to better understand consumer buying processes. Festinger’s theory of cognitive dissonance is one which has provided relevant, testable hypotheses. However, various experiments testing such hypotheses have produced evidence that both supports and conflicts with the basic theory itself. This article discusses certain methodological problems which may be contributing to such confusion.

Experiments may commit at least two potential errors in dissonance studies. The first is the error of concluding that the predicted and observed behavior is the result of an attempt to reduce cognitive dissonance when in fact the behavior was caused by something other than an attempt at dissonance reduction. The second error is that of measuring some variable other than dissonance.

A problem in the study of dissonance is its accurate measurement. In this regard, dissonance has been measured either directly or indirectly. The direct measure of dissonance has significant appeal, since it greatly simplifies experimental design; however, the validity of this approach is open to question.

Measuring Dissonance Directly

Attempts to measure dissonance directly have been reported in several issues of the JOURNAL OF MARKETING. If this method is valid, it would overcome one of the most difficult problems in dissonance research in that the experimenter does not have to decide upon the modes of dissonance reduction to be blocked off and the one to be measured. The researcher could also examine the relationship between the aroused dissonance and the strength of dissonance reduction attempts. This would permit him to test a basic assumption of dissonance theory; namely, the greater the dissonance, the stronger the dissonance reduction attempts.

4Brehm and Cohen, same reference as footnote 1, p. 313.