

AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF HOW CONSUMERS VIEW OPTOMETRISTS' ADVERTISING

H. Ronald Moser, Cumberland University
rmoser@cumberland.edu

Gordon L. Freeman, Jr., Middle Tennessee State University
gfreeman@mtsu.edu

ABSTRACT

This paper represents the responses of 423 consumers to a mail survey examining views concerning advertising by optometrists in the United States. Historically, most professions prohibited licensed members from engaging in speech activities that proposed a commercial transaction, i.e., advertising. However, the history of an optometrist's legal right to advertise is not the main focus of this article. A brief review of the past, present, and possible future of such rights might assist readers in understanding the revolutionary constitutional and commercial speech changes that have occurred over the past three decades. An optometrist's legal right to advertise in the United States has developed as part of the evolutionary interpretation of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Our purposes for this study were to determine (a) consumers' attitudes toward advertising by optometrists and (b) whether occupation, age, race, marital status, number of children in household, total family household income, education, and gender of the consumer accounted for any significant differences in consumers' attitudes concerning optometrists who advertise in the United States. It was the intent of the study to discover information that would be useful to optometrists in planning marketing strategies and improving the quality of their advertising. The study seems to confirm the belief of many marketing professionals that advertising and marketing clearly have a place in the future of optometrists' services.

INTRODUCTION

For the health professions, marketing has traditionally been a controversial issue, and the notion of using advertising to promote a professional's practice is relatively new. However, according to Rizzo and Zeckhauser, advertising by optometrists and healthcare professionals has increased dramatically during the past decade, and this trend seems likely to continue (Rizzo & Zeckhauser, 1992; Moser, 2008), although many professionals find themselves ill-equipped to handle the dynamics of a changing environment, especially without some form of ongoing marketing plan. Most professional societies and associations have prohibited the marketing of their services (Lee, 2002; Carabello, 2003; Altman, 2003; Johns Hopkins, 2013). These optometrists and healthcare professionals believe advertising would have an adverse effect on the image of the profession in general and have no impact on competitive price reduction (Duffus,

1990; Ward, 2014). Also, a 1985 study conducted by Wright, Raho, and Berkowitz concluded that advertising and marketing are controversial topics among healthcare professionals. The study further notes the perception that advertising is evil no longer persists. The study also states the fear that advertising would lead to fraud and hucksterism has not materialized. The chance of false advertising is becoming remote in a modern society where such practices would not be tolerated by consumers, other optometrists, or other healthcare professionals (Wright, Raho, & Berkowitz, 1989; DeCresenzo, 2002; Staff Writer, 2009).

However, in a study conducted by Stevens, McConkey, and Loudon in 1990 of marketing professionals in a southern metropolitan area, strong sentiments against advertising by medical professionals were noted. The results indicated that optometrists and healthcare professionals were concerned advertising would impair public confidence in the profession, would not be credible, would not help a patient make more informed decisions, and would not help patients choose the most competent optometrist for a specific problem (Stevens, McConkey, & Loudon, 1990). It was common for professional codes of ethics to proscribe direct client or patient solicitation of any kind. In 1977, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down many of the bans against advertising in the ruling *Bates v. the State of Arizona*, holding they effectively reduced competition by depriving organizations and individuals of the right to inform potential clients and patients about their services (Bates, 1977). Since the *Bates* ruling, professionals have increased their advertising, and many have developed comprehensive advertising campaigns (Kotler and Clarke, 1987). Consumers can experience advertising by optometrists and healthcare professionals through a variety of media including television, radio, newspapers, billboards, telephone, direct mail, professional magazines, and popular magazines (Gadish, 2008).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

During the past several years, optometrists have become highly competitive in marketing services to the public, and it has become common to see optometrists advertising their services via a number of media. In this study, the researchers used a survey instrument previously developed by Miller and Waller (1979) and Hite (1982) to determine (a) consumers' attitudes toward advertising by optometrists and (b) whether occupation, age, race, marital status, number of children in household, total family household income, education, or gender of the consumer accounted for any significant difference in attitude toward optometrists who advertise. The intent of this study was to discover information that would be useful to optometrists in planning marketing strategies and improving the quality of their advertising. The results of this study may be useful to optometrists and other professional service providers who want to create more effective promotional strategies and could also provide insights for those with promotional expertise who advise clients in these fields including academicians as well as advertising and public relations firms.

BACKGROUND AND GENERAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Commercial speech, e.g., business and professional advertising, has not always enjoyed First Amendment protection. Furthermore, most professional associations (American Bar Association, AMA, etc.) traditionally explicitly prohibited licensed members from engaging in advertising their services to the public (Kershen, 1990; Altman, 2003; Jacobson, 2013). Such proscriptions were usually upheld by the courts, whose longstanding legal position was clearly enunciated in an early decision by the U.S. Supreme Court (*Valentine*, 1942). The Court ruled that the First Amendment did not impose restraints on government regulation of commercial advertising. The Supreme Court did not critically re-examine this position for more than 30 years. Then in 1975 the Court held that the “relationship of speech to the marketplace of products or of services does not make it valueless in the marketplace of ideas” (*Bigelow*, 1975; *Goldfarb v. Virginia State Bar Association*, 1975).

One year later the Court clearly reaffirmed the new First Amendment protection for commercial speech. In 1976, the Court struck down a state statute that prohibited licensed optometrists from advertising prices of prescription drugs, stating that even if an advertiser’s interest is “a purely economic one, that hardly disqualifies him from protection under the First Amendment” (*Virginia State Board of Pharmacy*, 1976; *Bates v. State Bar of Arizona*, 1977). The following year the Court recognized that providing healthcare services was both a profession and a business, and in order to survive in a changing and competitive environment, healthcare providers had to adopt modern business practices. These practices would include advertising for new patients (Endresen and Wintz, 2002). This was when the Court established the bedrock foundation for the constitutional protection of optometrists’ advertising. The Court was asked to decide whether a “state may prevent the publication in a newspaper of appellant’s truthful advertisement concerning the availability and terms of routine legal and healthcare services” (*Bates*, 1977). In response, the Court held that “blanket suppression of healthcare advertising—does abridge First Amendment rights” (*Bates*, 1977). In *Bates* and other decisions, the Court has recognized that a state has a “substantial interest” in professional and healthcare advertising and may impose “reasonable restrictions on the time, place, and manner of advertising” (Martel Jr., 1997).

During the 29 years since *Bates* was decided, courts have often reviewed the issue of constitutional protection for professionals who advertise. Cases have addressed such issues as the solicitation of patients in person, listing of professional practice specialties on letterheads, use of illustrations/pictures in ads, and use of targeted direct-mail solicitations. A review of these cases demonstrates that while the courts have permitted some state limitations on optometrists’ advertising, the right of healthcare professionals to engage in truthful commercial advertising has consistently been upheld (*Ohralik*, 1978; *In re R.M.J.*, 1982; *Zauderer*, 1985; *Shapero*, 1988; *Peel*, 1990; *Florida Bar*, 1995; Ross, 2015).

During this time the business practices of healthcare professionals have undergone many changes. One of these changes is that consumers are becoming more involved in their own healthcare and are willing to take more responsibility to obtain adequate treatments than in the

past (Handlin, Mosca, Forgione, & Pitta, 2003). Another change is the frequent use of advertising. Today it is fairly common in most parts of the country for people to see one of the many thousands of optometrists' advertisements shown on television every day, receive a spam e-mail advertisement from an optometrist, view one of the many hundreds of yellow page optometrist ads while using the phone book, or even see some of the hundreds of highway billboards promoting healthcare services or optometrists that are permitted in some areas of the nation (Carabello, 2003). A marketing budget has become critical for most medical practices. Many healthcare professionals and optometrists now use marketing consulting firms or have their own internal marketing/advertising committees (Sahl, 2003; Gadish, 2009).

According to a study by Butler and Abernethy (1996), yellow page ads have been the most popular form of advertising by optometrists and healthcare professionals. This study revealed that every month approximately 21.6 million adults in the United States refer to the yellow pages before obtaining medical care (Butler & Abernethy, 1996), although a study conducted by Reade and Ratzan in 1987 revealed that yellow pages are potentially misleading to consumers and that member boards of the American Board of Medical Specialties should consider ways to diminish this possible misrepresentation (Reade & Ratzan, 1987). Such ads are now the top revenue category for the directory; optometrists and professionals such as doctors spend more than \$700 million annually to be listed. In the year 2000 they spent \$230 million on television advertising just in the nation's top 75 TV markets (Freedman, 2001).

While the attitude of optometrists and healthcare professionals toward advertising is mixed and the attitude of most state regulators has generally been negative, the attitude of consumers has historically been fairly positive (Hekmat & Heischmidt, 1991; Moser, 2008; Owens, 2005). Since professional organization advertising became commonplace after the *Bates* decision, there have been many professional organization-sponsored and academic studies designed to measure consumers' and healthcare providers' attitudes toward advertising. The results of a study conducted by Moncrief and Bush (1988) revealed that consumers felt advertising by professionals was somewhat helpful in making a decision about healthcare providers. Whether advertising attracts new patients, the concern of healthcare professionals and optometrists has been the focus of several academic studies. The answer has been a definite "yes." These studies show most optometrists and healthcare professionals who advertise will likely see an increase in the number of lower- to middle-income patients. Optometrists who advertise discover quickly that advertising, though usually very expensive, works if it is done properly and ethically. One study found the return on dollars invested in advertising by healthcare services providers was four to six times the cost (Freedman, 2001; Schnuckle, 2015).

The above discussion shows that professional advertising usually works, produces an increase in patient flow, yields a good return on optometrists' advertising dollars, and is protected by the First Amendment. It shows that historically consumers have not always had a positive view of optometrists who advertise but believe optometrists' advertisements provide useful information. This study explores opinions regarding the informational function of, importance of price in, deception in, future of, and appropriate media for optometrists' advertising. Specifically, the study examines attitudes concerning whether optometrists' advertising would (1) provide useful information to the public, (2) increase the costs of optometrists' services, (3) increase the quality of optometrists' services in the future, (4) help consumers make more intelligent choices between

optometrists, (5) tend to lower the credibility and dignity of their services, and (6) make the public more aware of optometrists' services.

PROCEDURE

Much of the initial planning of this study was based on Hite's study at the University of Arkansas (Hite, 1982). The Hite study indicated that advertising and marketing can be advantageous to healthcare professionals. Most healthcare professionals will generally find that consumers are aware of their advertising and appreciate the information communicated to them through advertisements. Hite suggested that healthcare professionals who research their target market and its significant attitudes are likely to enjoy a competitive advantage over the competition. Acknowledgement is given to Hite's research instrument as well as Miller and Waller's (1979), which served as bases for the questionnaire in the current study. Also, acknowledgment is given to the organization and writing style of Hite's study, which served as a model for this paper.

A four-part questionnaire was used to collect the data. The first section of the questionnaire concerned demographic characteristics of the respondents including city of residence, occupation, age, sex, race, marital status, number of children in household, total family household income, and education.

The second section included 19 statements designed to measure how favorably consumers perceived advertising by optometrists. The respondents were asked to answer Likert-type questions regarding the strength of their agreement on a scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Tables 1 through 5 contain these 19 statements.

The third and fourth sections of the questionnaire listed 10 different media optometrists could use to advertise their services. The respondents were asked to answer Likert-type questions regarding the strength of their agreement as to whether each medium was appropriate for optometrists to use. The responses ranged from "very appropriate" to "very inappropriate." The researchers asked the Marketing System Group (a research company in Fort Washington, Pennsylvania) to draw a random sample of 4,000 consumers from the 10 metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) in Tennessee: Chattanooga, Clarksville, Cleveland, Jackson, Johnson City, Kingsport-Bristol, Knoxville, Memphis, Morristown, and Nashville. Appropriate numbers from each MSA were drawn according to the ratio of each MSA's population to the total population of all 10 urban areas. The research instrument was mailed to these consumers, and 423 usable questionnaires were received and used in this study, representing a 9.55 percent response rate. This sample of 423 respondents represents a subset of the United States, or more specifically, a subset of the residents of the state of Tennessee.

STATISTICAL TESTS

The data obtained from the 423 respondents via the research instrument were analyzed by tabulating the frequency percentages for each item on the questionnaire. Cross-tabulations were then performed between the demographic factors (occupation, age, sex, race, marital status, number of children in household, total family household income, and education) and the 19 attitudinal statements in Section 11 of the questionnaire. Tables 1 through 5 provide the distribution of responses to the 19 statements in the questionnaire about optometrists' advertising. Chi-square tests were then performed to detect any significant differences between the cross-tabulations. In general, the chi-square analysis is employed when researchers want to determine whether there is an association between two or more populations or variables of a particular characteristic being studied. The significance level is the point at which a relationship is significant. This value lies between 0.0 and 1.0. Values closer to zero have greater significance. Therefore, a smaller level of significance (i.e., 0.05) means a conclusion is correct between 95 and 99 percent of the time. Chi-square probability of 0.05 is commonly used by social scientists doing business research (Lind, Marchal, & Wathen, 2005). The level of significance for all statistical tests for this study was set at 0.05.

FINDINGS

The data obtained from the 423 respondents via the research instrument were analyzed by tabulating the frequency percentages for each item on the questionnaire. Tables 1 through 5 illustrate the distribution of consumer responses to the 19 statements in the questionnaire about optometrists with respect to advertising for the 2016 sample.

Consumer Attitudes toward Advertising Optometrists' Services

The percentages given in Table 1 illustrate the distribution of consumer responses to the 19 statements in the questionnaire about optometrists' advertising. With regard to consumers' present image of optometrists (statement 9), 64.3 percent agreed they presently have a high image, 24.6 percent had no opinion, and 11.2 percent said they do not have a high image.

TABLE 1: FREQUENCY PERCENTAGES OF CONSUMER RESPONSES TOWARD ATTITUDE STATEMENTS (IN PERCENT) FOR OPTOMETRISTS' ADVERTISING

Statement	Attitude Response				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4. It is proper for optometrists to advertise.	15.8	54.6	18.0	9.5	2.1
9. I presently have a high image of optometrists.	11.8	52.5	24.6	9.5	1.7
10. In general, my image of optometrists would be lower as a result of advertising.	0.7	11.1	22.5	54.6	11.1
15. Advertising by optometrists would tend to lower the credibility and dignity of their services.	4.7	19.4	16.8	48.0	11.1
19. I would use the services (if needed) of optometrists who advertise.	10.9	61.0	21.0	5.7	1.4

In general, consumers indicated a somewhat favorable image of optometrists' advertising. Seventy-one percent felt it is proper for optometrists to advertise (statement 4). Also, 71.9 percent agreed and only 7.1 percent disagreed with statement 19 that they would use the services (if needed) of optometrists who advertise. Also, 65.7 percent disagreed with statement 10 that in general their image of optometrists would be lower as a result of advertising. Finally, 59.1 percent disagreed with statement 15 that advertising by optometrists would tend to lower the credibility and dignity of their services, 24.1 percent agreed, and 16.8 percent were undecided.

Informational Function of Advertising Optometrists' Services

The percentages given in Table 2 illustrate the importance of information in optometrists' advertising and show that opinions are favorable on this topic.

TABLE 2: FREQUENCY PERCENTAGES OF THE PUBLIC’S RESPONSES TO ATTITUDE STATEMENTS ABOUT THE INFORMATIONAL ASPECT OF OPTOMETRISTS’ ADVERTISING

Statement	Attitude Response				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. The public would be provided useful information through advertising by optometrists.	13.2	68.3	11.3	5.7	1.4
5. Advertising by optometrists would be a useful means of informing potential clients about services and specialties.	26.5	53.0	9.7	8.0	2.8
11. Advertising would help the public make more intelligent choices among optometrists.	12.3	55.8	13.0	16.8	1.9
16. Advertising makes the public more aware of the services of optometrists.	12.5	56.0	13.9	14.4	3.1

The results show 81.5 percent of the respondents agreed with statement 1 that the public would be provided useful information through advertising by optometrists, while 11.3 percent were undecided. The respondents agreed (79.5 percent) that optometrists’ advertising would be a useful means of informing potential clients about services and specialties (statement 5). Also, 68.5 percent agreed with statement 16 that advertising makes the public more aware of optometrists’ services. Finally, 68.1 percent agreed that advertising would help consumers make more intelligent choices between optometrists (statement 11), while 18.7 percent disagreed. These results indicate members of the public view optometrists’ advertising as a reliable source of information but still not more reliable than word of mouth.

Importance of Price in Advertising Optometrists’ Services

The percentages given in Table 3 illustrate the importance of price in optometrists’ advertising. In response to statement 7 that it is good to deal with optometrists who offer the lowest prices for routine services, 40.9 percent agreed, 37.6 percent disagreed, and 21.5 percent were undecided. Also, 73.8 percent agreed it is better to deal with a reputable optometrist than one who offers the lowest price (statement 18).

TABLE 3: FREQUENCY PERCENTAGES OF THE PUBLIC’S RESPONSES TO ATTITUDE STATEMENTS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF PRICE IN ADVERTISING OPTOMETRISTS’ SERVICES

Statement	Attitude Response				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2. When optometrists advertise, the costs are passed on to customers through higher prices.	7.3	59.8	19.4	11.3	2.1
7. It is good to deal with optometrists who offer the lowest prices for routine services.	8.0	32.9	21.5	27.4	10.2
13. When optometrists advertise, prices are lowered due to more competition.	5.0	34.3	28.4	27.2	5.2
18. It is better to deal with reputable optometrists than with the one that offers the lowest price.	20.6	53.2	15.1	9.2	1.9

With regard to the effect on prices, 40.8 percent of respondents agreed with statement 13 that optometrists’ advertising lowers prices due to more competition. Consumers also believed (67.1 percent) that prices were increased rather than decreased because of the costs of advertising (statement 2). It would appear the primary benefit of optometrists’ advertising is not the communication of price information but providing information about optometrists’ services. Respondents also indicated the optometrist’s reputation, image, and services are more important than specific price information.

Deception in Advertising Optometrists’ Services

The percentages given in Table 4 illustrate the distribution of the public’s responses to statements in the questionnaire concerning deception in advertising optometrists’ services. In response to statement 6 that advertising by optometrists would be more deceptive than other forms of advertising, 53.9 percent disagreed, and 23.7 percent agreed. Also, 64.1 percent of respondents disagreed with statement 12 that they would be suspicious of optometrists who advertise. However, 72.3 percent agreed with statement 17 that advertising by optometrists would primarily benefit the uninformed citizenry. Consumers agreed (64.3 percent) with statement 8 that people can rely more on what friends tell them about optometrists than on advertising. These results suggest that one of the primary benefits of optometrists’ advertising is the communication of information about services rather than price.

They also indicate that while respondents view advertising by optometrists as potentially no more deceptive than other forms of advertising, personal recommendation was a more reliable source of information.

TABLE 4: FREQUENCY PERCENTAGES OF THE PUBLIC’S RESPONSES TO ATTITUDE STATEMENTS ABOUT DECEPTION IN OPTOMETRISTS’ ADVERTISING

Statement	Attitude Response				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6. Advertising by optometrists would be more deceptive than other forms of advertising.	5.7	18.0	22.5	42.6	11.3
8. You generally can rely more on what a friend tells you about optometrists than on advertising.	18.0	46.3	13.5	18.9	3.3
12. I would be suspicious of optometrists who advertise.	5.4	15.8	14.7	51.8	12.3
17. Advertising by optometrists would benefit the uninformed citizenry.	13.2	59.1	17.5	8.7	1.4

The Future of Optometrists’ Advertising

The percentages given in Table 5 illustrate responses to statements in the questionnaire concerning consumers’ attitudes about the future of optometrists’ advertising. When asked if they would like to see more advertising by optometrists (statement 14), 37.6 percent of respondents agreed, 35.9 percent were undecided, and 26.5 percent disagreed. In addition, a majority (48.3 percent) of respondents agreed and 31.9 percent disagreed that advertising would increase the quality of optometrists’ services in the future (statement 3). It would appear that optometrists need to conduct a comprehensive analysis of their target market to determine the attitudes and preferences of their clients.

TABLE 5: FREQUENCY PERCENTAGES OF THE PUBLIC’S RESPONSES TO ATTITUDE STATEMENTS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF OPTOMETRISTS’ ADVERTISING

Statement	Attitude Response				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3. Advertising will increase the quality of optometrists’ service in the future.	10.9	37.4	19.9	28.4	3.5
14. I would like to see more advertising by optometrists.	5.4	32.2	35.9	22.2	4.3

IMPACT OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS ON CONSUMERS’ ATTITUDES

Significant differences in consumers’ attitudes were found with regard to age, occupation, gender, income, and education. Since the cross-tabulations of race and marital status were not significant for any of the 19 statements, it appears the perceptions/attitudes within these demographics toward optometrists’ advertising are similar to the responses for all respondents. Findings follow for cross-tabulations for age, occupation, gender, income, and education for all statements for which significant differences (.05 level) in attitudes were found.

Age of Consumers and Advertising by Optometrists

The sample of 423 respondents was divided by age into two groups: consumers under 46 and consumers 46 and older. Significant differences in consumers’ attitudes were found regarding statement 6 that advertising by optometrists would be more deceptive than other forms of advertising. Of younger respondents, 50.5 percent disagreed, and 26.5 percent agreed. Of older respondents, 64.2 percent disagreed, and 15.1 percent agreed. Significant differences in consumers’ attitudes were found regarding statement 7 that it is good to deal with optometrists who offer the lowest prices for routine services. Most of the younger respondents (46.1 percent) agreed and 32.8 percent disagreed, while 51.9 percent of older respondents disagreed and 25.5 percent agreed. Significant differences in consumers’ attitudes were found regarding statement 12 that they would be suspicious of optometrists who advertise: 61.2 percent of younger respondents disagreed, and 24.6 percent agreed. Of older respondents, 72.6 percent disagreed, and 16.0 percent were undecided. Significant differences in consumers’ attitudes were found regarding statement 13 that when optometrists advertise prices are lowered due to more competition. Of the younger respondents, 41.3 percent agreed, and 29.0 percent disagreed; of the older respondents, 42.5 percent disagreed, and 33.0 percent agreed. A study by Yavas and Riecken in 2001 reported that attitudes toward professional advertising are not consistent or homogeneous across consumers and the healthcare segment.

They also reported that younger consumers hold more positive attitudes toward advertising by healthcare providers than their older counterparts (Yavas and Riechen, 2001). Significant differences in consumers' attitudes were found regarding statement 15 that advertising by optometrists would tend to lower the credibility and dignity of their services: of younger respondents, 54.9 percent disagreed, and 28.4 percent agreed; of older respondents, 71.7 percent disagreed, and 17.0 percent were undecided. Significant differences in consumers' attitudes were found regarding statement 18 that it is better to deal with reputable optometrists than with the one who offers the lowest price: of younger respondents, 69.4 percent agreed, 18.6 percent were undecided, and 12.0 percent disagreed; of older respondents, 86.8 percent agreed, and 08.5 percent disagreed. Significant differences in consumers' attitudes were found regarding statement 19 that they would use the services (if needed) of optometrists who advertise: of younger respondents, 68.1 percent disagreed, and 23.0 percent were undecided; of older respondents, 83.0 percent agreed, and 15.1 percent were undecided.

TABLE 6: DIFFERENCES IN CONSUMERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD ADVERTISING BY OPTOMETRISTS BASED ON AGE

Statement Age	Attitude Response			Significance Overall Chi Square Probability
	Agree or Strongly Agree	Undecided	Disagree or Strongly Disagree	
6. Advertising by optometrists would be more deceptive than other forms of advertising.				
Younger	84 (26.5)*	73 (23.0)	160 (50.5)	0.0259
Older	16 (15.1)	22 (20.8)	68 (64.2)	
7. It is good to deal with optometrists who offer the lowest prices for routine services.				
Younger	146 (46.1)	67 (21.1)	104 (32.8)	0.0003
Older	27 (25.5)	24 (22.6)	55 (51.9)	
12. I would be suspicious of optometrists who advertise.				
Younger	78 (24.6)	45 (14.2)	194 (61.2)	0.0150
Older	12 (11.3)	17 (16.0)	77 (72.6)	
13. When optometrists advertise, prices are lowered due to more competition.				
Younger	131 (41.3)	94 (29.7)	92 (29.0)	0.0377
Older	35 (33.0)	26 (24.5)	45 (42.5)	
15. Advertising by optometrists would tend to lower the credibility and dignity of services.				
Younger	90 (28.4)	53 (16.7)	174 (54.9)	0.0012
Older	12 (11.3)	18 (17.0)	76 (71.7)	
18. It is better to deal with reputable optometrists than with the one that offers the lowest price.				
Younger	220 (69.4)	59 (18.6)	38 (12.0)	0.0008
Older	92 (86.8)	05 (04.7)	09 (08.5)	
19. I would use the services (if needed) of optometrists who advertise.				
Younger	216 (68.1)	73 (23.0)	28 (08.8)	0.0060
Older	88 (83.0)	16 (15.1)	02 (01.9)	

* Parentheses indicate row percentages.

Occupation of Consumers and Advertising by Optometrists

The sample of 423 respondents was divided into two occupational groups: professional and nonprofessional. Table 7 shows the significant differences between the attitudes of these two groups with regard to advertising by optometrists.

TABLE 7: DIFFERENCES IN CONSUMERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD ADVERTISING BY OPTOMETRISTS BASED ON OCCUPATION

Statement Occupation	Attitude Response			Significance Overall Chi Square Probability
	Agree or Strongly Agree	Undecided	Disagree or Strongly Disagree	
2. When optometrists advertise, the costs are passed on to customers through higher prices.				
Professional	71 (58.2)*	25(20.5)	26 (21.3)	0.0069
Nonprofessional	213 (70.8)	57 (18.9)	31 (10.3)	
3. Advertising will increase the quality of optometrists' service in the future.				
Professional	47 (38.5)	27 (22.1)	48 (39.3)	0.0341
Nonprofessional	157 (52.2)	57 (18.9)	87 (28.9)	
6. Advertising by optometrists would be more deceptive than other forms of advertising.				
Professional	19 (15.6)	26 (21.3)	77 (63.1)	0.0233
Nonprofessional	81 (26.9)	69 (22.9)	151 (50.2)	
13. When optometrists advertise, prices are lowered due to more competition.				
Professional	37 (30.3)	34 (27.9)	51 (41.8)	0.0167
Nonprofessional	129 (42.8)	86 (28.6)	86 (28.6)	
14. I would like to see more advertising by optometrists.				
Professional	35 (28.7)	54 (44.3)	33 (27.0)	0.0311
Nonprofessional	124 (41.2)	98 (32.6)	79 (26.2)	
15. Advertising by optometrists would tend to lower the credibility and dignity of their services.				
Professional	19 (15.6)	21 (17.2)	82 (67.2)	0.0285
Nonprofessional	83 (27.6)	50 (16.6)	168 (55.8)	

* Parentheses indicate row percentages.

In response to statement 2 (when optometrists advertise, the costs are passed on to customers through higher prices), more of the nonprofessional respondents agreed (70.8 percent), while more professional respondents also agreed (58.2 percent). More nonprofessionals agreed (52.2 percent) with statement 3 that advertising will increase the quality of optometrists' service in the future. More professional respondents disagreed (63.1 percent) with statement 6 that advertising by optometrists would be more deceptive than other forms of advertising. Nonprofessional respondents agreed more strongly (42.8 percent) with statement 13 that when optometrists advertise, prices are lowered due to more competition. More nonprofessionals also agreed (41.2 percent) with statement 14 that they would like to see more advertising by optometrists. More of the professional respondents disagreed (67.2 percent) with statement 15 that advertising by optometrists would tend to lower the credibility and dignity of their services.

Sex of Consumers and Advertising by Optometrists

The sample was divided into males and females. Table 8 shows the significant differences between the attitudes of these groups with regard to advertising by optometrists.

TABLE 8: DIFFERENCES IN CONSUMERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD ADVERTISING BY OPTOMETRISTS BASED ON SEX

Statement Sex	Attitude Response			Significance Overall Chi Square Probability
	Agree or Strongly Agree	Undecided	Disagree or Strongly Disagree	
2. When optometrists advertise, the costs are passed on to customers through higher prices.				
Male	161 (73.9)*	36 (16.5)	21 (9.6)	0.0072
Female	123 (60.0)	46 (22.4)	36 (17.6)	
3. Advertising will increase the quality of optometrists' service in the future.				
Male	113 (51.8)	48 (22.0)	57 (26.2)	0.0308
Female	91 (44.4)	36 (17.6)	78 (38.0)	
6. Advertising by optometrists would be more deceptive than other forms of advertising.				
Male	64 (29.4)	56 (25.6)	98 (45.0)	0.0006
Female	36 (17.6)	39 (19.0)	130 (62.4)	
12. I would be suspicious of optometrists who advertise				
Male	55 (25.2)	36 (16.5)	127 (58.3)	0.0346
Female	35 (17.1)	26 (12.7)	144 (70.2)	
15. Advertising by optometrists would tend to lower the credibility and dignity of their services.				
Male	68 (31.2)	35 (16.1)	115 (52.7)	0.0019
Female	34 (16.6)	36 (17.6)	135 (65.8)	

* Parentheses indicate row percentages.

In response to statement 2 that said when optometrists advertise, the costs are passed on to customers through higher prices, more male respondents agreed (73.9 percent), while more female respondents also agreed (60.0 percent). More of the males also agreed (51.8 percent) with statement 3 that advertising will increase the quality of optometrists' service in the future. More females disagreed (62.4 percent) with statement 6 that advertising by optometrists would be more deceptive than other forms of advertising. More female respondents also disagreed (70.2 percent) with statement 12 that they would be suspicious of optometrists who advertise. Also, more of the female respondents disagreed (65.8 percent) with statement 15 that advertising by optometrists would tend to lower the credibility and dignity of their services.

Income of Consumers and Advertising by Optometrists

The sample was divided into three income groups. The low-income group was defined as \$30,000 or less, the middle-income group as \$30,001-\$60,000, and the high income group as more than \$60,000. As shown in Table 9, no statements showed a significant disagreement in overall opinion among the three income groups. All three income groups did not agree with statement 3 that advertising will increase the quality of optometrists' service in the future. The low-income group agreed as strongly as the middle-income group (60.7 percent for low, 50.0 percent for middle). Also, the higher (66.7 percent), middle (49.4 percent) and low-income (46.2 percent) groups disagreed with statement 6 that advertising by optometrists would be more deceptive than other forms of advertising. A somewhat deeper analysis of the data shows that the middle income group is almost equally divided between professional and nonprofessional respondents, and the nonprofessional respondents in the high income group do not agree as strongly with statement 7 as the other groups. More of the high- and low-income respondents disagreed with statement 12 that they would be suspicious of optometrists who advertise. More of the middle-income respondents agreed (30.4 percent), while more of the high income respondents disagreed (72.6 percent). Low-income respondents agreed more strongly (47.7 percent) with statement 13 than when optometrists advertise, prices are lowered due to more competition. Significant differences in consumers' attitudes were found regarding statement 14 that they would like to see more advertising by optometrists: of middle income respondents, 48.5 percent agreed and 27.7 percent disagreed. More high-income respondents disagreed (74.8 percent) with statement 15 that advertising by optometrists would tend to lower the credibility and dignity of their services. High-income respondents disagreed more strongly (79.3 percent) with statement 18 that it is better to deal with reputable optometrists than with the one that offers the lowest price.

TABLE 9: DIFFERENCES IN CONSUMERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD ADVERTISING BY OPTOMETRISTS BASED ON INCOME

Statement Income	Attitude Response			Significance Overall Chi Square Probability
	Agree or Strongly Agree	Undecided	Disagree or Strongly Disagree	
3. Advertising will increase the quality of optometrists' service in the future.				
Low	79 (60.7)*	21 (16.2)	30 (23.1)	0.0005
Middle	79 (50.0)	27 (17.1)	52 (32.9)	
High	46 (34.1)	36 (26.6)	53 (39.3)	
6. Advertising by optometrists would be more deceptive than other forms of advertising.				
Low	32 (24.6)	38 (29.2)	60 (46.2)	0.0024
Middle	47 (29.7)	33 (20.9)	78 (49.4)	
High	21 (15.6)	24 (17.7)	90 (66.7)	
7. It is good to deal with optometrists who offer the lowest prices for routine services.				
Low	64 (49.2)	30 (23.1)	36 (27.7)	0.0310
Middle	63 (39.9)	35 (22.2)	60 (38.0)	
High	46 (34.1)	26 (19.3)	63 (46.6)	
12. I would be suspicious of optometrists who advertise.				
Low	26 (20.0)	22 (16.9)	82 (63.1)	0.0034
Middle	48 (30.4)	19 (12.0)	91 (57.6)	
High	16 (11.8)	21 (15.6)	98 (72.6)	
13. When optometrists advertise, prices are lowered due to more competition.				
Low	62 (47.7)	36 (27.7)	32 (24.6)	0.0077
Middle	67 (42.5)	41 (25.9)	50 (31.6)	
High	37 (27.4)	43 (31.9)	55 (40.7)	
14. I would like to see more advertising by optometrists.				
Low	63 (48.5)	31 (23.8)	36 (27.7)	0.0031
Middle	58 (36.7)	62 (39.2)	38 (24.1)	
High	38 (28.1)	59 (43.8)	38 (28.1)	
15. Advertising by optometrists would tend to lower the credibility and dignity of their services.				
Low	34 (26.2)	28 (21.5)	68 (52.3)	0.0000
Middle	56 (35.4)	21 (13.3)	81 (51.3)	
High	12 (08.9)	22 (16.3)	101 (74.8)	
18. It is better to deal with reputable optometrists than with the one that offers the lowest price.				
Low	87 (66.9)	30 (23.1)	13 (10.0)	0.0348
Middle	118 (74.7)	19 (12.0)	21 (13.3)	
High	107 (79.3)	15 (11.1)	13 (09.6)	

* Parentheses indicate row percentages.

Education of Consumers and Advertising by Optometrists

The sample of 423 respondents was divided into a low-education group and a high-education group. The low-education group was defined as having less than a college degree and the high-education group as having a college degree. More high-education respondents agreed (69.0 percent) with statement 11 that advertising would help the public make more intelligent choices among optometrists. More lower-income respondents also agreed more strongly (44.6 percent) with statement 13 that when optometrists advertise, prices are lowered due to more competition. Significant differences in consumers' attitudes were found regarding statement 14 that they would like to see more advertising by optometrists: 42.5 percent of the high-income group were undecided and 36.8 percent agreed. Also, more of the high-education respondents disagreed (66.7 percent) with statement 15 that advertising by optometrists would tend to lower the credibility and dignity of their services.

TABLE 10: DIFFERENCES IN CONSUMERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD ADVERTISING BY OPTOMETRISTS BASED ON EDUCATION

Statement Education	Attitude Response			Significance Overall Chi Square Probability
	Agree or Strongly Agree	Undecided	Disagree or Strongly Disagree	
11. Advertising would help the public make more intelligent choices among optometrists.				
Low	168 (67.7)*	25 (10.1)	55 (22.2)	0.0194
High	120 (69.0)	30 (17.2)	24 (13.8)	
13. When optometrists advertise, prices are lowered due to more competition.				
Low	111 (44.6)	67 (26.9)	71 (28.5)	0.0218
High	55 (31.6)	53 (30.5)	66 (37.9)	
14. I would like to see more advertising by optometrists.				
Low	95 (38.2)	78 (31.3)	76 (30.5)	0.0251
High	64 (36.8)	74 (42.5)	36 (20.7)	
15. Advertising by optometrists would tend to lower the credibility and dignity of their services.				
Low	69 (27.7)	46 (18.5)	134 (53.8)	0.0282
High	33 (19.0)	25 (14.4)	116 (66.7)	

* Parentheses indicate row percentages.

Race of Consumers and Advertising by Optometrists

Table 11 shows the significant differences between the attitudes of the 423 respondents based on race. The sample was divided into two groups: white and nonwhites. Table 11 shows the five

areas of disagreement between the two groups on their overall opinion. More of the nonwhite group (51.3 percent) agreed with statement 7 that it is good to deal with optometrists who offer the lowest prices for routine services. More of the nonwhite group (66.2 percent) agreed with statement 9 that they presently have a high image of optometrists. More of the white group (67.5 percent) disagreed with statement 12 that they would be suspicious of optometrists who advertise while, 50.0 percent of the nonwhite group also disagreed. The white respondents disagreed more strongly (62.1 percent) with statement 15 that advertising by optometrists would tend to lower the credibility and dignity of their services. Finally, 71.1 percent agreed with statement 16 that advertising makes the public more aware of optometrists' services

TABLE 11: DIFFERENCES IN CONSUMERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD ADVERTISING BY OPTOMETRISTS BASED ON RACE

Statement Race	Attitude Response			Significance Overall Chi Square Probability
	Agree or Strongly Agree	Undecided	Disagree or Strongly Disagree	
7. It is good to deal with optometrists who offer the lowest prices for routine services.				
White	132 (38.5)*	69 (20.1)	142 (41.4)	0.0036
Nonwhite	41 (51.3)	22 (27.5)	17 (21.2)	
9. I presently have a high image of optometrists.				
White	219 (63.8)	91 (26.5)	33 (9.7)	0.0393
Nonwhite	53 (66.2)	13 (16.3)	14 (17.5)	
12. I would be suspicious of optometrists who advertise.				
White	59 (17.2)	53 (15.5)	231 (67.3)	0.0001
Nonwhite	31 (38.8)	09 (11.2)	40 (50.0)	
15. Advertising by optometrists would tend to lower the credibility and dignity of their services.				
White	72 (21.0)	58 (16.9)	213 (62.1)	0.0064
Nonwhite	30 (37.5)	13 (16.2)	37 (46.3)	
16. Advertising makes the public more aware of the services of optometrists.				
White	244 (71.1)	40 (11.7)	59 (17.2)	0.0133
Nonwhite	46 (57.5)	19 (23.7)	15 (18.8)	

* Parentheses indicate row percentages.

Marital Status of Consumers and Advertising by Optometrists

The sample of 423 respondents was divided into groups based on marital status: single and married/once married. Table 12 shows the four areas with disagreement among groups on their

overall opinion. More of the single group (54.8 percent) agreed with statement 3 that advertising will increase the quality of optometrists' service in the future than the married/once married group (43.5 percent). More of the married/once married disagreed (60.6 percent) with statement 6 that advertising by optometrists would be more deceptive than other forms of advertising, while 44.6 percent of the single group also disagreed with this statement. Also, more of the single group agreed (47.5 percent) with statement 7 that it is good to deal with optometrists who offer the lowest prices for routine services, while 41.8 percent of the married/once married group disagreed. Once again, more of the married/once married disagreed (66.7 percent) with statement 15 that advertising by optometrists would tend to lower the credibility and dignity of their services, while 48.6 percent of the single group disagreed.

TABLE 12: DIFFERENCES IN CONSUMERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD ADVERTISING BY OPTOMETRISTS BASED ON MARITAL STATUS

Statement Marital Status	Attitude Response			Significance Overall Chi Square Probability
	Agree or Strongly Agree	Undecided	Disagree or Strongly Disagree	
3. Advertising will increase the quality of optometrists' service in the future.				
Single	97 (54.8)*	26 (14.7)	54 (30.5)	0.0300
Married/Once Married	107 (43.5)	58 (23.6)	81 (32.9)	
6. Advertising by optometrists would be more deceptive than other forms of advertising.				
Single	51 (28.8)	47 (26.6)	79 (44.6)	0.0051
Married/Once Married	49 (19.9)	48 (19.5)	149 (60.6)	
7. It is good to deal with optometrists who offer the lowest prices for routine services.				
Single	84 (47.5)	37 (20.9)	56 (31.6)	0.0469
Married/Once Married	89 (36.2)	54 (22.0)	103 (41.8)	
15. Advertising by optometrists would tend to lower the credibility and dignity of their services.				
Single	52 (29.4)	39 (22.0)	86 (48.6)	0.0008
Married/Once Married	50 (20.3)	32 (13.0)	164 (66.7)	

* Parentheses indicate row percentages.

Children of Consumers and Advertising by Optometrists

The sample of 423 respondents was divided into two groups: no children and children. Table 13 shows the three areas of disagreement between the two groups on their overall opinion. More of the children group disagreed (61.0 percent) with statement 6 that advertising by optometrists would be more deceptive than other forms of advertising, while 47.5 percent of the no-children group also disagreed. Also, more of the children group was undecided (43.0 percent) with

statement 14 that they would like to see more advertising by optometrists. More of the children group disagreed (66.0 percent) with statement 15 that advertising by optometrists would tend to lower the credibility and dignity of their services than the no-children group (52.9 percent).

TABLE 13: DIFFERENCES IN CONSUMERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD ADVERTISING BY OPTOMETRISTS BASED ON CHILDREN

Statement	Attitude Response			Significance Overall Chi Square Probability
	Agree or Strongly Agree	Undecided	Disagree or Strongly Disagree	
6. Advertising by optometrists would be more deceptive than other forms of advertising.				
No Children	60 (26.9)*	57 (25.6)	106 (47.5)	0.0213
Children	40 (20.0)	38 (19.0)	122 (61.0)	
14. I would like to see more advertising by optometrists.				
No Children	92 (41.3)	66 (29.6)	65 (29.1)	0.0163
Children	67 (33.5)	86 (43.0)	47 (23.5)	
15. Advertising by optometrists would tend to lower the credibility and dignity of their services.				
No Children	63 (28.3)	42 (18.8)	118 (52.9)	0.0226
Children	39 (19.5)	29 (14.5)	132 (66.0)	

* Parentheses indicate row percentages.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study have a number of implications. First, although consumers' opinions about advertising by optometrists are mixed, they look for and generally favor advertising as a means of obtaining some kinds of information about optometrists. The results in Tables 1 and 2 indicate consumers desire more information about the services of optometrists and feel that advertising by optometrists could help them learn about services and specialties of particular optometrists. Optometrists and other healthcare providers should be informed of these and similar survey results so they can begin to satisfy the healthcare needs and desires of the public.

However, it is interesting to note that, as indicated in Table 5, 37.6 percent wished to see more advertising by optometrists, 26.5 percent did not wish to see more advertising, and 35.9 percent of respondents were undecided about wanting to see more advertising by optometrists. Second, opinion leaders among the healthcare industry should be encouraged to use informational advertising. Much has been written about the ethical implications of advertising by professionals and the attitudes of those professionals who must make the decision whether or not to advertise.

Although many optometrists have indicated they would not advertise even if others did, it is likely some of these optometrists could be encouraged to try advertising if they were convinced it could be done tastefully and for the purpose of informing and serving the community.

From the marketer's viewpoint, the rapid change of attitudes based on changing demographic and cultural factors dictates a greater need for understanding the optometrists' market. The results in Table 6 indicate consumers of all ages are not in favor of optometrists' advertising their professional services; however, older consumers disagreed more strongly than the younger group. Both age groups also agreed that advertising will increase the quality of optometrists' services in the future. Here the younger consumers showed stronger agreement. Both groups strongly agreed it is better to deal with a reputable optometrist than one who offers the lowest price. Older consumers are more likely to identify with advertisements that depict them in roles similar to the ones they occupy in real life. Optometrists and other healthcare professionals who market services must closely monitor the changing attitudes of various age groups and be prepared to make whatever adjustments are necessary to keep pace with their expectations. Optometrists must clearly define potential consumers and devise well-defined marketing strategies.

Opinions based on race regarding the use of advertising by optometrists were mixed, according to Table 11. The results indicate that nonwhites viewed advertising as an information tool more favorably than whites. The white group felt advertising by optometrists would provide useful information, make the public more aware of the services and specialties of optometrists and help consumers make more intelligent choices between optometrists. Nonwhites also agreed regarding this information function. However, more whites disagreed that advertising by optometrists would be more deceptive than other forms of advertising. More of the younger group agreed that when optometrists advertise, prices are lowered due to more competition.

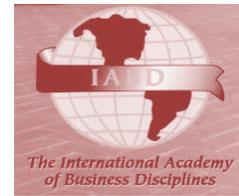
Both groups agreed the public would be provided useful information through advertising by optometrists. Also, all groups strongly agreed advertising would help the public make more intelligent choices among optometrists. The results in Table 8 indicate the male group agreed more strongly that advertising by optometrists would be more deceptive than other forms of advertising. The female group strongly disagreed they would be suspicious of optometrists who advertise.

This study seems to confirm the belief of many marketing professionals that advertising and marketing clearly have a place in the management and operation of an optometrist's practice. Although the present image of optometrists is positive, opinions are rather mixed as to whether it is proper for optometrists to advertise. The study also confirmed the quality of service and the reputation of optometrists are more important to the consumer than price. Optometrists will now find that consumers are generally receptive to their use of advertising as a means of communicating information about their services (Barr & McNeilly, 2003). Optometrists who carefully research the market and investigate attitudes and preferences of specific socioeconomic groups are likely to enjoy a competitive advantage over other optometrists.

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