Group Research Project

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Marketing 4040: Buyer Behavior

Group Project

All students must complete a major group project that is due at the end of the semester. The purpose of this project is to provide you with an opportunity to:

- examine a consumer behavior-related issue and/or problem in detail and first hand,
- gain experience analyzing a consumer behavior issue/problem that is not "pre-digested" or well laid out for you (e.g., you are not presented with all the relevant information in a tidy case format),
- design and analyze primary market research that you have collected,
- apply some of the important concepts and knowledge you have acquired in the course,
- combine your conceptual, theoretical, and analytic knowledge and skills with your creativity, and
- work through differences of opinion, perspectives, and assumptions that may occur among marketing colleagues (just as these occur among managers in firms!) who are working together on a project.

Group Formation

Students must complete the group project in self-selected (as opposed to instructor assigned) groups of about 5 students. These groups should be formed as early as possible (as soon as enrollment is stable-typically in the second or third week of class) so that adequate time can be devoted to selecting/generating a topic. While you will need to meet with your group outside of class, three group workshop days have been scheduled during class time to ensure that you have adequate time to meet with your group to work on the project.

Final Group Project

For the project, each group should select a real-world marketing issue in which consumer behavior plays a critical role (some examples are listed below). This issue can be one that a company or organization that you have access to is grappling with or one that you can acquire information about by reading business or other publications. Feel free to creatively follow your interests, but note that the issue you select should be of interest to any number of organizations. Some examples of consumer behavior issues that groups have been studied in the past include: (1) How Do Marketers Shape Young Consumers' Self Concept, (2) What Kinds of Consumers Collect Certain Products (e.g., Beanie Babies, Precious Moments Sculptures) and Why, (3) How to
Position Anti-Bacterial Gels to Different Consumer Segments, (4) Understanding the Psychology and Consumption Behavior of Latinos, & (5) Experiential Marketing and Appealing to Consumers' Senses.

Choose a topic for your project for which there is a high level of interest among your group members. Spend some time brainstorming about different possibilities. Don't decide on the first topic that comes to mind simply to end the first meeting. The time invested in this preliminary stage can pay off in the long run. If your project focuses on a particular product, service, or organization, I've found that students generally uncover more interesting and insightful results for new products, small share, underdeveloped products or product categories, products that have underutilized marketing (e.g., dentists, some banks), or products that have experienced a loss of appeal among consumers (small bookstores). On the other hand, feel free to study a more general topic that pertains to consumer behavior (e.g., overeating in America and the weight loss industry).

Your task for the project is two-fold: diagnose the key issues underlying the consumer behavior problem and develop a marketing plan consisting of suggestions for addressing the problems. To better understand the problem, you will be expected to obtain secondary data from the library, trade organizations, the company, etc. and to conduct your own primary research. This might entail conducting in depth interviews with one or more segments of relevant but reasonably accessible consumers or influencers, or run focus groups, administer surveys, or develop experiments. In addition to delivering a presentation of this project, a report of your analysis is due on the day of final project class presentations. No late reports will be accepted. Your report must be typed, contain appendices that offer details such as those pertaining to your primary research and your documented references (identified by numbers in the text), and not exceed 10 double-spaced pages, excluding appendices. Reports will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- Extent and soundness of the insightful inferences and recommendations or conclusions drawn from your references, primary research data, and general knowledge
- The soundness and internal consistency of the logic offered for all of your recommendations
- Appropriateness, quality, and thoughtfulness of your primary research materials, data analysis, and data interpretation
- Comprehensive and thoughtful coverage of the issues
- Extensiveness and insight-worthiness of references
- Identification and application of relevant consumer behavior concepts/theories from the course
- Presentation of the report in terms of organization of material and its logical presentation flow, sentence structure, and general professionalism

The final project should contain:

1. a statement of the consumer behavior issue being studied (1/2 to 1 pages),
2. a description of the methodology used for the research (1/2 to 1 page),
3. a thorough analysis of both the consumer behavior issue and the findings of the research (3-5 pages),

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4. recommendations for marketing actions based on your analysis (3-5 pages),
5. appendices containing details of your research instrument, methodology, and data analysis or results, and references for your secondary research.

Possible Useful Information Sources (beyond Internet information): (1) Library--Books, popular magazines, business magazines (e.g., Business Week, Fortune), academic journals (e.g., Journal of Popular Culture), trade publications (e.g., American Demographics, Advertising Age, Women's Wear Daily), and (2) Institutions--Most companies have corporate communications departments that offer information kits and can be helpful. Information from specialized museums or collections are sometimes available (e.g., the Coca-Cola Museum in Atlanta). Don't rely exclusively on a limited number of sources or those that contain redundant material. The more sources you use, the richer your analysis is likely to be. Don't overlook insights that relevant individuals may provide. In all cases, be sure to document your sources, including conversations with business people, experts, insider-informants, organization members, etc.

**Project Proposal**

*All groups must submit a written project proposal (2 pages) by week 5.* This proposal should identify your group members (full names), describe the issue you want to study, what issues you are considering exploring in your primary research (NOTE: do not waste your efforts examining questions that already can be answered based on available secondary research), the research methodology you expect to use, and briefly explain why you feel the issue is important.

**Final Group Project Presentation**

Each group will be expected to *make a brief presentation of their work to the class the last week of class.* This presentation is intended to give you practice in preparing and delivering a group presentation and to allow the class to share the insights your group makes. The presentation should last about 15 minutes and identify clearly the issue(s) examined, the methodology, the insights and important findings of your research, and a discussion of and rationale for your recommendations. Your grade for the project will not be based on your presentation per se, although good presentations can contribute to your class participation grade.

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