

MARKETING

Materialism and Macro Marketing

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Course

Marketing 300: 2 sections, 30 students each, Spring 2007.

This course is designed to introduce marketing to the undergraduates who have not formally studied the area previously. It serves as a vehicle by which students can become familiar with the area of marketing. It provides a basis for future study in marketing and a better understanding of the business world and the role which marketing plays therein.

With my participation in the Ignatian Mentoring Program, I made the following changes to incorporate a mission-driven teaching component that stresses the *need for discernment and responsible action*. With this inclusion, the course content is broadened to a macro level.

Syllabus addition

Assignment

Each student is required to turn in a 3 to 5 page paper on his/her understanding of the phenomenon of materialism and his/her thoughts on the topic. For this assignment, students are required to

- (1) visit the library databases such as *ABI Inform* or *Business Source Premier* and understand the meaning of the term 'materialism',
- (2) read articles/books/websites (such as 'The World is Flat', 'Micro-lending: Banker to the Poor', the 'Product RED'),
- (3) write a research paper elaborating the implications of materialism for individuals, business organizations, and society as a whole and linking the concept of corporate social responsibility to some of the real world examples in the marketplace.

Lecture & Class Discussions

While lecturing the chapters on Segmentation and Targeting, and Global Marketing, I used the following questions to guide the class discussions:

- (1) Does marketing promote materialism?
- (2) Does the practice of segmentation and targeting create class issues within our society?
- (3) International marketers tend to overlook poverty stricken people in less

- developed countries. Why is this?
- (4) Can marketing be applied to help lift poverty and improve the quality of life in an impoverished society? How?

Materialism and Ignatian/Jesuit Pedagogy

This teaching component seeks to:

- Involve students to practice critical thinking in understanding the high price of materialism, and linking social responsibility to firms' marketing decisions.

- Inspire students to change our society and the world for the better by engaging them in a discernment process to:
 - (a) understand the high price of materialism
 - (b) link social responsibility to firms' marketing decisions
 - (c) seek ways to break the material values cycle
 - (d) focus on values for self-acceptance, good relationships and contributions to the community.

Materialism defined:

Materialism in economic psychology and consumer research has been defined as "the importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions" (Belk 1985) or as "an orientation which views material goods and money as important for personal happiness and social progress (Ward and Wackman 1971). Not only are materialists viewed as "driven" to consume more, but they are also seen to focus on the consumption of "status goods" or unique consumer products. The popular notion of materialism also associates materialism with excessive status consciousness, condescension, envy, disregard of others and of social issues, self-centeredness, a lack of principles, possessiveness, insecurity, and interpersonal detachment. Sociologists describe materialism as a personal value that encompasses concern with material things, competitiveness, and emphasis on making profit as opposed to human well-being.

Learning Outcome

Students met the challenge of this assignment in articulate ways. I present some of the highlights of their responses:

Student reflection

"When individuals in a society are driven by material values, weakened interpersonal connections, disrupted community life, resource depletion and environmental damage result."

“The best ways to break the material values cycle are focusing on values for self-acceptance, fostering good relationships and contributing to community.”

“Marketing and materialism go hand in hand. On one side of the argument, marketing is a profitable experience for business as well as helping the consumers to improve their standard of living. On the other hand, marketing and materialism create unattainable goals for the public as well as pushing aside thoughts of inner self-improvement and more toward conformity.”

“Perhaps it is about time to forget about possessions and get back to the days where community and family were the most important things in life.”

“Marketers have the self-interest in selling their products to consumers because this affects their bottom line. While it is their job, marketers need to act in responsible ways so as not to destroy the social fabric of our culture by shifting all focuses to materialistic concerns.”

“Materialism helps economy grow and flourish, but at the same time drives people to unhappiness.”

“Materialism in essence is like a drug. It relieves the pain temporarily but offers no promise of a cure.”

“Before I was exposed to the concept of ‘Product RED’, I never thought that marketing can be used to impact the world in such a positive and powerful manner.”

“International marketers tend to assume that people in the poor nations do not have enough money or business sense to buy or sell products. Thus, marketing is strongly promoted only in the affluent nations, which leads to a worsened situation in materialism in these nations. The affluent nations might be able to enjoy all the branded goods and services, but people in these nations are not necessarily happier.”

“The primary goal of business corporations is to maximize shareholder wealth, but perhaps of equal importance is the social responsibility these companies have towards their employees and the areas in which they operate. The world is becoming interconnected, and some countries may be left behind because of their inability to afford products or the inability of their citizens to operate them. Micro-lending and similar concepts have proven they have a positive affect on all participants. Multi-national corporations have the resources and international marketers have the knowledge to present programs and products so as to improve the global standard of living, and not leave any nation behind.”

“As multinational corporations play a significant role in improving the standard of living in developing nations, international marketers are called to help promote

the product effectively to the right people. All of the programs designed to help the poor, need to be marketed correctly to appeal to the potential beneficiaries. Micro-lending and the One Laptop Per Child are two great examples.”

“International marketers need to be ready to help the developing countries establish the best industries in which to invest. Furthermore, marketers are encouraged to look at the product and consider a few questions to see if their products can become a global product: is our product too sophisticated for this new market? How do we make our product image more attractive to a larger segment of the total population? How do we match our product quality and purchasing power to create real and long term demand?”

“As a next generation international marketer and entrepreneur in an era of globalization, I recognize that it is becoming the trend to create new markets and not merely adapt to the existing ones. By creating new markets, international businesses can pave the way for emerging markets and promote economic reform in the poorer nations of the world.”

Instructor Reflection

In preparing for this new teaching component, I was challenged to explore new topics to broaden my research agenda. I became interested to research topics on macro marketing and the role of international marketing in a flattened world. I am also planning to incorporate this new teaching component in all other marketing courses that I will be teaching in future semesters.

In conclusion, this added component in M300 was very beneficial to the students and the instructor. During discussion all students agreed that this assignment should be included as part of the course in future years. The assignment was able to instigate a self-reflection by the students as well as the instructor to help them find a new anchor in their life and their career.

References

Belk, R.W. (1985), “Materialism: Traits aspects of living in the material world,” Journal of Consumer Research, Vol. 12, No. 3, pp. 265-280.

Ward, S. and Wackman, D. (1971), “Family and media influences on adolescent consumer learning,” Am Behav Scientist, 14, 415-427.