

ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH TO CONSUMER BEHAVIOR: A MARKETING EDUCATIONAL CASE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

This paper is about a marketing educational case approach to consumer studies. Various approaches to consumer studies have been developed. Although not totally new, the anthropological approach is suggested to be adopted to help students understand consumer behaviors. Anthropology and consumer studies are two related academic fields in terms of theoretical and methodological traditions. Adopting the anthropological approach through practitioner-oriented projects could be fruitful although more improvements are needed.

Key Words: Anthropology, Consumer Behavior, Culture, Food Service, Marketing Education.

INTRODUCTION

Various approaches have been developed to teach consumer behavior, such as a psychological approach, a sociological approach, an economic approach, and a market research approach, among others. It is obviously that different approaches may not share the same focuses, for example, the psychological approach stresses the consumers' psychological processes in terms of consumption decision making and post-consumption evaluation (Statt 1997); the market research approach stresses the linkages between the study of consumer behavior and the practice of marketing research (Finch 1997). There is no "black and white" cut off to determine which approach is better but the teaching outcomes may be significantly influenced by the approach that individual instructors adopt. In most cases it is up to the individual instructors to decide which approach or combined several approaches should be adopted according to his or her experiences, knowledge, and preferences to gain the best outcome. In his teaching practice, the author has adopted and developed an anthropological approach to consumer studies, which he would like to share with his colleagues in the marketing education world.

This paper first probes the relationship between anthropology and consumer behavior in terms of academic connections. Secondly, it defines the anthropological approach to the study of consumer behavior, and presents the rationale as to why the author adopted and developed the anthropological approach as a pedagogical method. Thirdly, it presents the way the author designed the course and how he integrated the anthropological approach into the course on consumer behavior by using food service

business as observation sites. Finally, it will discuss some pros and cons, based on an analysis of the students' work, of the anthropological approach to marketing education, and some suggestions by the author for better practice for any business faculty members who are willing to adopt the anthropological approach in marketing education.

Consumer Studies and Anthropology

The primary purpose for studying consumer behavior as part of marketing the curriculum is to help students understand why and how consumers make their purchase decisions. In a real business world, with a good understanding of consumer behavior the marketers will be able to make better strategies for higher profitability. While much consumer behavior research has traditionally been psychological and statistical, the anthropological approach employs more subjective and qualitative methods that are invaluable within a number of contexts. Abrams (2000) indicates that in some cases quantitative analysis might not help decision makers to truly understand consumers, while "descriptive anthropology" (qualitative and observational) research often provides revealing insights. In recent years, anthropologically-inspired research tactics have become increasingly prominent within consumer research. For example, Thompson and Hirschman (1995) applied classic anthropology theories to study the consumers' self-conception of body images and self care practices in the modern urban society to help the marketers understand the relationship between consumer "socialized body" and consumption behavior. McFarlane (2001) observes that when consumer reaction to a new product needs to be determined, companies traditionally

turn to the qualitative focus group (another qualitative method).

The core concept in anthropology is culture. According to one source, it is reasonable to estimate that between 25 percent and 50 percent of behavior is culturally determined (Gannon 1993). Therefore, it is important to look at cultural variation to understand variation in behavior; this principle applies to the consumer behavior studies exceptionally well. Anthropology provides useful methods for analyzing particular cultures. Harris and Moran (1987), for example, focus on the fact that culture provides people with a sense of who they are, gives them a feeling of belonging, establishes rules of how to behave, and offers rankings of what goals are important, etc. Culture provides a learned, shared, and interrelated set of symbols, codes, values, knowledge, etc. that justify and motivate human behavior. In recent years, those with international experience have written any number of guides of foreign countries that help those in international business to understand diverse cultures in order to be more effective within that context.

Marsha Richins, in his President's Address to the 2000 Annual Conference of Association for Consumer Research, stresses that consumer research should be viewed as a social science. Consumption is important to economic performance; it is connected to personal health and well-being; and many pressing social problems are related to consumer behavior. He further indicates that consumption impacts virtually every aspect of our life (Richins 2000). Although consumer behavior can be viewed as a social science, it is often not treated as such. As a result, the focus is often on the psychological factors of the individual and not the social context of behavior and motivation. After all, consumer research is a multifaceted discipline that combines applied aspects of psychology and the social sciences and uses them to understand the behavior of consumers and the marketplace. As a result, some researchers focus to such a degree upon psychology that they might pay relatively little attention to cultural concerns.

Much consumer behavior research is conducted at the individual level. However, a comparative research at the culture level is suggested (Mooij 2004). McCracken (1990) demonstrates how the consumption process has meanings that resonate from culture. For McCracken, consumption is broadly defined to include the processes by which consumer goods and services are created, bought, and used. According to McCracken, the relationship between culture and consumption is profoundly interrelated within three contexts: history, theory, and practice. As such, anthropology and especially its ethnographic methods have been becoming increasingly popular sources from which to borrow tools to investigate marketing and consumer behavior since the late 20th century (Olsen 1995). More and more anthropologists have involved themselves recently with consumer studies. More and

more anthropologists do research on consumers' behavior that helps high-tech companies to design new products for the market based on their findings. They conduct observational research, dispatching anthropologists to employ their ethnographic skills by interviewing, watching, and videotaping consumers in their natural habitats. It is reported that companies like Apple, Motorola, Xerox, and Intel, as well as telecommunications and cable companies, have brought anthropologists into the corporate fold. The goal is to apply what the anthropologists learn to new product concepts by understanding the customer (Hafner 1999).

Meanwhile, more and more marketers are using anthropological methods in their marketing practice. For example, Holt (1998), by employing anthropological approaches, found out that cultural capitals structure the American people's consumption patterns and behaviors. Griffith (1998) using semi-structured interview technique conducted research among both buyers and sellers in Jordan's central marketplace and illustrated a few of the many ways culture may influence one aspect of a retail structure in tradition-based societies. In a similar study, Rossiter and Chan (1998) found out that ethnicity plays a significant role in doing business and consumption.

The anthropological approach is effective in consumer studies because anthropologists and anthropological methods offer an alternative perspective. Using advertising as an example, while focus groups might be used to look at the demographics of a region to best select a specific advertising campaign, an anthropologist would study how people react to the ad. An anthropologist might notice that sometimes people go to the bathroom or kitchen during commercials while others mute them together. Because people may be performing multiple tasks, the only way to know what they are doing is through observation, one of the fundamental skills that anthropologists use in their field studies. Along with the conceptual and methodological contributions anthropology offers, there are specific analytical and research techniques from which students who study consumer behaviors can benefit (DeJesus and Tian 2004; Hafner 1999; Sherry 1995).

Teaching Consumer Behavior Through an Anthropological Approach

Business education is designed to provide individuals with knowledge, skills, and abilities to meet local, state, and national needs for business leaders and employment. Although business professors are largely committed to the vocational preparation of students, they espouse contrasting pedagogic philosophies in seeking to achieve this goal. However, in spite of the variety in goals sought and pedagogy implemented, similar issues can be found when professors attempt to change the approach in which they teach business. A study by Nulty and Barrett (1996) indicated that business students prefer pedagogies that are

active and concrete. Stewart and Felicetti (1992) found that marketing majors, relative to non-marketing majors, preferred a learning style that was either methodological or holistic. Anthropological approach in teaching consumer behavior is therefore widely accepted in the business education field. For instance, in some Asian business schools the theory and methodology of anthropology has been introduced into the international business research courses. Three frameworks were designed for this type of courses. The first was a cultural awareness model adapted from Morgan's (1980) idea of paradigmatic orthodoxy getting in the way of embracing new perspectives. The second was key organizing principles (KOPS). The third was a mapping model designed to allow researchers to chart their own cultural position and the position judged to be that of respondents on a set of cultural dimensions deemed to be central to the research context (Whiteley 2001). Apparently, the disciplinary background of business professors is significant to understanding their attitudes to both pedagogy and epistemology. In this case, the teaching approach under discussion fits well into the well established business education pedagogy (DeMoranville et al. 2000; Macfarlane 1998; Pharr et al. 1997).

Teaching consumer behavior, like teaching almost any marketing course, involves assigning new terms or terminologies to unfamiliar theoretical frameworks and concepts. To accomplish this, marketing professors often break down the subject matter into a number of relatively distinct sub-areas for study, such as the "four Ps in the marketing mix." Exploration of each of the component parts allows the student to develop an understanding of each of the areas deemed important to an overall understanding of the overall topic. Unfortunately, students typically have problems understanding the conceptual linkages between the fundamental components. It is in these linkages that business practitioners say the business' competitive advantage lies (Porter 1980). As such, business suggests that higher education needs to facilitate learning by using more practitioner-oriented exercises to help students understand the linkages and interactions between various concepts (Oblinger and Verville 1998). The anthropological teaching approach to consumer studies under discussion here is one type of practitioner-oriented practices as it is based on participant-observation.

While fully supporting the merits of extended participant-observation, the instructor let students know that his personal experience convinced him that marketers could successfully employ many aspects of an anthropological perspective in marketing in a shorter time frame. While the results will not be an ethnography (nor are they designed to be), they can be complete enough to help the marketers to understand the driving forces that shape consumers' belief and behaviors in a particular market (Tian 1999, 1998). It is claimed that there is no better way to get close to the consumer or any other marketplace

stakeholder for that matter than by using ethnography as a bridge. To help the students understand what ethnography is the instructor showed them films that demonstrate how anthropologists do their field work.

To help the students apply the anthropological approach in consumer behavior study, it is very important to give lectures on anthropological methodologies. The primary technique anthropologists use to study culture is participant-observation, which involves living among a group of people, observing and recording their behavior, and participating in their daily lives as much as possible. The resulting account of a cultural system and its members is termed ethnography. While doing participant-observation, anthropologists try to adopt an outside-in approach to uncover "native" images for events and behavior by observers. These "native" images are recorded separately from the researcher's images – observations and interpretations. Thus, through a kind of "stereovision" (image of the left eye and image from the right eye) two distinct texts are created. These texts must be analyzed separately and then combined to reveal any differences. To resolve existing discrepancies, "native" informants should be asked to comment on the researcher's descriptions and explanation. These comments serve as check on the researcher's ethnocentrism while adding greater depth to the "native" view. In the same way, discrepancies within the "native" text need to be uncovered and explained. Indeed, the richest accounts of a cultural system incorporate both contradiction and controversy as consensus.

It is also very important to let students understand that anthropologists use a variety of data-gathering techniques in the field. Traditionally, these have been largely qualitative, and include structured and unstructured interviews; hypothetical situations; the analysis of critical events, social networks, myth and folklore, life histories; and historical reconstruction. In practice, anthropologists also employ qualitative techniques along with more quantitative approaches (survey, for example), especially if they are doing research in complex organizations. Even when quantitative and qualitative techniques are combined, the author argues that in-depth participant-observation (lasting at least several months) is the mainstay of valid anthropological research.

Textbooks and Supplementary Reading Materials

Although consumer behavior textbooks typically include an obligatory discussion of culture, such content is often truncated, combined with other issues, and as a result culture can easily be overlooked or discounted. From a practical point of view, the concept of culture and its implications for consumer research are often lost in the shuffle. The profound impact of culture upon consumer response, however, is observable and undeniable (Douglas and Craig 1995; Griffith and Ryans 1995). Those teaching marketing, consumer research, advertising, etc.

need to scan the textbooks they use to be sure these topics are adequately addressed. Where they are not, supplemental materials need to be added. In this case, the author used Schiffman and Kanuk's book *Consumer Behavior* as the text for the consumer behavior classes because they have adopted a multiple approach, especially in the discussion of consumers in their social and cultural settings.

The instructor developed the anthropological approach by taking the advantage of the textbook while integrating his own expertise and knowledge into the course design. Schiffman and Kanuk assign five chapters in their book to discuss the relations between cultural issues and consumer behaviors, making it possible for the instructor to teach in an anthropological approach. The anthropological approach encompasses both a way of viewing consumer behaviors and techniques for understanding those behaviors (cf., Sherry 1995). In an effort to gain the integration of marketing and anthropological concepts and skills, the author designed several lectures that focused on the relations between cultures and consumer behaviors by integrating anthropological principles into the classroom. These lectures were designed to lead the students to understand some fundamental concepts and methods in anthropology, and their implications in studying consumer behaviors. To help the students become interested in the anthropological approach to the study of consumer behaviors, the author used his own work to illustrate what anthropologists do and how to use anthropological skills in marketing practice.

The instructor also assigned some extra readings that dealt with anthropological theories and methods and their implementation in marketing practice for the students to read after class. These reading materials were deliberately selected from various leading academic journals and magazines for the purpose of fostering the student's interest in and understanding of anthropology and marketing. The materials selected include a monograph *Contemporary Marketing and Consumer Behavior: An Anthropological Sourcebook* edited by Sherry (1995). This book is the most comprehensive one at the current time that deals with the basic theories and methods in understanding consumer behavior through the anthropological approach. The contributors demonstrated very well how anthropological theories and methods can be applied to study consumer behavior by case analyses and theoretical discussion. Another book, *Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping*, written by cultural anthropologist Underhill (1999), is also strongly recommended to the students. In this book the author, by applying an anthropological research methodology, divulges more about consumer behavior than individual consumers may know themselves: how a consumer ignores items shoved onto the bottom shelf, how a customer likes touching the merchandise, whether the merchandise is paperbacks or underwear. It describes what consumers do, and what they do not do, in stores, restaurants and showrooms. The findings

contained in the book have much to do with marketing and retailing practice and with consumer behavior studies as well.

The instructor used supplementary materials to demonstrate that in the field of consumer behavior, qualitative researchers often employ anthropological or anthropologically inspired techniques (such as the naturalistic method of Belk, Sherry, Wallendorf 1989) in order to study consumers actually living their lives and making decisions regarding the purchase and consumption of products. Marketing involves targeting an audience for a product and then selling it. Working within this process, anthropologists are often responsible for finding out how specific items are purchased, valued, and consumed as well as what feelings particular people have regarding certain products and their use. By recording in great detail how people live and how products fit into their lives, anthropologists often gain useful information that could not be easily gained from a formal interview. As a result, an increasing number of anthropologists are being hired by industry (Walsh 2001).

The students were asked to discuss the reading materials in groups and were encouraged to present to the class their findings from the reading assignments with an emphasis on how could they implement what they had learned into their research projects. Moreover, the individual students were required to write an article review based on the reading assignments. They were encouraged to make comments on how the authors used the anthropological approach in the study of consumer behavior and to suggest how they would use the same approach in their studies. For example, one group of the students, upon finishing their reading assignment, decided to use the ethnographic approach, to study consumer behavior at the college's cafeteria. They suggested that participant observation was one of the best ways for them to conduct such research. Accordingly they prepared their research proposal and started their research project. The participant observation helped the group collect enough first hand data to conduct the analysis of the consumers at the college cafeteria.

Learning Consumer Behaviors Through Participant-Observations

Teaching and learning is interactive. Despite the fact that learning is all-pervasive in our life, there is no single, universal theory of how people learn. There are two major schools of thought concerning the learning process: one consists of behavior theories, the other of cognitive theories. Cognitive theorists view learning as a function of purely mental process, whereas behavioral theorists focus almost exclusively on observable behaviors (responses) that occur as the result of exposure to stimuli (Schiffman and Kanuk 2004). It is suggested that good marketing strategy often be based upon a defined set of consumer

behaviors. Yet, students can forget this truism when they discuss sometimes esoteric and often complex findings of consumer studies and their corresponding models. It was found that the truths and power of consumer analysis become real to students when they directly observed a variety of consumers in different shopping situations (Pharr 1997). Observation is the principal method in anthropological marketing research. However, students often will not automatically make the connections between the study of consumer behavior and the practice of anthropological marketing research. This is particularly true for the undergraduate students; they are more easily drawn to the psychological approach to the study of consumer behavior given the fact that most consumer behavior textbooks are written with this approach (Tian 2001).

To help the students understand the principles of consumer behavior, the instructor designed two assignments that strengthened the linkages between anthropology and marketing. He designed two projects – one mini-report, and one comprehensive research project. For the mini-report assignment, students were required to write up a mini-report analysis of consumer behaviors based on their own observations/experiences at any food service site. They were encouraged to use one or two concepts and methods that they had learned from the course to record and analyze consumer behaviors in a real business situation. Each student was also directed to discuss, with the instructor, individually the progress and problems pertaining to the fieldwork and observations at least once during the period when the research was conducted. By doing so the instructor would have the opportunity to make some comments and suggestions on their individual fieldwork and observations.

The instructor read and graded the students' mini-report with the individual student present. The instructor would praise the individual students for what they had done correctly and made comments on what they did not do properly. Then he would let the individual students tell him how they could improve their work if they were asked to re-do the assignment. Through the mini-report practice and the interaction with the instructor, the students learned more about how to observe and how to record the data. Moreover, the students were trained how to analyze the rural data and how to write the research report based on primary data they collected. The mini-report training helped build a solid foundation for the students to conduct their final comprehensive research project.

For the comprehensive research project, the students were directed to study the consumers at any food service business through participant observation and other methods, such as interviews and questionnaire survey. The students were requested to properly record and keep their original fieldwork notes, which would be graded together with their final reports. By the time the comprehensive research project started, the great majority of the students

had already mastered the basic skills in doing fieldwork, conducting observations, taking notes, which they had learned and practiced from their previous mini report projects. However, to help the students and to provide advice on site, the instructor also accompanied individual students to lunches or dinners in their selected food service sites from time to time during the period when they were doing the fieldwork. Students were encouraged to do some interviews while the instructor was present, so that they could get the advice immediately if they needed. They were also encouraged to exchange information as much as they could but they had to give each other credit if they did such an exchange in their final reports.

This project had a number of benefits for students. For instance, it acquainted them with observational research techniques and the subjectivity inherent in pure observation. Moreover, it made them realize that trends or patterns are revealed by consumer analysis while reinforcing many of the age, gender, ethnic-based, or other consumer findings presented in textbooks. Next, it was a true-to-life illustration of the differences between non-probability and probability sampling. And finally, it invariably caused the students to become more aware of their own consumer behavior. The results of their comprehensive projects turned out to be very good and the quality of the research reports, according to the comparison by the instructor, was much improved from their mini reports.

The students claimed that they learned concrete skills and knowledge through their hands-on experiences than they did through the textbook and in-class lectures because the anthropological approach directly involved them with the consumer and gave them a better understanding about consumer behavior (cf., Table 1). For instance, through participant observation, the students realized that they themselves could be used as research instruments, which helped them understand all other types of research instruments, such as interviews and questionnaire surveys. More importantly, the students learned how to collect first-hand research data in their everyday life. These skills and course concepts would be abstract to them if the students had not been guided in their hands-on work. One student wrote: "I learned that in order to be a successful observer you must do just that. If you want to see what consumers are doing and saying then you must sit back and observe. As an observer you need to look at the body language of the customer, facial expressions, and listen to what they are saying. This is a good process that takes a while to get used to, but after you get the hang of it you pick up on many things that you normally would miss. Your eyes and ears are the best tools that I used when conducting this research. I enjoyed this assignment; here at the college we are often swamped by definitions and lectures, but we rarely get to apply what we have learned to a real situation. I feel that this exercise enabled me to take the tools that I have gotten from the classroom and apply to them in the real world."

Using the Food Service Sector as Learning Sites

According to Mulrone (2002), one of the most obvious applications for using anthropology within business research is the study of consumer behavior in retail business. Newman (1993), a business anthropologist, has examined the effects of economic decline on consumption patterns, lifestyle, and family relationships. Underhill (2000) discusses consumer behavior within the context of retailing in great detail. He explores why consumers go into a store for one item and end up buying something else, what kind of store atmosphere is most effective for influencing shopping behavior, and so on. The reasons that the instructor selected food service sites as the locations for teaching and learning are various. The food service sector is suggested as one of the best places to study consumer behavior. It is at food service sites that consumers are not only consuming tangible goods (food and drink), but also intangible service. It is in restaurants that consumers will interact with the waiters/waitresses and with other consumers. It is also suggested that many consumer behavior related concepts and theories could be tested in the food service sector, such as consumption motivation, family/friends influences on consumer behavior, cultural influences on consumer behavior (Doern and Kates 1998; Goffman 1959; Leidner 1993; McCarty et al. 1990; Schau and Gilly 1997; Tian 2000).

One approach suggested for the analysis of consumer behavior is termed "cross-cultural interpretation," meaning that there are differences in cultural norms and values between countries, which can be best illustrated through studying food consumption. Food consumption functions as a way for the consumer to gain cultural meaning as well as establish self-identities (Tian 2000). The beliefs and attitudes a culture has about food consumption are impor-

tant to the choices consumers make about food; this is particularly meaningful to the study of consumer behavior at various ethnic restaurants. Through the on site study as well as the in class lectures, the students are able to learn that food habits and consumption represent ethnic, regional, and national identities, and differ from country to country because of cultural differences (Bailey and Tian 2002; DeJesus and Tian 2004; Tian 2001; Witte and Tian 2003).

The more familiar a society is with different cultures, the more acceptable are its rituals and culture (Bell and Valentine 1997). Likewise, the food of other cultures will be more accepted if its ingredients and preparation styles are familiar (Gabaccia 1998). It is through on-site observation and study that students learn that food choice based on the price is derived from the culture's meanings based on social status. American culture has transformed into a society that ranks food consumption solely on financial sacrifice. Appearance and taste have been replaced with the eating environment and the ability of like-minded individuals who have the means to pay certain prices for certain foods. The connotation of filet mignon and lobster convey the meaning of high social status along with high prices. In turn, fatback and chicken-necks portray the lower income and social status of its consumers (Pillsbury 1998).

In food service sites, students learned that culture as a concept is regularly and fruitfully used to describe and analyze both the varieties and generalities of human behavior, values, choices, preferences, practices, beliefs, attitudes, and so forth throughout the world (Costa 1995). Accordingly, food choice and consumption is a typical human behavior that is strongly culturally oriented (Mead 1943; Mooij 2004). Moreover, food choice is an extremely complex behavior to quantify. Many factors can play a

TABLE 1
STUDENT EVALUATION RESPONSES (FALL 2002)

Selected Evaluation Items	Course Average	College Average	Rolling Average*
Problem-solving skills learned	5.00	4.26	4.29
Ability to write	5.00	4.23	4.08
Comments on papers	5.00	4.26	4.51
Goals and organization	4.67	4.34	4.12
Text and materials	4.67	4.14	3.97
* Rolling average is the average for all course evaluations on file.			

part in the choices consumers make for consumption, factors for which there is no method of value measurement. There are several factors that influence food choices, including but not limited to: environment, tradition, familiarity, social status, and perceived properties (Schiffman and Kanuk 2004). Environmental factors influence the choices consumers make by the process of availability within a market. The ability to produce the products necessary for specific foods is the key to assimilating them into a society's culture. Without the required ingredients, the foods of different cultures cannot be experienced or accepted. Tradition within specific regions dictates the level and type of consumption. What identifies familiarity is that which has become long accustomed and is considered the norm for the specific region (Pillsbury 1998).

Through the on-site study, the students learned that Indian, Mexican, and Chinese cuisines are identified as the best-known ethnic cuisines in the United States. Due to their growing popularity, people do not feel as strongly about ethnic cuisines, because such foods have become commonplace, more available, and are found in non-ethnic restaurants and multicultural grocery stores nationwide. Mills (2000) observes that today's consumers desire a good overall restaurant experience, including friendly service, flavorful foods, and a good overall experience, whether it be a typically American restaurant or an ethnic restaurant. Restaurants are the primary source of ethnic cuisine education for consumers. As a result, those who choose to dine at an ethnic restaurant with little knowledge about that cuisine often judge the entire cuisine based on a favorable or unfavorable dining experience, which ultimately determines whether they opt to eat it again (DeJesus and Tian 2004).

A segmentation study on ethnic restaurants done by the National Restaurant Association, finds that Diners tend to fall into three distinctly different categories: Culture-Oriented, Restaurant-Oriented, and Preparation-Oriented. Culture-Oriented consumers are those who actively seek out new dining adventures, Restaurant-Oriented consumers view ethnic restaurants as simply another eating-out alternative, and Preparation-Oriented consumer's interest in ethnic cuisine tend to center on the cooking and ingredients (DeJesus and Tian 2004). These categories are similar to those found in Mills' (2000) study. The students learned through on-site observation and study that when consumer behavior is combined with attitudes about ethnic cuisine, divisions among ethnic-cuisine supporters can be made into two segments: Internationalists and Urban Professionals. Internationalists seek out foreign experiences; they want authenticity and are more inclined to have a taste for hot and spicy foods, such as Mexican and Thai cuisines; they look for the whole experience from décor to servers who speak the restaurant's native language. Urban Professionals tend to be older than Internationalists; they like to experiment with new cuisines, but watch what they eat and like for menus

to specify clearly what is in their foods. These categories and segments are formed because Americans tend to differ in terms of how they relate to ethnic cuisines (Bailey and Tian 2002; Mills 2000; Tian 2001; Witte and Tian 2003; DeJesus and Tian 2004).

Conclusions and Suggestions for Future Improvement

It is clear that consumer behavior refers to consumers' responses to products and services, and to how those products and services are presented. In order to understand consumers and the choices consumers make, students must study a range of human responses, including, but not limited to, affective (feelings), cognitive (thoughts), and behavioral (actions). All those human responses can be learned through participant-observation, a powerful anthropological pedagogical approach that fits in the behavioral theories of learning well. The primary foundation for behaviors can be evaluated from observation and then used to formulate opinions with the subjectivity of the observer and the desired effects. The food service sector is viewed as the ideal place for students to learn about consumer behavior because food service sites are places where customers consume both tangible products and intangible service. Through participant-observations and interactions with the consumers, students are able to understand the reasoning behind societal actions, including an understanding of the culture from which actions are derived (Jordan 2003; Kardes 2002; Sherry 1995; Tian 2000 2001; Walle 1998).

The anthropological approach adopted by the author in the consumer behavior course was effective in several teaching sections. For instance, 10 student term papers in two sections were either published in peer reviewed academic journals or presented at peer reviewed academic conferences. The students were happy and enjoyed the learning process; they commented that by this approach they had learned knowledge in both fields of study, namely anthropology and consumer behavior. They particularly enjoyed the hands-on projects and the fieldwork; they claimed that the training they got fostered and developed their abilities in implementing consumer behavior theories in the real business world (see Table 1). The business division head at the college after examining the course syllabus, teaching notes, assignment designs, and student work, made a very positive comment about the anthropological approach to teach. She indicated that the approach is a constructive improvement in teaching consumer behavior at the college and encouraged the instructor to continue the approach. The author had also presented the teaching method and approach to his marketing educators whose feedback was very positive and encouraging (Tian 2001).

However, like any other approach, the anthropological approach to consumer behavior studies is not without

shortcomings. As suggested earlier, traditional consumer behavior studies mainly use the psychological approach. The anthropological approach is relatively new in this field of study and this makes it difficult to draw upon necessary resources. It is important for the instructors who want to adopt this approach to search and prepare related academic and practical resources beforehand. Also because the students who take a consumer behavior course might not necessarily have taken an anthropology course, it is necessary for the instructor to systematically address some of the basic principles of anthropology in the class and then connect them with the consumer behavior studies. Abrams' (2000) book entitled *Observational Research Handbook* and Mooij's (2004) book entitled *Consumer Behavior and Culture* are strongly suggested to be used for reference.

One serious problem which the author identified is that the students tended to spend more describing what they observed than on analyzing what they observed because they believed they had plenty of material to present from their observations. As a result, although they were able to make some analyses, the analyses tended to be superficial and lacked connections with consumer behavior theories and concepts. Therefore, it is necessary to require an analysis in class of a few case studies, which should include various approaches to the study of consumer behaviors, to help the students understand how to link the theories and concepts they have learned with the real world they observed. Instructors may integrate a few applied anthropology lectures with consumer cultures to demonstrate how to enhance reliability and validity as well as readability by implementing related theories and concepts. Accordingly, it is necessary to design the assignment within the framework of consumer behavior theories and to instruct the students to apply the course concepts as much as possible in their research reports. It is important to let the students know that their grades will be negatively affected if they neglect to use the course

concepts and consumer behavior theories in their report.

Another issue is the arrangement of the course project. Based on the author's experience it is better to first have all students do their mini report collectively on the same market or the same marketplace so that the instructor can give them a demonstration and give them help on site. After the critical analysis of their mini reports, the students can be directed to conduct their comprehensive research project by selecting their own retail stores to observe and to study consumer behaviors. However, the experiences of the author indicate that the ideal locations to train students to study and observe consumer behavior are the various food service sites.

In short, the anthropological approach is not a simple combination of anthropology and consumer behavior studies. Based on the author's own understanding and experience, the anthropological approach focuses on the influences of culture and society on the individual consumers' behavior; it emphasizes the participated observation and academic analysis of consumer behavior through both management and consumer perspectives (cf., Sherry 1995; Tian 2000). The instruction of consumer behavior through an anthropological approach is relatively new in marketing education. Although the author personally found this approach, if used in a proper way, to be very effective in helping students understand the principles of consumer behavior; it does not mean that other instructors will also think so. As professionals in the field of marketing education, we need to consistently improve our teaching methods and practices. While a commitment to a critical pedagogy is not a common goal shared by all business educators, it is clearly a more practical perspective approach could be reached. It is the author's hope that professors in the marketing education field can critically review his experience and practice, and provide suggestions and comments to the author so that further improvement to his teaching practice can be made in the future.

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