



EXPLORING THE MARKETPLACE: SCAVENGER HUNTS AS FIELD-BASED **EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING**

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ABSTRACT

This article describes the process of implementing a field-based experiential learning activity using a marketplace scavenger hunt. Evidence for integrating short-term field-based learning in marketing classes is limited, compared to other disciplines. This is surprising given the accessibility and richness of marketplace settings that can add realism to marketing course concepts. The marketplace scavenger hunt is designed to facilitate deep understanding and application of consumer behavior concepts through observation and interpretation of real-world marketing strategies. Additional benefits for students include development of observation skills, exposure to retail settings, and heightened awareness of how marketing influences buying behaviors.

Every day, marketing instructors enter their classrooms and do their best to engage students, motivate them to learn, and reinforce that what they are learning is important. However, competition for student attention is relentless as instant messages, social media, and videos are an endless stream of distractions. A recent study found that college students spend on average between 8 and 10 hours per day using their cell phones (Roberts, Yaya, & Manolis, 2014). Although immersion in technology may be beneficial for learning about marketing topics such as digital and social marketing, many promotional and retailing activities continue to occur in physical marketplace settings. In fact, although trending upward, nonstore retailing accounts for just 12 percent of all U.S. retail sales today (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). To the extent that traditional marketplace settings may be disregarded or ignored, by both students and instructors alike, we may be missing out on valuable opportunities for teaching and learning.

Unique to the discipline of marketing, compared to other business disciplines, is that our students engage in daily experiences that directly relate to course content. These experiences can provide rich contexts for learning if students reflect on them and make connections between their lived experiences and the course content. In reality, however, most students do not instinctively make these connections. Thus, it is important that marketing instructors provide opportunities, guidance, and encouragement for students to connect

theory with reality, so that they are prepared to apply what they have learned in class to the strategic decisions they will face in their future careers. To increase the realism of course material and enhance student engagement and learning, this paper describes using a short-term field-based experiential activity referred to as a marketplace scavenger hunt. In this activity, students scrutinize various aspects of a marketplace setting that can be linked to consumer behavior concepts and theories. Consistent with Kolb's experiential learning theory (1984), this process of real-world observation, reflection, and application contextualizes learning with personal, lived experiences, thereby increasing understanding of the course concepts and improving critical thinking skills (Alvarez, Taylor, & Rauseo, 2015; Burnthorne Lopez, & Budden, Gravois, Wurdinger & Allison, 2017).

Field-Based Experiential Learning

Kolb (1984, p. 48) defined experiential learning as a process where "knowledge is created through the transformation of experience." To facilitate this process, marketing instructors can provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge to real-world situations (Frontczak, 1998). Compared to lecturing, experiential activities more effectively increase student engagement and learning related to marketing and behavior (Manzon, consumer 2017; Thomas,



Magnotta, Chang, & Steffes, 2018; Vinuales, Magnotta, Steffes, & Kulkarni, 2019). While there may be increased awareness of the value of experiential learning, there is evidence to suggest that there remains only limited use of these techniques in higher education and that lectures continue to dominate (Wurdinger & Allison, 2017). This points to the importance of disseminating relatively simple experiential learning ideas that can easily be replicated to increase adoption of this valuable pedagogical approach.

In the marketing education literature, some of the more recent examples of experiential learning include using games (e.g., Liao-Troth, Thomas, & Webb, 2015), experiments (e.g., Upshaw, Hardy, & Habig, 2018), role-playing (e.g., Thomas et al., 2018), professional skill-building (e.g., Bennett, Matos, & Andonova, 2019), and field-based learning (e.g., Ellinger, 2007; Thyroff, 2019). Field-based learning, or place-based learning, is that which occurs beyond the walls of the classroom (Shahanaz, 2018; Wurdinger & Allison, 2017). When implemented effectively, field-based learning allows students to see and experience things first-hand and can significantly impact understanding of abstract concepts by encouraging deep learning (Krakowka, 2012). Common examples of long-term field-based learning experiences include internships, residencies, and study abroad programs, which are extremely valuable, which but also require a significant time and cost investment and therefore not all students are exposed to them. In contrast, examples of using short-term field-based learning activities, which are accessible to all students and have little to no cost, are much more sporadic in the marketing education literature. With the exception of industrial site visits, which are typically structured more like traditional field trips, short-term field-based learning appears to be an underused pedagogical technique in marketing classes, especially in comparison to other disciplines such as geography (e.g., Krakowka, 2012) and hospitality/tourism (e.g., Goh, 2011).

Given the power of field-based learning to bring to life classroom concepts and the accessibility of marketplace settings for our students, the potential for using this technique in marketing classes is significant. However, to do so effectively, instructors must clearly and creatively link the course material to real-world settings and guide students through the observation process (Thyroff, 2019). One way to achieve this and provide structure to the experience is by using a scavenger hunt technique. There is some evidence for the effective use of scavenger hunts in disciplines such as nursing (e.g., Tinnon, 2014), geography (e.g., Krakowka, 2012), and management (e.g., Barclay & York, 1996) where the activity is directly linked

to the course content. For example, Barclay and York (1996) describe using a scavenger hunt activity in an Organizational Behavior class where students have to locate items that illustrate a university's organizational culture. However, most scavenger hunts described in the literature are used to serve other purposes such as increasing awareness of campus resources and facilities, connecting students with faculty and staff, building student camaraderie, and facilitating cultural or community immersion through basic "seek-and-find" exercises. This could result in scavenger hunts being perceived as a "waste of time" by students when they are unrelated to the course objectives (Rugan & Nero, 2013, p. 7).

In contrast, the scavenger hunt activity described here was carefully crafted according to Kolb's experiential learning theory to provide students with a concrete experience in which they make observations, as well as guide them through reflection, abstraction, and synthesis of their experiences (Kolb, 1984). In a review of experiential learning, Frontczak (1998, p. 31) emphasized how critical it was for educators to lead students through the four phases of the experiential learning cycle following any field experience to provide "complete and valuable learning." In the marketplace scavenger hunt described below, students are guided through the process of making connections between course concepts and the real-world examples that they observe in a marketplace setting. This distinguishes it from basic "seek-and-find" activities that are disconnected from the course content and are meant to serve other purposes as previously described. The overall purpose of this teaching innovation is to bridge the classroom to the real world with the goals of promoting active learning, increased engagement, and enhanced comprehension of consumer behavior course concepts (Lumpkin, Achen, & Dodd, 2015).

Teaching Innovation: The Marketplace Scavenger Hunt

Scavenger hunts evolved from ancient folk games and typically involve being given a list of specific items by an organizer with the goal of locating, collecting, or completing the items on the list ("Scavenger Hunt", 2019). This particular scavenger hunt activity was implemented in two sections of a consumer behavior course with a total of 63 students who were primarily business majors pursuing a marketing concentration. There were a total of 15 questions or "clues" that the students answered. The assignment was designed in relation to the course objectives, which are (1) To develop an understanding of the relationship between consumer behavior and successful marketing strategy formulation, and (2) To address

the factors influencing consumer behavior, including sociocultural, psychological, and environmental influences. The questions relate to these learning objectives and specific consumer behavior concepts that are used to analyze the marketing strategies students are prompted to observe (see Table 1 for sample questions and related course objectives and concepts).

A couple of days prior to the day of the activity, the instructor visits an indoor shopping center close to campus, which includes a variety of stores (e.g.,

Table 1. Consumer behavior marketplace scavenger hunt

| Sample "clues" | Answers | Related course concepts | Related learning objective(s) |
|---|-----------------------------|---|---|
| What restaurant in the food court has a chandelier hanging from the ceiling? In your opinion, why? | Villa Italian Kitchen | Social class and status symbols; Cultural values and norms; Servicescape design and its effects on consumer behavior | Address sociocultural factors influencing consumer behavior Address environmental factors influencing consumer behavior |
| Locate a recycling bin – What is it shaped like? Explain how this is an effective marketing strategy. | Coca- Cola bottle | Perception of shapes and symbols related to branding; Learning theory related to branding and brand loyalty; Trademark law | Address psychological factors influencing consumer behavior Address relationship between consumer behavior and suc- cessful marketing strategy formulation |
| There is a store that is named very similar to a popular lingerie store – What is the name of the store? Why do you think they chose this name? | Vittoria Select | Stimulus generalization and stimulus discrimination; Meaning/brand transfer; Brand equity; Effects of learning, memory and information processing on consumer behavior | Address psychological factors influencing consumer behavior Address relationship between consumer behavior and suc- cessful marketing strategy formulation |
| The store "Champs" is displaying apparel in what color in the window of the store? In your opinion, why? | Pink | Social marketing; Cause-related marketing; Color perception, attention, and learning related to consumer behavior | Address sociocultural factors influencing consumer behavior Address psychological factors influencing consumer behavior |
| In front of the movie theater, there is a vending machine where you can play a popular children's game – What is the name of the game? What type of advertising does this represent? Play it! | Memory | Interactive advertising; Long-term memory (memories of playing game as child); Emotions (excitement elicited by game) related to consumer behavior; Non-store retailing | Address psychological factors influencing consumer behavior Address environmental factors influencing consumer behavior |
| What "scent" is Bath and Body Works featuring this month in its store? Why did they choose this particular scent? | Pumpkin spice | Seasonal effects on buying behavior; Sensory influences on buying behavior; Effects of product scarcity (it was a limited-time release) on consumer behavior | Address environmental factors influencing consumer behavior Address psychological factors influencing consumer behavior |
| What does the kiosk "Piercing Pagoda" offer for free? In your opinion, why? | Ear piercing | Spillover sales; Impulsive purchasing; Consumer value perception | Address environmental factors influencing consumer behavior Address relationship between consumer behavior and successful marketing strategy formulation |
| When standing at the entrance to Bass Pro Shops, what do you see and hear from the front of the store? In your opinion, why do they feature this at the front of the store? | Waterfall | Store atmospherics; Sensory influences on consumer mood responses and associated buying behaviors; Influence of perception and information processing on consumer behavior | Address psychological factors influencing consumer behavior Address environmental factors influencing consumer behavior |

boutiques, corporate chains, department stores, restaurants, and entertainment venues). While walking around the shopping center, the instructor takes notes on various marketplace characteristics and marketing strategies that can be linked to or analyzed using concepts previously discussed in class. During this visit, the instructor also locates security personnel and makes them aware of the upcoming activity. This process takes about 1 hour to complete. Based on the notes, the instructor generates the clues. The questions are designed so that students do not need to enter the stores to answer them, rather the information can be gathered from the common areas in the shopping center or standing at a storefront. This is done intentionally so as not to overwhelm any store or raise suspicion.

Students are informed of the activity on the first day of semester. They are required to complete a liability release form before they can participate. The shopping center is located approximately 10 minutes driving time from campus. Students are given a 15-minute window for arrival since they come from various locations and many from a previous class. The instructor offers to facilitate transportation if needed. Students are instructed to check in at a designated location upon arrival and are provided with a hard copy of the scavenger hunt guide. At the top of the page are specific instructions, along with the instructor's cell phone number in case the students need assistance. In the interest of student safety, students are made to walk around in pairs or small groups. This also helps build class camaraderie since many students complete the activity with someone they did not know beforehand. The students take notes of their answers to the clues on the sheet provided, and once finished, check out with the instructor.

Students use their notes to complete the assignment individually at home, which is due at the beginning of the next class period. Completion of the activity counts as an assignment grade (10 percent of their final grade). The grade primarily is based on whether or not they provided the correct answer for each clue, which most students do since they are fairly straight-forward, and integration of the course terminology and concepts in formulating answers to the reflection questions that are posed (prompted by "why" or "explain") (see Table 1). For this part, a grading rubric is applied where a grade of 90-100 indicates that course terminology was used appropriately and/or to a significant extent; 80-89 indicates that course terminology was used somewhat appropriately and/or to a moderate extent; and 70–79 indicates that course terminology was used inappropriately and/or rarely used. Lower grades would capture incomplete assignments. Each student receives an individual grade on the assignment, since answers to the reflection

questions are written independently at home. About a week later, the assignments are returned and a debriefing session is conducted where student responses to each question and their reflections/interpretations are discussed. The instructor carefully guides this discussion to connect the students' observations with concepts from the course by using probes (e.g., Why do you think this strategy was chosen? What other strategies would you recommend? Would you recommend it to be a temporary or long-term approach?). Overall students enjoy getting out of the classroom and into the real world and are enthusiastic to share their experiences.

Method and Findings

At the end of one semester, students in two course sections were asked to provide open-ended feedback on an online survey asking what they found most valuable about the course. Participation was voluntary and 26 students participated. To analyze the data, comments were reviewed and subjected to a process of qualitative open coding, which suggested several emergent learning-related themes into which the responses could be categorized (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Overall, the data support that the activity (1) Reinforced course concepts and objectives; (2) Increased understanding of course concepts through real-world examples; (3) Increased student engagement and motivation to learn; and (4) Increased awareness of the link between course concepts and real-world marketing and consumer behavior. These themes, along with supporting student comments, are found in Table 2. It is important to note that these themes overlap with the course learning objectives mentioned earlier of promoting an understanding of the relationship between consumer behavior and successful marketing strategy formulation and addressing the key factors influencing consumer behavior.

Discussion

The marketplace scavenger hunt is an interactive and unique activity that incorporates active and experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). Mapping onto Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle stages, it (1) provides an observational experience that is directly related to the course concepts and objectives; (2) encourages reflections and observations of the experience; (3) applies existing theories and concepts to the experience; and (4) puts into practice what has been learned. The activity serves as a model for students, teaching them how to independently apply their marketing knowledge to their everyday experiences; in other words, develop "look

Table 2. Emergent learning-related themes.

| Themes | Supporting student comments | |
|---|--|--|
| Themes (1) Reinforced course concepts and objectives | The assignment we did outside of class was spot on with course material and course objectives. Required application of pretty much every concept covered in the course, so it tied everything together nicely. The out of class assignment directly related to topics discussed in class. The concepts learned in class applied to the real-world examples. Related course concepts to real-life examples. | |
| | Gave new insight to what we learned in class. | |

- (2) Increased student engagement and motivation to learn
- Made learning the material fun.
 Was engaging applicable and in
- Was engaging, applicable, and informative, so that I actually learned and did not just memorize notes.
- Up-to-date and interesting and kept my attention!
- Was fun but gave plenty of challenge for us.
- The work was interesting so it kept me engaged.
- Involves students in the learning process and helps us understand the concepts using a different method.
- Inspired us to learn the material.
- (3) Increased understanding of course concepts through realworld examples
- Real-life examples helped me understand the concepts we discussed in the course.
- By seeing the concepts related to the examples I was able to understand them.
- So many examples provided that really helped boost the learning content of the course.
- It made the information relatable and understandable.
- Gave us real-world perspective of the material that was being covered.
- Great way to get us out of the classroom and learn the material in the real world.
- Real-world examples of current marketing were very helpful in understanding the concepts.
- Examples illustrate how concepts are being used in the real world.
- Examples make it easier to understand the concept.
- (4) Increased awareness of link between course concepts and realworld marketing and consumer behavior
- The value of relevant examples that are present in today's economy and society.
- Taught us things that we could actually apply later on in life.
- Realized consumerism is everywhere.
- I have learned what to look for and how to determine and dictate what is what.
- Will change the way I buy products in the future. I expect that I will put more thought into many purchase decisions.
- Makes sure students know the material in order to contribute to the working world and know the terms required to succeed in business.
- Learned the research and analysis behind various consumer behavior issues.

and think" skills (Twidale, 1999, p. 241). Students often express surprise that they had not noticed or given much thought to the marketing strategies they were being exposed to and that the activity was an eyeopening experience. They indicate feeling more aware of and more likely to notice the marketing that surrounds them on a daily basis. The findings here corroborate those of Gravois et al. (2017, p. 72), illustrating that "some of the most meaningful learning takes place when students reflect on how course concepts connect to their lives, the world around them, and how their learning has changed them personally and professionally." There is also a novelty factor associated with field-based learning, which increases student engagement and memorability (Manzon, 2017). Lastly, these activities naturally appeal to various learning styles and further help students develop valuable professional skills (e.g., market research skills, teamwork skills, written communication skills).

Challenges and Opportunities for Future Research

Designing an experiential field-based learning activity in a way that emphasizes hands-on learning (over memorization) and combines theory with reality can be complex (Wurdinger & Allison, 2017). Additional barriers to implementing these types of activities include logistical issues, time costs, transportation needs, and administrative approval (Higgins, Dewhurst, & Watkins, 2012; Wurdinger & Allison, 2017). Instructors may find it intimidating to integrate experiential learning due to concerns about time constraints, student safety, class sizes, and potential costs (monetary and non-monetary) (Krakowka, 2012). This particular activity, however, is fairly simple and easy to implement, even with fairly large class sizes and under time constraints. In this research, the field-based learning experience was conducted in a 75-minute class with 25 and 38 students



per section. Instructors may also be concerned about student participation, although the findings suggest students are eager to get out of the classroom and appreciate the novelty of the experience. A minor challenge would be if there were changes made to marketplace features between the time that the instructor prepares the clues and the time that the hunt is performed. This happened once in the scavenger hunt described here, and the students were very quick to let the instructor know of the discrepancy!

This innovation is extremely adaptable to many other marketing classes focused on marketing strategy, retail management, promotion, and branding. For example, in a branding class, the clues could focus on branding elements such as logos, colors, taglines, and so on. In a retailing class, the clues could focus on elements of store atmosphere such as merchandise configuration, scents, sounds, lighting, floor/wall coverings, and so on. The activity could be conducted on campus if transportation is an issue, especially if there are numerous retailers such as a bookstore, coffee shop, restaurant, etc. Additionally, as a modification or complementary activity, students could work individually or in teams to create their own scavenger hunts for another team or class (or the instructor!) to complete. This would assess whether students are able to recognize and identify specific marketing strategies used by retailers in the marketplace without the instructor's guidance and challenge them to reach the highest levels in Bloom's Taxonomy by having them create new learning experiences based on their knowledge (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956). This type of activity would likely be more time-consuming and possibly work better as an out-of-class homework assignment. Additionally, to share their experiences, students could take pictures or videos of what they observed. Future steps involve implementing the activity with additional classes and conducting a quantitative assessment of student perceptions and associated learning outcomes based on the qualitative findings presented in this research.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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