Course Description and Objectives

At the heart of any business is demand for the product or service. Therefore, an understanding of what, when, why, where and how consumers choose products, is important for marketers. Research into consumer behavior over the last several decades has drawn on various fields such as psychology, economics, anthropology and sociology. Based on this, several consumer behavior models and theories have been developed that can help marketers. In this course, a classic consumer decision making model will be examined to see how marketers can make managerial decisions based on an understanding of the different steps in the consumer choice process. We will see how this model can be adapted and modified for various products, services and circumstances so that they can be helpful for making appropriate marketing strategies such as segmentation and positioning. In order to gain better insights into consumer behavior such as consumer learning, perception and brand loyalty, we will look at some marketing research techniques and tools that will help the marketer. Students will have the opportunity to discuss real life cases, cutting edge as well as popular articles, do several in-class exercises and conduct small scale research studies on actual consumers.

At the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Analyze consumer decision making in a variety of situations and be able to develop a simple decision model for a specific product/brand/situation.
- Gain an appreciation of several facets of consumer behaviors so that it can be applied to improving marketing strategy.
- Utilize both conventional and novel research methods to solve management problems (such as segmentation, positioning, customer satisfaction etc.) through an understanding of consumer behavior.
- Do a small scale consumer research study to help solve a management problem or analyze recent CB studies and examine how they can be applied to your own business.

Course Approach

The format of the course is a combination of lectures, discussions of articles and cases, in-class exercises and a project. You are expected to prepare the assigned material, to attend class and to actively participate in class discussions.
Course Materials

**Reading Packet:** A list of cases and articles will be provided. Most cases are from Harvard Business Publishing. Articles are from leading consumer research journals as well as some popular business magazines.

**Textbook:** There is no specific textbook assigned. There are plenty of textbooks in the market. You can use any of them to supplement the textpak. One recent book that you might consider is: *Consumer Behavior: How Humans Think, Feel and Act in the Marketplace*, by Banwari Mittal et al, Open Mentis Publishing, 2008.

**Some fun books to read on consumer behavior:**
- *Positioning: The Battle for your Mind* by Al Ries and Jack Trout; McGraw Hill

Evaluation

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<tr>
<th>Evaluation Item</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Group Case Analysis : Report &amp; Presentation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Individual write-up of Case : Report</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Individual write-up of Articles (2*5)</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Mini-Project**: (Individual or Group)</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Class Participation, Discussion and Critique of Cases/ Articles/ Projects, Group In-Class Exercises</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Term Project (can be done in group or individually)</td>
<td>25%</td>
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** You can opt to do two additional article reviews instead of a mini-project

Case Discussions

Cases are carefully chosen to highlight different aspects of consumer behavior and their implication for marketing strategy. I will provide a set of questions for each case that you can use as a signpost. However, you need not restrict yourself to these questions or issues. You can raise additional issues that you consider relevant and important. As you are probably aware, all cases are about some events that happened in the past (obviously, since it is already published). One temptation in analyzing the case and deciding on a managerial course of action is to do what the firm subsequently did in real life. This, however, may not necessarily be the correct approach. The firm’s actual decision may or may not be the best approach. Also, other factors subsequent to the case would have impacted the actual decision taken by management. The value of a case is in looking at the case data alone and any other info that would have been common knowledge at the time of the case and then deciding on a course of action. Although cases are historical, they are very valuable in giving us an opportunity to see how basic consumer behavior principles can be applied to marketing strategy even if specific circumstances vary.

Case presentation and Report:

Five cases have been designated for in-depth discussion and report writing by groups and for individual submissions. These are:

1. TiVo in 2002
2. L’Oreal Class to Mass with Plenitude
3. Inside Intel Inside
4. Priceline.com: Naming your Own Price
5. Pokemon you Gotta Catch ’em All
Each of these cases will be assigned to a group on first day of class. Each group will present and write a detailed analysis of the assigned case.

Each individual will also submit One detailed case analysis of any of the above 5 cases (apart from the one they were assigned as a group). Since I would like these to be spread out over the term, I will have sign-up sheets for these on first day of class.

This written reports whether for individual or group assignments can be about 3-5 pages (typed, double spaced and font size 12). The actual number of pages are not important- what I will be looking for is whether you have identified the major CB issues in the case, suggested a suitable course of action for management and give compelling reasons why. The rest of the class should also come prepared to discuss the case. Your class participation marks depend on how well you are able to critique the presenting group and offer your own solutions and suggestions. Grades for both the presenting group and the rest of the class also depend on whether you are able to generate a lively and pertinent discussion.

Article Discussion & Report

Articles are chosen from both leading marketing journals as well as a few from popular journals and business magazines related to the topic under discussion for that session. These are meant to provide a basis for discussing the topic of the day.

Each individual will do two “article reviews” over the term. Each review may be based on one article or on a combination of related articles. The first review is due on first day of class (June 28th). Choose one or more related articles (or even a consumer related movie instead of an article) to do this review. See tentative course outline for list of articles related to topics we will discuss that day.

The written article review should be brief, about 2-3 pages. It should highlight the main points, critically review consumer behavior issues and examine how the ideas can be applied to your business or any business you are interested in. In addition, although a formal presentation is not required, those submitting the report should lead the class discussion on the article. I expect others in the class to join in the discussion. For the second review, I will pass along sign-up sheets to spread them out over the rest of the term.

Mini Projects (MP): The purpose of this activity is to apply concepts or research techniques discussed in class to obtain consumer behavior insights in a quick and focused manner. Unlike the term project where I expect you to do a more detailed project, this will be a specific and short duration activity. This is an opportunity to use new or novel methods, explore hunches or do a quick informal survey. You may use this mini project as a prelude to your term project so there is some synergy of effort.

You may submit and present your MP in any of the eight sessions, i.e. except the first and last sessions. Output is in the form of a written report (2-3 pages) and a brief presentation. Presentation need not be formal i.e. no need for power point type presentation unless you want to. The idea is to share your CB insights with the class.

MPs can be done in groups or individually. Ideally it would help to have the MPs related to the topic under discussion that session or the preceding session. Please let me know in advance (the previous class or a few days before) when you plan to submit the report & present your findings.
so that I will know how much time to allocate for other activities. A list of suggested topics will be in your textpak. If you want to do a MP on June 28th, please contact me before course starts so I can help you and also allocate time for your presentation.

Term Project

The purpose of the project is to help you apply concepts learnt to a specific marketing situation of your choice. You may do this in groups or individually. You may do primary or secondary research. If you have not already done a course on marketing research, I can give you a crash course outside class hours. The purpose here is not to evaluate your research per se, but to provide an opportunity to solve a managerial problem through a better understanding of consumer behavior by using research as a tool. I expect a short, focused and original research study where the emphasis is on gaining insights into consumer behavior. If you plan to extend research done for another project, please cite the earlier work and show what exactly the new contribution is.

Here are the steps required for the project.

- Identify a management problem/ consumer behavior issue you are interested in.
- Do a brief background research of this problem or issue and why/how you think a better understanding of consumer behavior will help you solve the management issue. This can be descriptive based on your current understanding of the situation or from company literature or research based on published sources.
- Identify one or two research questions that will help you solve the management problem.
- Decide on the best way of doing primary research. You choose any research technique such as: in-depth interviews, focus group, content analysis, observation, metaphor elicitation, surveys, experiments or a combination of them.
- Analyze the results and come with a managerial recommendation

Students have done very good projects even when the course was done in a one-month compressed format. Since you have two months, if you start early enough, you can do a fairly in-depth project. Some examples of topics you might consider are given below.

- Defining and eliciting customer satisfaction for a product you are marketing
- Developing a consumer behavior model
- Developing a positioning map
- Spending a day in the life of your customer
- Segmenting your market in a new way based on an understanding of CB
- Examine if there is consumer interest in a product/ service (several students have used this opportunity to check out interest for a new business they were considering).

You may choose any of the above or come with your own. If short and focused is not your cup of tea, you can do a project which lists ten consumer behavior principles/ insights you learnt in this course and how you can apply them to your business.

I need a commitment from the group/ individual by July 19th in the form of a project proposal. This can be a brief and less than a page. I need to know your topic, research question you will be studying and the method you will use. This is not for grading purposes but to get you started on the project and also to help and guide you better. The earlier you decide the more time you have to actually do your project.
Project Report and Presentation:  The project report and presentation are due on the second session of last week, i.e. August 30th. The project report can be about 5-7 pages (typed, double-spaced 12 size font). What I am looking for is consumer behavior insights you obtained through this project and how it was helpful to your business. Make sure, you include an executive summary at the beginning of the report.

Absences
Please note that missing a whole day on Saturday is equivalent to missing two classes. This will involve a loss of 10 points (roughly one grade level). If you know in advance you will miss classes due to travel or other reasons, please consider other courses. If a true medical or other such emergency arises, I will assign make-ups.

Late Submissions/ Incompletes
All late submissions will involve loss of points. This is fair to all those who are on time. Also, please submit reports that neat & professional (typed wherever possible, stapled etc.). Email submissions will be accepted only if I give you special permission. I have had some haphazard and irregular submissions in the past. Note that any assignment including make-ups submitted after the last day of class will not be graded. Part of the learning experience in an MBA program is adhering to a discipline that takes deadlines, professional reports etc. in account. Also, I am not a full-time faculty member here. My contract ends when the course is over. So, Incompletes may not be possible unless GSM makes some special arrangement with me for this.

About Me: I got my PhD in marketing from New York University and have been teaching at universities within the U.S. and abroad for the last seventeen years. I have taught various marketing courses such as: Marketing Management, Marketing Research, Consumer Behavior, New Product Development, Pricing Strategies and Business & Society. In addition to teaching, I have been a marketing research consultant for non-profit and government agencies abroad and have also published several papers and business cases in refereed journals and books including an award winning paper in the Journal of Retailing. In the area of consumer behavior, I am interested in and have published or presented papers on consumer perceptions of cause-related marketing, genetically modified foods, gift-giving behavior and consumer learning in an unfamiliar environment. Currently, I am a marketing research and management consultant as well as a marketing educator.

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