

TO TAKE OR NOT TO TAKE: THE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR DECISION-MAKING PROCESS AS FRAMEWORK FOR STUDENT NEW COURSE CHOICE

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ABSTRACT

Much past research on marketing education has focused on student learning and classroom interactions; the issue of student course choice has largely been neglected. It is important to understand not only what compels students to choose one existing course over another, but also what attracts students to new courses, in order to continue attracting students to a rapidly evolving discipline. It has been shown that students tend to view their educational choices in consumerist terms (Nicholls et al. 1995), and thus a consumer behavior decision-making framework can serve as a model of students' course choices. In this paper, we outline a conceptual framework of student course choices, developing propositions based on motivation-ability theory, the Theory of Reasoned Action, and other theories.

PROPOSITIONS

Motivation theory suggests increased risk leads to increased motivation. Thus, we posit that students who are financially independent will be more motivated towards their course selections than those who are financially dependent (P1a). Similarly, students who are on academic probation or must pass a class to graduate will be more motivated towards their course selections than those whose grade in the course has no immediate consequence (P1b). We also theorize that students will be more motivated towards selecting courses within their major than courses outside their major (P2a); and that students will be more motivated towards selecting upper-division courses than lower-division GE courses (P2b).

Research has shown ease of product exposure increases with motivation/ability; and individuals with high motivation/ability are more likely to pay attention to product information than are those with low levels (Canfer and Ackerman 1989). Thus, we posit that students with low motivation/ability towards course selections will be less exposed to information about those courses (P3); students with low motivation/ability towards course selections will pay less attention to information they are exposed to about course choices (P4); and repetitive course marketing of new course information will result in higher a) exposure

and b) attention paid by low motivation/ability students than single-source new course communication efforts (P5).

We also build on the learning and memory literature, proposing that students will perceive themselves to better understand the purpose of a course which clearly fits with their preexisting (marketing) category associations than those that do not (P6); and students will put more effort into processing course descriptions that differ moderately from their preexisting category associations than those that differ from them extensively or that match them closely (P7). We further propose that students with low motivation and ability will process course descriptions in more detail if the descriptions are benefits-focused rather than attributes-focused (P8a), and that students with high motivation and ability will process descriptions in more detail if the descriptions are attributes-focused rather than benefits-focused (P8b).

Drawing from the attitude formation literature we posit that students with low motivation/ability will more readily change their attitudes towards new course topics than will high motivation/ability students (P9); yet repetition of marketing communications regarding new courses will generate negative attitudes more quickly among high motivation and ability students than low motivation and ability students (P10). Further, high motivation students should be more likely to process new course information via the generation of support and counterarguments than low motivation students (P11a), while low motivation students should be more likely to process new course information via heuristic processing than high motivation students (P11b). Finally, for high motivation students, the use of two-sided arguments will generate more positive attitudes towards new courses than one-sided arguments (P12), while for low motivation students listing more attributes in a new course description will generate more positive attitudes than listing fewer attributes (P13).