

A FAMILIAR FACE: TEACHING MARKETING TO STUDENTS OF COLOR

LaCalvin D. Simpson, Indiana University East

Abstract

Teaching marketing has always presented unique challenges. New technology and crossed target audiences has opened the gateway for interesting pathways of new marketing strategies. Most students take what is taught in the classroom at face value. Students simply learn what is need to pass the course without considering individual thought or questioning the methods. Marketing in particular has projected the perception that all course content is relatable to all students of color (SOC). However that is where the problem lies. There is still a large segment of African American students, because of their upbringing, continue to struggle with this concept. As educators we do not ask the questions: Does this content relate to everyone in the course? Can this information be adapted? We simply teach the material that is given to us.

The African American population may view general marketing plans as one sided and it does not take into account the “Black Urban Experience”. Basic elements of marketing can viewed differently based on urban living conditions and the basic need to survive their current surroundings. It is no secret that companies adjusts not only their marketing strategies depending on the data they collected on a projected target audience, specifically urban areas.

The main function of marketing is to create the feeling of “*need*” from the idea of “*want*”. This concept can have different meanings to students from urban areas. Many African-American students question the very basics of marketing itself and its relatability to why did I “*need*” to purchase that particular product. This is based on individual perception that has been shaped by subcultures in the African American community. Thus the general perception of “needs” and “wants” can often be interchangeable depending on the individual and personal circumstance.

Although minority college enrollment has increased, America’s teachers are disproportionately female (75 percent) and white (83 percent), according to recent federal data. Black men make up less than 2 percent of teachers (McClain, 2016). White or Caucasian instructors can often be dismissed as your typical college professor who is only there to teach the course material and no real connection to the minority student population. This can cause some disconnection to the relevancy of simple marketing terms. Being an African American male instructor who has taught at majority white institutions, I understand the importance of providing a “*familiar face*” of whom students of color can relate to. I had the opportunity to teach marketing courses both a predominately white colleges and at HBCU’s (Historically Black Colleges and Universities), in which many of the black students came from challenging backgrounds both academically and personally. Based on my observational research I have noticed a difference in learning styles.

It is projected that all students regardless of color can comprehend basic course information. Relatability factor that add another layer of understanding to SOC’s. Even basic information can be challenging. Take a look at the 4P’s of marketing: Product- Lack of income is more prevalent in the black community and will determine the product's value. Products may not be available in urban areas. Quality of products may not be the same. Place-What is considered the right place? It is a matter of convenience for most in the black community. Even at the cost of a higher price products. Lack of transportation also plays a factor. Promotion-Promotional efforts are hit or miss. Its effectiveness depends on the other three components of the 4P’s. Specifically the wants vs. needs and the value of the product. Price- Lack of income is more prevalent in the black community. Upbringing may shape perceptions of wants and needs. Multiple alternatives may be available at a lower price. For example a can of generic beans that cost eighty-five cent less than popular brands.

I acknowledge that it is my responsibility to make sure all student understand, comprehend course material. I embrace the idea of teaching marketing to SOC's without re-enforcing negative stereotypes. No longer will African-American students feel ostracized and irrelevant to course material, these students will see information as it is relevant and relatable to them as well.

References Available Upon Request