

Teach to the Room

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Abstract

A key component of marketing strategy is marketing communications. To be effective and efficient, media and message strategy will be developed with the intended audience in mind. The current marketing environment has seen the impact of the rapid diffusion of technologies into the mix. Not unlike corporate marketing communications, the marketing education environment has increasingly experienced demands to incorporate technology into the delivery of courses. Changing learning styles, business environments, student values, attitudes and behaviors along with institutional demands have contributed to the growth in distance learning facilitated by new technologies. In addition, nontraditional students often prefer to communicate electronically and find distant learning to have desirable flexibility. Therefore, the marketing education literature devoted to online teaching has been considerable (ie. Anitsal, Anitsal, Barger, Fidan and Allen 2010).

This paper, however, investigates means to make traditional in-class courses more effective. What is the differential advantage of teaching a course face-to-face, even in large classes, over on-line courses? This question needs to be answered independently by the institution, the educator and the student each of which has their own perspective on the issue. Given that the audience for this study is marketing educators this paper will approach the issue of the learning servicescape along with educator behavior to determine subtleties in student preferences. In addition, four personality traits will be examined for differences in learning environment preferences. The results of this examination, along with other findings will be incorporated into suggestions for tactics and behaviors to improve in-class teaching performance.

A total of 255 undergraduate students at a mid-sized public university were surveyed and given extra credit in random business classes. The sample was 55% male and 45% female, a statistic that roughly reflect the overall enrollment in the college of business. The largest proportion of the sample were seniors (38%), however, all grade levels were included (21% freshmen, 15% sophomores and 26% juniors).

Servicescape variables that were deemed to be pertinent for the study were preferred row (front, middle and back), room section (middle, instructor's left or right), tiered or flat room, number of seats in room and proximity to door. Whether it is important to sit next to someone they know and time of day preferences were

also investigated. Testing and studying tactic preferences were included. Nine Likert statements examined teaching behaviors such as the use of Power Point and making eye contact.

Four personality traits were studied. Previous studies have focused on personality types and learning differences (ie. Ashraf, Fendler and Shrikhande 2013; Ziegert 2000) thus, providing an opportunity to look at specific personality traits and learning preferences. Four distinct personality traits were chosen to reflect different impacts on the face-to-face interactions between instructors and students.

Since the primary purpose of this study was to investigate face-to-face teaching situations the personality trait of introvert/extravert was included with the assumption that interacting with an introvert may require different course delivery than to an extravert. A confrontational student may require a different approach than one less prone to be argumentative thus likelihood of confrontation was measured and explored. An easy-going student vs. a student with a fixed mindset might require modified lectures or assignments to transmit course information therefore rigidity was measured. Given the demands in today's business environment and the unique contributions of marketing managers creative problem solving was investigated as a defining personality trait.

In a brief summary of selected findings, highlights will be shared. When it came to seat preference, none of the four personality traits were significantly related to specific seat choices. Thus, it can't be assumed that more confrontational students could be found in the back row, or to the instructor's left, for example. An area of the room, either back row vs front row or left-side vs right-side, was not more favored by individuals with the measured personality traits.

However, it was determined that personality traits were different for the students actually in the class, but would have preferred to take the course online (30.6%). Those who would have preferred an online delivery were significantly more introverted, more confrontational, less rigid and higher in creative problem solving. These results could have implications for both in-class and on-line course preparation.

Of the Likert statements referring to in-class course delivery the one with the highest level of agreement (4.24/five-point scale) was "I wish all instructors would give organized lectures so I could take good notes". These findings correlate with numerous studies on teaching excellence (ie. Faranda and Clarke 2004, Smart, Kelley and Conant 2003). The statement with the lowest level of agreement (2.12/five-point scale) was "It is distracting an instructor wanders around the room during class". Again, this finding contributes to advice from over a decade ago that students appreciate movement during classroom delivery. Another statement with a high level of disagreement is "Without Power Point a class is boring". Perhaps this

indicates that today's students appreciate the dynamics of personal and face-to-face delivery of course content.

Additional finding, including row selection and ultimate grade in the course, will prove to be insightful and will contribute to the conclusions and suggested application. In-class course delivery will be improved if the educator knows as much about the audience and their preferences as possible. The findings can help enhance achievement of institutional, educator and student goals.

Developing a good rapport with the audience, or students, is essential for communication effectiveness. The findings of this study, integrated with other findings, will be utilized to present learning tactics and traits that lead to a more personal and credible delivery for the traditional classroom course.

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Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and Practitioners: Effective teaching in traditional classroom settings is still of concern to the majority of marketing educators. Investigating the dynamics of face-to-face teaching is a novel means to enhance our understanding of the learning process.

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