CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR¹ [DOCTORAL SEMINAR COURSE]

Lead learner: Prof. Suresh Paul Antony
Email & Mobile: SPA@IIMTRICHY.AC.IN | +91-96558 32324
Class contact hours: 30 hours

Preamble

The purpose of this seminar is to provide students with an introduction to topics in consumer behavior. The class will be organized in a way that allows you to gain -

1. exposure to a breadth of consumer behavior topics
2. depth in areas of your choice
3. practical experience to prepare you for life as a researcher

The breadth objective will be achieved through our class meetings. We shall discuss an aspect of consumer behavior in each class, drawing primarily upon readings from marketing. Students are responsible for primary readings, which will be discussed in a seminar-format in class; students will be treated as adults until proven otherwise!

Additional readings may be listed to provide background information and to guide students interested in further investigation of a topic. These readings were selected to illustrate: how basic social science research and consumer behavior research are related; how theories and concepts are applied, adapted, constrained and combined when applied to consumer issues; and how research streams evolve over time. Each student should come to the seminar prepared to discuss each primary article in depth and to present your ideas about the major ideas, contributions, or shortcomings of each article.

The depth objective will be accomplished through independent reading in conjunction with two short idea papers and an in-depth research paper. Each of the short idea papers should identify the basic problem, outline hypotheses, describe the experimental design and procedure, and briefly discuss how you would analyze the data. They should not include a literature review and should be no more than 2 pages long in total (minimum 11 pt. font). The final paper may be based on one of these research ideas or may be another idea. It should include a literature review as well as much more detailed versions of all of the sections in the idea paper. Papers are typically 20-30 pages in length and written in either JCR or APA format. The idea papers and final paper are intended to provide students with an opportunity to develop research ideas that may prove useful for future research activity in their area of interest.

The practical objective will be accomplished through a short assignment designed to socialize students into academic life. Students will practice on an article review. In addition, students will develop their ability to professionally critique scholarly articles throughout the seminar and will be given the responsibility to lead class discussion of selected articles from the reading list.

¹ This course outline is adapted from AMA DocSIG (2004), Bettman (2009), Bolton (2003), Darke & Goldsmith (2005), Menon (2007), Reed II (2005), Tuan Pham (2011), Warren (2012).
Pedagogy [philosophy, tools and approach]

This is the age of distributed learning. We would learn best, when we participate in the generation of knowledge, as producer-consumers. Therefore, I am confident that you would actively participate in the learning process; one of the ways to participate would be to come prepared with the assigned reading(s).

Our approach to learning -

- Critical and creative thinking ability: We would seek to develop critical and creative thinking ability. Decision-making and problem solving in a business environment can be very complex. Uninformed managers can make poor decisions that affect the lives of many individuals. Therefore, our most important goal would be to learn to be informed and effective decision-makers.
- Honesty and fair play: We would strive to stay abreast of developments in business literature and research. My job is not to show you what I know, but to teach you what you need to know, and more importantly to facilitate your learning. We would therefore not fight shy to hide our ignorance and ensure an environment conducive for learning.
- Respect for each other: We would treat each other as co-learners and with respect. We are in this journey together. We must try to accommodate questions, positions and misgivings at any time, not just during class and office hours. I can sacrifice the syllabus and schedule if you do not understand what has already been covered.
- Mid-course corrections: Your feedback is welcome at all times. Mid-course corrections would save us a lot of trouble. I actively encourage continuous teaching evaluation. You may present to me an evaluation of the course at any time during the semester in person, or by email or in an anonymous fashion.

Evaluation

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Class participation

It is needless to emphasise that students come to class prepared for discussion. What you get out of this course depends upon what you - and your fellow students - put into it. You cannot expect to develop your research skills by passively attending class and taking careful notes. You should actively listen and think critically about the concepts and issues raised. You should be willing and able to present your analysis and viewpoint to the class when the opportunity presents itself. You will also be asked to serve as a discussion leader; i.e., lead seminar participants in a critical analysis, evaluation and integration of selected readings.

For every class session, a student will have the responsibility to briefly present one assigned paper. I will randomly assign a paper to a student and while every student may not end up presenting in every session, it is my hope that by the end of the semester, all students would have presented approximately an equal number of papers. As the “presenter”, you will need to summarize what was
done in the paper, and as well as make a critical assessment of the paper. This responsibility entails

two things:

i. guiding the class discussion on the paper
ii. bringing a one-page (no longer than 1 page, please!) summary of the paper to class - please
make copies for the whole class.

When guiding the class discussion, please do not summarize the paper (since everyone will have
read it, and the written summary will serve as a memory cue for everyone). Rather, prepare a 10-
minute (maximum) presentation of the following:

a. What are the central findings of this paper?
b. Why do you think this paper was published? In other words, how does it contribute to our
knowledge?
c. What would you have done differently to test the hypotheses?
d. Are there any alternate explanations to the results?
e. What may be some specific future research directions? Pick one to discuss. Please also be
prepared to answer questions that your student colleagues may have about details of the
paper that were unclear to them.

For the written summary, make sure to examine the stated objective and positioning of the research,
the hypotheses, the methodology, the results, and 2-3 sentences of actual contribution. In addition,
please read all the papers that have been assigned for each day. Your class participation grade will
be determined by:

a. active discussion of the papers
b. your presentation and critique of the assigned papers
c. no rewards for mere attendance

Final Paper

This is the final component of your grade. You can choose a topic of interest to you, and in doing so
feel free to go beyond the topics that we discuss in class; you may also wish to work on the idea
papers you have pursued earlier. Please understand that in this seminar we merely scratch the
surface as far as breadth of topics and depth within a topic are concerned. We have to exercise
severe restraint in deciding on topics and papers. Your research paper should reflect in-depth
reading in your selected area and this involves going beyond papers discussed in class. This will allow
you to gain knowledge in areas that interest you as the course provides only an overview of each
area.

A brief outline of your research idea has to be submitted [TBD]; in this outline you will write a couple
of paragraphs about the topic area you wish to pursue for the final proposal that you will be working
on during the semester, and make a presentation [TBD].

Your final paper would typically address the following:

i. literature review of the area in which you seek to submit a research proposal, together with
the basic propositions you seek to investigate
ii. write-up of the methodology that you propose to employ to address your research question;
you are not required to conduct any empirical data collection or analysis for this project.
However, you are required to develop a proposal that is detailed enough in terms of hypotheses to be tested, experimental design, method and procedure, so that we could assess the proposal carefully and give you constructive comments.

**Guidelines**

You may select an issue that merits research and develop a detailed research proposal. Your research proposal should reflect the various considerations discussed during the course. It should be sufficiently detailed so that you can implement the research and collect data. There is an absolute 30-page limit, inclusive of references (mandatory), tables (optional) and figures (optional).

Write with the reader in mind! i.e. assume the readers perspective when writing, reviewing, and editing your paper.

**Introduction** *(Positioning and Overview of the Paper)*

i. Importance - big picture - knowing the literature and important issues  
ii. State purpose very early  
iii. Issue in marketing/conceptual issue/combination of the two  
iv. State main findings

**Literature Review and Hypotheses**

v. Use only what you need for the case at hand  
vi. Use subheads and overviews of coming points - try to have a logical flow  
vii. Summarize main points you want the reader to get  
viii. Hypotheses: explicit or not?

**Method**

ix. Overview  
x. Sections: Participants, Design, Procedure, Measures, Analysis Plan

**General Discussion**

xi. Summary  
xii. Relate back to introduction and purpose – conclusions  
xiii. Some issues better in discussion than up front  
xiv. Limitations and future research

**References**

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2 Guidelines are guidelines! You are welcome to violate them with impunity; however exercise caution!
Course Outline [tentative]

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Introduction to the Course

We will spend some time during this session discussing the outline and class requirements. In addition, we will begin a preliminary discussion about what consumer research is.

Discussion questions:

i. How you would define consumer research?

ii. How is consumer research different from research in basic disciplines such as psychology?

Readings:


Perception, Attention, and Search

What we perceive and encode depends on what we attend to and search for, which in turn depends on many factors (some of which we can control). External factors often affect how we attend to certain stimuli. At the same time, our own prior knowledge and experience also determines what we attend to in our environment.

Discussion questions:

Think of the following issues when you read the assigned papers:

i. What are the factors that influence the encoding of marketing stimuli (e.g. ads)? Consider factors related to the stimulus as well as the perceiver (i.e. the consumer).
ii. How much attention do consumers pay when they choose packaged goods?
iii. What consumer-related factors can affect the extent of search?
iv. What types of studies should be conducted to further our knowledge of consumer search?

Readings:


**Inferencing**

We shall first discuss consumers’ use of incomplete information to form inferences. Inferences can be content-related such as information about specific brand attributes missing in advertising or about brand personality or about the source of information. We shall then discuss when and why such inferences are made.

**Discussion questions:**

i. What is an inference? What types of inferences do consumers make?

ii. What inference rules do consumers use? When are the different rules likely to be used? How can you assess the perceived reliability of each rule?

iii. Under what conditions do people make inferences? When are these inferences likely to be spontaneous? How can you measure spontaneity?

iv. Come up with your own contingency-based model of inference making.

v. What do you think prevents people from updating their beliefs in many cases? When are priors especially likely to be sticky?

**Readings:**


Learning

We shall start with a discussion of consumer learning based on classical conditioning theory. We will then discuss how consumer knowledge about product categories and brands are used in judgments.

Discussion questions:

i. What is learning? Differentiate between associative and cognitive learning.
ii. Compare priming effects to conditioning effects.
iii. Define consumer knowledge. What are the different types of knowledge? How does it develop over time?
iv. What are the effects of knowledge on information acquisition, evaluation strategies, and evaluation?

Readings:

Classical Conditioning:

Preference Formation:


Knowledge and Memory:


**Expertise:**


**Categorisation**

Categorization is the fundamental cognitive activity of arranging objects, events, and entities around us into meaningful groups and categories. It therefore plays a critical role in a wide variety of judgments and decisions that we commonly undertake.
Discussion questions:

i. Why is categorization important to study?

ii. Descriptive issues related to categorization:
   a. How are categories represented in memory?
   b. How do these categories develop?
   c. What are the different kinds of categories?
   d. What are the bases for categorization decisions?

iii. How has the literature in marketing typically approached the categorization literature? Use illustrations from research on brand extensions, new product evaluations, and brand positioning.

iv. How does the act of categorization have important consequences for both the target decision in question, as well as several unrelated and independent decision contexts?

Readings:


Attitudes

The area of attitudes is one of the most researched areas in psychology. Early research in the area was concerned with structural models looking at information integration and components of attitudes. In the last decade, attention has shifted to process models which consider how attitudes are formed. One such process model is the Elaboration Likelihood Model and the paper by Petty et al. has an application of this model in consumer behavior. More recently, there are some ideas and measurement-related issues put forth by Greenwald on implicit attitudes. Before this class, go to [http://www.tolerance.org/hidden_bias/index.html](http://www.tolerance.org/hidden_bias/index.html), choose a domain, (e.g., gender, race etc.) and complete the online Implicit Attitude Test for that domain. Print a copy of your results. Consider the
test and analyze its procedure and theoretical assumptions in the Greenwald et al paper. Come to class prepared to discuss these issues.

Discussion questions:

i. How are attitudes formed?

ii. Are the central and peripheral routes (or the systematic and heuristic routes) to persuasion mutually exclusive?

iii. Under what conditions are attitudes updated? What are some of the mechanisms by which such updating takes place?

Readings:


**Judgment**

When consumers make judgments, what is accessible in memory plays a big role in the judgment making process. However, there could be other intervening factors that affect how and when such accessible information is used in judgments and choice. In this session, we will discuss a few of these factors.

**Discussion questions:**

i. What are some of the factors that affect information accessibility?

ii. When is accessible information diagnostic?

iii. What is the relevance of these constructs for consumer judgment and choice?

**Readings:**


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**Context Effects in Judgment**

In this session, we shall discuss the role of contextual factors on judgments. We will discuss the broad question of the conditions under which judgments are consistent with (or assimilated with), versus contrasted with, other information or prior judgments.

**Discussion questions:**

i. What are assimilation and contrast effects? Operationally, how do researchers detect assimilation and contrast effects?

ii. How might the type of information rendered accessible by the context influence the nature and direction of context effects on judgments?

iii. What theoretical constructs affect whether people construct an evaluation versus retrieve an existing evaluation from memory?

iv. How might context effects that occur at encoding differ from those that occur at retrieval? How does the role of processing capacity on context effects vary at encoding versus retrieval?

**Readings:**

Emotions

Emotions can work in at least two ways: They can affect the outcome of decisions we make, and they can be affected by these very same decisions. In this session, we will spend time trying to understand some of the mechanisms by which emotions operate.

Discussion questions:

i. Are affect, emotions and mood all different terms for the same phenomenon?
ii. What is the contribution of appraisal dimensions to the emotions literature?
iii. Develop a research idea in a consumption context based on the readings for today.

Readings:


**Fluency effects**

Over the past two decades psychologists have shown that our judgments and decisions are influenced not only by information content, but also by the subjective ease or difficulty with which the information is perceived and processed. Such phenomena fall in the realm of fluency effects, which will be the focus of this session.
Discussion questions:

i. How prevalent are fluency effects in everyday decision making? Indicate your response on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 = "rarely" and 10 = "everyday" and justify your answer.

ii. Are fluency effects based on affective or cognitive responses?

iii. Availability, ease and fluency: Are these different terms for the same effect or are these different effects?

iv. Are fluency effects conscious or non-conscious? If fluency effects are non-conscious, then how can consumers articulate the underlying naive theory?

Readings:


Automatic / Non-conscious Processes

In this session, we return to an issue that we have touched upon in previous sessions (e.g., in discussions on implicit memory, priming, fluency). This time, we will try to pin down what it means for a process to be automatic. We will also highlight why this distinction is important for consumer behavior research.

Discussion questions:

i. Why is automaticity important to study?

ii. What kinds of consumer processes are automatic?

iii. What kinds of consumer processes are not automatic?

iv. How do you demonstrate automaticity?

v. What's next in the automaticity literature?

Readings:


