# THE VALUE OF PLACE IN MARKETING EDUCATION

Brian Vander Schee, Aurora University

Susan Geringer, California State University, Fresno

Ellen Novar, Wilmington College

E. Vincent Carter, California State University, Bakersfield

We believe that much of the discussion in contemporary marketing education has revolved around how to use social media in classroom instruction. However, what has been explored to a lesser degree is the value of various forms of content delivery and how students perceive their *place* in those methodologies. Place can be defined many ways including physical location, social access, virtual environment, or cultural experience. In marketing education much focus has been on using technology to facilitate how place is defined and thus utilized to promote effective teaching. However, the concept of place is not so one-dimensional. In our panel session we explore the various aspects of place that influence student learning. We have divided the broader topic into three more concisely defined areas to help facilitate the conversation as outlined below.

Place as a Physical Entity

At one time attending class in a physical classroom was a given. Many courses are still delivered in this traditional format. However the availability of information resources online, such as e-books may diminish the importance of being physically present for class. Although faculty may insist that attending class adds value to the educational experience students may not share this perspective. Research was conducted at two institutions to ascertain student opinions on the fairness of class attendance policies and whether attendance influences individual student performance or performance of the class as a whole.

Survey results at a private liberal arts college ($n = 296$) and a larger public institution ($n = 366$) suggest that students perceive some leniency in class attendance policy is most fair however mandatory attendance where absences are penalized with the opportunity to make up for the nonattendance with extra assignments likely increases individual student performance. Students perceive that a mandatory attendance policy penalizing each absence with no opportunity to make up for non-attendance increases overall class performance. Similar results were found regarding on-time arrival policies where a certain number of late arrivals converts into an absence and then the

attendance policy of the class is enforced. Follow up research will determine whether actual student performance correlates with class attendance data. This will add to the discussion regarding *place as a physical entity.*

Place as a Virtual Environment

The learning communication process relies so much on place orientation that the emergence of virtual instruction challenges marketing educators to revisit core pedagogical assumptions. Exploring the virtual dimension of place can reveal these pedagogical assumptions and improve course instruction. For virtual settings one must consider the "look and feel" associated with digital access devices, user-interface methods, online/website features, learning delivery network configurations, formats/protocols, media/content options, and design personalization – including artificial worlds and animated avatar personas. Virtual settings presently comprise only the signal stimuli for the human senses of sight, sound, and touch. Substituting purely information symbols for tactile material substance introduces new place coordinates for sharing learning content. The cognitive processing of learning content without physical interpersonal interaction or physically touching education materials goes to the heart of philosophical debates about being, reality, and existence. Negroponte's (1995) seminal work "Being Digital" highlights changes in the human environment that result from interacting with people as "bytes versus atoms." In practical terms, time, cost and convenience are the most often cited advantages of shared digital content. Other issues related to *virtual places of marketing education* are discussed.

A ripening literature stream has begun to examine the marketing education impacts of virtual presence and digital learning technology (Buzzard, et al. 2011; Wood 2011; Twining 2010; Kaplan, et al. 2010; Wood and Solomon 2009; Peltier, et al. 2003; Ueltschy 2001). Likewise, marketing educators must respond to the "real world" virtual media trends and digital marketing strategies reflected in societal and company practices. The marketing "servicescapes" literature is instructive for visualizing place orientation on the continuum from physical to virtual learning (Hightower 2010; Ezeh and Harris 2007; Rosenbaum 2005; Williams and Dargel 2004; Sherry 1998; Bitner 1992). Indeed, services marketing frameworks for charting the "product-service continuum' (Shostack 1977) as well as for "blueprinting" service processes based on structural visibility (Shostack 1987), can serve as templates for configuring learning delivery along the continuum of entirely physical to entirely virtual education places.

To that end, a basic communications model frames four virtual place parameters:

1.    Place orientation as a *spectrum* from entirely physical to entirely virtual learning platforms (education medium).

2.    Place orientation for *signaling* learning expectations and motivations (education receivers).

3.    Place orientation for *sampling* learning delivery methods by instructors (education senders).

4.    Place orientation as a *source* of shared content for learning design (education message).

Place as a Part of Culture

The place where students go following graduation is also of concern. Are students ready for the increasingly diverse culture in which we live? Are they ready to market their products, services, and ideas to people unlike them? Are we preparing students for these possibilities? These are questions we ask at a small college in small town Ohio. There was no other way to demonstrate to largely Ohioan students that other parts of our country are being energized by first- and second-generation immigrants from Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Middle East whose cultural and religious backgrounds have a meaningful impact on how they behave as consumers and how they respond to marketing messages than to bring students to those places. Our expeditions to places "off the beaten tracks" in Chicago hammered home to them that not everyone values, eats, shops, and lives like those belonging to the dominant Anglo-culture in the United States thus highlighting *place as a part of culture*.