JOURNALING IN MARKETING EDUCATION USING KOLB’S EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an empirical study which analyzes journaling as an experiential learning technique for marketing education. Although journal writing has been used successfully by marketing educators, this study examines an alternative assignment which uses Kolb’s experiential learning cycle. Students in a consumer behavior course were given a semester-long journaling assignment. Results are presented according to the four stages of learning according to Kolb. Journaling is shown to be an effective learning technique.

INTRODUCTION

The variety and popularity of experiential learning techniques used by marketing educators continue to expand (Gaidis and Andrews 1990). Computer simulations, case analyses, client projects, field trips, video tapes, and guest speakers represent some of the more traditional experiential learning techniques used (Henke, Locander, Mentzer, and Nastas 1988). Numerous creative new learning techniques have been discussed in the marketing literature. For example, in a consumer behavior course, Olsen (1994) asked students to write radio scripts incorporating various consumer behavior concepts into the script.

Many of the experiential learning techniques used in marketing education are group oriented. The effectiveness of such group projects is well documented in the marketing literature (Daly and Worrell 1993; Williams, Beard, and Rymer 1991; Haas and Wotruba 1990; Malhotra, Tashchian and Jain 1989; Ramocki 1987; Dommeyer 1986; de los Santos and Jensen 1985; and Goretsky 1984). Although students favorably evaluate most group assignments, they also frequently request fewer group projects. For marketing majors, often nearly every marketing course involves a major team assignment. Students complain about too many groups. The problems of team projects such as free-riding, are also noted in the literature (Strong and Anderson 1990; Sweeney 1973). Marketing educators see the numerous benefits of group assignments such as: (1) team projects more closely represent real world experience, (2) group dynamics are an important aspect of learning, (3) groups produce a higher quantity and quality of ideas, (4) less time is involved for the professor in terms of both grading and student contact. However, marketing educators may need to add more balance in assigning experiential learning techniques by incorporating more individual projects. The experiential learning technique discussed in this study is individual in nature.

Also, few experiential learning techniques used by marketing educators actually include all stages of learning. David A. Kolb (1984) developed an experiential learning model which includes four aspects to learning. The technique proposed in this study allows marketing students to experience all four phases of learning.

The assignment analyzed in this empirical study also encourages the important skill of writing in marketing education. Marketing educators have discussed this critical communication skill in numerous studies (Hansen and Hansen 1995; Corbin and Glynn 1992; Chonko 1993; November 1993).

The experiential learning technique researched in this study is called journaling. The specific type of journaling used here is based on Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning cycle. Although use of journal writing is not new to marketing education (Fisher 1990; November 1993; Moncrief, Shipp and Lamb 1995), this particular type of journaling is new for marketing educators. This study focuses on a particular format for journal writing which uses Kolb’s learning cycle.

Specifically, this paper presents:

(1) A summary of relevant literature on the effectiveness of journal writing in marketing education.
(2) A discussion of David A. Kolb's experiential learning model which will serve as a basis for the individual student journal assignment.

(3) Methodology of an empirical study on the use of journaling in marketing education.

(4) Results and direction for future research efforts.

JOURNAL WRITING IN MARKETING EDUCATION

A journal is a "personal form of communication that entails observation, analysis, and recording" (Moncrief, Shipp, and Lamb 1995). Recent studies have found some success in using journal writing as an experiential learning technique in marketing education (Fisher 1990; November 1993; Moncrief, Shipp and Lamb 1995). Fisher (1990) suggested that journaling assignments were found to help students integrate classroom concepts with the "real world," provide an increased sensitivity to marketing activities, and benefit student communication skills. November (1993) used journaling in a marketing management course as a method of assessment. In addition, he suggested that journal writing stimulates right-brain development which is often lacking in marketing assignments. The benefits of journal writing for both student and professor are expressed in Hansen and Hansen's (1995) article concerning Writing Across The Curriculum. Moncrief, Shipp and Lamb (1995) suggested the success of using journal writing assignments for students studying international business on a foreign study tour. This study suggests an alternative format for journal writing.

KOLB'S EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING MODEL

The focus of this study is a model created by David A. Kolb (1984). He developed an experiential learning model which suggests that learning occurs through a process called an Experiential Learning Cycle. This process begins with a "concrete experience," which leads to "reflective observation" or feelings and emotions related to the experience. "Abstract conceptualization" follows where concepts and theories are applied to the experience. "Active experimentation" completes the learning cycle as the concepts are put into practice generating new learning goals. According to Kolb, to be an effective learner, a person needs to be skilled in all four aspects of the process.

To learn from any experience a person must be able to describe an experience, then step back and reflect on the experience, analyze it according to theory, and finally use that knowledge in new situations (Cogian 1993). Most individuals need practice in this process of learning. This study uses the learning process described by Kolb as it applies to consumer behavior experiences. Few academic experiential learning techniques used by marketing educators actually allow students to experience all four stages of learning.

Previous studies in the area of journal writing in marketing education have not encouraged the student to complete all four stages of the experiential learning cycle described by Kolb. For example, in Fisher's (1990) study students were asked to note their observations of consumer behavior (the "concrete experience" stage) and relate these observations to material covered in the class or textbook (the "abstract conceptualization" stage). The other two phases of the learning cycle were not included in the assignment. Moncrief, Shipp, and Lamb's (1995) study which asked students to describe observations in a foreign country and then relate those observations to marketing theories learned in class also primarily considered only two stages of learning. The journaling assignment used in this study specifically incorporates all four stages of the learning cycle.

METHODOLOGY

Students in an undergraduate consumer behavior course were asked to use the journaling procedure for ten purchases throughout the semester. For each of their ten journal entries, students were asked to respond to the four areas of inquiry corresponding to Kolb's stages of learning. (See Appendix A for specific assignment.) For each journal entry or purchase each student was asked to write about the four areas of learning: (1) Concrete Experience, (2) Reflection, (3) Conceptualization, and (4) Experimentation. Since this is an exploratory study on journaling in marketing education, a convenience sample of 29 undergraduate marketing students was obtained. The sample included 15 men and 14 women with an average age of 26.3 which matched the age demographic of the school (an undergraduate urban campus).

Students were given the choice to write their entries in a notebook used for this specific purpose or enter their journal entries on a computer. The instructor gave the students an example of a journal entry for a purchase which included the four parts according to Kolb. Students were asked to number each entry (1 to 10), include the date of the entry and explain what purchase was being discussed. For each entry, the four stages of Concrete Experience, Reflection,
Conceptualization, and Experimentation were labeled. The instructor reviewed student entries, especially at the beginning of the semester, to make sure all students understood the assignment.

This individual journaling assignment was worth 25 percent of the grade for the consumer behavior course. Other than examinations, there were no other assignments in this particular course. At the end of the semester all students completed a brief questionnaire asking them to evaluate the journal assignment.

RESULTS

A total of 290 journal entries were analyzed by the author for the purpose of this research. Since this empirical study is not quantitative in nature, a content analysis of the findings is presented according to Berelson's (1952) method. Summary results from each of the four stages of Kolb's experiential learning cycle will be discussed.

Concrete Experience: In providing an objective description of a purchase for each journal entry, students selected a broad variety of goods and services. Certainly the purchases were fairly typical for college students attending an urban campus, yet several differences in the types of purchases made by men and women are noted. The number one product discussed by women (18% of all journal entries for women) was clothing or shoes. For men, the main product purchased (11% of all entries by men) was an automotive product or gasoline. A close second for the men (10% of entries) was clothing.

TABLE 1
Concrete Experience: Types of Purchases Selected by Men and Women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Car</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing/shoes</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast Food</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurants</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groceries</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifts</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beer</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice cream</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Reflection section often included personal, touching comments from students which allowed the instructor to learn more about individual students and feel a connection with them. Students' openness and honesty in the journals turned out to be a unexpected and positive surprise. Here are just a few examples:

- **Male student writing about a gift he had given to his girlfriend to "make up for making her mad":** "I truly know buying the item wouldn't help as much as if we talked things through. I didn't have a sense of joy or excitement when the purchase was made. I realize now in buying the wreath I was trying to make myself happy, not her. I was trying to buy her forgiveness."

- **Male student writing about buying a Father's Day card:** "These feelings were triggered because I love my father and I wanted to let him know that he has always been a great father...I feel that it is very important to show your parents how important they are to you. As children we don't show them this enough."

- **Young female Asian student writing about a dinner with her boyfriend:** "This was my first dinner with Vinh"
and my first time eating at Red Lobster. I was so excited that I had butterflies flying around my stomach like crazy. I felt so special and romantic at the same time because nobody ever took me out to celebrate my birthday before."

- A female student writing about buying a wedding gift: "I felt happy about the wedding for them and even a little jealous and envy them finding love."

- A female student taking a friend to breakfast: "My friend and I were trying to figure out if we're friends or more than friends. But it seemed obvious to me that I cannot be anything but friends. I told him my feelings and he was pretty upset."

- Male student writing about buying a book for he and his wife: "My wife and I have spent time recently in marriage counseling. In this time we have learned many things about each other ... we have a hard time communicating some times. Our therapist recommended a book to us."

- Male student who had purchased a plane ticket to Las Vegas: "I made the decision while I was under the influence of alcohol. I just felt like being wild."

**TABLE 2**
Reflection: Feelings and Emotions Related to Purchase Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feelings Expressed by Men &amp; Women</th>
<th>Feelings Expressed by Men</th>
<th>Feelings Expressed by Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>POSITIVE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Joy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>Amazed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glad</td>
<td>Relief</td>
<td>Reassured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleased</td>
<td>Felt Good</td>
<td>Romantic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>Rational</td>
<td>Fullfilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like</td>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>Relaxed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surprised</td>
<td>Proud</td>
<td>Gratified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Impressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NEGATIVE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Embarrassed</td>
<td>Annoyed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disappointed</td>
<td>Skeptical</td>
<td>Anxious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustrated</td>
<td>Cheated</td>
<td>Dislike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disgusted</td>
<td>Disturbed</td>
<td>Guilty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upset</td>
<td>Obsessive</td>
<td>Frantic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afraid</td>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>Impatient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impulsive</td>
<td>Irrational</td>
<td>Bummmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worried</td>
<td>Tense</td>
<td>Panicked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprehensive</td>
<td>Unhappy</td>
<td>Detached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stupid</td>
<td>Puzzled</td>
<td>Hesitant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hate</td>
<td>Uncontrollable</td>
<td>Weary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regret</td>
<td>Overwhelmed</td>
<td>Sympathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurried</td>
<td>Discomfort</td>
<td>Nervous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shocked</td>
<td>Foolish</td>
<td>Stressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Desperate</td>
<td>Concerned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Irritated</td>
<td>Jealous</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A female student admitted she had a drinking problem and probably needed help, while an older male student subtly discussed being gay. Men and women alike did not shy away from their feelings in this section.

**Conceptualization:** Students were next asked to relate their purchase to relevant concepts and theories learned in the consumer behavior course which they were enrolled in. A listing of all consumer behavior concepts discussed by students is presented in Table 3. Students were able to apply the concepts studied in class to their own purchases in a thoughtful, insightful manner. Analysis of the Conceptualization section of the journals was the most rewarding to the author since it was clear that students had understood and learned the concepts covered in the course. The students often made unsolicited comments about how much the journal had helped them to learn consumer behavior. One student wrote, "In the first weeks I could not relate my purchases to the theories. But in time I began to realize how theories are linked to everyday purchases." Concepts discussed in the beginning of the semester naturally had a higher rate of occurrence in journals than those concepts covered later in the course. However, even concepts covered later in the semester were incorporated into student journals.

**TABLE 3**
Conceptualization: Consumer Behavior Concepts/Theories Related to Student's Purchase Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Self-Concept</th>
<th>Stages of Decision Making</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Cognitive Dissonance</th>
<th>Evoked Set</th>
<th>Attitudes</th>
<th>Diffusion</th>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Personality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The mean number of concepts or theories mentioned by students for the first journal entry was 2.04. The mean number of concepts included for the tenth journal entry was 4.70. Both the quantity of concepts applied to the purchase and complexity of the discussion increased as the semester progressed.

**Experimentation:** In the final phase of Kolb's experiential learning cycle, students were asked to explain what they had learned from this experience and how they could apply this knowledge to future purchase experiences. Overall, the students learned a great deal from their own analysis of ten purchase
experiences. Many students seemed surprised by how much they had learned. This process helped them understand what they would do for the next similar purchase.

CONCLUSION/DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The main benefit of student journaling using Kolb's experiential learning process is that it allows students to experience all phases of learning. Students were able to apply the concepts and theories learned in the consumer behavior course to their own purchases. Students did not just memorize abstract theories and concepts in order to learn. They were given the opportunity to relate these theories to their own behavior in a stimulating, highly involving assignment. Students also enjoyed the opportunity to work individually, since numerous marketing assignments are team-oriented. Finally, this experiential learning technique gives students a chance to improve their writing skills.

Both students and marketing educators can benefit from this journaling technique. Based on student feedback from the questionnaire at the end of the semester, the journal assignment was successful.

Benefits to students:
- Students learn the subject (consumer behavior in this study) from this experience.
- Students have fun since they are more personally involved with the assignment.
- Since the journal assignment includes all four stages, a more complete learning experience is achieved.
- This assignment helps students overcome their aversion to writing because they write about something of interest to them, their own personal purchases.
- Students do not experience team related problems with this assignment.
- This assignment gives students an opportunity to express emotions and feelings.

Benefits to marketing educators:
- The journaling assignment allows a faculty member to learn more about student's interests, motivations, ability to write, and even deep concerns.
- Reading journals is more enjoyable compared to reading more traditional, often dry, reports and papers.
- This technique provides a rewarding way for faculty to know their students are truly learning the material.
- Student feedback from this assignment is very favorable.

Future research using journaling in marketing education could be expanded to courses other than consumer behavior. For example, use of this particular journal assignment would be appropriate for an advertising course where students could describe an advertisement or campaign, discuss their feelings toward the campaign, relate elements of the campaign to theories and concepts learned in class, and then explain what they learned based on their evaluation of the campaign. Another area of consideration for future study would be the analysis of alternative formats for journaling in addition to the format suggested by Kolb's learning cycle. Effective methods of grading for journal assignments also need to be developed. Research could be conducted to include a control class in order to more effectively measure learning from journal writing. Finally, an analysis of learning styles could be related to preference for journal writing.

In conclusion, journaling is an effective experiential learning technique for marketing education. Kolb's learning cycle provided an appropriate format for a journal assignment in consumer behavior. This learning technique allows students to experience the full cycle of learning.

APPENDIX A
Journal Assignment

Your journal will include a total of 10 entries. For each entry please respond to the following 4 areas with specific, detailed (not general) comments.
1. Concrete Experience: Describe a concrete event in your purchasing behavior (behavior as a consumer).
   a. What happened?
   b. What you did.
   c. What process led up to the event (or purchase).
   d. Consequences of what happened.
   (This section should be written like a "news item," neutral, without evaluation.)

2. Reflection: Describe your feelings, reactions, questions, observations, and judgments with regard to the experience.
   a. Explain your behaviors, reactions, emotions.
   b. What triggered these feelings.
   c. How you view this behavior.

3. Conceptualization: Relate relevant concepts, theories, or information from this class to the above experience.
   a. Formulate tentative hypotheses, conclusions, generalizations based on class information or assignments from the text.
4. Experimentation: Suggest action implications for applying
  testing or extending what you have reflected on.
  - Include behavioral goals for similar future situations.
  - Do not include "general resolutions" but specific learning
    goals resulting from your experience, reflection, and
    conceptualization above.

References


