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Rationale: Marketing: Through the Consumer's Perspective

“Innovations in Marketing”: The class that started it all.

During my second semester freshman year, I found the pinpoint of my soon to be concentration. It was a Media, Culture, and Communications course that developed my understanding of marketing beyond the confines of “pretty” advertisements and touching campaigns. In the course, I was pushed to analyze not only the immediate wants and needs of customers but what cultivates those wants and needs. We delved into research on identity, economic constraints, and cultural factors among many other circumstances that influence today's consumers' values. My area of study can be captured with three guiding queries.

1. Why consumers' have certain wants and needs.
2. Why it is crucial that marketers address them.
3. Where to look to find these consumer values that will ultimately affect the success or failure of today's marketers.

When diving into the social sciences, specifically studies of sociology, it becomes apparent how crucial the human view of oneself (adjacent to the world at large and among our immediate peers) truly is. In Foucault's work studies the impact of the watched body. Specifically, in a panopticon shaped jail, he studied the actions of inmates. The catch was the inability of the inmates to see when they were watched and who was watching them. In Foucault's “Discipline and Punish” he says, “Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault 3). He then goes on to say that “This architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relations independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves

the bearers” (Foucault 3). The panopticon created a constant state of anxiousness that led the inmates to control their own behavior without physical exterior forces similar to the way behavior of everyday individuals is affected by pressure to adhere to the norms of the society around them.

In a previous class abroad “Fashion, Culture and the Body” we discussed the practice of human bodies fashioning themselves in order to adhere to the standards of the society around them. In the case of Foucault studies, not only does the body fashion its movements and actions according to society, the pressure is enhanced by the constant sense of a “figure” looking inward. Further, bringing home the theory of the fashioned and even docile body is Entwistle in “The Fashioned Body: Chapter 1 Addressing the Body.” She describes dressing oneself as a “practice requiring knowledge, technique, and skill (7).”

This skill and learned practice mentioned by Entwistle is clearly seen in the studies of the Decameron. Although fictional, Boccaccio lays out the importance of one’s perceived value according to social rules and social class. Through the work, as the elite group settles in, far from the plague, they come up with their own set of rules to govern themselves. These rules are not merely created from thin air, they mirror the values of aristocratic life in comparison to the life of the lower class of Florence at the time of the plague. Even when separated from the city’s barriers a class system formed and controlled the elites’ actions towards their own appearances, actions and the actions of their peers.

One truly wonders, how the inmates described by Foucault, the dressed bodies described by Entwistle, and the elite described by Boccaccio learned the rules and actions for presenting themselves. This large question leads to discussion an individual's perceived value of themselves within a society and what measures they will endure to maintain that value. In Marx’s, “The

Working Day” he takes account of human value in terms of labor and measured the amount of labor that will positively impact a workforce. In his Conflict perspective, Marx pins the laborer against the capitalist in a situation where each body needs to leverage its value in order to sustain economic gain. From the conflict perspective, it becomes clear that there is a need for the human to justify themselves in the eyes of society in order to gain a foothold toward obtaining “limited valuable resources.” In the case of Marx the limited resources revolve around gaining capital. On the other hand, in Durkheim’s functionalist view, the each individual in society needs to be placed at either the bottom, the top, or the middle in order for society to run successfully. In both views the human is forced the realize their place and or value within the perspective of the society surrounding them.

When we begin to study marketing, two concepts are drained into our minds:

1. Customer’s wants
2. Customer’s needs.

In the context of past, present, and future consumers justifying their value based on their ability to thrive and sustain themselves in the midst of adhering social norms and assessments, there is reason to believe that the wants and needs of one person are drastically different that of the next. These needs are reflected and are based on identifiers such as class, race, religion among many others. These identifiers that shape a consumer values are necessary to understand in order to understand consumers relationships with the products and brands they interact with.

A look at studies of the humanities eases us into the practical implications of understanding wants and needs in everyday consumption. In the “Medium is the Message: Understanding Media” McLuhan discusses how mediums should consumed in terms of media and physical products. For this, McLuhan uses an example concerning IBM. He says, “When IBM

discovered that it was not in the business of making office equipment or business machines, but that it was in the business of processing information, then it began to navigate with clear vision (McLuhan 20).” He goes on to explain that the same understand in the context of At&t. At&t’s value proposition is not that it is simply a cell phone carrier, it’s value is that it moves information. Pinpointing value propositions in the terms of these companies’ customer’s actual uses and needs of the products was what eventually escalated the worth of each business. In order to understand the value propositions and before beginning, marketing and media initiatives, understanding your target markets’ positions in life and how they believe a product positively or negatively can affect their social status is crucial. The underlying need for IBM to have those machines is not simply for business activities, it is so IMB employees can generate success in the form of money. This will benefit the individuals in the company that need to finance their families, food provisions, health care, etc. The need for certain products in relation to the benefits those products will have on the consumer's’ qualities of life are why people engage with brands. Understanding this relationship is crucial to any marketing campaign and was the basis of the study of my Innovations in Marketing Class. McLuhan focuses on the character of a medium instead of the content of a medium, and stresses the understanding of the mediums in cultural and social contexts.

Furthermore, in Michael Baxandall’s, “Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style” he discusses the motives for trading art. In an early example, he layouts of the reasons elite, Giovanni Rucellai, purchased art. Rucellai had several works from famous artists of the time as the decor of his household. At first glance, Baxandall mentions the obvious motive: Rucellai wanted to owned a product perceived as “good.” He then takes into account, Rucellai’s other purchases saying, “ Elsewhere, speaking

now more of his very large expenditure on building and decorating churches and houses (Baxandall 2).” Then suggests three more motives for Rucellai’s purchases by saying, “ These things give him ‘the greatest contentment and the greatest pleasure because they serve. the glory of God, the honour of the city, and the commemoration of myself.’”(Baxandall 2) These point of purchase motives were not simply influenced by a “good” products, the decisions were influenced by the way Rucellai perceived himself in relation to society, his cultural upbringing (especially regarding religion) and the what he believed honored the society around him. By taking a look into the past at these motives, it is clear that human experience and why people are drawn to certain causes and products goes far beyond the product itself. The point of purchase is wholly and completely focused on the immediate values of the consumer and the network of people that surround that buyer.

Current marketing strategies are quick to sell a product or a brand name, and forget the values of the consumers being targeted. This is often noticed by the advertisements we see that we glance over without no impact on us. The advertisements and campaigns that “touch us” are the ones that speech and connect with the way in which we perceive ourselves within the world and explain why that product or brand will have a positive impact on our self-perception.

Instead of simply focusing on broad demographics, and characterizing consumers based on qualitative data, success in the marketing industry needs to be assessed by equal amounts of quantitative and qualitative data. In Jeff Constable’s “Talking to Humans: Success Starts with Understanding Your Customers,” he stresses the importance of speaking with customers in person, learning how they operate on the basis level, and then finding patterns in the answers we receive about their behavior. In the over the course of my junior year and this final year, I have been working on a start-up at the university. Although, the Constable’s book primary focuses on

finding early adopters and studying their behavior in early startup phases, the customer discovery methods I have used for my own start-up have been extremely relevant to my concentration. I have conducted several customer discovery interviews to understand how the potential early adopters of my product behave, what their values are, and where their immediate wants lie. In the creation of a campaign, these interactions where behavior research is gathered first hand is where marketers, or new founders alike, will learn what we don't know about how consumers of the products we are presenting value them in relation to their own behaviors within society.

Continuing on, in chapter 4 of "How the World Changed Social Media: Our Survey Results" the researchers describe the impact of the culture on the click rates of social media advertisements. The researchers discovered that in geographic locations that did not engage with consumption often as a culture, such as in northern Chile, the advertisements clicks were lackluster. Also, in terms of social standing, generally older adults interviewed were more avid about announcing avoidance of social media advertisements. When crafting a marketing plan, a understanding of how the people of Chile normally take in information relating to consumption and a study on older adults tendency avoid advertisements online would have given the marketers of the advertisements that failed insight that would have made the campaigns much more efficient. Social media is generally an extremely large outlet for today's brands to direct marketing campaigns towards consumers. Even instances of simply utilizing social media as marketing tool, it is evident that a deeper understanding of the backgrounds of target consumers is what will deter or drive their motivation to engage with brands online.

In conclusion, marketing is void without discovery. The social, cultural, and economic identifiers of a consumer are what will make them react positively or negatively to a company's marketing agenda. The root of the understanding how to reach consumers is based on learning

how they see themselves in relation the society around them. Where a brand can add value to their target consumers ideas of their own perceived quality, is where that brand will thrive.

Throughout the rest of my studies at this university, I want to continue developing my thoughts on the impact of consumers' introspective reasoning in relation to societal pressures and how this reasoning affects marketing efforts in preparations for my colloquium. As far as an outside understanding of the marketing field, I have done several internships and will be apply for a final internship in the digital marketing field for the Spring. I am looking forward to my colloquium date and discussion of the breath of the topics mentioned throughout this rationale.