Purpose of the Course

This course will address issues related to consumer behavior from a number of different viewpoints. In general, the hope is to give a well-rounded view of consumers in the contemporary culture of consumption. In particular, the course will cover all aspects of consumption (acquiring, using, disposing) of numerous kinds of products (goods, services, events, ideas) from the perspectives of different focuses (decisions, experiences) at contrasting conceptual levels of analysis (micro, macro) as studied by different methods (neopositivistic, interpretive) for various purposes or aims (managerial relevance, knowledge for its own sake). An attempt will be made not to take sides concerning focuses, concepts, methods, or aims but rather to provide a broad overview of the field as a whole.

Approach

The course will approach consumer behavior as a serious academic discipline - one with its own tradition of empirical research and scholarship, one worth studying not only for its potential relevance to managers but also for the universal importance of its subject matter to the human condition. Clearly, because of the close connection between customers and businesses, the issues covered by the course will be of direct concern to marketing managers. Also, some issues will be of further interest because of their relevance to the discipline of consumer research; because of their broader bearing on the society in which we live; because of their connection with key themes of concern to the school (quality, global environment, ethics, human resources); and/or because, in trying to understand consumers, we ultimately seek to understand ourselves.

As implied by its name, the Columbia Business School is a school of business. "Business" might be defined as "an interaction between managers and customers." Hence, a full view of business implies devoting equal attention to managers, customers, and the interaction between them. However, most courses at the School
focus most of their attention on business managers and leave the customer pretty much out of the picture (lurking in the background as a sort of vague specter). To correct the balance somewhat, the focus of the present course is skewed in the opposite direction. Specifically, it begins with the customer before addressing issues concerning the implications of consumer behavior for marketing managers. Therefore, the course is designed for those who have an interest in management and who also entertain a lively curiosity about how marketing and consumer behavior work together to shape the contemporary culture of consumption in which we live.

Reading Assignments

The course will utilize five major types of reading assignments: (1) a basic textbook for background material (required); (2) a handbook of reviews that describe the current state-of-the-art in consumer research (recommended for those who wish to explore a topic or topics in greater depth); (3) a short monograph that portrays the range of options in studying consumer behavior (recommended for those who wish to ponder alternative methodologies); (4) a collection of readings intended to serve as (a) helpful overviews of important topics (required) and/or (b) illustrative examples of key concepts (optional); and (5) a book of introspective essays (viewed as supplementary for those who just can't get enough of the stuff). In addition, there will be a video viewing assignment based on (6) a videotape about the Consumer-Behavior Odyssey (recommended, on reserve, and/or to be circulated among the class members for watching at home).

Specifically, reading and viewing assignments come from the following six sources (the first, third, and fifth of which will be available at both the Columbia University and the Labyrinth Book Stores):


(2) Recommended - Thomas S. Robertson and Harold H. Kassarjian (eds.), Handbook of Consumer Behavior, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1991. [NOTE: Though recently "out of print," this compendium is on reserve in the library and is recommended for those wishing to pursue one or more topics in greater depth.]

(3) Optional - Elizabeth C. Hirschman and Morris B. Holbrook, Postmodern Consumer Research: Consumption As Text, Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992. [NOTE: This short work is optional and is intended for those wishing to explore alternative methodologies in greater depth.]

(4) Required or optional (as indicated) - Morris B. Holbrook
Readings for B8601, Columbia Business School. These Readings contain two types of materials—identified on the syllabus as Required Overviews and Optional Examples, respectively. The required overviews should be read by all students as key bases for class discussions. The optional examples should be read by those interested and will be used to illustrate key course concepts as time permits.


In the schedule for topic sessions, assignments from these six sources will be referred to by the numbers just given.

Grading and Evaluation

Grades for B8601 will be based on the following components (weighted roughly as indicated by the applicable percentages):

- Term Project (65%)
- Class Presentation (15%)
- Class Participation (20%)

Term Project (65%). Reflecting the very strong sentiments expressed by our MBA students in an informal poll recently taken by the instructor, the main assignment for the course will be a term project to be completed individually by each member of the class working independently. The main purpose of this assignment is to permit each class member to demonstrate his or her mastery of the relevant consumer-behavior concepts within the context of some real-world business-related application. Two alternative versions of this assignment are available, to be selected according to the student's own preferences.

Plan A (recommended). Plan A (which the instructor believes most class members would find the more "painless" of the two options) involves the creation of an 18-page paper intended to apply any 16 course-related topics to some industry, product, brand, or other consumption-related phenomenon of interest to that particular student. The advantages to Plan A are that it provides the requisite structure more or less automatically and that it encourages the student to work on the project week-by-week so that the whole thing will be finished in due course as the term progresses. The structure for the 18-page paper must be as follows.

Page 0 is a title page with the student's name,
address(es), and phone number(s) clearly indicated.

By way of introduction, page 1 describes the industry, product, brand, or other consumption phenomenon of interest, giving reasons for why this focus has been selected and indicating what the author hopes to get out of the investigation.

Pages 2 - 17 contain 16 applications of key course concepts to the industry-product-brand/etc. of interest. Each page deals with one of the 21 topics covered by the course - i.e., one page per topic, in chronological order. In other words, 16 of the 21 course topics are singled out for consideration and are presented in the same order that we discuss them in class. Each page describes how one or more concepts relevant to that particular topic shed(s) light on the chosen industry-product-brand. Relevant conceptual subtleties and practical applications are carefully noted.

Page 18 presents a discussion of key conclusions stemming from the foregoing analysis.

Plan-A papers will be judged primarily on the degree to which each page provides a conceptually sophisticated and realistically appropriate illustration how to apply the relevant course topic. Some attention will be paid to how well the whole thing hangs together, but the primary criterion for success will be an insightful topic-by-topic progression through the relevant course concepts and their applicability to some real-world area of interest.

Plan B (not so highly recommended but perfectly acceptable nonetheless). The alternative plan can be summarized as "anything within reason that the student wants to do." Plan B is riskier (but, in some cases, perhaps potentially more rewarding) than Plan A. It is intended for class members who do not wish to have their freedom of expression restricted by the rather tight structure imposed by Plan A. Its advantages are that it offers maximum scope for creative innovation and the option of doing the work whenever the student finds it convenient. Such students are invited to select any area of interest that is relevant to consumer behavior - any industry, product, brand, strategic plan, cultural phenomenon, economic problem, demographic trend, multicultural contrast, global issue, consumption phenomenon, career objective, etc.-etc.-etc. - as the focus for a traditional "term paper" structured in whatever manner they desire. Here, papers will be judged primarily on the success of the overall package - how well it integrates relevant course concepts into an insightful analysis of the relevant problem(s) chosen for consideration.

General Points Applicable to Both Plan A and Plan B

(1) The whole point of this assignment is to allow each
class member to select a focus that he or she finds interesting, exciting, motivating, worthwhile, and fun to work on over the course of the term. Please be sure to select a theme that will provide maximum stimulation and enjoyment.

(2) Students are welcome to come and discuss the project with the instructor at any time during the term.

(3) The project is due - to be handed in - on the last day of class (or sooner, if desired). No exceptions, please.

(4) The instructor plans to keep his copy of the project. Hence, each class member should be sure to make a duplicate for his or her own use.

(5) For purposes of providing feedback concerning the instructor's responses, each project must be accompanied by a letter-sized self-addressed envelope.

(6) Please use 12-point type, double spaced, with all pages numbered. When relevant, tables, figures, diagrams, pictures, or other visual aids are welcome and should be placed on or directly after the page to which they apply.

Class Presentation (15%). Also at the suggestion of students from previous terms, the last twenty minutes or so of each class period (beginning after the first few sessions) as well as one full class meeting at the end of the term will be devoted to brief presentations (of a short length yet to be determined) by one or more students who have agreed to prepare for that particular day. This will give each participant a chance - paraphrasing Andy Warhol - to be "famous for fifteen minutes" and to share with the class one or more aspects of the project just described. The coverage should be highly selective and should focus on some aspect(s) of the project that the student finds particularly instructive and interesting. The exact length and scheduling of these class presentations will be determined after the class roster has been finalized and we know how many people will be involved.

In other words, this assignment/opportunity/requirement to make a brief class presentation will give each student a chance to find some area of his or her class project that holds special interest, to examine it in depth, and to call the attention of the class to the issues involved. Rather than trying to summarize the whole project, the presentation should focus on just some small subset of topics that appear especially significant.

Obviously, since the instructor has no way of knowing the number of students in the class in advance, the timing and scheduling of these class presentations will have to wait for a couple of weeks until the class roster has been firmly established. Once the schedule is set, however, the success of this plan depends heavily on the cooperation of all students with the following crucial guidelines:
(1) each student must prepare to come and speak on the day his/her presentation is scheduled (no exceptions, please);

(2) each student must complete his/her presentation within the time period allowed (again, no exceptions, please).

In order to achieve (1) and (2), students should make every effort to prepare, edit, rehearse, and otherwise perfect their presentations so that these can be delivered smoothly and on time in a professional manner. To preserve fairness to all involved, all participants will be asked to start and stop on time (with the help of a kitchen timer).

These presentations will be evaluated using two key criteria (combined into the final grade):

(1) the instructor's assessment (5%/15%) of the presentation (for which purpose the presenter might wish to give him some "token(s)" or "souvenir(s)" to refresh his memory - such as an outline, hard copies of overhead transparencies, exhibits of one sort or another, etc.);

(2) a peer review (10%/15%) in which each member of the class rates each presentation on a standardized rating scale designed for this purpose (which, of course, implies observing the highest ethical standards - for example, not rating anyone whose presentation you missed, not discussing your ratings with others, and not engaging in any sorts of bias-producing gaming strategies).

Both (1) the instructor's assessment and (2) the peer review will be based on the following five criteria: Clarity (careful preparation, well-organized presentation); Conscientiousness (thorough coverage); Course Relevance (pertinence to key concepts in Consumer Behavior); Conciseness (fitting the time limit); and Creativity (imagination, insightfulness).

Like the project itself, this assignment is intended to be fun and to give each student a chance to shine in some special area of interest. Please approach the assignment in that spirit by choosing a topic that you find particularly relevant, challenging, stimulating, entertaining, or otherwise worthwhile.

Class Participation (20%). Class participation is viewed as an essential ingredient in conveying the student's sense of interest, ability, motivation, preparation, and mastery of the course materials. Hence, above and beyond the class presentation just described, each student will also be assessed (by the instructor) on his/her contributions to the class discussions.

In this spirit, the instructor plans to learn your name, to call on you when you raise your hand, and to react appreciatively when you ask a penetrating question or say something insightful. Toward that end, he relies heavily on picture cards. For this reason, please be sure to turn in a picture card by the third
meeting of class. If for any reason you do not have a picture card, please stop by one of the ubiquitous photo stores, have a small passport-sized photo taken, and make your own picture card. Or, if you prefer, make a Xerox of your driver's license, school ID, or Web-Site photo and paste it to a suitable 3"x7" card. Besides the information already routinely contained on your picture card, it should include (1) your preferred nickname, (2) your telephone number, and (3) your favorite music(ians).

Research Responsibility

It is likely that, at some point during the course of the term, the instructor will ask the members of the class for their help in conducting some aspect of his own research. This will involve spending about 45 minutes or so participating in an experiment, completing a questionnaire, or collecting data from some other respondent(s). Such an assignment will be intended to make connections between the aims, concepts, and methods discussed in the course and thereby to further the educational objectives of all concerned.

Prerequisites for Enrolling

There are no prerequisites for B8601. All are welcome.

COURSE OUTLINE

I. OVERVIEW

Wednesday, September 8

Topic 1 Introduction: Focuses, Concepts, Methods, Aims, History

(1) Required - Solomon, Ch. 1, pp. 1-29; pp. 33-35.
(2) Recommended - Handbook, Preface, pp. vii-x.

Monday - Wednesday, September 13 - 15

Topic 2 Perspectives: Alternative Focuses - Decisions Versus Experiences

(1) Required - Solomon, Ch. 9; Ch. 10, pp. 313-321.
(2) Recommended - Handbook, Ch. 2 (Bettman, Johnson, Payne).
(4) Required Overview from Readings: (B) Holbrook and
Monday, September 20

Topic 3  Concepts: Micro Versus Macro Levels

(1) Required - Solomon, Ch. 1, pp. 29-31; pp. 33-35 (review).

Topic 4  Methods: Neopositivistic Versus Interpretive Approaches

(1) Required - Solomon, Ch. 1, pp. 31-33.
(2) Recommended - Handbook, Preface (review); Ch. 14 (Wind, Rao, Green); Ch. 15 (Peter); Ch. 16 (Sherry).
(3) Optional - Hirschman & Holbrook, Consumption As Text.

Topic 5  Aims: Managerial Relevance Versus the Growth of Knowledge

(1) Required - Solomon, Ch. 1, pp. 30-31 (review).

II. THE INDIVIDUAL CONSUMER: THOUGHTS, EMOTIONS, ACTIVITY, VALUE

Wednesday, September 22

Topic 6  A General Model of Consumer Behavior: Thoughts, Emotions, Activity, and Value


Monday, September 27

Topic 7 Thoughts - Cognitive Reception: Physiology, Arousal, Search, and Attention

(1) Required - Solomon, Ch. 9, pp. 274-281 (review).
(2) Recommended - Handbook, Ch. 4 (Bagozzi).

Wednesday, September 29

Topic 8 Thoughts - Cognitive Perception: Sensation, Recognition, and Interpretation

(1) Required - Solomon, Ch. 2.

Monday - Wednesday, October 4 - 6

Topic 9 Thoughts - Cognitive Structure: Memory and Meaning

(1) Required - Solomon, Ch. 3, pp. 84-97; Ch. 9, pp. 282-295 (review); Ch. 2, pp. 59-65 (review).
(2) Recommended - Handbook, Ch. 5 (Shimp); Ch. 1 (Alba, Hutchinson, Lynch).

Monday, October 11

Topic 10 Thoughts - Cognitive Structure: Spatial
Representations


Wednesday - Monday, October 13 - 18

Topic 11 Emotive Aspects: Motivation

(1) Required - Solomon, Ch. 4; Ch. 6, pp. 165-170 (review).

Wednesday, October 20

Topic 12 Emotive Aspects: Affect or Emotion

(2) Recommended - Handbook, Ch. 6 (Cohen, Areni).
(4) Optional Example from Readings: (Z6) Holbrook and Rajeev Batra (1988), "Toward a Standardized Emotional Profile (SEP) Useful in Measuring Responses to the Nonverbal Components of Advertising," in Nonverbal Communication in
Monday, October 25

Topic 13  Activity: Actions and Reactions (Thoughts, Reasons, Emotions, and Value)

(1) Required - Solomon, Ch. 3, pp. 71-84; Ch. 10, pp. 321-328.
(2) Recommended - Handbook, Ch. 11 (Van Raaij).

Wednesday October 27 & Wednesday November 3 (NOTE: Monday November 1 is the ELECTION-DAY RECESS)

Topic 14  Reasoned Actions: Affect, Intention, and Behavior

(1) Required - Solomon, Ch. 7; Ch. 8.
(2) Recommended - Handbook, Ch. 7 (Petty, Unnava, Strathman)

Monday - Wednesday, November 8 - 10

Topic 15  Reactions: Value and Satisfaction


III. THE SOCIAL SETTING

Monday, November 15

Topic 16  The Situation: A Person-Environment Interaction

(1) Required - Solomon, Ch. 10, pp. 304-313.
Psychophysics and the Vending-Machine Problem," Journal of Retailing, 58 (Spring), 82-94.

Topic 17 Social Influences on Consumption: The Social Self, the Family, and the Reference Group

(1) Required - Solomon, Ch. 5, Ch. 12, Ch. 11.
(2) Recommended - Handbook, Ch. 8 (Folkes, Kiesler)

Wednesday, November 17

Topic 18 Subcultures: General Customer Characteristics

(1) Required - Solomon, Ch. 13; Ch. 14; Ch. 15; Ch. 6; Ch. 3, pp. 92-94 (review); Ch. 5 (review).

IV. THE BIG PICTURE: DIFFUSION, CONSUMER ETHICS, SOCIAL POLICY, AND GLOBAL CONSUMERS

Monday, November 22

Topic 19 Diffusion: Product Life Cycle and Marketing Strategy

(1) Required - Solomon, Ch. 17, pp. 532-545.
(2) Recommended - Handbook, Ch. 9 (Gatignon, Robertson).
(4) Required Overview from Readings: (Z2) Strategy Matrix from B6601.

Wednesday, November 24

THANKSGIVING RECESS

Monday, November 29

Topic 20 Consumer Ethics and Social Policy

(1) Required - Solomon, Ch. 16, pp. 508-514; Ch. 1, pp. 19-29 (review).
(2) Recommended – Handbook, Ch. 13 (Andreasen).
(4) Optional Examples from Readings:  (T) Holbrook and Corfman (1984), "Quality and Value in the Consumption Experience: Phaedrus Rides Again" (review); (Z14) Elizabeth Cooper-Martin and Holbrook (1993), "Ethical Consumption Experiences and Ethical Space."

Wednesday, December 1

Topic 21  
Global Consumers: Multicultural Differences and Universal Similarities

(1) Required – Solomon, Ch. 16, pp. 495-508; Ch. 17, pp. 521-532; Ch. 17, pp. 545-556; Ch. 16, pp. 508-514 (review).
(2) Recommended – Handbook, Ch. 16 (Sherry, review).

Monday, December 6

Last Class  
Festival of Student Presentations

Presentations by those remaining students who have not yet had a chance to share their term projects with the rest of the class.

NOTE: Student Projects are due on the last day of class. No exceptions, Please.