



Consumer Behavior Concepts Identified by Students through Pinterest

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With 25 million active users, Pinterest is the third most popular social networking website in the United States (Morgan, 2013). Pinterest's unique social environment allows users, mostly young adults, to create and share a visual "pinboard" of pictures, charts, and articles about various brands and products. Pinterest is highly popular due to the virtual pinboard's entertainment value (Mull & Lee, 2014). Retailers are quickly expanding their social media coverage to include Pinterest, and are using the visual nature of the online social network to disseminate company information (Morgan, 2013). A senior-level course focused upon consumer behavior utilizes the growing popularity of Pinterest to engage students in recognizing the concepts of consumption.

The objective of the Pinterest Writing assignment is to facilitate the use of critical thinking skills to create relevant, thoughtful relationships between popular social media content and various concepts of consumer behavior. Students are given three topics throughout the semester, in which they must find a visual from Pinterest and relate the visual with content on the topic assigned. Assignments are completed individually and are approximately one page in length, which includes the visual and a description of the relationship between the visual and course content. Students must also accurately cite the textbook and the visual from the social media site in American Psychological Association's (APA) format.

Grading criteria for this assignment includes the ability to link course content on the assigned topic to a visual the student selects from Pinterest. Grammar, spelling, and accuracy of APA formatting is also considered within the assignment grade. Many students find a visual and describe what the visual is portraying using appropriate terminology. For this assignment, students are able to use notes from lectures and the textbook *Why of the Buy* by Rath, Bay, Petrizzi, and Gill (2015) to think about the possible associations between course content and the visual. Students within this class have all had access to Pinterest prior to enrollment in the course. A brief explanation of how to maneuver around Pinterest was included in the explanation of the assignment. The Pinterest Writing assignment has been used in the same course for the past three years allowing for further refinement and effectiveness of the assignment.

Pinterest Writings have been highly popular among students based upon feedback in student evaluations of the course and an online survey inquiring about the effectiveness of the Pinterest Writing assignment sent to the most recent class of students. An open-ended, anonymous online survey through Qualtrics was sent to students to complete. Voluntary responses resulted in 20 surveys completed out of 24 students. Responses were analyzed and

two major findings were identified, which were *Relevance to the Student* and *Awareness of Concepts Used*.

Students discussed the *Relevance to the Student* as the Pinterest Writings allowed them to use a media which they enjoy perusing for hedonic purposes and relate it to the content learned in class. One student described this relationship between course work and content by stating,

“I enjoy the Pinterest writing assignments. I feel as though they are a great way to relate class information to a source that is used so often anyway, and one that we are actually interested in.”

Another finding was that students had developed an *Awareness of Concepts Used* and were now able to identify and apply concepts introduced in class.

“It takes the information I have learned in the classroom and applies it to the "real" world. I think all classes should do this, because it helps you understand what you are learning. When I see an advertisement or the way a store operates I can now know why they do this and apply the things I learned in class to the retail industry.”

Many students stated that visuals from Pinterest for this assignment were found while browsing the social media site for fun. Thus, relevance to the students' life and everyday interaction with course content in various contexts has assisted in the learning of consumer behavior concepts.

The Pinterest Writing assignment has been a valued learning tool in the classroom for initiating critical thinking skills. These skills are used to create relationships between course content on consumer behavior concepts and popular social media. Its success lies in the interest students have with using the social medium, Pinterest, for hedonic purposes and the ability for content to be applied in such a context. This assignment could be adapted for other social media or personal interactions in which students engage with on a daily basis.

References

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