

MOTIVATING PARTICIPATION IN STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS: ASSESSING THE ROLE OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND CIALDINI'S PRINCIPLES OF INFLUENCE

Laura Serviere-Munoz, University of Dallas
Sonja Martin Poole, University of San Francisco

Abstract

Two complementary theories from the field of psychology, Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) and Cialdini's Principles of Influence, have been referenced as possible methods for attracting and retaining members in student professional organizations; however, there have been no attempts to measure these theories on students' motivations to participate. In addition, in a participation and satisfaction study of chapter membership in the American Marketing Association, Peltier and colleagues (2008) found that while students reported that they join to gain wider experience, membership often fails to meet their expectations. The researchers go on to argue that there is a need for research that investigates in greater detail how different pedagogies might influence student organizations and curricula. There is also a lack of detailed information about organizational features that attract students (Clark & Kemp, 2008). To fill this gap, this study explores how traditional undergraduate marketing students perceive collegiate chapter membership in the American Marketing Association; in particular, using experiential learning theory and Cialdini's principles of influence, we look at the ways in which students appraise membership.

The conceptual framework for this study is anchored in two complementary theories, Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) and Cialdini's Principles of Influence. ELT, a well-known pedagogical model that goes beyond the classic boundaries of a classroom or disciplinary area (Bobbitt, Inks, Kemp, & Mayo, 2000), involves learning from experience, or "learning by doing" (Dewey, 1938). Cialdini's Principles of Influence are identified as six critical factors that affect people's behavior and when applied strategically can be used in combination to persuade others. (Cialdini, 1993). The principles include reciprocity (modeling the desired behavior), consistency and commitment (making people's commitments active, public, and voluntary), scarcity (highlighting unique benefits and exclusive information), authority (exposing expertise whenever possible), social proof (validating options by using peer power whenever it is available), and liking (uncovering real similarities and offering genuine praise and complements) (Cialdini, 1993).

To test the significance of ELT and Cialdini's principles in motivating students to participate in professional organizations, a group of undergraduate students were surveyed. With respect to ELT, the study found that students value activities that involve 'professional development' and 'contact with professionals,' but 'entrepreneurial activities' had a negative influence on student's intention to participate in an organization. Regarding Cialdini's principles, 'authority' and 'social proof' were the principles found to be positively related to student participation; the 'scarcity' principle was found to be negatively related. Finally, 'age' was also found to be negatively related to student intent to participate. In order to enhance membership recruitment and retention efforts, educators should focus their efforts on experiential activities that enable student-faculty contact, career exploration, and skill development. In addition, the findings suggest involving knowledgeable and trustworthy figures and incorporating recognition by the school's leaders and demonstration of members' cohesiveness are effective approaches to use for positively influencing a student's intention to participate.

References Available upon Request