

RETAIL RESCUE! INTRODUCING REALITY TELEVISION TO SERVICE-ORIENTED COURSE CURRICULA

Mark S. Rosenbaum and Ioana Moraru, Northern Illinois University

Abstract

Marketing educators, especially those teaching service and retailing courses, confront two challenges when teaching undergraduate students. First, unless students participate in service-oriented internships, they typically lack managerial work experience in service industries. Consequently, their ability to apply newly learned service concepts to personal experiences is nearly impossible.

A second challenge confronting service educators is that millennial learning preferences are considerably different than past generation ones (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2006, Silverstone, 2007). Millennial students have come of age in an era of YouTube videos and reality television (Holmes & Jermyn, 2004; Pew Research Center, 2010), but to our knowledge, no services or retailing texts have addressed this issue by substantially incorporating these media into their everyday course content. Yet educational research reveals that to enhance millennial leaning outcomes, instructors need to move from delivering lecture-based knowledge to encouraging students to build personal experiences, and from placing value on textbooks to valuing technology (Silverstone, 2007).

Indeed, in an attempt to understand why consumers relish reality television, Rose and Wood (2005) conclude that reality television viewers routinely disaggregate these shows and continuously situate their speculative personal selves into emerging situations and dilemmas. This leads us to argue that educators should begin exploring how they can transfer learning to millennial students through reality television (Burr & King, 2011; see also Center for Children and Technology, 2004, for extensive review).

The goal of this article is to show that instructors of service-oriented courses can help overcome the challenges inherent in their students' lack of real-world work experience and take advantage of their interest in video technology, as well as satisfy their need to immerse personal experiences in their education experience, by integrating reality television shows into their undergraduate day-to-day course curricula. More specifically, many courses may offer students end-of-chapter exercises that require them to watch specific YouTube videos or to analyze a firm's Internet site. Although these video-infused chapter exercises are valid, we propose the immersion of reality television shows as a means to augment reading and lecture material, to

enhance student comprehension and discussion around germane service concepts, and to increase student motivation and enthusiasm for concepts for which they lack personal experience (Center for Children and Technology, 2004). Thus, in this article, we empirically demonstrate that reality television shows, especially those based on distressed service and retail businesses provide students with a means to apply services and retailing concepts to real-life situations and to acquire some experience by constantly self-reflecting how they would confront and solve dilemmas posed in reality episodes.

Methodology and Findings

We obtained data through online, self-administered questionnaires given to students enrolled in one of the author's retailing courses in the United States and two services marketing courses, which were held in the U.S. and Romania. The retailing course consisted of 31 undergraduate students; of these, 68% were business majors, 26% were textiles and apparel merchandise majors, and the rest were other liberal arts majors. The services marketing course in the United States consisted of 32 undergraduate students; of these, 50% were hospitality majors, 44% were business majors, and the remaining were liberal arts majors. The services course in Romania consisted of 29 undergraduate hospitality students. Student response data came from eight reality programming assignments (i.e., three in retailing, four in U.S. services marketing course, and one in the Romania services marketing course).

In terms of students' interests in the reality programming, the data reveal that the overwhelming majority of students, in many instances well over 90%, reported being "extremely" or "very much" interested in each of the eight reality television shows (see Table 3). The impact of this finding on students' learning is profound; too often instructors use approaches that interest them rather than the students. In these situations, opportunities to use interest-linked motivation in mastering course content is sacrificed (Tomlinson et al., 2003).

An analysis of the findings regarding the perceived usefulness of a reality program in helping the students understand service-related issues reveals that the majority, and in two cases 100%, of the respondents reported the usefulness as "extremely" or "very much." Thus, students view reality television programming learning activities as meaningful and worthwhile; learning occurs because they find reality content interesting and the assignment activity enjoyable, in the sense that they clearly perceive its relevancy (Brophy, 2010).

Last, the results reveal that the overwhelming majority of students perceive reality television programming as being “extremely” or “very much so” appropriate for learning about business concepts through reality television shows. This finding indicates that students perceive reality television viewing as an appropriate instructional approach and a method that can enhance their personal development especially in customer-centered occupations.

References Available upon Request
