

ARE YOUR STUDENTS INTERESTED IN MARKETING? HOW STUDENT INTEREST IMPACTS THE DESIRABILITY OF CHOICE IN A COURSE

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ABSTRACT

Choice, the freedom to evaluate the merits of options and select among them, is generally viewed as desirable. Choice has been linked to self-determination and empowerment in consumer contexts (Dholakia, 2006; Schwartz, 2004). The desirability of choice has been less explored in higher education contexts, probably because instructors have traditionally done most of the choosing. Within the constraints set by departmental or institutional standards and policies, instructors typically select assignments and activities, require particular textbooks or sets of readings, determine how class time will be spent, and administer their preferred types and numbers of exams, and students carry out the required work. However, the assumptions underlying such prescriptions are changing. Many educators are putting more emphasis on student engagement and self-regulated learning (Young, 2005).

Young (2005) explored self-regulated learning as a means of achieving student engagement. Traditional classroom management, where the instructor assigns prescribed topics and tasks, and the students perform them, does not adequately support self-regulated learning. However, when an instructor gives students some control over their learning experiences, perceived autonomy is increased, and this tends to increase intrinsic motivation and self-regulated learning. Young (2005) recommended that marketing instructors provide activity choice to support the development of self-determination.

Ackerman and Gross (2006) examined the impact of choice on perceptions of, and satisfaction with, a marketing curriculum. They found that while students do want choice, they also place value on guidance and direction. For example, the perceived value of a marketing curriculum to employers and for students' careers was greatest when there was some choice but not too much. Students appeared to

prefer more guidance for taking basic or core courses, and to prefer more choice when considering electives or courses in their individual areas of interest. In order to extend the findings from Ackerman and Gross (2006) to choice within a marketing course, an experiment was done to examine the effects of levels of choice in selecting topics within a course.

Students in a basic marketing course were given extra credit to complete an online survey regarding a hypothetical consumer behavior course. Students in the high choice condition were shown a list of 20 topics and asked to, "choose nine topics from the list that you would like to study for a consumer behavior course and write them in the space below." Students in the low choice condition were given eight topics randomly chosen from the full list by the researchers and then asked to choose one from among two additional topics. Lastly, students in the no choice condition were simply given nine topics that they would be required to study in the course. All students were then asked to fill out a survey about their perceptions of the course.

Analysis of the students' responses suggests that choice within a marketing course is perceived as good by those who are interested in marketing as a subject, perhaps majors, but is considered less desirable by those who are not as interested. For those student subjects who were interested in marketing, any choice, regardless of how much, led to increased confidence that the course would be important for the student's future career and that they would like the instructor. For those who were not as interested, more choice led to less positive perceptions of the course and the instructor. These findings have implications for marketing instructors.

References Available on Request