

SOCIAL AXIOMS AND LEARNING STYLES: IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETING EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Learning is one of the most universal of human activities; however, the ways in which knowledge is gained can be different for different cultures (Hofstede 1997; Joy and Kolb 2009). Increasingly, most classrooms are at least somewhat multi-cultural, but even within the same culture, we may find variations in student's beliefs, which may further impact the way they pursue and obtain knowledge. The main purpose of this paper is to describe some possible ways in which social beliefs may shape the learning styles of marketing students. More specifically, we attempt to connect the differences among the five social axioms suggested by Leung et al. (2002) with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) and Kolb's Learning Style Inventory (Kolb 2005). A close examination of the social beliefs and their interaction with student learning styles will give us valuable insight into how individual learning styles are shaped and developed in the process of socialization.

KOLB'S TYPOLOGY OF LEARNING STYLES

Kolb argues that as a result of different factors of the environment and our specific experience, we develop learning styles that emphasize given learning abilities over others. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, which has been extensively applied in the marketing education literature (e.g., Petkus 2000; Hagenbuch 2006), involves four stages of experiential learning: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

SOCIAL AXIOMS

Social axioms are formally defined as "generalized beliefs about oneself, the social and physical environment, or the spiritual world, and are in the form of an assertion about the relationship between two entities or concepts" (Leung et al. 2002, p. 289). Social axioms have four specific functions: "They facilitate the attainment of important goals (instrumental), help people protect their self-worth

(ego defensive), serve as manifestation of people's value (value-expressive), and help people understand the world (knowledge)" (Leung et al., 2002, p.288). In the marketing education context, the knowledge-obtaining function is the most relevant, and will be the one on which we will focus. Leung et al. (2002) discuss five dimensions of social axioms - *cynicism, reward for application, fate control, spirituality, and social complexity.*

PROPOSITIONS

We develop a model that proposes relationships between marketing students' preferred learning styles and knowledge-obtaining function of the social axioms that they hold. Linking the personality of people holding one of the social axioms to the characteristics of those who prefer a specific learning style, we put forward four propositions:
Proposition 1: Social cynicism in marketing students will correlate with a preference for the converging learning style.
Proposition 2: Belief in reward for application among marketing students will correlate with a preference for the assimilating learning style.
Proposition 3: Belief in fate control and spirituality among marketing students will correlate with a preference for the accommodating learning style.
Proposition 4: Social complexity beliefs among marketing students will be correlated with a preference for the diverging learning style.

CONCLUSION

Previous research has linked learning styles to cultural differences, but the two concepts seem somewhat contradictory as learning style is individual level variable while culture is a macro level variable that implies a belief system shared by a group of people. In this paper, we try to resolve this conflict by applying an individual level variable, social axioms, to the context of learning styles.

References available on request