

## EXAMINING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES THROUGH FOREIGN STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN INTERNATIONAL MARKETING PROJECTS

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One of the more difficult problems in teaching American students about International Marketing is their lack of exposure to differing cultural environments. As a result, they lack the sensitivity necessary to effectively develop marketing plans for use in foreign markets and are unable to anticipate the problems likely to arise in conducting marketing research in a foreign country. Ideally, this ethnocentric perspective is tempered by foreign travel and study at a foreign university. For most students these options are neither economically nor academically feasible. Since many campuses in the United States have foreign student populations representing diverse ethnic backgrounds, it was felt that these students could be used to teach American students about the difficulties posed by cultural difference. This paper examines how foreign students were used as a vehicle for providing students of International Marketing with increased cultural sensitivity.

Research conducted at the University of Arizona indicated that unbiased and reliable consumer information about foreign markets could be obtained from foreign students if they were well informed on the products or market activities being studied and if the questions could be clearly explained to the respondents (Alkheadair, 1978). Several potential problems must be recognized at the outset, however. Arndt (1978) indicated that both theoretical problems concerning what to study and whom to research and methodological problems of functional equivalence of samples and measurements could present serious problems. Several previous studies emphasized the problems in cross-cultural research (Hoover, 1978, and Sheth 1980).

### Design of the Project

After discussion of previous research and consideration of problems, a research project using international students was incorporated into the international marketing course. The project was designed to provide information about purchase decisions of foreign students and to provide information about the differences that foreign students observed while shopping in the U.S. Students were encouraged to develop the study along the lines they felt most appropriate as it was felt this was important in order to emphasize the problems of cultural difference.

### Conduct of the Study

In order to obtain as much information as possible and to identify problems and constraints individual personal interviews were conducted. Students from a business class at the Center for English as a Second Language (CESL) were chosen as subjects and each student in the International Marketing class was assigned to conduct an interview. CESL students had previously been exposed to material on marketing in the