Chapter 11
Developing a Grassroots Cross-Cultural Partnership to Enhance Student Experiences

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Increased globalization of the world economy makes international aspects of marketing an important priority. A growing number of business colleges provide cross-cultural experiences in marketing disciplines that help students better understand other cultures while applying their academic preparation to real-life settings. Today's students represent the first generation that has been born into the digital age, and freely use multiple technologies in preparing for classes, sharing notes, shopping, rating professors, and accomplishing multiple everyday tasks. This case discusses a class project on developing integrated marketing communications conducted by American and French cross-cultural student groups to promote environmentally-sustainable products in international markets. Modern social networking technologies were widely used both as tools for accomplishing the project, as means for presenting and displaying the results and as a medium for international marketing communications.

INTRODUCTION

Bringing real-world relevance into the classroom is a widely-acknowledged challenge for marketing educators (Bearden, Ellen, & Netemeyer, 2000). Media convergence and globalized markets present complex and unique problems to budding

practitioners, requiring skills in innovativeness, problem-solving, resource optimization, and creativity. Business colleges and schools face more rigorous demands from both employers and students for adequate and cutting-edge workplace preparation. In addressing these challenges, marketing professors increasingly utilize innovative teaching methods that include simulations, qualitative interpretive research, interdisciplin-

ary projects and innovative uses of technology (Albers-Miller, Straughan, & Prenshaw, 2001). Such emerging and rapidly developing content areas as corporate social responsibility, marketing ethics, digital and mobile marketing, globalization of marketing, and ecological sustainability are being incorporated in marketing curricula to reflect the changing business environment (Bridges & Wilhelm, 2008; Kelley, 2007; Jahan & Mehta, 2007). This chapter reports on designing and implementing a cross-cultural student team project that answers the calls for comprehensive, realistic, and relevant teaching tools in marketing classrooms, which promote collaborative problem-solving using available technological advancements, and broaden students' perspectives on the global economy.

SETTING THE STAGE

The idea for the project was developed by the instructors as a result of sharing research papers and data online: both the French and the American marketing professors were using qualitative research in their investigation, and observed substantial cultural differences in student responses to similar questions. This finding led to an idea of having student teams create marketing communications campaigns using qualitative research data collected by their international teams with the goal to introduce and emphasize the concept of cross-cultural marketing and comparative marketing. The existence and wide availability of the Internet, the availability of overlapping instructional calendar schedule, as well as the requirement for the French students in their program to fluently speak English helped avoid frequently mentioned challenges for cross-cultural collaborations. The choice of the content area for the project was mutual: environmental sustainability has become a globally urgent issue that has yet to find its way into the marketing curriculum. The intensifying development of "green" start-ups, investment

firms, political initiatives and regulations creates an imperative for business schools to prepare graduates for the sustainable business activities and practices, strategies and tactics. The project was conducted in the fall semester of 2008, with one pilot class of 30-35 students in each of the participating universities (in France and in the US).

CASE DESCRIPTION

Cross-Cultural Marketing Education

Increased globalization of the world economy makes teaching international aspects of marketing an important priority. The demand for international literacy and sensitivity among the business sector job applicants is reflected in AACSB requirements for international focus in business curricula. The major reason cross-cultural marketing education is necessary is that although globalization facilitates homogenization of tastes and fashions, strong national and local differences exist among cultures that warrant separate and different marketing campaigns, and brand and product development efforts. The ease of offering a product globally does not imply its universal acceptance. That is why globalization necessarily presupposes marketing with cultural sensitivity and understanding (Kelley, 2007). According to Morris et al. (1999), society can be analyzed using two different interpretations. The inside view considers constructs and ideas from a specific local perspective. This is the Emic view which relies on internal member's society criteria. In the outside view, the point of vantage is external and is called Etic. From the latter position, culture can be analyzed with universal categories. The two approaches are seen as either dichotomous or complementary and alternate in the process of cultural investigation. Thus, the ultimate goal of teaching cross-cultural marketing would be to teach students to evolve to the Etic interpretation through comparing various Emic approaches.

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