

ASSESSING BUSINESS STUDENT INTEREST IN WITNESSING PRODUCTION PROCESSES IN THE MARKETPLACE

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ABSTRACT

Undergraduate business students were polled as to their interest in witnessing production processes in the marketplace. The types preferred varied by age, race, and gender.

INTRODUCTION

Dorothy Sayers laments the “modern” techniques of educating in her powerful address at Oxford University in 1947 entitled “The Lost Tools of Learning”:

“Is not the great defect of our education today. . . that although we often succeed in teaching our pupils ‘subjects,’ we fail lamentably on the whole in teaching them how to think: they learn everything, except the art of learning”.

She continues her speech with the example of teaching a child to play a piano piece without ever teaching him/her to read music or to play scales. The student has memorized the selection and performed it perfectly to smiling parents at the Spring Recital: but, has not been given the tools to play a new musical piece on his own. Education’s most basic requirement should be to give students the tools of learning that may be transferred from one situation to the next. A failure to do this merely makes parrots of the students, where they simply play back to the teacher the information given them.

Experiential learning goes beyond the process of students’ regurgitating information fed them by their instructors to “focus on learning through reflection on one’s personal experience” [McCarthy, 1987]. “Through reflection, students link concrete experience to theoretical understanding. The process serves as a framework to guide future action and helps students advance from passive learners to active doers” [Goby and Lewis, 2000]. Today, educators are enhancing their teaching techniques by supplementing passive learning (i.e. traditional lecture format) with active learning techniques. Active learning encourages students to become more involved in their subject matter by “applying theory to real-life situations” [Hamer, 2000]. Finding creative teaching tools that relate to more students is a constant goal for the conscientious instructor.

It is suggested here that greater use of *Consumer Experience Tourism* (i.e., manufacturing plant tours, company visitor centers, and company museums) is one such instructional tool. The purpose of this manuscript is to discuss the growing use of *Consumer Experience Tourism* in the marketplace and to suggest how today’s business educators may better utilize this phenomenon to supplement traditional classroom activities. Further, student interest in witnessing the production processes of a variety of products is assessed. This analysis permits an evaluation of the influence of demographic factors on student interest. Ultimately,

instructors can improve student performance by selecting class projects, field trips, internship partners, and other experiential learning opportunities that best meet the interest of their particular student audience.

BUSINESS EDUCATORS AND CONSUMER EXPERIENCE TOURISM

Consumer Experience Tourism provides an excellent opportunity for business educators to include active learning in their course offerings. In particular, college-sponsored field trips to manufacturing plant tours, company museums, or company visitor centers provide an effective hands-on learning experience that is embraced by the student and provides an effective learning experience for students of all learning styles. It provides experiential learning at its best. An added bonus to experiential learning comes in discovering areas of special interest to particular students. It is understood that students learn better and retain more when studying information that genuinely interests them. A study evaluating student preferences in field trip choices reveals valuable information for business educators seeking to select the appropriate locations or destinations for his/her class. This is the focus of the remainder of this manuscript.

METHODS

Students enrolled in Consumer Behavior at a medium sized state university in the southeast United States worked with their instructor to create the questionnaire used in this study. An extensive review of the literature was conducted to better understand current practices within this tourism segment. Further, a review of existing sites served as the starting point to identify product categories for evaluation. The completed questionnaire included the following directions:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The purpose of this study is to evaluate your level of interest in watching products being produced. Specifically, assuming you could take a tour and watch an item being produced, would you be interested in doing so? The results of your questionnaire will be kept confidential. Only overall research results will be evaluated and reported.

Directions: Below is a list of product categories. Please circle your level of interest in witnessing the item's production process using the following 1-5 scale:

- 1 = Very Interested**
- 2 = Moderately Interested**
- 3 = Somewhat Interested**
- 4 = Very Little Interest**
- 5 = Not Interested At All**

A total of forty-one product categories are evaluated in this study. Further, a series of demographic questions was included to profile respondents and to evaluate possible influences on response.

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Table 1: Sample Composition (n = 291)

Gender:	Male = 131 (45%)	Female = 160 (55%)
Ethnic Group:	Caucasian = 214 (73.5%) Asian American = 10 (3.4%) Native American = 0 (0.0%) Other = 2 (0.7%)	African American = 46 (15.8%) Latin American = 6 (2.1%) Foreign National = 13 (4.5%)
Age Group:	24 < 29 = 219 (75.3%) 30-34 = 7 (2.4%) 35-44 = 7 (2.4%) 45-54 = 7 (2.4%) 55-64 = 1 (0.3%)	25-34 = 56 (19.2%) 35-44 = 7 (2.4%) 45-54 = 7 (2.4%) 65 and over = 1 (0.3%)

Table 2: Interest in Product Categories Mean Scores Ranked in Order of Interest for All Respondents (n = 291)

Variable (Product Category)	Mean Response	Standard Deviation
V4 = Automobiles (cars, trucks, heavy trucks, etc.)	2.215	1.138
V14 = Communications Media (radio and television studios)	2.235	1.158

V17 = Entertainment Facilities (arenas, theatres, etc.)	2.297	1.215
V8 = Beverages (Alcoholic)	2.416	1.282
V16 = Consumer Electronics (televisions, stereos, etc.)	2.507	1.276
V33 = Photographic Equipment (cameras, film, etc.)	2.588	1.227
V15 = Computer Hardware	2.653	1.248
V7 = Beverages (Non-Alcoholic)	2.663	1.269
V13 = Clothing / Garments	2.742	1.339
V32 = Pharmaceuticals (ointments, pills, etc.)	2.745	1.258
V40 = Toys	2.783	1.285
V38 = Recreational Vehicles (boats, campers, etc.)	2.816	1.363
V19 = Food Products (baked goods, frozen foods, snacks, etc.)	2.828	1.288
V2 = Aircraft Production and Maintenance	2.841	1.375
V37 = Printing Process (books, magazines, newspapers, etc.)	2.934	1.247
V3 = Athletic Equipment (balls, racquets, clubs, etc.)	2.979	1.248
V35 = Pottery and China	2.990	1.333
V20 = Furniture	3.072	1.196
V10 = Candles	3.076	1.357
V21 = Glass and Glass Products (crafts, jars, etc.)	3.182	1.236
V18 = Eyewear (glasses, contact lens, etc.)	3.216	1.253
V31 = Personal / Household Products (cleaners, cosmetics, etc.)	3.226	1.290
V5 = Automobile Parts (brakes, engines, seats, etc.)	3.255	1.304
V24 = Home Furnishing (comforters, drapes, linens, etc.)	3.385	1.266
V34 = Plastics / Plastic Molded Products	3.414	1.197
V30 = Paper and Paper Products	3.436	1.197
V11 = Carpeting and Rugs	3.467	1.178
V36 = Power Generating Equipment (turbines, relays, etc.)	3.479	1.370
V12 = Cloth Weaving	3.485	1.247
V25 = Household Appliances (washers, dryers, ranges, etc.)	3.493	1.206
V6 = Automobile Tires	3.540	1.258
V39 = Steel and Aluminum Production	3.601	1.240
V9 = Building Supplies (wood, concrete, etc.)	3.606	1.203
V22 = Hand Tools (drills, sanders, etc.)	3.657	1.156
V28 = Mining (rock, gravel, etc.)	3.667	1.199
V27 = Metal Crafts (iron, pewter, etc.)	3.691	1.232
V23 = Home Fixtures (lighting, plumbing, etc.)	3.697	1.119
V29 = Mobile or Modular Homes	3.753	1.224
V1 = Agricultural / Lawn and Garden Equipment	3.763	1.227
V41 = Warehousing (storage and movement of goods)	3.801	1.181

V26 = Machining (bearings, coils, plating, etc.)	3.872	1.132
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Table 3: Interest in Product Categories --- Influence of Gender

Variable	Male Respondents (n=131)	Female Respondents (n=160)	T-Value	P-Value
V1 = Agricultural / Lawn and Garden Equipment	3.4809	3.9938	-3.62	0.000**
V2 = Aircraft Production and Maintenance	2.3769	3.2201	-5.44	0.000**
V3 = Athletic Equipment (balls, racquets, clubs, etc.)	2.6923	3.2125	-3.60	0.000**
V4 = Automobiles (cars, trucks, heavy trucks, etc.)	1.9612	2.4188	-3.46	0.000**
V5 = Automobile Parts (brakes, engines, seats, etc.)	2.9308	3.5188	-3.91	0.000**
V6 = Automobile Tires	3.2385	3.7862	-3.77	0.000**
V7 = Beverages (Non-Alcoholic)	2.8702	2.4938	2.54	0.012**
V8 = Beverages (Alcoholic)	2.3053	2.5063	-1.33	0.184
V9 = Building Supplies (wood, concrete, etc.)	3.3846	3.7862	-2.86	0.005**
V10 = Candles	3.8295	2.4688	9.76	0.000**
V11 = Carpeting and Rugs	3.7328	3.2500	3.55	0.000**
V12 = Cloth Weaving	3.8015	3.2250	4.03	0.000**
V13 = Clothing / Garments	3.2366	2.3375	6.04	0.000**
V14 = Communications Media (radio and television studios)	2.1615	2.2956	-0.98	0.328
V15 = Computer Hardware	2.3435	2.9063	-3.92	0.000**
V16 = Consumer Electronics (televisions, stereos, etc.)	2.1154	2.8250	-4.89	0.000**
V17 = Entertainment Facilities (arenas, theatres, etc.)	2.2923	2.3000	-0.05	0.957
V18 = Eyewear (glasses, contact lens, etc.)	3.3817	3.0813	2.05	0.042**
V19 = Food Products (baked goods, frozen foods, snacks, etc.)	3.0229	2.6688	2.35	0.019**
V20 = Furniture	3.1538	3.0063	1.05	0.297
V21 = Glass and Glass Products (crafts, jars, etc.)	3.2443	3.1313	0.78	0.439
V22 = Hand Tools (drills, sanders, etc.)	3.1908	4.0443	-6.71	0.000**
V23 = Home Fixtures (lighting, plumbing, etc.)	3.4198	3.9245	-3.64	0.000**
V24 = Home Furnishing (comforters,	3.6412	3.1750	3.17	0.002**

drapes, linens, etc.)				
V25 = Household Appliances (washers, dryers, ranges, etc.)	3.3664	3.5975	-1.63	0.105
V26 = Machining (bearings, coils, plating, etc.)	3.4923	4.1813	-5.40	0.000**
V27 = Metal Crafts (iron, pewter, etc.)	3.3817	3.9438	-3.97	0.000**
V28 = Mining (rock, gravel, etc.)	3.3511	3.9250	-4.18	0.000**
V29 = Mobile or Modular Homes	3.5038	3.9563	-3.19	0.002**
V30 = Paper and Paper Products	3.5115	3.3750	0.97	0.334
V31 = Personal / Household Products (cleaners, cosmetics, etc.)	3.6923	2.9188	5.31	0.000**
V32 = Pharmaceuticals (ointments, pills, etc.)	2.7846	2.7125	0.48	0.628
V33 = Photographic Equipment (cameras, film, etc.)	2.6031	2.5750	0.19	0.847
V34 = Plastics / Plastic Molded Products	3.2977	3.5094	-1.50	0.134
V35 = Pottery and China	3.3130	2.7250	3.83	0.000**
V36 = Power Generating Equipment (turbines, relays, etc.)	2.8636	3.9874	-7.61	0.000**
V37 = Printing Process (books, magazines, newspapers, etc.)	3.1069	2.7911	2.16	0.032**
V38 = Recreational Vehicles (boats, campers, etc.)	2.4574	3.1069	-4.13	0.000**
V39 = Steel and Aluminum Production	3.1603	3.9625	-5.79	0.000**
V40 = Toys	2.8473	2.7296	0.78	0.438
V41 = Warehousing (storage and movement of goods)	3.6260	3.9438	-2.30	0.022**

Table 4: Interest in Product Categories --- Influence of Ethnicity

Variable	Caucasian Respondents (n=214)	African American Respondents (n=46)	T-Value	P-Value
V1 = Agricultural / Lawn and Garden Equipment	3.7196	3.9565	-1.21	0.227
V2 = Aircraft Production and Maintenance	2.7453	3.4565	-3.24	0.001**
V3 = Athletic Equipment (balls, racquets, clubs, etc.)	2.9906	3.0870	-0.47	0.638
V4 = Automobiles (cars, trucks, heavy trucks, etc.)	2.2441	2.2222	0.12	0.908
V5 = Automobile Parts (brakes, engines, seats, etc.)	3.3286	3.0217	1.46	0.145

V6 = Automobile Tires	3.6009	3.2889	1.52	0.129
V7 = Beverages (Non-Alcoholic)	2.7196	2.3478	1.79	0.075
V8 = Beverages (Alcoholic)	2.2944	2.8261	-2.60	0.010**
V9 = Building Supplies (wood, concrete, etc.)	3.6038	3.4783	0.64	0.522
V10 = Candles	3.1509	2.8478	1.36	0.174
V11 = Carpeting and Rugs	2.5140	3.2609	1.30	0.194
V12 = Cloth Weaving	3.5701	3.1957	1.83	0.069
V13 = Clothing / Garments	2.9813	1.8696	5.32	0.000**
V14 = Communications Media (radio and television studios)	2.3832	1.9111	5.32	0.000**
V15 = Computer Hardware	2.8598	2.0435	4.08	0.000**
V16 = Consumer Electronics (televisions, stereos, etc.)	2.6854	1.9565	3.60	0.000**
V17 = Entertainment Facilities (arenas, theatres, etc.)	2.3832	2.0222	1.84	0.067
V18 = Eyewear (glasses, contact lens, etc.)	3.3972	2.6304	3.95	0.000**
V19 = Food Products (baked goods, frozen foods, snacks, etc.)	2.9953	2.2174	3.81	0.000**
V20 = Furniture	3.1596	2.7174	2.30	0.022**
V21= Glass and Glass Products (crafts, jars, etc.)	3.2009	3.1087	0.46	0.647
V22 = Hand Tools (drills, sanders, etc.)	3.6887	3.5870	0.54	0.587
V23 = Home Fixtures (lighting, plumbing, etc.)	3.7324	3.5217	1.10	0.273
V24 = Home Furnishing (comforters, drapes, linens, etc.)	3.4486	2.9783	2.32	0.021**
V25 = Household Appliances (washers, dryers, ranges, etc.)	3.5915	3.1739	2.18	0.030**
V26 = Machining (bearings, coils, plating, etc.)	3.9108	3.9130	-0.01	0.990
V27 = Metal Crafts (iron, pewter, etc.)	3.6495	3.9348	-1.42	0.156
V28 = Mining (rock, gravel, etc.)	3.5561	4.1739	-3.22	0.001**
V29 = Mobile or Modular Homes	3.8551	3.4783	1.92	0.056
V30 = Paper and Paper Products	3.5047	3.3291	1.39	0.167
V31 = Personal / Household Products (cleaners, cosmetics, etc.)	3.3879	2.9130	2.29	0.023**
V32 = Pharmaceuticals (ointments, pills, etc.)	2.8364	2.4000	2.12	0.035**
V33 = Photographic Equipment (cameras, film, etc.)	2.7617	2.3043	2.30	0.022**
V34 = Plastics / Plastic Molded Products	3.5023	3.2826	1.15	0.252
V35 = Pottery and China	3.0467	2.8913	0.71	0.475
V36 = Power Generating Equipment	3.5187	3.6444	-0.56	0.573

(turbines, relays, etc.)				
V37 = Printing Process (books, magazines, newspapers, etc.)	2.9906	2.7174	1.36	0.174
V38 = Recreational Vehicles (boats, campers, etc.)	2.7453	3.0889	-1.54	0.126
V39 = Steel and Aluminum Production	3.6075	3.6957	-0.44	0.661
V40 = Toys	2.8598	2.4348	2.07	0.039**
V41 = Warehousing (storage and movement of goods)	3.8551	3.7609	0.49	0.624

Table 5: Interest in Product Categories --- Influence of Age

Variable	Respondents 24 and under (n=219)	Respondents 25 and older (n=72)	T-Value	P-Value
V1 = Agricultural / Lawn and Garden Equipment	3.8447	3.5169	2.00	0.047**
V2 = Aircraft Production and Maintenance	2.9078	2.6389	1.44	0.151
V3 = Athletic Equipment (balls, racquets, clubs, etc.)	2.9498	3.0704	-0.71	0.480
V4 = Automobiles (cars, trucks, heavy trucks, etc.)	2.2615	2.0704	1.23	0.220
V5 = Automobile Parts (brakes, engines, seats, etc.)	3.3073	3.0972	1.19	0.236
V6 = Automobile Tires	3.6359	3.2500	2.27	0.024**
V7 = Beverages (Non-Alcoholic)	2.6849	2.5972	0.51	0.612
V8 = Beverages (Alcoholic)	2.4110	2.4306	-0.11	0.911
V9 = Building Supplies (wood, concrete, etc.)	3.7339	3.2113	3.23	0.001**
V10 = Candles	3.1014	3.0000	0.55	0.584
V11 = Carpeting and Rugs	3.5616	3.1806	2.40	0.017**
V12 = Cloth Weaving	3.5616	3.2500	1.85	0.066
V13 = Clothing / Garments	2.6667	2.9722	-1.69	0.093
V14 = Communications Media (radio and television studios)	2.2166	2.2917	-0.48	0.634
V15 = Computer Hardware	2.7260	2.4306	1.75	0.081
V16 = Consumer Electronics (televisions, stereos, etc.)	2.4725	2.6111	-0.80	0.425
V17 = Entertainment Facilities (arenas, theatres, etc.)	2.2477	2.4444	-1.19	0.234
V18 = Eyewear (glasses, contact lens, etc.)	3.2009	3.2639	-0.37	0.712
V19 = Food Products (baked goods,	2.8858	2.6528	1.33	0.183

frozen foods, snacks, etc.)				
V20 = Furniture	3.1239	2.9167	1.28	0.203
V21= Glass and Glass Products (crafts, jars, etc.)	3.2329	3.0278	1.22	0.223
V22 = Hand Tools (drills, sanders, etc.)	3.7752	3.2958	3.08	0.002**
V23 = Home Fixtures (lighting, plumbing, etc.)	3.8402	3.2535	3.66	0.000**
V24 = Home Furnishing (comforters, drapes, linens, etc.)	3.5114	3.0000	3.01	0.003**
V25 = Household Appliances (washers, dryers, ranges, etc.)	3.6073	3.1408	2.87	0.004**
V26 = Machining (bearings, coils, plating, etc.)	3.9128	3.7500	1.03	0.291
V27 = Metal Crafts (iron, pewter, etc.)	3.7717	3.4444	1.96	0.050**
V28 = Mining (rock, gravel, etc.)	3.7078	3.5417	1.02	0.309
V29 = Mobile or Modular Homes	3.7671	3.7803	0.35	0.724
V30 = Paper and Paper Products	3.4658	3.3472	0.73	0.467
V31 = Personal / Household Products (cleaners, cosmetics, etc.)	3.2752	3.2361	0.22	0.824
V32 = Pharmaceuticals (ointments, pills, etc.)	2.7385	2.7639	-0.15	0.882
V33 = Photographic Equipment (cameras, film, etc.)	2.5708	2.6389	-0.41	0.684
V34 = Plastics / Plastic Molded Products	3.4312	3.3611	0.43	0.668
V35 = Pottery and China	3.0822	2.7083	2.08	0.039**
V36 = Power Generating Equipment (turbines, relays, etc.)	3.5917	3.1389	2.45	0.015**
V37 = Printing Process (books, magazines, newspapers, etc.)	2.9541	2.8732	0.47	0.636
V38 = Recreational Vehicles (boats, campers, etc.)	2.8750	2.6389	1.27	0.204
V39 = Steel and Aluminum Production	3.7123	3.2639	2.69	0.008**
V40 = Toys	2.7798	2.7917	-0.07	0.946
V41 = Warehousing (storage and movement of goods)	3.8813	3.5556	2.04	0.042**