

MKT 4270 Final Exam Essay

When this semester began, I started my studies in this class with the most practical first step: reading the syllabus. As I read through the syllabus, I remember how much the course overview section stood out to me. The general ideas we were going to cover were foreign to me and unlike anything else I had studied in the past. As a Spanish and International Business student who wants to go into marketing as a career, this class seemed to offer the perfect information and learning opportunities to prepare me for my future endeavors. The expectations (and excitement) I had at the beginning of the semester after reading about what I may learn were not only met but exceeded. In this essay, I want to not only demonstrate the knowledge I acquired as a result of my studies in this course, but I want to answer the three questions listed in the syllabus that explain what this course is concerned with: What makes all humans across the world similar? Given they are all so similar, how do humans get as different as they appear? How do you use a fundamental understanding of humans and culture to better implement marketing actions in unfamiliar countries and cultures?

The first time I read these questions, I had little to no answer to each of them. Coming into a class with completely unfamiliar material and just some background knowledge was something I knew would be a challenge. However, I decided this challenge would be much better used towards improvement in my learning, marketing knowledge, and confidence in international navigation, rather than something I shied away from. So, when I was choosing what I wanted to talk about in this essay, I did not want to just choose terms from the class and define them. Instead, I thought back to these questions and through introspection of my newfound knowledge, realized that I now had the previously unknown answers. I realized there is no

better way to demonstrate my knowledge and aptitude in this class than to answer what the course is modeled to value and teach us the most.

This brings me to answering the first question: what makes all humans across the world similar? In the very first lecture in this class, we discussed a concept that changed my perspective on humans and differing cultures as well as shaped my understanding of the rest of the course. This concept was on fractals. The example used to clarify and demonstrate how this concept plays out was through imagery of a close-knit forest. If you were to view a forest from above, you would see several different types of trees, different shapes, different amounts of leaves, different amounts of area taken up, etc. It would look overwhelmingly diverse and it would seem impossible that all of these trees share anything in common besides just simply all being trees. There is a different perspective that can be taken, however, from the bottom of the forest. From this perspective, you can see that although the growths and formations of the branches and limbs appear different, the reality is that each and every tree is growing the same. This exact idea can be applied to humans. When you take each and every culture and country and subgroup of humans at face value, it seems that from one culture or group to another, there is nothing they share in common besides simply all being humans. However, there is so much more that we share beneath the surface and at this different perspective that cannot be seen at an overview.

The concept of fractals and the difference between a perspective from “above” and “below” coincides with another key concept towards understanding similarities between humans. As I said before, a cross-cultural examination of humans from the overview perspective would leave you astounded at how there could possibly be any concrete similarities between these people, besides being of the same species. When you dig further into the evolutionary past of

humans, that is when you can begin to understand how similar we truly all are. There is one specific sentence that was a part of our lecture on evolution that shifted my perspective on differences between humans and it is that the things that we perceive to be different between humans are simply cultural differences, not biological. We are all very similar from an evolutionary standpoint. Humans even share something with almost all species, so how could we not share a multitude of similarities with each other? According to Professor Geert Hofstede, there are six cultural dimensions that can be used to distinguish countries from each other. According to Hofstede, “culture can only be used meaningfully by comparison.” (Hofstede Insights “National Culture.”) The dimensions are power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long versus short term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint. There is a lot that can be said about these cultural dimensions, but I want to instead use them to exemplify how we are only different at surface level. For example, there might be one culture that is more collectivist, comfortable with uncertainty, values nurture, is more egalitarian, etc. This culture would be at the low end of the spectrum. Another culture on the high end of the dimensions would be more hierarchical, value power, be individualist, etc. These two cultures could not appear to be any more different. However, the humans that belong to each of these cultures all evolved the same. They are all biologically the same. We all contain the basic biological components and share the correct genes that are necessary to all be human. Just like the concept of fractals and how that can be related to trees, humans all grow the same as well. At our very core, we are all the same.

The next question that was answered in this course was: given they are all so similar, how do humans get as different as they appear? When you say that all humans are similar at their core and that we all grow the same due to our evolutionary past, it may seem hard to conceptualize

how we could have developed these massive cultural differences. In one of the earlier lectures, the idea of evolution was discussed and how different traits are ultimately more successful, and the less successful traits do not die out, but are rather pushed out. When we think of evolution, we typically think of how humans have changed over time as a result of genetic evolution. In the previous paragraphs, I explained the idea that humans are incredibly similar from a biological standpoint. However, humans have been experiencing cultural evolution throughout time, and this has led us to evolve to be different in our beliefs, values, norms, sanctions, etc. The book *The Secret of Our Success* by Joseph Henrich was mentioned in an early lecture. This book explores cultural evolution in humans and provides perspective on how this has contributed to our success. There is a key point made in this book that helped me understand the idea of cultural evolution which is that we are a cultural species, and that humans have learned from each other “in such a way that culture became cumulative” (Henrich 19). We thrive off of cultural learning and as a result, we acquire our beliefs and values from our ingroups/communities. Another very important piece of cultural learning that comes from our ingroups is social norms, which impact the way we act, dress, eat, etc. Humans are innately social and tribal, which means that we will always find our ingroup and learn from that group. These tendencies have lived on throughout history and are ultimately the reason that we have such a large amount of and such varying cultures.

All of this learning thus far brings me to the last question that this course was meant to answer: how do you use a fundamental understanding of humans and culture to better implement marketing actions in unfamiliar countries and cultures? This question was answered in part through our lectures, but some of my greatest takeaways were in our finishing assignments, from our study of market segmentation to the opportunity assessment we performed on our assigned

countries. Humans are, at our core, the same. Biologically, we evolved the same. However, there are variations between groups of humans because of our experiences in cultural evolution. Our cultural evolution has caused intergroup differentiation in our beliefs, values, and social norms. From a marketing standpoint, it can seem incredibly hard to take marketing action in an unfamiliar country or culture because of these differences. This new country or culture is your outgroup, and you may not understand them or understand how to appeal to them. Marketing efforts may seem futile because of these differences. How could you possibly translate your advertising cross-culturally and still have it be a success? My main takeaway on this takes us back to the fractal perspective of humans. Culturally, we vary greatly, and that is an unavoidable circumstance. At our very base as consumers, however, we operate the same. This concept is intertwined with the consumer behavior process, which is something that each and every consumer experiences. Specific beliefs and values may impact how marketing efforts are received and interpreted across all cultures. However, if marketers understand how consumers behave and how humans operate as a whole, they can overcome these differences across cultures and create marketing content that will spark the consumer behavior process to begin. There are a multitude of indicators that can be used to evaluate a country to understand how they will be best reached through marketing efforts, an example being the aforementioned cultural dimensions created by Hofstede. A country who is high on those dimensions will need incredibly different marketing content than a country who is low on those dimensions. However, the previous point that all consumers will react the same to marketing efforts if they are well-performed still stands. As long as marketers tweak their content to fit a cultures beliefs, values, and norms, there is no reason that consumers in an unfamiliar country would not want their product or service any less than consumers in the home country.

My learning in this course challenged me to think in new ways, as well as forced me to set aside any previous learning I had about culture to allow space for a new perspective on the world, culture, and how to overcome cultural differences in order to successfully market to these unfamiliar countries. Even through writing this paper, I learned more about my own cultural evolution and why my beliefs, values, and norms are so similar to those around me. I feel a great sense of growth in myself after this semester where I began not knowing how to answer those three key questions. Now, I understand exactly why humans are all similar, how we formed cultures and how those cultures impact us, and how to overcome these cultural differences to still produce effective and easily interpretable marketing content.

Works Cited

- Henrich, J. P. (2016). *The secret of our success: How culture is driving human evolution, domesticating our species, and making us smarter*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
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