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Abstract: Third year Business students were required to evaluate their experiential consumption of a sporting activity using Holt's taxonomy. The aim of this paper is to explore the benefits derived from using photos as a mirror; firstly to capture the data and provide validity to the activity; and, secondly as a tool to encourage reflective learning. The literature addresses issues and examples focusing on visual methods as a means of data capture in qualitative research. In addition, educationalists have explored flexible delivery and assessment methods incorporating visual mediums as a tool to enhance the learning experience. This paper explores the synergies obtained by combining both the visual data capture mechanism and the synthesis of theory into practice, and producing the respondent’s (student’s) own introspection artefact. This paper presents findings from the reflections of 54 students (local and international) and discusses how the use of photography is used in a learning context. Some students found the task technologically challenging, time consuming and a few didn’t engage with the medium. Overall however, the results indicated that the use of pictures significantly enhanced student learning outcomes. A consistent message from the student reflections was their need to understand the concepts of the project before selecting their photos. In this instance, the photos became the words to describe the concepts of Holt’s taxonomy. Being able to choose their own photographs enabled students to be empowered by the ability to construct the parameters within which they displayed their understanding of the concept and were subsequently assessed. In this activity students learn through applying the theory to themselves rather than simply rote learning. By using the visual communication vehicle to complete the assignment it was evident that students needed to have a thorough understanding of the concepts so that they can communicate them back in a manner where they synthesise, conceptualise and apply the concepts. This demonstrates true deep learning practices. Models are difficult to teach and to assess student’s understanding. This case study is an example of where theory and practise come together in an engaging experience for students, making the learning process more memorable and consequently more effective.

Keywords: photoelicitation; Holt’s taxonomy; sport consumption; student learning

1. Introduction

Students in a third year Sport Marketing unit are required to evaluate their experiential consumption of a sporting activity using Holt’s taxonomy. This paper explores the benefits derived from using photos as a mirror in the teaching process to firstly capture the data and provide validity to the activity; and, secondly as a tool to induce reflective learning as students introspect about their own individual experiences.

The paper details the procedure involved in this teaching technique and explores how photos are able to convey complex and difficult concepts to students irrespective of their English language level and whether they are visual learners or not. It highlights an alternative way that lecturers can assess students understanding of more complex issues through a deep learning process where students apply their learned theory to a real life setting of their own choice.

2. Background

Photographs have been used as a means of data capture for many years. Their use in recording observable phenomenon from different epistemological points of view in qualitative and ethnographic research is well documented and the benefits derived from their use means they provide a valuable tool for researchers (Stanczak 2007). Indeed, photographs have been used as visual projective techniques in a variety of disciplines, including tourism (Jenkins 1999), marketing (Ryan and Ogilvie 2001) and education (Kaplan and Howes 2004; Loeffler 2005). Consumer researchers have also used photographs to investigate attachment to ‘favourite things’ (Wallendorf and Arnould 1988), ‘Thanksgiving rituals’ (Wallendorf and Arnould 1991) and ‘home and interior design’ (Firth 1995).

Photographs add an element of realism not found in other forms of visual representation (Hine 1980). Beger and Mohr (1982) claim the camera and positivism emerged together and share similar aligned beliefs in that the truth can be discerned empirically from objective facts that have been observed, systematically recorded and documented to provide understanding of certain social processes (Stanczak 2007). Consequently many consider photographs to be inherently honest; although, the photographer
may not be. The photo captures a moment in time that is then used to illustrate a concept and allows the researcher to marry the concept with a real live event (Stanczak 2007).

Educationalists have also explored flexible delivery and assessment methods incorporating visual mediums as a tool to enhance the learning experience (Clouder 1998; Ogilvie and Ryan, 2001). Magolda suggests that "students develop through ‘transitional knowing’ to realise that knowledge is not absolute and that understanding is more crucial" (Clouder 1998 p188). By developing their own perspective, students transcend through ‘contextual knowing’ where certainty depends on context. Clouder claims it is the educationalists responsibility to guide students to these higher cognitive levels of individual contextual knowing. "We should aim for a situation where they can consider issues, compare perspectives, synthesise new and existing knowledge and make decisions" (1998 p188) A mechanism of learning that is enabled extensively through photographs and other visual means.

Various studies claim that learning is relational and takes place in a tripartite fashion involving the learner, the content and the learning environment. (Biggs and Moore 1993, Entwistle 1997; Trigwell and Prosser 1996). Other phenomenological studies have extended this link further and included cultural variations in the process of learning and more specifically the “paradox of the Asian Learner” that seems to rely on surface learning strategies of memorisation and yet understands deeply (Marton and Booth 1997; Entwistle 1997). It is in these students that the use of visual mediums adds the greatest strength for it provides an alternative pathway for overseas students to communicate their understanding of course material besides written English text.

A variety of studies have demonstrated the improved learning outcomes derived from ‘deep’ learning strategies (Biggs, 1987, Gerstman and Rex, 2001, Marton and Slijo, 1984, Van Rossum and Schenk, 1984). According to Biggs, (1991) when students are motivated to understand they learn differently to when they are required to simply regurgitate facts. In these instances, students tend to employ ‘deep’ learning strategies and are more likely to recall concepts because their desire for learning appears to be self derived and intrinsically based, as opposed to the more extrinsic motivations apparent in surface learning where students learn for the purpose of others (Gerstmen & Rex, 2001). Evidence suggests that deep learning aids retention of knowledge far more effectively than surface learning strategies (Biggs, 1999, Entwistle, 1990). Indeed, Gerstmen and Rex (2001, p.3) find that “there is strong evidence that deep learning facilitates an ability to transfer a body of knowledge and skills, and those skills are more likely to be used in a variety of ways and contexts. This is because when learning is understood it is more likely to be recalled and applied than learning that is memorised without understanding”.

Other studies have demonstrated how students who initially learn through memorisation, progress through their university studies to become aware that it is more rewarding to learn through processes that have personal meaning for them and that allow them to transform information and ideas in terms of their own experiences and knowledge (Entwistle 2000 p131). Indeed, research has demonstrated that some of the best learning experiences come when we are actively involved in the creation and development of a project, and in particular when they include things that have meaning to us or others around us (Resnick 2002).

This paper outlines a learning method whereby students become actively involved within the learning process so that they experience the theoretical concepts and models first hand. The aim is to facilitate a practice whereby students more easily remember theoretical concepts and are able to appropriately apply them to real world applications. In this case study we are exploring the applications focused around sporting activities and events.

2.1 Sport as a consumption process

Throughout the world, the consumption of sport is an integral and daily part of many people’s lives. People consume sport as participants and/or as spectators. Consumer behaviour academics put forward the view that consumption in marketing refers to how people make use of objects rather than ‘use up’ objects (Mackay, 1997). This constructive perspective on consumption suggests that:

- People make use of the symbolism to construct their identities.
- People can make use of objects [e.g. facilities] rather than use up [devour or consume] objects.

Clearly, sports consumption is about people, people who are involved in sport. A common theme of marketers is that sport is a high involvement activity [involvement in a marketing sense means - of
personal relevance and interest]. Furthermore, to be involved in the consumption process the sports consumer must be present. However, this presence may take different forms, for example:

- A sports participant who is mentally and physically present at the sport encounter [e.g., a player]
- A sports spectator who is mentally and physically present at the sport encounter [e.g., a spectator at a soccer match]
- A sports spectator who is mentally present but remote from the sport [e.g., listening to the radio whilst working in the garden]

In this study we focus on the concept of Holt’s Taxonomy in consumer research. The taxonomy is often applied to consumption situations but this paper addresses and explores its adaption to the sporting environment. A brief description of the taxonomy follows.

2.2 Holt’s typology of consumption

Holt (1995), building on the work of other academics, suggests that consumption acts have purpose and structure. The purpose is either (1) an end in itself [an autotellic action] or (2) as a means to an end [an instrumental action] and the structure is performed through (1) objects and (2) people. This forms a 2X2 matrix; Holt then labels each of the four cells that represent distinct yet interrelated consumption activities with a metaphor. The four metaphors, consuming as experience (quadrant 1), consuming as integration (quadrant 2), consuming as play (quadrant 3) and consuming as classification (quadrant 4), are used to explore how consumers use products to provide meaning. Each of the four metaphors is explored through sub-classifications. The four metaphors and the sub-classifications are discussed in the following paragraphs with reference to sport.

(Adapted from Holt 1995)

![Figure 1: Holt’s typology of consumption](image-url)

*Consuming as experience (quadrant 1):* is a reaction that is emotional or aesthetic. There are three sub-classifications:

- **Accounting:** interpreting or making sense of actions using a shared framework of meanings e.g. holding the ball, off-side,
- **Evaluating:** using conventions and history to make judgments e.g. goal of the year, mark of the year
- **Appreciating:** feelings toward actions, objects or situations e.g. athletic ability of a player, pleasure when your team wins.
Consuming as integration (quadrant 2): acquiring, using and manipulating consumption objects to express oneself and give self identity and adopt the identity of the group. There are three sub-classifications:

- **Assimilating**: developing skills and knowledge to help interaction. Assimilating involves thinking, feeling, acting, and looking like a consumer of a sport e.g. reading magazines and watching TV shows, wearing team jumpers or waving banners.
- **Producing**: attempting to exert control over the game and increase interaction e.g. yelling advice, berating umpires, enhancing self through association, collecting autographs, attending club training sessions.
- **Personalizing**: asserting one’s individuality through objects e.g. waving a personally made banner, collecting/pinning badges on a hat, face painting.

Consuming as play (quadrant 3): interacting with others simply for the pleasure of interacting with others:

- **Communin**: sharing mutually felt experiences, cheering a goal or booing the opposition.
- **Socializing**: the performative entertainment of others, humorous comments and actions, reciprocating and competing, attempts to outdo others in knowledge, responses to humorous comments by rivals.

Consuming as classification (quadrant 4): using the consumption experience and objects to affiliate with others

- **Through objects**: symbolically transferring meaning from objects as a means of classifying self and increasing credibility, membership of club, special collections and souvenirs.
- **Through actions**: storytelling involving association with celebrities, meeting with a famous player or personality.

Holt’s (1995) work is important for marketers as it reinforces the concept that products have components that are both tangible and intangible. Whilst, sport often includes tangible goods it is an intangible dominant product that is rich in services, ideas and experiences. Holt’s work also reminds marketers to look beyond the obvious benefits as often people wish to “engage others – to impress, to befriend, or simply to play” (p.15). These are often the case in sporting activities and events. In addition, researchers emphasise the increased significance of experiences in consumption activities of western societies (Gupta & Vajic 2000; O’Sullivan and Sprangler 1998). They assert that although the experience component is embedded in most products its importance is often underestimated by marketers. They maintain that experience involves:

- Consumer participation and involvement
- A physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual presence
- May include changes in knowledge, emotion, memory or skills
- Intentional attendance to satisfy a psychogenic or biogenic need.

### 2.3 Experiential consumption

Experiential consumption was first proposed by Holbrook & Hirschman (1982). In essence it strives to understand the feelings, fantasies and fun within the consumption process. The shift from rational choice consumption behaviour to the experiential view of consumer behaviour has been evolving over the last quarter of a century, with experience becoming a key element in understanding consumer behaviour (Addis and Holbrook 2001).

Experience is predominantly a subjective dynamic, and therefore phenomenological in application. This subjective dynamic of the consumption process engages in a product or service and elicits feelings or experiences with “symbolic meaning, hedonic responses and esthetic criteria” (Holbrook & Hirschman 1982: 132). The consumption experience is broader than the actual purchase of the good or service and has been defined by four stages:

- Pre consumption experience - the planning, anticipation of the consumption.
- Purchase experience - the choice, payment, exchange act.
- Core consumption experience – the emotion, experience, satisfaction/dissatisfaction.
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- Remembered consumption experience – the consumption memories, stories, re-living the experiences. (Arnould, Price and Zinkhan 2002)

3. Methodology

Students studying a third year unit in Sport Marketing participated in this research. The unit’s primary objective is to ensure students understand consumer research methodology as it applies to the sport industry. This includes discussing key concepts underpinning sport needs, motivations and lifestyle. Within this process students were exposed to Holt’s taxonomy of consumption (Holt, 1995) and required in their first assignment to apply Holt’s consumption model to sport. The assignment contributed a significant percentage (40%) to their total mark for the unit. The assignment was designed to maximise student’s own participation and reflection into the consumption of sport. Rather than simply read and summarise from the Web, the lecturer purposely set out to engage students in the process of participation of a sporting event. The assignment also required students to plan ahead – it was clearly not an assignment that could be undertaken at the last minute. Student’s were required to chose a sporting event and plan their photographs at the event. The reflection process has been well documented in the literature (Entwistle 2000, Resnick 2002), and was part of the methodology used in this assignment and data gathering exercise with students. The assignment mirrored the experiential consumption stages of pre consumption experience, purchase experience, core consumption experience and reflecting on the experience.

The following paragraph outlines the assignment requirements.

Assignment summary:

Prior to the assignment students were provided with an essay template to follow which would facilitate easier analysis of data. Students were also given instructions on Holt’s typology and posters of the typology were shown and discussed in class. Students were also given access [via Blackboard] to previous student’s essays where expected standards were provided. Interesting to note that only one case of plagiarism has been detected in over 300 assignments in this unit so far.

Students were provided with the following guidelines for the assignment:

Read Douglas Holt’s article and apply this concept to a sport of your choice.


The project should be no more than six pages. The project should include photographs (4-6) that you have taken. The selected photographs should help demonstrate your understanding of the topic. Care should be taken when taking photographs to ensure that no offense can be taken. The project should include: a title that reflects the theme of your project [it may include a pun or humour], a brief abstract that provides a summary of the contents, an overview of the article, your methodology, your findings and your conclusions. The conclusions section should be approximately 20% of the total paper.

Students should adhere to the following guidelines in relation to the photographs:

- Photographs should be scanned and embedded into the text [text wrapped is appropriate]. Photographs downloaded from the web are not considered appropriate for this assignment. Refrain from clipart.
- Printing should be to a high standard and preferably in colour.

The assignment was pivotal in facilitating students’ understanding of the consumption process as modelled by Holt’s taxonomy (Holt, 1995). It clearly integrates the intangible and tangible aspects of sport and most importantly the experiential factor of the consumption process. In choosing photographs as the key learning tool in this assignment the aim was to ensure students attend a sporting event, therefore engage in the experience themselves whilst the theory is being discussed in the classroom. This enabled the timeliness of the activity and heightened the relevance of the learning experience. Photographs in this context provided self generated data that the students had to synthesize to accurately reflect the dimensions of Holt’s typology.
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At the end of the unit the students were required to reflect on the assignment and through their own introspection of the experience reported how the learning process was successful (or not). The research methodology approach considered relevance, accuracy, timeliness and cost (Blankenship & Breen 1995; Rosnow & Rosenthal 1996). As this part of the research was designed to uncover the ‘experiential view’ of the students the introspection design was considered appropriate as the essence of introspection is self-reflection (Gould 1995; Boring 1953). The technique aims to explore the feelings and emotions associated with the experiences of the introspector that may not be overtly apparent to others (Wallendorf and Brucks, 1993). It was also considered that this method would be more reliable than face-to face interviews on autobiographical topics (Conrath, Higgins and Mc Clean 1983) especially as the group of students were young and familiar with documenting (on-line journals, blogs, face book) their feelings and emotions (Caru and Cova, 2008).

The introspection process was simply conducted by asking students to write about their thoughts on developing their poster for the assignment. As it was anticipated that the process was highly individualistic and symbolic to each student, the choice of qualitative data gathering and in particular an introspection approach was deemed appropriate to assist the researchers to explore the depth and richness of the student experiences. The following instructions guided their reflections:

*Please write as much as possible on any aspect of the assignment that was important to you. You may want to consider the following areas.*

- Did the process of selecting the scene to be photographed impact on your learning in any way?
- Was it easier to understand the concepts of the unit through photos or did you learn by some other means?
- How did choosing the photos for the poster influence your learning about Customer Relationship Management?
- Any other comments or thoughts on the assignment would be greatly appreciated.

The student introspections were examined with the view to obtaining their feelings and learning experience in the unit. They were transcribed and entered into a word processing package. A grounded theory approach was used to investigate student expectations and feelings and their associated feelings on completion of the trip. This approach was adopted to allow the themes to emerge prior to any bias that may have resulted from focused reading in the area. Grounded studies rely on the close examination of empirical data prior to focused reading in the literature (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Goulding 1998; Locke 1996). By reversing the usual order of literature review and data collection, a grounded approach seeks to adapt previous findings to the specific characteristics of the phenomena under study (Hirschman and Thompson 1997). A grounded approach to data collection and analysis presented itself as a useful methodology for addressing the requirements of the research task as it allowed the central themes to emerge from the data rather than being forced to fit a preconceived theoretical framework (Glaser and Strauss 1967). In this study, student reflections were reviewed and grouped into themes independently by two of the researchers. The themes were then compared and revised with a third researcher. The final themes emerged after discussion and cross correlation of the common themes within all three summaries.

The following section discusses the major themes from the analysis.

4. Themes

Students found the use of visual methodologies in the classroom setting a positive and interesting way to acquire and synthesise knowledge. Whilst some were initially reserved, once the idea was embraced they all appeared to enjoy and learn from the experience. It was interesting to see how students at first were reticent about the project as it required them to leave the comfort of their learned behaviour of academic learning and assessment, and embark on a new and very different way to communicate their understanding.

Overall students were empowered by the ability to construct the parameters where they displayed their understanding of the concept and were subsequently assessed. In particular, overseas students who may struggle with English language, in this instance were able to demonstrate their sound understanding and application of the theory and concepts.
A common theme emerging from the reflections by students was to document their individual learning experience and how they synthesised the knowledge to create their poster to demonstrate understanding. For example:

“Through this (the application of theory and attending games) I learned to understand my own behaviour as a spectator. I also realised other people’s impact on my behaviour.” (Male: Soccer International level)

Here we see how the student is introspecting about the process and through these reflections gaining understanding of the concepts through his own experiences. The process of understanding their own behaviour in relation to the theory embedded the theory in their mind and enhanced their understanding of the theory and its use. Furthermore, there was evidence to support the use of the medium developed student’s ability to apply the concepts through photos.

“I have learnt through my observations that sport can be used by consumers to create a sense of identity, through its ability to meet one’s psychogenic needs such as the affiliation felt when wearing your team’s jumper or joining in on a special team chant, and that participating/interacting with a game produces a number of hedonic benefits due to the excitement and happiness created within the atmosphere of a footy game.” (Male, football, state/territory level)

“After reading how consumers consume it helped me with relating it to a real life experience where everyday supporters and spectators of a cricket game choose to consume objects and the actions they go through to consume cricket as an actual experience. My chosen experience, Test match, and visual evidence were enough to gain a comprehensive understanding towards Holt’s chosen practices, consuming as integration, consuming as classification and consuming as play.” (Female, Cricket, International level)

Although some students were initially not convinced of the knowledge transfer process and struggled with the assignment. However, once they reflected further on their activities and the unit, became aware of the benefits they derived from the exercise. It seems that in some students there was a quite extensive time delay and only after reflecting fully over the whole course were they able to contextualise what they had actually achieved.

“I have a retail background and have a keen interest in sport. With my previous work experience I believe I had a better understanding of the unit and the terminology used than most other students.

…..While attempting assignment #2, (the poster assignment) I believe I had a good understanding of the chosen topic and was able to use pictures to get my message across. While I understood the topic I chose to present, I do believe the list of postter topics seemed difficult to present with the use of pictures. Even though I thought I had a good understanding of the topics I found it hard to make my point with pictures rather than words.

Since I am a first year university student my expectation of learning was certainly not through pictures however after completion of the unit, I can reflect back and honestly say I did get a great deal out of this unit.” (Female, 26 years)

In the exercise in this case study, it became apparent that students were learning through different pathways rather than the normal channels of surface learning. By using a visual communication vehicle to complete the assignment it was evident that students needed to have a thorough understanding of the concepts so they could communicate them back in a manner where they synthesise, conceptualise and apply the concepts. This demonstrates true deep learning practices and supports findings of other studies which argue that it is through these methods that we learn the most effectively (Biggs and Moore 1993, Entwistle 2000). Student reflections supported these claims as they reviewed the project.

The whole process of the poster presentation was also much more engaging for the class as each student presented and explained their individual poster. With a more interactive classroom, learning was also increased as each of the students engaged with not only their own visual representations but with the examples offered by others. Thereby, reinforcing the theories and concepts involved in the unit in different situations for the students to learn from.

Our findings would indicate that photos offer a unique way to develop reflective learning and introspection. Through this process, students apply learned knowledge and concepts to demonstrate
understanding without the barrier of written language. In this regard, we found it a better way to measure understanding than alternative University assessments.

5. Conclusion

This paper explores the synergies obtained by combining both the visual data capture mechanism and the synthesis of theory into practice, and producing the respondent's (student's) own introspection artefact.

Theoretical models can be challenging to teach and to assess student understanding of these models. This case study is an example of where theory and practice come together in an engaging experience for students.

The reflections of 54 students (local and international) indicated that the use of photographs made the learning process more memorable and consequently more effective. Whilst some students found the task technologically challenging, time consuming and a few didn’t engage with the medium overall, the results indicated that the use of pictures significantly increased student learning outcomes. A consistent message from the student reflections was their need to understand the concepts of the project before selecting their photos. In this instance, the photos became the words to describe the concepts of Holt’s taxonomy. It was evident that students were developing deep learning practices through this activity. By using the visual communication vehicle to complete the assignment students needed to have a thorough understanding of the concepts so that they can communicate them back in a manner where they synthesise, conceptualise and apply the concepts.

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