

HACE 8900: Seminar in Housing and Consumer Economics
The Web and Its Impact on Consumer Choices
Spring Semester, 2008: 3:30 to 6:15 p.m., Wednesdays

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Course Description and Overview

The Web has changed consumers' marketplace, social, and economic interactions. In this course, we'll focus on research questions related to the impact of the Web on consumer choices and consumer responses to those choices. Another area of emphasis will be how to use the Internet to conduct research – on topics related to consumers' offline activities as well as their online activities. Questions we **could** explore in this course include:

- How has the Web changed consumers' marketplace interactions? What future changes are likely?
- Who uses the Web? How do we know; i.e., who's doing quality research on Web use and what are they learning?
- How can researchers learn more about consumers' use of the Web? What are the interesting research questions that need to be addressed? What methodologies are appropriate to use to address those questions?
- What influences whether consumers trust and believe (credibility) in their online transactions?
- The number one concern that consumers express about cybermarket interactions is privacy (what will you – or others -- do with my personal information if I give it to you) and security (if I give you my personal information, how will you keep it safe). Just what does that mean? What can be done (either to actually improve privacy and security or to change consumer perceptions)? How are privacy and security related to trust and credibility?
- What are the social implications of the Web and the Internet? How does the Internet affect consumers' interactions with family and friends?
- How does anonymity affect general behavior and consumer behavior on the Web?
- What existing laws and regulations apply to consumers' market transactions on the Web? What new areas still need to be addressed?

In addition, there are a number of issues that affect consumers but fall outside the realm of consumer behavior. Some of those are:

- ✓ Are online markets more economically efficient than offline markets?

- ✓ How can online payment systems be set up to facilitate e-commerce?
- ✓ Should online retailers collect sales taxes from consumers? Does *not* collecting taxes unfairly disadvantage offline consumers (and offline businesses)?

While we're definitely going to include *some* of the topics above in this course, it's intended to be just a starting point. I expect the final structure of the course will evolve to include topics that are of interest to you as well as to me.

Course Objectives

Each student will:

1. identify and explore relevant research questions related to consumer online behaviors,
2. learn methodologies for conducting research online and their advantages and disadvantages,
3. become familiar with the current literature related to Objectives 1 and 2, and
4. participate in the identification of other important objectives for the course.

Required Course Materials

I am starting with the assumption that all of our readings will be available via the Web. I will provide some references and you could just read from my list. But to really benefit from this course you'll continue to search out new literature. You already have the references I'm providing – why not look for even more current ones? If you don't use Google Scholar now, I recommend you learn to.

In addition, you'll need those references as each student will create an EndNote library for the course. At the end of the semester, I will merge the libraries to create one (minus duplications) for all of us.

I highly recommend Dillman's book (see reading list) for anyone interested in survey research. We'll be reading the chapter on online research but the book is a great basic reference for anyone. I recommend the Sage University Paper by Best and Krueger specifically for Internet data collection.

Course Policies and Procedures

1. **Academic Honesty.** Procedures specified in the UGA Academic Honesty Policy (<http://www.uga.edu/honesty/>) will be followed. It is your responsibility to be familiar with this policy. In this course, unless specifically and explicitly instructed otherwise (such as group work authorized by me), all assignments should be done individually. Individually means without assistance from classmates or anyone else.

2. **Assignments.** All work must be completed and turned in on the dates indicated. It is your responsibility to know and comply with deadlines. Exceptions will be granted only when you (or someone you designate) notify me (or Deb Templeton, Department Staff, 543-0560, datemple@uga.edu) in a timely way of documented medical, personal, or family emergencies.
3. I'll send **e-mail for the course via** WebCT so check it often.
4. **Attendance:** Much of the learning in this class will come from class interactions. That won't be possible if you don't attend class.
5. **Changes in Course Content or Schedule.** At this point, I have only a tentative agenda for the course. As decisions about course content or scheduling made, they will be announced in class and on the course syllabus on WebCT.
6. **Extra Credit.** I don't believe in extra credit for graduate students.
7. **Student Responsibilities**
 - ✓ You are expected to read the relevant material before coming to class. You are expected to respect your fellow students and the instructor. I believe that means you must turn off cell phones and pagers during class and keep them out of sight. We are in a classroom with computers. You may use the desktop in front of you from time to time for class-related work. There is wireless access in the building and you may use your laptop from time to time for class-related work. But doing other work (checking e-mail, updating your Facebook page, doing homework for other classes) means you are NOT participating in class and will not be tolerated.
 - ✓ You are responsible for any missed material. It is your responsibility to get any information, notes, handouts, etc. that you miss due to an absence from class.
 - ✓ It is your responsibility to ask questions when you are uncertain about assignments or course materials. There is no such thing as a stupid question. If you don't understand, it is likely that others in the class are confused as well.
 - ✓ If you have questions about grades, you should see me immediately. Each grade and the final grade that you earn will be final unless you can show there was an error in calculation or recording.
 - ✓ If you have personal problems which are affecting your ability to turn in assignments, it is your responsibility to contact me.
 - ✓ You are responsible for earning your grade (with the instructor making every effort to help you learn the material).
 - ✓ Remember there is little you can do at the end of the semester to significantly change your grade. If you are concerned about the grade you are earning, speak with me immediately.
8. All written materials for the class are to be prepared using one of the accepted formats (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.). You'll find guidelines for most formats at <http://www.libs.uga.edu/ref/citation.html>. *HACE students are required to use APA format.*

Grading

20% *Class attendance and participation:*

Are you in class?

Do you participate in class discussion?

Do you complete the assignments for each class and post/e-mail as instructed?

What is the quality of your participation/preparation for class?

30% *An independent study project:*

Select a topic of your own choosing (but it must relate to consumer online behavior in some way), propose what you will study, and how you will share the outcome of your study. The only requirement is that one way in which you must share what you've learned is in a presentation to the class. The presentation will likely use PowerPoint and MUST present what you've learned and generate discussion among the class. Each presentation (including discussion) is 15 to 20 minutes. Dr. Cude AND your classmates will evaluate your presentation and give you feedback. In-class presentations will be no later than April 23.

30% *An online data collection project (individual or approved by Dr. Cude as a group project):*

Each individual must identify an online data collection project (research or evaluation). If you do the project with someone else, you must clearly identify who did what. In addition, more will be expected from projects when there's more than one person involved. If the project is research, the topic must relate in some way to online behavior. *The topic of your online data collection project and your independent study project may be the same.*

Human Subjects: If you want to do the project strictly for the opportunity to learn and agree not to publish the results, you'll be covered under the class project Human Subjects application. You must complete the "Application for Student Projects" and submit it to Dr. Cude. In addition, you must use the UGA Human Subjects consent form for class projects. See <http://www.ovpr.uga.edu/hso/index.html>.

If you want to do a project and have the option to publish the results, you'll need to submit your own Human Subjects application (and Dr. Cude will help you). If you choose a project that involves content analysis of websites, Human Subjects isn't an issue.

The required components of this project are:

A proposal by **March 5**; earlier if you're submitting an individual application to Human Subjects.

Actual collection of data (although it is not required that it be from the actual population for which it is intended; for example, if you REALLY want to survey high school students but we don't have time to set that up, you could ask graduate students to complete the survey); note that analysis of data is NOT required but a data analysis plan is a good idea.

Presentation of your methodology to the class and your observations about what you learned from this project. Each presentation will likely use PowerPoint and will be 10 to 15 minutes, including the discussion that you're expected to generate among the class. Dr. Cude AND your classmates will evaluate your presentation and give you feedback. In-class presentations will be no later than April 23.

If you choose an evaluation project, speak with Dr. Cude for ideas.

10% *An Endnote library*

We will use EndNote to create a bibliography of references used in this course. Each entry into your library should include annotations and an electronic copy of the reference if one is available. Each student must enter a minimum of 12 references into their library. You can download EndNote to any computer from <http://www.libs.uga.edu/liaison/endnote/endnote.html>. I will inventory the class and if the group would value instruction in EndNote, I'll arrange for that.

10% *A final comprehensive written exam.*

This exam is likely to consist of one or two questions (most likely you'll choose among three or four questions) and will be take-home; due by **May 8**.

A 93 pts	C- 70-72.9
A- 90-92.9	C+ 77-79.9
B+ 87-89.9	C 73-76.9
B 83-86.9	D 60-69.9
B- 80-82.9	F Less than 60

Tentative Schedule, Topics, and Readings

Dates	Topics	Readings	Assignment
1/9	Introduction to course and instructor; introduction of students and their interest in the course; input from students on course objectives, content, and learning activities.	Morrison. (1992).	Conduct an environmental scan -- see the end of the syllabus for information. Complete WebCT survey.
1/16	Reports of environmental scans Hand-on work with EndNote, Google Scholar, and Gailileo databases		

Dates	Topics	Readings	Assignment
1/23	Who is (and isn't) online, how do they get there, and what do they do online? Who isn't online and why?	A Nation Online: Entering the Broadband Age Internet Population Estimates and Demographics	Read A Nation Online ; pay attention to the definitions used. Scan "Internet Population Estimates and Demographics;" see the end of the syllabus for activities. Select two topics you'd like to focus on for your independent study.
1/30	Conducting Research Online	Dillman, Chapter 11; Lyons, Cude, Lawrence, & Gutter. (2005) Best & Krueger (2004).	Read Dillman, Lyons, Best. Investigate at least two online survey software websites and one website archive software (see the end of the syllabus). Answer the posted questions.
2/6	Conducting Research Online	Read one article that used the online methodology that interests you.	Critique the article, focusing on the methodology and post online to "An Example of Online Research" discussion group. What will YOU do online?
2/13	Conducting Research Online		Focus on mechanics; putting surveys, experiments online; Human Subjects approval; topics for the class
2/20	Privacy and Security; Trust and Credibility		
2/27	No class -- Meet individually with Dr. Cude on 2/25 or 2/26 to discuss plans and work on independent study topics; online research project		
3/5	No class -- Meet with Dr. Cude on 3/3 to discuss plans; continue work on independent study topics, online research project		
3/10-14	Spring Break		
3/19			
3/26			
4/2			
4/9			
4/16			
4/23	Reports on online research projects and independent study projects (reports may begin earlier than 4/23)		
5/5	3:30-6:30 Final Exam Period		

An Incomplete List of Possible Independent Study Topics for the Course

In each case, our focus would be on consumer behavior related to some aspect of the topic:

Who uses the Internet
Privacy and security issues
Internet fraud
Internet access - the digital divide
Societal implications of the Web and the Internet
The Internet and sales taxes
The efficiency of online markets
The Internet and consumer power
Electronic payment systems
Children and the Web
Online auctions
Trust on the Internet
Consumer price sensitivity online
Consumers' online behaviors
Internet behaviors of consumers in other countries
The implications of e-money for monetary policy
Electronic government
Online investment behaviors
Internet usage by a subset of consumers (by age, by ethnicity, gender, etc.)
Online grocery shopping
Online insurance sales
Family dynamics and the Internet
The digital economy
Information search online
How does anonymity affect general behavior and consumer behavior online
How do different design features and interactive functions of websites affect consumers' online behaviors and decisions

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For class on January 9 (to be completed by and discussed in class on January 16):

1) Read Morrison, J.L. (1992). Environmental scanning. In M.S. Whitley, J.D. Porter, & R.H. Fenske (Eds.), *A Primer for New Institutional Researchers* (pp. 86-99). Tallahassee, FL: The Association for Institutional Research. Accessed online November 3, 2005 at <http://www.horizon.unc.edu/courses/papers/enviroscan/>

Environmental scanning is a technique to “understand the external environment and the interconnections of its various sectors.” As Morrison says, “There are no hard and fast rules to lead to a “correct” interpretation of information” nor are there many guidelines on how to approach it.

The class will conduct an environmental scan of the impacts of the Web on consumers' marketplace, social, and economic interactions. You'll be randomly assigned one topic in class; select two others that are of interest to you. Look for reports on how people's daily behavior is different now because of the Internet or the Web. For example, what do people do now that wasn't possible before the Internet and how does doing this affect their lives? (One example, people surf online instead of watching tv.) What do people do online that they used to do previously in the brick-and-mortar world and how does going online affect their lives? (For example, e-mailing their friends.)

2) Write a paragraph on each of your three examples (what's the online activity and how has it affected people's consumer, social, economic, etc. lives); provide the appropriate citation. Post your work to the Environmental Scan Discussion Group on WebCT.

To be completed by and discussed in class on January 16:

1) Give some thought to the topics that you'd most like to work on as an independent study. Send Dr. Cude an e-mail with your ideas; you have another week to decide.

To be completed by and discussed in class on January 23:

1) Read A Nation Online; pay attention to the definitions used in the report. Scan "Internet Population Estimates and Demographics" which mentions LOTS of sources of data on who uses the Internet.

2) Select at least two sources of data on who uses the Internet and how they use it (i.e., Media Metrix, Nielsen/Net Ratings, Pew Internet and American Life Project, Forrester.com, NUA Internet Studies – and/or any other source you find on your own). For each, answer the following questions:

- a. What is the definition of Internet user?
- b. What is the data source? Is it weighted? If so, how?
- c. What types of statistics are being reported?
- d. How is the information made available?
- e. Any other questions you think of

3) Also find one academic center that focuses on research on consumer use of the Internet. (An example is the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania – but Dr. Cude will report on that one!) Describe the basic set up of the center; how is it funded and what does it do? How might it be a useful resource to the class?

4) Post your results to the Who's Online WebCT Discussion Group.

5) Set up and add references to your EndNote library.

6) Email Dr. Cude the two independent study topics that most interest you and what you

would propose to do to study each.

Economics and Statistics Administration, National Telecommunications and Information Administration. (2004, September). [A Nation Online: Entering the Broadband Age](http://www.ntia.doc.gov/reports/anol). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce. Available online at <http://www.ntia.doc.gov/reports/anol>

Schulzrinne, H. (n.d.). Internet population estimates and demographics. Available online at <http://www.cs.columbia.edu/~hgs/internet/population.html>

To be completed and discussed in class on February 6 -- Conducting Research Online:

- 1) Read Dillman, Ch. 11, Lyons, Cude, Lawrence, and Gutter, 2005; and Best and Krueger (2004).
- 2) Investigate at least two online survey software websites – Survey Monkey and any other site (possibilities include Websurveyer, Conconfirm, Question Pro, Ultimate Survey, KeySurvey, Hosted Survey, Perseus, Zoomerang, Survey Pro). There are lots of sites and I haven't checked out many of them. Choose one you **don't** know about; **don't** pay to subscribe to any of them just to complete this assignment. What does the site do? How much does it cost? Any advantages or disadvantages that you can see?
- 3) Visit BlueSquirrel.com and check out WebWhacker or Grab-a-Site – each is software that allows you to archive websites on your computer. Again, you don't need to buy anything to complete this assignment. What does the site do? How much does it cost? Any advantages or disadvantages that you can see?
- 4) Post a brief report of what you learned about each to the WebCT Online Research Discussion group.
- 5) Propose a research question for the research project. Post it to the Online Research Discussion group.

Best, S.J., & Krueger, B.S. (2004). *Internet data collection*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc. (Available from Amazon.com at \$16.95 new and \$10.17 used)

Dillman, D.A. (2007). *Mail and Internet surveys: The tailored design method 2007 update with new Internet, visual, and mixed mode guide*. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Lyons, A.C., Cude, B., Lawrence, F.C., & Gutter, M. Conducting research online: Challenges facing researchers in Family and Consumer Sciences. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 33 (4), 341-356.

To be completed and discussed in class February 20

Read:

Nora J. Rifon, Robert LaRose, and Sejung Marina Choi. (2005, Winter). Your privacy is sealed: Effects of web privacy seals on trust and personal disclosures. *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 39(2).

OR

Miyazaki, A.D., & Krishnamurthy, S. (2002). Internet seals of approval: Effects on online privacy policies and consumer perceptions. *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 36 (1), 28-49.

And

Any other article on privacy or security. Be prepared to summarize the article in class and lead a discussion of the article. (Try to steer clear of articles on spam, ID theft, trust, or credibility.)

And

Review the Website for Truste, BBB Online, **OR** WebTrust. When you see the seal for one of these programs, what assurances can you as a consumer expect regarding your privacy? What do companies have to do to obtain and keep the seal?

And

Check out any commercial website.

What is its privacy policy?

What types of personal information does it collect? (personally identifying information, such as your name, and/or demographic nonidentifying information such as your age)

Where is the privacy policy located? (How tough is it to locate?)

What does the policy say?

Are you offered a choice about the information they collect about you or how it's used?

Are you allowed to review the information they have about you or to ask questions?

Is there information about how the information is kept secured once it's collected?

Post your comments on the privacy seal program and the commercial website to the privacy discussion group on WebCT.