Teaching belief systems in marketing classes
Preparation students for international stakeholder interactions

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Abstract
Purpose – Marketing students need better grounding in understanding major worldviews of the twenty-first century, given nearly guaranteed, international interactions with stakeholders. As such, the purpose of this paper is to develop a pedagogy focused upon secular and religious worldviews that can be used effectively in the classroom.

Design/methodology/approach – A cross-cultural study using data from the USA and China examines current worldview understanding among business school students. A training session in worldviews is then conducted, and a follow-up study is used to assess worldview learning and further interest in learning more about worldviews.

Findings – Student understanding of worldviews is increased through a 1.5-h teaching session. Students’ interest in learning more about worldviews significantly increased after the teaching session.

Practical implications – Worldview training is an effective way to prepare students for interacting with stakeholders in the increasingly global world in which these students will eventually work. Business schools need to incorporate worldview training in international marketing courses, at a minimum, or offer complete courses in worldviews and related applications to business operations.

Originality/value – Prior research has not tested worldview training on business students, especially when comparing student learning in a more religious-based culture (USA) and a more secular-based culture (China). Thus, this research shows that worldview training is effective regardless of the culture it is used in, which is important to informing students in a growing global marketplace.

Keywords Religion, Globalization, Belief system, Worldview, Secular belief system

Worldviews can be secular (e.g. economism) or religious in nature (e.g. Buddhism), both of which can have a profound influence on cultures and societies and, in this way, influence marketing systems (Mittelstaedt, 2002; Smart, 2000). Religious worldviews are rooted in the scripture and teachings of prominent religious figures and the non-physical/spiritual world, and secular worldviews are rooted in strivings of the physical world. Such belief systems provide the foundation for behavior within cultures (Sire, 2010; Sire, 2009), and studying these major worldviews provides students with easier application to international markets that they may be working in upon graduation from business school (Alleyne and Persaud, 2012; Crossman and Bordia, 2008; Ma Rhea, 2009). Notably, neither secular worldviews nor religious worldviews can be proven empirically through scientific methods (Poplin, 2013).

Stated simply, all worldviews – including an atheistic worldview – begin with faith.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the importance of major worldviews in business, especially marketing. Specifically, this paper seeks to:
to gauge the current level of marketing students’ understanding of the belief systems of different worldviews in two different regions of the world (USA and China);

• develop a useful strategy to teach belief systems worldwide to marketing students; and

• provide a way to assess the effectiveness of worldview teaching sessions.

The USA and China were chosen to compare marketing students from two important business cultures on their knowledge about the belief systems of worldviews and their openness to learning about these belief systems of worldviews. Additionally, this paper presents a field-tested approach for teaching the belief systems of worldviews to business students, particularly those enrolled in marketing courses and desiring to interact in the increasingly globalized world of business.

The globalizing world is often plagued by polarization and mistrust between culture groups (Huntington, 2002). In this contemporary setting, there has never been a greater need for marketers to be aware of the influences of major worldviews on the conduct of business across countries and within multicultural countries (e.g. Malaysia). While international marketing is frequently emphasized in business school curricula, the belief systems of worldviews (whether secular or religious) underlying effective interactions across international boundaries are often missing, despite their great importance (Bennis, 2013).

The importance of worldviews in understanding consumption

Religion can be regarded as a system of beliefs in a divine power and practices of worship for such a divine power (Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi, 1975). Recently, Minton and Kahle (2014) have underscored the relevance of religion and spirituality to consumer behavior, influence of worldview on consumption decisions, voting practices, reaction to pro-social messages and public policy and donating behavior.

Around the world today, religion is surging (Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 2009). According to The Economist (2009), the proportion of people attached to the world’s four biggest religions (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism) is expected to grow from 73 per cent in 2005 to 80 per cent in 2050. The belief systems of worldviews greatly influence a consumer’s core values, which influence their behavior (Minton and Kahle, 2014; Roccas, 2005; Minton, 2015, 2016; Minton et al., 2015). The belief systems of worldviews influence not only consumers in the marketplace but also interactions among business people, clients and development of respectful marketing practices.

Failure to consider the influence of a religious worldview on host-country consumers can lead to much pain and expense for multinational companies. For example, in a fashion show in Indonesia, France’s Chanel had super model Claudia Schiffer wear a low-cut dress with verses from the Koran written on it in gray pearls (Washington Post, 1994). By doing this, Chanel had unintentionally offended not only many Muslims in Indonesia but also many Muslims around the world who viewed Chanel as desecrating the holy book of Islam. The event turned out to be a public relations nightmare for Chanel. Clerics in Indonesia overwhelmingly called for a boycott of Chanel. Eventually, Chanel publicly apologized to all Muslims and destroyed the dresses.

A gap in marketing pedagogy: teaching worldviews

At this time, major textbooks of marketing and international marketing are limited in their attention to the belief systems of religious worldviews, and even more so to secular worldviews (such as secular humanism that is pervasive across western Europe). As a result
of this thin treatment, marketing students do not receive sufficient reinforcement for the important influence of worldviews on marketing practice – especially in the international arena. Smart et al. (1999) have called for marketing educators to take a meaningful leadership role in the twenty-first century. One step toward assuming such leadership would be helping students improve their worldview literacy so that they will seize opportunities and avoid needless blunders in multicultural and/or international marketing.

Culturally sensitive global marketers must understand how to navigate their way not only in cultures strongly influenced by religious worldviews (as in Africa, the Middle East, and Southern Asia) but also in cultures strongly influenced by secular worldviews, as in Europe or China. Aside from the need for working effectively in an increasingly multicultural, domestic marketplace and in a diverse international marketplace, marketers in a globalizing world increasingly need to understand the identity myths of cultures, rooted in worldviews, that are crucial to successfully positioning one’s brand as a representative of important cultural values (Holt, 2004). For example, positioning a consumer good in a changing but strongly collectivistic culture like China will lead astute marketers from the USA to consider questions such as the following: What does the brand mean for societal well-being? What does the brand contribute to the status of the user and his/her family? What does the brand suggest about individual choice and freedom?

**A review of prominent religious and secular worldviews**

Understanding the belief systems of major worldviews is increasingly important not only to transnational policy makers and political leaders but also to non-governmental organizations, marketers and informed citizens who would like to inhabit a less threatening planet. Mittelstaedt (2002) has reviewed the interplay of religion and markets. These researchers conclude that in every region of the world, religion affects what is traded, how trade occurs and when and where trade occurs. For this reason, if marketing students learn more about the belief systems of different worldviews, marketing across societies of the world would be facilitated.

As already mentioned, worldviews fall into two main categories: secular and religious. Secular worldviews worship, honor and live by things of the material world, and religious worldviews worship, honor and live by a divine being or beings in the spiritual realm outside of the material world. Although there are hundreds of worldviews and thousands upon thousands of unique interpretations of these worldviews, the study herein focuses on six worldviews. To provide better understanding of a sample of worldviews that will likely influence the actions of marketers and marketing thought in the coming years, three religious worldviews (Buddhism, Christianity and Islam) and three secular worldviews (economism, humanism and what can be termed transcendental globalization) were included in this geographically diverse worldview analysis.

The selection of religious worldviews for the study herein follows that of other researchers, such as Cornwell et al. (2005), who focused upon Buddhism, Christianity and Islam in their cross-cultural study of the role of religion in consumers’ ethical positions. This selection covers both Western religious beliefs (Christianity and Islam) and Eastern religious beliefs (Buddhism). Eastern religious followers believe in a pantheistic view of a god or divine being, meaning that there are many gods. In contrast, Western religious followers believe in a monotheistic view of god, meaning that there is only one god (Minton and Kahle, 2014). The choice of religious worldviews to include in this study is particularly relevant for business students given that Christianity and Buddhism alone represent the religious worldviews of the two dominant countries in the international marketplace – the USA and China. In addition, Islam is included because of the prominence of Islam in the
news and the general strict adherence to principles of faith among Muslims (adherents to Islam), thereby influencing marketing practices. Additionally, the selection of secular worldviews represents worldviews most applicable to marketing given close connections to buyer behavior (economism), self-focus (humanism) and international marketing (transcendental globalization).

Starting with secular worldviews, economism, humanism and transcendental globalization are reviewed. Given that marketing encompasses consumers’ acquisition of material objects, expression of self through objects and global connectedness, marketing can be reflected in all three secular worldviews discussed here, therefore providing justification for why these worldviews were chosen for this study. Economism focuses on the accrual of wealth and material possessions (Huan, 2010). The emphasis on economism often comes at the sacrifice of other things that detract from wealth and material development (e.g. working longer hours rather than spending more time at home with family). Similar to every other worldview, economism helps to answer the consumer’s challenge of where to allocate their money, time and other resources on a daily basis. Economism often leads to materialism, given the focus on attainment of wealth and what wealth can buy (Laffey, 2004). Similarly, social status for individuals following an economism worldview is often very important. Economism is closely tied with views of capitalism and much of the marketing environment, given the focus on attainment of wealth.

In contrast to economism, humanism emphasizes on the importance, growth and development of the self (American Humanist Organization, 2015). In other words, economism focuses on wealth and material possessions as the end goal in life, while humanism focuses on development of the self and self-attainment that benefits larger humanity as the end goal in life. For a humanist, self-development could be evidenced through wealth or material acquisition, but is more likely evident through accomplishments (e.g. learning new topics, moving up in an organization, traveling to new locations and participating in organizations that help others attain their personal goals). As the American Humanist Organization (2015) describes:

[…] humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without theism and other supernatural beliefs, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity.

Humanism influences attitudes and behaviors in the marketplace (Engelland, 2014), given the inherent use of goods and services in the process of self-development.

Finally, transcendental globalization focuses on striving for globalization, powered by an interconnected consumer culture (Terranova, 2004). Globalization is regarded by many as irreversible, and its benefits, such as lower risk of regional conflict and rising incomes, are undeniable (Friedman, 2012). Those who impart a universalistic aspect to globalization can be said to impart a transcendental dimension to globalization. In relation to marketing, consumers following a transcendental globalization worldview can be seen as early adopters of technology that allows for interconnectedness, involved with international marketing practices, or signing petitions to encourage outsourcing to foreign countries, thereby capitalizing on the benefits of a globalized world. This is different from economism and humanism, given the focus on interconnectedness. Economism focuses on one’s own goal of wealth, humanism focuses on one’s own goal of self-development and transcendental globalization focuses on a goal of a globally interconnected culture.

In contrast to secular worldviews, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam are the religious worldviews used for the study herein and accompanying classroom session. Monotheistic religions, such as Christianity and Islam, believe in one god who created the world and who
should be worshipped in reverence for life. Monotheistic religious believers seek forgiveness from God to attain heavenly life after earthly life (Hunt and Penwell, 2008). Christians believe that Jesus is the savior that God provided to grant forgiveness to people, and the details of the Christian faith are provided in their holy book of the Bible. Because of this, Christians are called to be forgiving, kind and respectful to others, as well as strive for other high standards of behavioral conduct, which can influence interactions in the marketplace (Minton and Kahle, 2014). Christians generally treat Sunday as their holy day. Christian religious celebrations that are integrated with marketplace practices include Christmas (representing Jesus’ birth) and Easter (representing Jesus’ death and resurrection).

In contrast, Muslims ( followers of Islam) believe that Muhammad was sent by God as a key prophet and blessing to mankind, and the details of the Muslim faith are provided in their holy book of the Qur’an (Hunt and Penwell, 2008). Muhammad is not viewed in the same sense of a savior as Christians view Jesus, but he is still sacred in the faith. The focus of prayer time that occurs five times per day is on Allah (God). Muslims also participate in many other rituals, such as fasting during the month of Ramadan and pilgrimage to Mecca, that influence behaviors in the marketplace (Minton and Kahle, 2014). Muslim rituals are often referred to as the five pillars of Islam, namely, testimony, prayer, alms giving, fasting and pilgrimage (Hunt and Penwell, 2008). Some Muslims, depending on the country and variations on belief, follow dietary restrictions (e.g. not eating pork) and wear specialized clothing (e.g. a head covering known as the hijab). When involved in international business transactions, marketers may need to also adhere to these practices so as to be respectful of a business partner’s beliefs.

Pantheistic religious followers, in contrast to monotheistic religious followers, believe in multiple gods (Hunt and Penwell, 2008). Hinduism would be one example of a pantheistic religion. Monism, in which all elements are considered to be of one substance, could be viewed as a form of pantheism. Buddhism is one example of a monistic religious tradition as Buddhists believe that ultimate reality would be achieved when a person would become one with all things.

Buddhists seek mental departure from the physical world (i.e. search for enlightenment), and rather than worshipping specific gods, follow the teachings of Buddha to attain enlightenment. In pursuing departure from the physical world, Buddhist teachings highly discourage materialism or other connection and devotion to material belongings. Likely for this reason of distancing one’s self from material aspects and living more in connection with one’s self and nature, Buddhists should be more sustainable than Western or non-religious consumers (Minton et al., 2015). Buddhist teaching centers around four noble truths:

1. the fact that dukkha or suffering exists;
2. the origins of dukkha;
3. the cessation of dukkha; and
4. how to end dukkha.

Related to these four noble truths, there is an eightfold path of attitudes and behaviors that describe how to end dukkha:

1. right view;
2. right intention;
3. right speech;
4. right action;
5. right livelihood;
Many of the attitudes and behaviors of this eightfold path play out in marketplace interactions (e.g. in knowing what right action looks like in the marketplace).

In summary, worldviews can be separated into two broad categories: secular worldviews and religious worldviews. Although these worldviews are unique beliefs, it is important to note that worldviews can often be merged together (e.g. a sacred worldview with a secular worldview), and adherence to worldviews can greatly differ by the individual. As an example of Christianity, some followers are C&E (Christmas and Easter) Christians, where they attend religious services twice a year but do not practice the faith outside of those services, whereas others intimately try to follow all guidelines of the faith and attend religious services weekly. Thus, in instructing business students in worldviews, it is important to acknowledge and inform students that worldview beliefs may not be strictly adhered to by all people who identify with a faith.

Study: a cross-cultural examination of teaching worldviews in business school
Prothero (2007) makes an important point that individuals can achieve meaningful worldview literacy that will prepare them for national, regional and global citizenship. As an extension of this idea, a premise of this study is that learning about the belief systems of worldviews not only can be done but also can be initiated effectively in the context of a classroom. Such analysis will empower students and marketers to quickly orient themselves in a multicultural or international marketing arena and to boost their own cultural sensitivity by understanding some of the similarities and differences across the belief systems of worldviews, thereby serving as a motivation for this study.

Measures and constructs
The purposes of the following empirical study are to:

- gauge the current level of understanding for the belief systems of different worldviews;
- develop a useful approach for teaching the belief systems of worldviews to marketing students; and
- assess the effectiveness of a learning session focused on increasing understanding about the belief systems of worldviews.

To fulfill these purposes, this study includes instruction and assessment related to three secular worldviews (economism, humanism and transcendental globalization) and three religious worldviews (Buddhism, Christianity and Islam).

This study adopts six dimensions (quality of life [QOL], the nature of man, the source of evil/suffering, being in community, what is worshipped, and afterlife) for the analysis of belief systems of worldviews because they represent major parts of mental models of the way the world works regarding concepts of nature, self, society and afterlife (Geertz, 1973). In this way, a framework for considering major aspects of human life is considered by featuring humans, their troubling experiences in life, their relationships with others, their higher power and their ultimate destiny. Each of the final dimensions of the study offers a vantage point to not only consider the important beliefs for a major worldview but also compare such beliefs with those of other worldviews. These are presented in Appendix 1.
Because consumer values are proposed to be influenced through one's worldview (Wood et al., 2006), a framework for worldview analysis would not be complete without considering how belief systems of worldviews discuss material possessions and one's material environment (i.e. the QOL dimension). Toward this end, classroom discussion drew on QOL research as a starting place for comparing worldviews on important dimensions (Johansson, 2002; Sirgy, 2001, 2012). Specifically, understanding how material QOL (material things) is regarded in different worldviews would be relevant to marketers because much of marketing is about new product development and selling material things.

Methods
The first part of the research design was to develop a survey instrument to measure marketing students' level of general knowledge of the worldview concept, as well as their knowledge of important beliefs of the focal worldviews of this study. To gauge the level of competence marketing students have for belief systems of worldviews, a scale of six items was developed for the concept of gaining knowledge about the belief systems of worldviews based on the levels of learning commonly occurring in educational settings featured in Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (Bloom and Krathwohl, 1984). Additionally, items were developed that focused on gauging understanding of the major elements of each of the six focal worldviews in the study. Additionally, items were written that would measure respondents’ understanding of how the beliefs of worldviews can affect business decisions, as well as respondents’ interest in learning more about worldviews. See Appendix 2 for scale items.

The second part of the study was to test whether worldview learning could be improved by teaching a 1.5-h class devoted to the analysis of belief systems of worldviews. To gauge how involving students found learning about the belief systems of worldviews, six leading items from Zaichkowsky’s (1985) Personal Involvement Inventory concluded the survey. See Appendix 2 for specific items. All items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), except worldview interest items, which were measured on seven-point bipolar scales.

The two-group experimental design featured a static-group design in which the experimental group received exposure to the treatment and the control or baseline group did not receive the treatment (Malhotra and Peterson, 2006, p. 221). For the experimental group, researchers made measurements after respondents received instruction in a worldview pedagogy. The control or baseline group received no formal instruction on belief systems of worldviews but was measured for its knowledge of belief systems of worldviews. The control groups in both the Chinese and US settings were a second section of the same marketing class taught by the first author at the same institution in China and the USA. Data in all locations were collected on-site by the first author.

The control group allowed for testing of the first proposition of the study about the currently modest level of worldview competence for international business students. Comparing the experimental group with the control group allowed for testing of the second proposition of the study that a pedagogy focused on the belief systems of worldviews delivered in one-class period would significantly improve students’ competencies in worldview analysis.

Descriptive statistics regarding the different groups of the study are presented in Table I. As can be seen, the US participants were younger with mean ages in the early twenties, while the Chinese participants had mean ages in the mid-thirties. The difference in mean ages between the Chinese and the USA actually provides more information to the analysis because the results can be seen for not only a culturally distinctive group but also for one
that features older students. In this way, generalizability of this study’s results is improved. Finally, both groups contained a relatively even number of men and women.

For those in the experimental group, respondents completed the survey after participating in a 1.5-h class session focused on the belief systems of the six focal worldviews of the study. This class session was led by the first author and featured:

- a 5-min introduction to the topic of belief systems of worldviews and their relevance to marketing, based in part on a review of Spirituality and QOL (Peterson and Webb, 2006; Prothero, 2007);
- a 60-min thumbnail review of the belief systems of six worldviews;
- a 15-min section featuring an oral reading of a retailing venture scenario, followed by small groups analyzing the scenario by using the contents of the matrix presented in Appendix 1 as if the protagonist was a committed follower of one of the six worldviews; and
- a 10-min wrap-up featuring the sharing of each small group’s recommended course of action for the scenario protagonist.

For the 60-min thumbnail review of the six focal worldviews, the contents of the matrix presented in Appendix 1 were used as a guide for how the six focal worldviews give treatment to the six worldview dimensions. This content was derived from overviews of religions (Esposito et al., 2006; Halverson, 1996; Kuran, 1997, 2004; Novak, 1994; Renard, 2001; Smith, 1991, 2003). For secular worldviews, specialized sources (American Humanist Organization, 2015; Barnett, 2003; Friedman, 1962) served as the foundations for the content of Appendix 1.

**Results**

Tables II and III present means and standard deviations by country and control-group/experimental-group measurement for all students who completed the worldview competencies, worldview interest, importance of understanding worldviews in business, desire to learn more about worldviews and self-reported understanding for each of the six focal worldviews in this study. As can be seen in Table II, US respondents in the baseline group reported only a modest level of agreement for the items measuring worldview competencies. The same can be said for understanding the six focal worldviews, as seen in Table III, with the exception of Christianity (that posted a stronger mean value of 5.77—the highest among the worldviews). The second highest mean for the baseline group was for a desire to know more about worldviews (\(M = 5.97\)). In general, a similar pattern can be seen for the Chinese baseline group, with the exception that the Chinese respondents report only a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive variable</th>
<th>China control group</th>
<th>China experimental group</th>
<th>US control group</th>
<th>US experimental group</th>
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<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>35.00 (4.59)</td>
<td>35.79 (6.778)</td>
<td>24.08 (4.76)</td>
<td>23.92 (5.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (%)</td>
<td>45.5 female</td>
<td>48.1 female</td>
<td>50.0 female</td>
<td>46.5 female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Means (standard deviations); No differences in age and gender between control group and experimental group differences are significant.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Control group</th>
<th>Experimental group</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Control group</th>
<th>Experimental group</th>
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<th>Control group</th>
<th>Experimental group</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General worldview knowledge and interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worldview competencies</td>
<td>3.96 (1.22)</td>
<td>4.95 (0.96)</td>
<td>4.46***</td>
<td>4.19 (1.47)</td>
<td>5.45 (0.79)</td>
<td>6.28***</td>
<td>4.16 (1.42)</td>
<td>5.22 (0.91)</td>
<td>7.23***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coefficient α</td>
<td>0.906</td>
<td>0.816</td>
<td>0.918</td>
<td>0.816</td>
<td>0.816</td>
<td>0.914</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.828</td>
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<tr>
<td>Worldview interest</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Worldviews and business</td>
<td>5.36 (1.21)</td>
<td>5.79 (1.11)</td>
<td>5.60 (1.17)</td>
<td>5.91 (1.22)</td>
<td>5.60 (1.17)</td>
<td>5.91 (1.22)</td>
<td>4.96***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning worldviews</td>
<td>4.50 (1.49)</td>
<td>5.38 (1.37)</td>
<td>3.03**</td>
<td>5.27 (1.67)</td>
<td>6.37 (0.84)</td>
<td>4.84***</td>
<td>5.11 (1.66)</td>
<td>5.11 (1.66)</td>
<td>2.34*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.64 (1.42)</td>
<td>6.19 (1.55)</td>
<td>1.82D</td>
<td>5.97 (1.35)</td>
<td>5.65 (1.63)</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>5.65 (1.58)</td>
<td>5.11 (1.66)</td>
<td>2.34*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** Means (standard deviations); ***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05; D= directionally significant at p < 0.10; t refers to the test of mean differences between the control and experimental groups. Coefficient α indicates scale reliability for the two scales used in this study: “worldview competencies” and “worldview interest” measured in experimental group only.
Table III. Descriptive statistics and t-test results for worldview understanding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>China control group</th>
<th>China Experimental group</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>US control group</th>
<th>US Experimental group</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Combined Countries control group</th>
<th>Combined Countries Experimental group</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific worldview understanding</td>
<td>3.95 (1.22)</td>
<td>5.25 (1.30)</td>
<td>5.01***</td>
<td>4.42 (1.64)</td>
<td>5.95 (1.20)</td>
<td>6.62***</td>
<td>4.23 (1.57)</td>
<td>5.63 (1.29)</td>
<td>7.54***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economism</td>
<td>4.23 (1.24)</td>
<td>4.88 (1.34)</td>
<td>2.48*</td>
<td>4.18 (1.72)</td>
<td>5.52 (1.17)</td>
<td>5.55***</td>
<td>4.19 (1.63)</td>
<td>5.22 (1.29)</td>
<td>5.80***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanism</td>
<td>3.82 (1.51)</td>
<td>5.19 (1.33)</td>
<td>4.75***</td>
<td>3.98 (1.81)</td>
<td>5.43 (1.18)</td>
<td>5.78***</td>
<td>3.95 (1.75)</td>
<td>5.32 (1.25)</td>
<td>7.36***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global connectedness</td>
<td>3.86 (1.89)</td>
<td>5.37 (1.28)</td>
<td>4.62***</td>
<td>3.53 (2.04)</td>
<td>5.38 (1.51)</td>
<td>6.44***</td>
<td>3.60 (2.01)</td>
<td>5.38 (1.40)</td>
<td>8.34***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>3.52 (1.82)</td>
<td>4.46 (1.35)</td>
<td>2.89**</td>
<td>5.77 (1.54)</td>
<td>6.22 (0.85)</td>
<td>2.61*</td>
<td>5.30 (5.46)</td>
<td>5.46 (1.45)</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>2.20 (1.32)</td>
<td>4.63 (1.39)</td>
<td>8.74***</td>
<td>3.60 (1.98)</td>
<td>5.27 (1.54)</td>
<td>5.94***</td>
<td>3.31 (1.94)</td>
<td>4.97 (1.47)</td>
<td>7.95***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Means (standard deviations); ***p < 0.001; *p < 0.05; t refers to the test of mean differences between the control and experimental groups
middling level of agreement for understanding Christianity. For the Chinese, the highest reported mean is for having a desire to know more about worldviews.

As expected in the experimental group results, evidenced in Table III, the US group reports the highest worldview understanding for Christianity ($M_{\text{control}} = 5.77, M_{\text{experimental}} = 6.32$), while the Chinese report the highest level of understanding for Buddhism ($M_{\text{control}} = 3.86, M_{\text{experimental}} = 5.37$). These results suggest that students report noticeably higher levels of understanding for the worldviews that have strongly influenced their home culture and much less understanding for those worldviews that have not. Another notable finding that can be seen in Table II is the relatively high desire to know more about worldviews. In each country, the reported mean is above 5.5 on a scale of 1-7.

T-tests comparing control and experimental groups' worldview items show a significant difference in almost all items. After a worldview learning session, participants in both countries reported increased general knowledge of worldviews, an increased understanding of how worldviews relate to business and an increased understanding of all of the six focal worldviews (economism, humanism, global connectedness, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam). Additionally, all participants reported relatively high interest in worldviews (all means greater than 5.0 on a scale of 1-7). Thus, one of the main purposes of this paper has been fulfilled by showing that teaching worldviews in business school can be used to effectively increase worldview understanding.

In sum, the results of analyzing the means for the survey items suggest a general pattern of response between the US and Chinese participants. The control groups reported only middling levels of competence in worldview learning, while the experimental groups reported a statistically significant improvement in worldview learning. Encouragingly, both groups reported a relatively high desire to know more about worldviews.

Discussion
The results of the empirical study suggest that business students who have not received a special pedagogy focused on the belief systems of major worldviews currently report levels of worldview literacy that can only be described as mediocre. This is evidenced through responses to pre-test worldview understanding in the 3-4 range on a scale from 1 (no understanding) to 7 (high understanding); see Table III. The pattern across the two baseline groups from the USA and China suggests that understanding of the major worldviews is highest for the major worldview influencing the home culture for students. What this means in practical terms is that business students are relatively weak in their understanding of worldviews that are different than their own.

In an increasingly globalized world where persons from other cultures and their worldviews cannot be avoided, future marketers appear to be destined for needless missed opportunities when interacting with those from other cultures in the future, as well as difficulty arising from cultural misunderstanding. Despite the ominous forecast that modest levels of worldview literacy might imply for business students in the future, other results from this study suggest a brighter future. Specifically, a statistically significant improvement in learning about the six focal worldviews was achieved in the experimental groups in the USA and China after only one class session that focused on the belief systems of these worldviews and included an applied venture-investing case. Additionally, this significant improvement in worldview knowledge was gained for both undergraduate and graduate students. This evidence for worldview learning improvement should be particularly encouraging for those educators who might have previously believed that teaching worldviews was too complex or too time-intensive for business students. To continue not offering students learning opportunities regarding the belief systems of major
worldviews in an increasingly globalized world would be a tragic disservice to students and their future employers, as well as to those from other cultures.

Research implications

An opportunity for business educators: teaching worldviews

Currently, the proportion of people attached to the world’s largest religions (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism) is 73 per cent and is forecasted to reach 80 per cent by 2050 (Economist, 2007). In combination with globalization and its accompanying deterritorialization fueled by migration and the internet, there are increasingly fewer places on the planet where one can hide in a monocultural enclave encountering only those sharing one’s worldview. The imperative for societies to encourage respect and appreciation across worldviews will only become more intense in the future. The healthy functioning of markets depends on this.

Relating to this, the results of the study herein have shown the importance of teaching worldviews in business school and, in doing so, have addressed the three purposes set forth in the Introduction. First, marketing students’ current understanding of belief systems was examined, finding that students currently report only a moderate level of understanding for the belief systems of worldviews (Table III). These findings occur regardless of culture (US or China). As expected, the highest worldview competency occurs for one’s dominant worldview in their home culture (i.e. Christianity for the USA and humanism and Buddhism for China). Second, this study identified a useful strategy for teaching belief systems, accompanied with a framework, to use to teach both religious and secular religious worldviews (Appendix 1). Third, various assessment techniques were used (and also provided in Appendix 2) to inform business educators of ways to assess worldview learning. The results from these assessment techniques showed that worldview learning can occur in as short as a 1.5-h class session.

Thus, worldview learning is needed for all business students, especially those who are aware of worldviews in their home culture but lack awareness of worldviews in the international marketplace. In an increasingly globalized world where persons from other cultures and their worldviews cannot be avoided, especially in interactions related to multicultural and international marketing, students are likely destined for some painful and expensive learning for themselves and their firms. This undesirable learning will occur when interacting with those from other cultures because of cultural misunderstanding.

For textbook authors and teachers who might have previously questioned the relevance of teaching the belief systems of worldviews as part of a marketing or international marketing course, the results of this study suggest that students report a relatively strong interest in further learning about the belief systems of worldviews. This phenomenon was observed in those who had received worldview teaching, as well as those who had not received worldview teaching. These results suggest that students have an intrinsic desire to learn more about the belief systems of both secular and religious worldviews. Students likely sense that worldview learning is important to their development and, as a result, want to learn more about the belief systems of worldviews. Although prior research shows that business school students and teachers may care less about topics seemingly viewed as unrelated to business education (Benton, 1993, 1994a, 1994b), a good job of aligning the topic (in this case, worldviews) with marketplace interactions and business outcomes may help to increase topic interest among students and faculty alike.

Students and business persons from both developing and developed countries can no longer afford to ignore important aspects of foreign cultures that are directly shapes by the dominant worldviews in these foreign cultures. In other words, to understand foreign
cultures, students and business persons can no longer allow the belief systems of differing worldviews to remain alien and foreign. This is an important issue because if marketing is not practiced with a full appreciation of cultural influences, it will be less likely to be conducted across cultural borders, and when it would be, it would be likely to be done less effectively, or in a self-defeating way.

Limitations and future research
The worldview pedagogy presented in this study focuses on six dimensions of the belief systems for three secular and three religious worldviews. In this way, the study focuses on key tenets of these worldviews. Some might criticize this study because it stresses the essentials of these worldviews and does not give treatment to the situational contexts in which individuals might live out these worldviews across the world (Samman, 2005; Sandikci, 2011). It is important to note that geographical, climatic, demographic, political and other cultural factors will lead to some differences in how a secular or religious worldview will influence individuals, institutions and societies around the world. However, the benefits of knowing the six dimensions of belief systems for worldviews, as presented in this study, should far outweigh negative outcomes, such as developing a caricature or stereotype of persons from other cultures.

This study used six focal worldviews to bring a manageable focus to the worldview analysis that was presented to students in a 1.5-h classroom session. Because of this, many worldviews could not be included in this study. Therefore, future research about students’ learning competencies for the belief systems of these worldviews would be appropriate. Religious worldviews, such as Hinduism, Judaism, Confucianism and Shintoism, would be relevant for inclusion in a second classroom session because of their influence on important economies of the world (India for Hinduism, the USA for Judeo-Christian traditions inspired by Judaism, China for Confucianism and Japan for Shintoism) (Smith, 1991). Additionally, secular worldviews could be included in an expanded treatment of worldviews. Here, Marxism would be a prime worldview for inclusion, if for no other reason than its continuing effect on China. Related, the findings from this study are based on small samples of students, and future research needs to replicate these findings with larger samples in new locations.

Additionally, the pedagogy featured in this study was developed for a 1.5-h class session. Alternatively, pedagogies could be developed for shorter sessions or integrated throughout a semester-long course in marketing or international marketing, as well as a marketing and society course, such as the ones proposed for undergraduates by Radford and Hunt (2008) or for online graduate students by Shapiro (2008). Evaluating the effectiveness of teaching belief systems of worldviews that is woven into a longer course would be a worthwhile topic for future study, given that longer coverage of worldviews would provide a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of each worldview, as well as much better coverage of learning at each level of Bloom’s taxonomy. In a similar vein, course projects could also be developed to include worldview learning.

Finally, this research is limited by the selected scale items. Future research needs to pretest and identify more comprehensive measures to assess worldview knowledge and learning. For example, students were asked their agreement with “I know what defines a worldview”. It is possible that students are familiar with the general worldview concept but not the term “worldview”. Short measures were used, in part, because of the challenges of teaching belief systems in a culture that is knowingly not supportive of prominent religious institutions (China). Additionally, the measures used in the study herein were self-report measures and therefore could be biased. Students may think that they understand what a
worldview represents but may truly not have a full grasp of the concept. Future research should better align course material with assessment measures, as suggested by leading educational researchers (Anderson et al., 2001; Blumberg, 2009), and identify measures that are not self-reported (e.g. actually ask students to report the major tenets of a worldview or indicate ways that a worldview influences marketplace practices).

Conclusion
To effectively internationalize business schools, classes need to be offered that teach belief systems, given that these belief systems underlie core value systems for much of society (Minton and Kahle, 2014; Roccas, 2005). This study has identified an instructional gap in the curricula for business students in two regions of the world. At the same time, this study has presented a structure for developing worldview pedagogy, with results showing that students who participated in a worldview class session in either the USA and China significantly increased worldview understanding. The way forward for international stakeholders and business educators now should be to develop other learning approaches and exercises to boost student worldview learning. In this way, business students will better know the importance of understanding the belief systems of other worldviews in marketplaces of the twenty-first century. Potentially, this improved knowledge will result in more effective marketing across cultures and an improved common good for citizens of the world.

References


*Further reading*


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major worldviews</th>
<th>Buddhism</th>
<th>Christianity</th>
<th>Economism</th>
<th>Humanism</th>
<th>Islam</th>
<th>Transcendental globalization</th>
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<tr>
<td>Material QOL</td>
<td>Buddhism has at its core the belief that desire/attachment is the root of all suffering, so focused material pursuits or prosperity are naturally not looked upon favorably. As Renard notes, Buddhist material life should be survivable but austere.</td>
<td>Material pursuits and prosperity viewed as a blessing, but too much emphasis on this life is viewed unfavourably. Certain ethical guidelines, similar to those of Judaism and Islam, should guide material conduct.</td>
<td>It is seen as the most important factor in society. From it, individuals are able to draw both purpose and self-motivation. Wealth is viewed as a good influence in society, while poverty or lack from any source is viewed negatively.</td>
<td>It is seen as a practically important part of human existence, but one that should be of little significance to each individual. As the Humanist Manifesto I notes, a socialist, equality-based society and the eventual absence of material cares present the best path towards human progress.</td>
<td>As Kuran notes, material pursuits and prosperity are seen in a positive light (even Muhammad was a merchant), but should be in accordance with Islamic traditions, such as alms-giving and a prohibition on interest.</td>
<td>A GDP per capita of $10,000 (US) is seen as the threshold for obtaining an appropriate level of happiness. After this, gains in material QOL do not correlate with happiness. McDonald's franchises in a country signify a society's warring tendencies have been curbed.</td>
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<td>Nature of man</td>
<td>Man can be seen as a being that can realize enlightenment. Widespread human inclinations to focus on desires and imbalances are symptoms of not being enlightened.</td>
<td>Man is on a lower level than god and angels. Individuals are capable of performing righteous acts with god's assistance. Humanity is many times considered to be inherently evil or rebellious towards god. The fall, or first act of disobedience to god, is viewed as particularly significant in determining man's standing.</td>
<td>Above all, humanity is seen as self-interested. This is not interpreted as &quot;good&quot; or &quot;bad,&quot; but rather leads to the important conclusion that individuals will usually make their decisions in such a way as to maximize their own personal satisfaction.</td>
<td>Life is entirely biological, and behavior is determined by environmental factors such as family, prominent societal institutions, government. As Noebel notes, humans are seen as capable of forward evolution and, eventually, self-perfection.</td>
<td>Capable of choosing good (Islam) over evil and good by nature. Created by god and situated on a lesser plane than god and spirits.</td>
<td>Man needs rules. Misalignment of rules triggers conflict and wars. With the right rules and with the right alignment of rules, interconnectedness and prosperity can be realized and perpetuated. Individuals can be separated into two broad descriptive categories, those who endorse connectedness and those who do not.</td>
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Table AI. Major worldviews
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<td><strong>Source of evil/suffering</strong></td>
<td>Man’s own choice to disobey god is the recognized source of evil and suffering. Whether or not man is considered to have an evil nature, the principal source of problems in the world is this choice, especially the first such choice by Adam.</td>
<td>Most problems, and the barrier that holds mankind back from utopia, come from scarcity. Material want and dissatisfaction are introduced because individuals are forced to forgo certain benefits that are precluded by scarcity. Reductions in economic and political freedoms are also seen as sources of dissatisfaction and scarcity.</td>
<td>Ineffective societies and environments are the only sources of suffering. Evil is a concept that does not necessarily have a standard definition or source but can generally be recognized as societal influences hindering the forward progression/evolution of man.</td>
<td>Choosing to disobey god is the principal source of problems. A devil figure (&quot;Iblis&quot; or &quot;Shaytan,&quot; a jinn) contributes to evil along with many lesser jinn (evil spirits).</td>
<td>Tribalism. Evil is recognized as the condition of being cut off from globalization and opposing the mainstream international community. Political and economic repression, virtually non-existent in the larger community, are very much present in countries of the planet's gap – those cut off from the developed core countries.</td>
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<td><strong>Being in community</strong></td>
<td>Early Buddhist missionary efforts have created many distinct Asian Buddhist nations and traditions. Buddhism has a very well-defined culture and community, even if universalist tendencies are sometimes present. Christians are part of the universal church community. Many doctrinal divisions exist, including broad Protestant and Catholic divisions. Belief in Christ’s death, Bible, and the afterlife provide a common link. Membership is determined, with differing emphasis, by an individual’s beliefs, profession, and baptism.</td>
<td>An individual is part of the collection of all economic agents, who purchase from and provide goods and services to other economic agents. People also exist as citizens in government, whose primary role should be that of guarantor of economic rights (Friedman, 1962).</td>
<td>Man is a part of the universal, physical community. Political, intellectual, and economic institutions provide a framework for the secular community. Mankind’s evolution or progress can be aided through these entities.</td>
<td>Muslims are a part of the umma, or universal Muslim community. Principal doctrinal divisions are Sunnis and Shi’ites. All Muslims support the common links of the five pillars, Muhammad, and the Koran.</td>
<td>The mainstream globalizing “core” community of developed countries is expanding and provides the basis for connectedness. Another, &quot;gap&quot; community of countries is detached from or not firmly connected to the core. Here, individuals do not necessarily share common values across tribes or groups.</td>
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<td>What is worshipped?</td>
<td>Sometimes local deities are recognized, but these are not central to the Buddhist belief system. Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) is revered as a teacher, and sometimes lesser enlightened individuals are recognized</td>
<td>One god existent in three persons (this is the “Trinity” doctrine) provides the center of worship; god the father is similar to the Jewish concept. The Holy Spirit is more personal and close to individuals. Jesus Christ considered to be earthly incarnation of the Son of god but still on an equal plane with first two persons</td>
<td>Because deity is usually not considered to play a role in man’s life, individuals themselves and the process of economic exchange and growth provide the unifying and all-important pieces of man’s existence</td>
<td>No deities are believed to exist, although the society at large and the process of evolution (physical and societal) can play similar roles as universal, all-controlling forces</td>
<td>One god (this is an important facet of Islamic doctrine), described through 99 beautiful names. Seen as merciful, all-powerful, close to individuals, and in control of all worldly happenings</td>
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<td>Afterlife</td>
<td>Nirvana is the ultimate goal of the Buddhist, but other afterlife levels (heavens and hells) are sometimes believed to exist. Nirvana is not described to have any attributes</td>
<td>The afterlife is seen as a place of judgment or reward. Differing emphasis is put on one’s own deeds, but an individual’s relation to Christ’s death figures prominently into judgment as a source of grace for bad deeds</td>
<td>This period is typically assumed to be non-existent, or simply the legendary product of individual cultures and backgrounds. It may have an affect a person’s life and actions, but this is simply their own reaction to their beliefs</td>
<td>No afterlife is recognized, as physical death brings an end to all biological processes</td>
<td>Day of judgment, person’s good and bad deeds weighed. Paradise/Hell assigned accordingly. Certain faiths. “Peoples of the Book” (Christianity, Judaism) typically seen as closer to salvation than members of other faiths</td>
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Globalization, itself, is projected to have powers of a deity. It is unstoppable. It is increasingly omnipresent. It brings salvation from tribalism and strife. It imparts a destiny of global harmony. It paves the way for self-actualizing individuals.
Appendix 2. Scale items

Worldview competencies

- I know what defines a worldview. (BLL: Knowledge)
- I am familiar with the concept of a worldview. (BLL: Comprehension)
- I can apply my knowledge of worldviews in a new setting. (BLL: Application)
- I can break a worldview into its important dimensions. (BLL: Analysis)
- I can classify worldviews based on a few question responses. (BLL: Synthesis)
- I can judge how a person’s worldview compares to the worldview of others. (BLL: Evaluation)

BLL = Bloom’s level of learning (note: this information was not included in the questionnaire distributed to survey participants).

Worldview interest

- unimportant – important
- irrelevant – relevant
- worthless – valuable
- boring – interesting
- unappealing – appealing
- not fun – fun

Worldviews and business

- I understand how worldviews can influence business decisions.

Specific worldview understanding

- I understand the major elements of a personal philosophy of Economism (materialism).
- I understand the major elements of a personal philosophy of Humanism.
- I understand the major elements of a personal philosophy of global connectedness.
- I understand the major doctrinal elements of Buddhism.
- I understand the major doctrinal elements of Christianity.
- I understand the major doctrinal elements of Islam.

Note: All scale items measured on seven-point Likert scales ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, except “Worldview Interest,” which was measured on a seven-point bipolar scale.

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