

Kirmser Undergraduate Research Award Reflective Essay

For my honors project within my Business Strategy class, my professor wanted me to study Nestlé's competitive strategy in Brazil. She also wanted to understand the ethical implications of getting the Brazilian population hooked on junk food and the public health issues that processed food companies were creating with their strategies. Ultimately, her goal was to have research that could potentially be used in a business ethics case study for her class. As background material, my professor gave me a link to a New York Times article on "How Big Business Got Brazil Hooked on Junk Food," so I had a lot of freedom for topic exploration. Ultimately, I decided to title my paper "Big Food, Big Problems: The Ethical Implications of Nestlé's Impact on Public Health in Brazil."

Since I was also enrolled in Marketing Management at the time, I decided to structure my paper around the 3C (Company-Competitor-Customer) framework we had been learning in that class. This helped to craft my research strategy as I started researching more of the country and competitive factors influencing Nestlé's strategic choices in Brazil and the ethics of their public health impact. More specifically, it helped with my searching technique as I used library research tools because it helped me know to do things such as picking a geographic filter (Brazil) or looking at databases under the "Business" category. For example, on Search It within my Nestlé Brazil search, I filtered by topic of "Processed Food Industry." With this filter, I found more background on their involvement in Brazil, including the concept of "regionalization" introduced in the company background section of my paper, as well as more information on Brazil's food customers. I was also able to find financial information that wasn't readily available online by using the MarketLine database provided by K-State Libraries. Because part of my paper was about the ethical dilemmas involved in a business process, I also had to go outside of my discipline and search for papers in the "Philosophy" databases. This resulted in me going beyond the original scope of the New York Times article by including information I found on theories of autonomy and "problem foods." Because of the broad nature of the topics in my paper, I had to keep a trail of the papers I had read. To do this, I had librarian Sara Kearns show me how to use RefWorks, which I was also used to manage my citations as I moved sections around in the paper.

Over time, after starting with a broad focus, I had narrowed down what I would include in the paper based on my preliminary literature review. As I started my research, my method for evaluating my sources quickly started to change when I realized how broad looking at a single company or country could be. I started looking more at the topic filters pre-programmed into the search tools I was using, as well as began filtering by language when too many Portuguese articles showed up. Once I found something that looked relevant, I evaluated it based on where it was published and how many citations it contained/how many times it was cited. When considering which sources I would take the time to read more carefully, I evaluated if the abstract/summary contained all the information I needed, or if I thought I could glean additional insights from reading the paper more in-depth. I also looked at other papers cited within the research I was reading to see if there were other aspects I could include (this was particularly helpful in the ethics and public health research, where I had less background). Ultimately, when deciding to keep information, I kept returning to the original questions and discovering my main points, then evaluated if the new information supported one of main points or if it was simply “interesting” but didn’t substantiate any claims.

Ultimately, this project was beneficial to my studies because it allowed me both to apply concepts I had been learning in my business capstone courses, such as the 3C Framework and Porter’s 5 Competitive Forces model, while also improving my capacity to utilize library resources such as RefWorks and Databases for a research project.