Faculty Interview: Dr. Aaron Brough

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Dr. Aaron R. Brough is an associate professor of marketing and the Harry M. Reid Endowed Professor of Research at the Huntsman School. He received a bachelor’s degree in Business Management from the Marriott School of Management at Brigham Young University and an M.S. and Ph.D. in Marketing from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University. Prior to joining USU, Dr. Brough was a faculty member at Pepperdine University.

Why did you choose the Huntsman School?
I chose the Huntsman School because of its trajectory. Dean Anderson’s focus on excellence has attracted faculty and students who are motivated to Dare Mighty Things, and I love the opportunity to be involved in helping accomplish the school’s mission. It has been wonderful to work under an incredibly supportive department head like Jim Davis and to be surrounded by outstanding colleagues. Although formally, my role at the university is primarily focused on research, I have enjoyed associating with students in numerous extracurricular activities, including global learning programs, career exploration trips, and national competitions. I led a group of students on a career exploration trip to the Bay Area in 2018 where we visited companies like Google, Adobe, SalesForce and Pinterest.

What class(es) do you teach and how do they help prepare students for their professional careers?
I teach classes related to marketing research, such as Data-Driven Decision Making (MSLE 4532) and Survey Research (MSLE 4534). These classes emphasize critical thinking, problem solving, and analytic skills that enable students to add value, starting on day one, to whatever organization they join after graduation. One of the most rewarding parts of teaching is when former students reach out with career updates and attribute part of their professional success to concepts they learned in my class.
What current research are you working on and what is the impact on business?
My research aims to better understand the psychology underlying consumer behavior. One of the projects I am currently working on with colleagues at Harvard and Ohio State looks at unintended consequences of privacy notices. We find that although managers expect privacy policies to help customers feel more secure, exposure to information about privacy protections often reduces people’s interest in making a purchase. We refer to this as the bulletproof glass effect, because like bulletproof glass, the presence (vs. absence) of privacy notices can heighten awareness of risks and paradoxically increase feelings of vulnerability despite offering greater protection. Thus, consumers respond by becoming less trusting and more reluctant to conduct transactions with the business. However, we also show that consumer trust can be preserved by incorporating emotionally-assuring language into the privacy notice. Although statements such as “We care about protecting your privacy” or “We respect you and promise to treat you fairly” do not convey any objective information about a firm’s privacy practices, they seem to be effective at reassuring customers who worry about the safety of their sensitive personal data. Read The Bulletproof Glass Effect.

What are some of your favorite Hobbies/Personal Interests?
I enjoy hiking, chess, painting, racquetball, and spending time with my wife and our five children.

Closing Thoughts?
As I approach a decade of teaching at the Huntsman School, I can see the tremendous advances we’ve made and am convinced that we remain on a trajectory not only to dare, but to accomplish, mighty things.