

GAPS IN MARKETING COMPETENCIES BETWEEN EMPLOYERS' REQUIREMENTS AND GRADUATES' MARKETING SKILLS

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Abstract

This study was conducted to highlight the gaps in marketing competencies that are required by employers and those that graduates learn at business school. The existing literature was surveyed to identify the knowledge, skills and abilities required by employers in the field of marketing and then contextualized according to the requirements of employers in Pakistan. A survey of marketing graduates was conducted in two parts, competency survey 1 was designed to identify the importance of different competencies required in marketing jobs and competency survey 2 was to make out the level of those competencies present in fresh graduates, according to their (graduates) own perceptions. A comparison was made between the results of two cohorts and it was found that statistically significant gaps existed in required and actual level of few marketing competencies like 'design and implement marketing plan', 'conduct market research' and 'forecasting and budgeting'.

Keywords: Competency, Curriculum, Marketing Knowledge, Marketing Practitioners, Employability Traits.

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Introduction

Background of the study

In the last two decades Business Schools have grown rapidly across Pakistan. There are approximately 60 universities and institutes that are providing business education in the country (HEC list). One of the success factors of a business institute is the consistent high demand of its graduates as mentioned by Salami (2007) in his report "The Challenge of Establishing World Class Universities". He states that one factor which differentiates high ranking universities from ordinary ones is that they produce well qualified graduates who are in high demand. Therefore in order to be one of the best business schools, an institute has to maintain high standards in education by upholding a future oriented approach and prepare the MBA graduates for the dynamic business world. The stakeholders of business institutes include their management and faculty, employers of graduates, alumni and present students. The input from all these stakeholders could prove very valuable to augment the education, curriculum and training in various business disciplines.

In order to help the graduates make a smooth transition from students to employees, business schools today are offering a number of courses keeping in consideration the employers' job requirements from fresh graduates, who step into the professional world. All these courses are offered to impart students the relevant subject knowledge and to prepare students for the workplace by developing generic and specific competencies that educators believe will be useful to employers (Rainsbury et al. 2002). Marketing is at the forefront of all businesses. Obviously organizations prefer to employ people who are proficient in marketing skills, like description, analysis and synthesis, presentation and reasoning also in teamwork and communication skills (Ellington, 2005). It is therefore the job of the business institutes to inculcate these skills in their MBAs to make them valuable for companies. It is in this regard that institutions are rigorously trying to identify gaps between what their academics provide and the required sets of knowledge and education in real practice. This study has been conducted to highlight and rank various marketing skills, interpersonal skills and personal traits that are

considered important by early marketing practitioners and the presence of those skills in fresh graduates.

Research Problem

The management of business schools constantly endeavor to increase the employability² of their business graduates because the corporate sector demands a lot of professionalism. The more knowledge and skills business schools incorporate in their courses to address the competencies required by the marketing firms the better they would be preparing their students for corporate sector jobs. The first step is to identify the marketing skills that lack proper coverage through the curriculum. One of the best sources, in view of the author, to identify these aspects of marketing is by obtaining feedback from graduates graduated in the last five years and are employed by the corporate sector.

Research Objective

The ultimate objective of this research is to contribute in curriculum development for the marketing discipline to impart the right knowledge and skills that would embed employability attributes in MBA (marketing majors).

The aim of the study is to identify competencies perceived to be important by graduates of 2009-2010, who have spent 3-4 years in marketing jobs and then matching the presence of these competencies in fresh graduates of 2011-2012 with 1-2 years of work experience.

The outcome of the study covers several aspects.

A) To identify important competencies in the field of marketing to function effectively, as perceived by recent MBAs.

B) To point out those gaps where marketing students lack practical knowledge.

C) To identify perceptions of students toward the marketing courses that is most helpful in their jobs. (Least helpful are also extracted).

²-Employability skills is a term that is used to mean, '...key skills, core skills, life skills, essential skills, key competencies, necessary skills and transferable skills.

Literature Review

Marketing is a challenging and dynamic field. To be effective marketers need a variety of core competencies that are not only technical i.e. marketing related but they fall into areas of hard as well as soft skills. Ellington (2003) work suggest that business education in general must provide business and analytical skills, societal values and ethics, theories, and models so as to make students effective in social and organizational settings. Marketing Education is responsible to instill the marketing competencies that culminate into desirable performance (ibid). Ideally marketing graduates should satisfy the demand of the employers by meeting the job requirements (Dolnicar and Stern, 2003). Relationship-driven model by Hilton et al (2008) of marketing education recommends that three parties, marketing faculty, marketing students and marketing practitioners must take part in curriculum development of marketing studies. The outcome of such work integrated program is to satisfy the demand of the employers by identifying the competencies that are believed to be needed by employers and then inculcating them in marketing students.

Much literature has been devoted to the employability skills of marketing graduates (Hefferman et al (2008), Wellman (2010)). Employability refers to “a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (ESECT, 2003). The most preferable employability skills found in different researches have been summarized in table-1.

Most of the previous studies were conducted amongst employers of different industries as they are the prime customers of business graduates. (Yen et al. 2009; Hodges & Burchell; 2003, McClymont, 2005; Lee, 2009). All these studies provide lists of the desirable marketing competencies preferred by employers of fresh marketing graduates. Table 2 depicts the most preferable five marketing skills identified by each of the above mentioned studies on the subject.

Well (nil) concluded that many entry level graduates were engaged in operational and tactical roles such as promotions and

Table 1

Employability Skills

Author	Methodology	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Wellman-2010	Meta analysis	Leadership	communications	Presentations	Numeric and quantitative analysis;	team work
Hefforman-2010	Interview with employers	Communication	Teamwork;	Problem Solving Work Ethic	Desirable persona;	Customer focus;
Wellman-2005	Analysis of job listing	Marketing research,	selling,	Internet marketing,	promotion	public relations
Schlee and Harich (2009)	Analysis of job listing	Communication all types	Team/relational/leadership skills	Customer behavior Promotion/advertising	Marketing research	Sales management

channel management. It was less likely to get the chance to be involved in strategic marketing decisions. Therefore most of marketing curriculum that pertains to marketing education cannot be put into practice soon after graduation. Marketing-related work experience was also on the wish list of employers. Dolnicar and Stern, (2003) argues that 95% employers emphasize upon ‘Marketing-related work experience and appearance’. Marketing experience was desired by most of the employers and appeared to be an influential factor on hiring decision. This substantiates the compulsory internship in business education.

Table 2

Competencies of Marketing Graduates

Author of the Research	Methodology	Competencies				
		1	2	3	4	5
Yen.P et al -2009	Survey	Ability to adapt to new technologies	Ability to work in team	Communicate effectively.	Work independently.	Demonstrate ethical practices.
Dolnicar.S (2003)	Survey	Communication skills	A hard working attitude	Time Management	Willingness to learn continuously.	Capable of teamwork
Hodges. D and Burchell.N (2003)	Survey of employers	Ability & willingness to learn	Energy & passion	Teamwork & Cooperation	Interpersonal communication	Customer service orientation
McClymont -2005	Survey	Analyse data/ understand statistics	Conduct situation analysis	Ability to implement a marketing plan	Determine strategies for targeting/ marketing	Prepare a marketing plan
Berry.K et al -2004	Comparison of different majors in business	Understanding competitive environment	Communication skills	Work Ethics	Teamwork	Interpersonal skills
Rainsbury.E et al -2001	Survey of employers	Work planning;	Team-working;	Communications;	Problem solving and decision making.	Leadership, entrepreneurialism, and negotiation

Finally all competencies mentioned were merged and categorized into Marketing Skills, Communication/Interpersonal Skills and Personal attributes, this categorization is the same as used by Hager.P(1995) (Table 1-3). The most desirable qualities of marketing graduates identified by employers can be categorized as 'technical attributes' and 'personal attributes'. Technical attributes come from the marketing knowledge and its application when required like 'making a marketing plan' etc and personal attributes can be 'leadership qualities' and delivering work on time." Different authors have used different basis for grouping these competencies like Dolnicar and Stern (2003) divided the attributes and competencies in four categories. The first category was named 'Formal Qualifications (degree)', 'Skills' (leadership and communication skills) 'Attributes' like (hard-working) and "Work related Personal Characteristics" (Confident, Creative and Sociable). Camuffo and Gerli (2004) evaluated the competencies of MBA graduates and not particularly the marketing graduates in the form of managerial and functional skill profiles. Yen et al. (2009) provided the list of competencies without segmenting it in different sections. Hager (1995) grouped the vocational competencies in three groups, 1) task-based or behaviorist approach, 2) general personal attributes and 3) integrated competency standards. On the whole competencies remain more or less the same but labeled differently in different studies

In order to consolidate the list of competencies, attributes and skills that could make them valuable for employers, weak areas of marketing graduates, requirement of employability skills and employers' wish list are compared and contrasted. The result is summarized in Table 3.

Finally all competencies mentioned in the three columns of Table -3 were merged and categorized into Marketing Skills, Communication/Interpersonal Skills and Personal attributes as used by Hager (1995). Marketing Skills included i) Scan marketing environment , ii) Comprehend Business Processes, iii) Design and implemented marketing plan, iv) Identify marketing problems, v)

Table 3
Consolidated List

	Weak Areas	EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS	EMPLOYERS' WISH LIST
Communication & Interpersonal Skills	Teamwork	Teamwork	Teamwork Flexibility
	Communication	Communication	Communication
	Problem solving		Problem solving
Personal Attributes	Time Management		Time Management
			Willingness to learn
			Leadership
			motivation
		Organization	
Marketing Skills		Networking	
	Identifying opportunities		Identifying opportunities
	Applying theory to work place		
	Business process management	Promotion	
		Market research	Market research
		Accuracy	Accuracy
		Merchandising	
		Selling	
		Internet marketing	
		Budgeting	
		Customer focus	

Conduct Market Research, vi) Make budgets, vii) Design advertising and promotion strategy, viii) Manage promotional events, ix) Perform channel management function, x) Carry out merchandizing, xi) Identify sales issues and opportunities and xii) Measure customer satisfaction.

Interpersonal and communication skills contained presentation and business language, negotiation and persuasion skills, conflict resolution, networking, building relationships, teamwork, interpersonal problem solving and leadership skills. Finally the short listed personal attributes were willingness to learn, able to work independently, commitment to work, personal presentation and ability to deal with pressure, initiative/motivation and time management.

Nearly all the studies which the author was able to explore were relating to employers' requirements. They are the prime customer and their needs are important for business schools to tailor their products (students) accordingly. The researcher could find only one study that was focused on graduates to assess the relevance of their work to marketing courses they have studied. The feedback of graduates at entry level jobs could provide valuable insights for business schools to tailor their curriculum according to the market requirements. (Hilton et al, 2008). The findings of Adams (2000) work provided strong empirical support to the notion that evaluation of marketing courses by students based on three factors- Personal Relevance, Educational Value, and Life Skills.

Marketing Education is a process that is constantly evolving. Credibility and respect in marketing education can only be developed through the application and maintenance of high standards—for marketing teachers, their courses, programs, and students. Therefore, it must be continually examined for potential improvements. Academia, employers and graduates themselves must take the responsibility to flourish KSA required in marketing field.

Research Methodology

Research Design

Focus Group: To contextualize the extracted list of competencies from literature review a focus group of local employers was held. These employers belonged to various sectors including banking, FMCGs, media and advertising. Employers felt that they wanted to see aspirations, not score sheets. In terms of the profile of the prospective employee, members of the focus group said that they prefer those graduates who are willing to get involved in all processes of supply chain and have a customer orientation. Preferred skills required were conceptual, analytical, and interpersonal. They wanted good negotiators, team players, and adaptable, hardworking, dedicated

people willing to take initiatives. Local knowledge and knowledge of concept of ROI in all marketing functions was preferred. They preferred an all-rounder, a generalist rather than a specialist. Most of the required competencies by local employers matched the shortlisted competencies from literature survey.

This research is descriptive and quantitative in nature. Primary data is collected through the questionnaire on the website “kwiksurveys.com” containing close ended questions.

Sample Size and Sampling Method

The population for this cross sectional study was marketing graduates from the year 2009- 2012 of the three Business Institutes of Karachi. The Business Schools selected were Institute of Business Management (IBA), College of Business Management (CBM) and Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Institute of Technology (SZabist). Names and contacts were compiled from Graduate Directories of years 2009 to 2012 of the selected institutes.

The sample for this study was 137 marketing graduates of the last four years that are employed by national or multinational companies. The sampling method was non-probability convenience sampling; to be exact it was a voluntary sample.

Questionnaire

Two similar questionnaires were designed; competency survey 1 (CS 1) was for graduates 2009-2010, and competency survey 2 (CS 2) was for recent graduates 2011-2012. The questionnaires consisted of 5 introductory questions, 29 items under constructs of marketing skills, interpersonal/ communication skills and personal attributes. For competency survey 1, five point Likert scale ranged from ‘Low importance’, ‘Helpful’, ‘Desirable’, ‘Important’ and ‘Essential’ was defined, with the assumption that graduates

having few years of marketing experience could rate general requirements of different marketing competencies. In competency survey 2, recent marketing graduates were asked to rate the level of proficiency of competencies of survey 1 within themselves. Therefore same competencies were listed in the questionnaire with a different scale, ranging from 'Poor', 'satisfactory', 'Fair', 'Good', 'Excellent' , because now the intensity of a particular marketing skill was to be evaluated. The next two questions were identical in both questionnaires. In one, graduates were requested to rate their agreement or disagreement on statements related to CGPA and job performance, effect of marketing majors on job performance, practical knowledge gained during Internship and business ethics. The other question was to evaluate the courses in marketing during MBA program, that are most helpful in marketing careers of graduates, respondents were asked to check a dichotomous response category of yes, in case the learning of the course has positively influenced their jobs or no otherwise.

Online questionnaires were sent to all marketing graduates from 2009-2012. Email addresses were obtained from the graduate directories of IBA, CBM and Szabist. The response rate of both surveys was much lower than the expectations of the author. The obvious reason was that the e-mail addresses and mobile numbers of many graduates had changed since they graduated making it difficult to trace them. The invitation was originally sent to all graduates, CS1 was sent to 299 and CS2 was sent to 379 graduates.

Analysis of Data

A sample of 137 graduates participated in the survey. Out of these, 57 respondents formed the sample of competency survey 1 and 80 formed the sample of competency survey 2.

According to CS1 which it can be seen in Table 4, that the mean rating of the importance of almost all marketing skills lies between 2.93 and 4.18. A mean of more than 3.0 was interpreted by the author as being important and essential. Therefore all marketing competencies identified that were listed in the survey seemed imperative to be successful in early stage of marketing profession. In order to fulfill the second objective, the comparison of competency level which the fresh graduates believe that they possess, was checked against the level of importance mentioned by MBAs having 3-4 years of experience. In 11 out of 13 marketing skills identified, the mean value of marketing skills of CS2 was less than CS1. To check its statistical significance (via a t-test of equality of means) the differences in these means were tested. Three competencies 'design and implement marketing plan', 'to conduct market research' and 'forecasting/budgeting' were found to be statistically significant (table 4). This implies that faculty of marketing may need to concentrate on bringing in additional resources from the "real-world" to energize their teaching.

Figure 1

Comparison of between desired and actual level of marketing skills

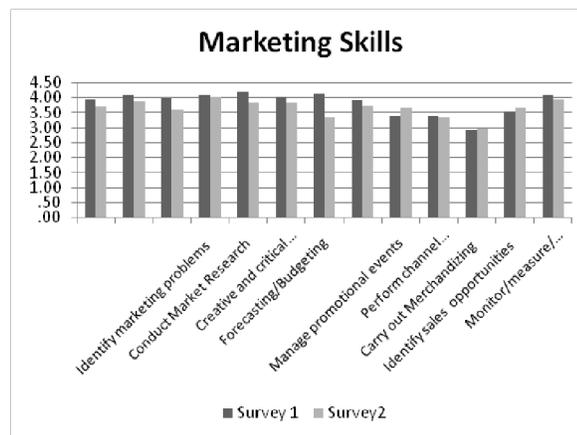


Table 4*T-test for Equality of Means of Marketing Skills*

	t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
Analyze the organization's marketing environment	1.431	0.155	0.242	0.093	0.577
	1.386	0.169	0.242	0.104	0.589
Comprehend Business Processes	1.574	0.118	0.225	0.058	0.508
	1.56	0.122	0.225	0.061	0.511
Design and implemented marketing plan	2.167	0.032	0.39	0.034	0.746
	2.09	0.039	0.39	0.02	0.76
Identify marketing problems	0.326	0.745	0.058	0.292	0.408
	0.313	0.755	0.058	0.308	0.423
Conduct Market Research	2.046	0.043	0.35	0.012	0.689
	2.027	0.045	0.35	0.008	0.693
Creative and critical thinking in Branding	0.992	0.323	0.18	0.179	0.539
	1.003	0.318	0.18	0.175	0.535
Forecasting/Budgeting	3.968	0	0.798	0.4	1.195
	4.14	0	0.798	0.417	1.179
Design advertising/promotion strategy	1.043	0.299	0.2	-0.179	0.579
	1.047	0.297	0.2	-0.178	0.578
Manage promotional events	-1.272	0.206	-0.264	-0.675	0.147
	-1.292	0.199	-0.264	-0.668	0.14
Perform channel management functions	0.093	0.926	0.018	-0.375	0.411
	0.095	0.925	0.018	-0.367	0.404
Carry out Merchandizing	-0.152	0.88	-0.033	-0.459	0.393
	-0.15	0.881	-0.033	-0.465	0.399
Identify sales issues and opportunities Manage promotional events	-0.676	0.5	-0.136	-0.534	0.262
	-0.671	0.504	-0.136	-0.538	0.266
Monitor/measure/evaluate customer satisfaction	0.639	0.524	0.121	-0.255	0.497
	0.627	0.532	0.121	-0.262	0.505

Similarly the next section of the questionnaire consisted of Communication/Interpersonal skills. Figure 2 shows the comparison of the mean importance of skills and actual level of expertise on that skill can also be seen in fig 2. A comparison of the mean importance of skills and actual level of expertise on that skill can also be seen in fig 2. The differences in these means were tested with t-test of equality of means and 'business language and expression', 'negotiation/persuasion', 'conflict resolution', 'networking', 'building relationships' and 'interpersonal problem solving skills' found to be statistical significant. This finding is in line with much of the previous research focusing on generic skills of entry-level positions which suggested PAKISTAN BUSINESS REVIEW APRIL 2015 136

that as a novice in the marketing field graduates were placed mostly in support roles, they were required to develop workplace knowledge and learn internal communication methods (Walker, 2009).

Figure 2
Comparison between Desired and Actual Level of Communication/Interpersonal Skills

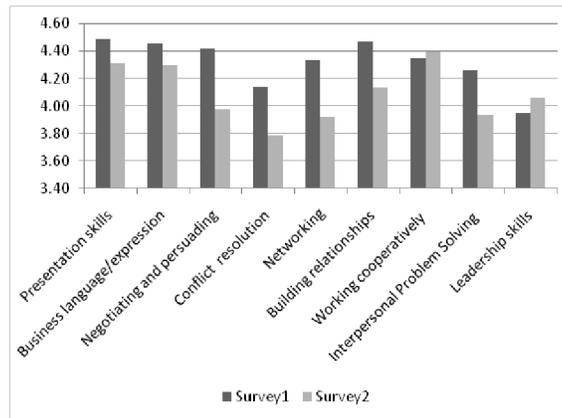


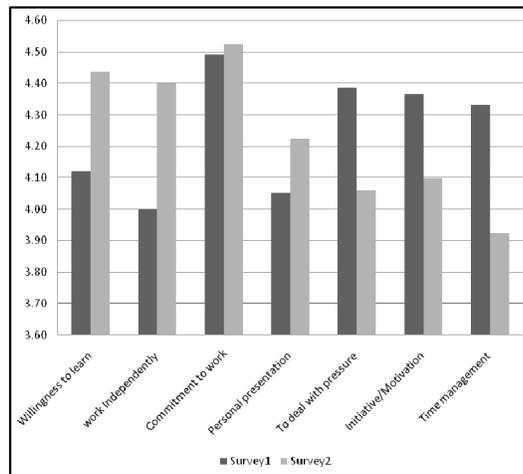
Table 5
t-test for Equality of Means of Communication/Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal/Communication Skills	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower	Upper
Presentation skills	1.398	135	.164	.179	.128	-.074	.432
	1.337	100.057	.184	.179	.134	-.086	.444
Business language and expression	1.299	135	.196	.156	.120	-.082	.394
	1.319	126.876	.190	.156	.118	-.078	.390
Negotiating and persuading	3.528	135	.001	.446	.126	.196	.696
	3.526	120.575	.001	.446	.127	.196	.697
Conflict resolution	2.273	135	.025	.353	.155	.046	.660
	2.245	115.095	.027	.353	.157	.041	.664
Networking	2.734	135	.007	.408	.149	.113	.704
	2.669	109.692	.009	.408	.153	.105	.712
Building relationships	2.280	135	.024	.336	.147	.045	.628
	2.235	111.689	.027	.336	.150	.038	.634
Working cooperatively within a group	-.363	135	.717	-.049	.135	-.317	.218
	-.359	115.325	.720	-.049	.137	-.320	.222
Interpersonal Problem Solving Skills	2.358	135	.020	.326	.138	.052	.599
	2.325	114.462	.022	.326	.140	.048	.603
Leadership skills	-.751	135	.454	-.115	.153	-.418	.188
	-.721	101.471	.473	-.115	.160	-.432	.202

An interesting observation can be made that in two competencies, i.e. 'Leadership skills' and 'working cooperatively', the level of skills fresh graduates perceive to have, is more than the importance given to these interpersonal skills. Here the assumption can be drawn that fresh graduates being over ambitious rate themselves higher than what actually their capabilities are. Just because someone took a class in negotiations doesn't mean they are any good at it rather it could cause a number of problems. Confidence is good, but not when it overshadows the inability (Slater, 1995). Moreover experience with [leadership](#) comes working under the [leadership](#) of others. Lack of experience seems to show up the most when someone is put in charge of managing and [leading](#) others. Therefore MBAs need to have real experience with good results in management either before or after getting their master's degree.

Figure 3

Comparison between Desired and Actual Level of Personal Attributes



In the same way comparison of two surveys on the basis of mean ratings, identifying desired and actual level of personal attributes can be seen in figure 3. Out of listed personal attributes, 'ability to deal with pressure', 'initiative/motivation' and 'time management' was

found to be statistically significant (Table 6). In two traits 'willingness to learn' and 'commitment to work' fresh graduates rated themselves quite high. The reason can be cited in the words of Slater.J (1995) that "This is more of an issue with people who have had very little real work experience" Although MBA programs offer good content but simply being exposed to a lot of great ideas doesn't say much about ability to implement those ideas in real life. In previous researches 'willingness to learn' was considered to be the most important attribute (Rainsbury et al, 2002, Wellman.N, 2010) but in the present study it came on fifth position out of seven attributes listed.

Table 6

t-test for Equality of Means of Personal Attributes

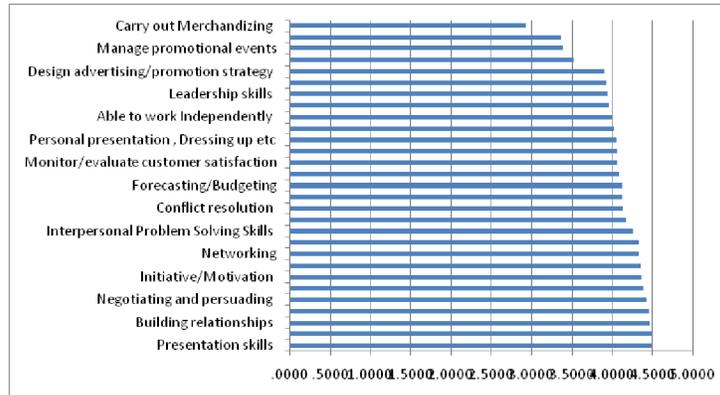
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Willingness to learn	-2.201	135	.029	-.315	.143	-.597	-.032
	-2.168	113.920	.032	-.315	.145	-.602	-.027
Able to work Independently	-2.777	135	.006	-.400	.144	-.685	-.115
	-2.743	115.224	.007	-.400	.146	-.689	-.111
Commitment to work	-.278	135	.781	-.034	.121	-.274	.206
	-.274	114.235	.784	-.034	.123	-.278	.210
Personal presentation Dressing up etc	-1.069	135	.287	-.172	.161	-.491	.146
	-1.068	120.258	.288	-.172	.161	-.492	.147
Ability to deal with pressure	2.588	135	.011	.323	.125	.076	.571
	2.583	119.927	.011	.323	.125	.076	.571
Initiative/Motivation	2.085	135	.039	.268	.129	.014	.523
	2.101	123.972	.038	.268	.128	.016	.521
Time management	2.790	135	.006	.408	.146	.119	.698
	2.763	116.356	.007	.408	.148	.116	.701

Figure 4 represents mean importance of all the competencies under three constructs. It can be seen that soft skills or non-technical skills are ahead of hard skills or technical (marketing) skills. Much of the literature emphasizes the critical importance of developing marketers those who are all-rounders (Heffernan et al. 2010; Welman, nil). This is supported by the respondents of the competency survey

1, which placed equal importance on marketing, communication and interpersonal skills in the workplace. Personal attributes were ranked a little less than the aforesaid competencies.

Figure 4

Ranking of Workplace Competencies



The perception of graduates, from 2009-2012, was gauged on different aspects like CGPA, utility of marketing majors, internship experience and work ethics. The scale used was 5- point liker scale ranging from “strongly disagrees” to “strongly agree”.

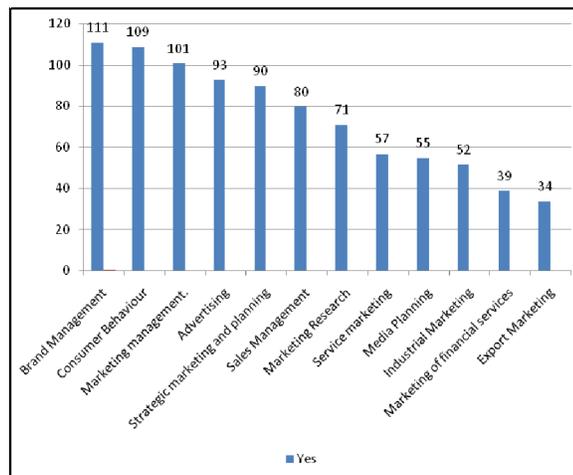
Graduates disagreed with the notion that a high CGPA is a prerequisite to perform well in the job. Graduates showed positive attitude towards courses offered in MBA as they perceived them worthwhile. The statement “*Internship experience enhanced my knowledge about working in the organization*” showed a general positive experience with internships. Most employers’ prefer that it was important for graduates entering business roles to have some business work experience prior to completing their Master’s degree as mentioned by Schlee and Harich (2010) “Most employers seek to hire applicants with skills and experience, rather than new college graduates”.

'Strong moral and ethical values' was one of the requirements of employers in the focus group that was conducted to contextualize the identified competencies. For the statement "*University has instilled strong work ethics in me*" the mean value is ($M=3.64$) which is more than neutral but for the characteristic that has been spelled out specifically by employers, the mean value of perception of graduates should have been higher. The author believes that business/marketing ethics is another area where business schools should concentrate as the overall values of society are on decline.

To address the last objective of the research that was to identify all those marketing courses that was helpful to the graduates while performing their jobs. The methodology used to evaluate the marketing courses is simply dichotomous question of 'yes' or 'no' according to the experience whether the listed marketing courses were helpful or not. Figure 5 shows the frequencies of yes meaning the knowledge gained from the course was applicable in professional life of graduates.

Figure 5

Graduates' Perception towards Practical Importance of Marketing Courses



Summary and Conclusions

The motivation to undertake this research was to identify and better understand the perceptions of marketing graduates about the skills, knowledge, and competencies that are essential to obtain and progress in a marketing positions. Once these competencies are identified, business schools could design their curricula to inculcate these competencies in their MBAs. Developing tomorrow's marketing professionals is not an easy task because of the rapid changes in the marketplace, fierce competition and the world truly becoming a global village. In this scenario marketing employers are expected to develop partnerships with universities to prepare individuals for the challenges ahead, and they should expect that nearly all marketing graduates would have acquired a set of common competencies. This study found out that both technical (marketing) skills as well as non- technical skills are important for fresh graduates to start in their marketing profession. According to the sample the three most required competencies were Presentation skills, Building relationships and Negotiation/persuasion skills. All of them belong to the construct of communication and interpersonal skills. Therefore it can be established that from new graduates' employers expect less marketing skills and more non-technical skills. This does not undermine the importance of marketing related Knowledge, Skills and Abilities; they are essential to provide a holistic approach in professional outlook but might be very initially after employment, fresh graduates need to display more communication/ interpersonal skills to perform in a support job role.

The general perception among graduates is that CGPA cannot be taken as the basis of good performance in marketing jobs. Although graduates conformed to the idea that marketing majors provided them with solid marketing background, they felt that there was room for improvement in curriculum and its delivery to raise them to the best of their potentials.

An important aspect in designing marketing curriculum for MBAs is that subjects offered in the program should be helpful in making new graduates settle down in the job. The study findings are positive about majority of marketing courses taught in most of the business schools i.e. they are relevant to marketing jobs. Mix of marketing courses offered seems to be appropriate. Courses like brand management and consumer behavior were found to be very helpful while stepping in practical world and it was also recommended by employers in focus group to make them as core courses. Other courses like marketing management, advertising and strategic marketing gave practical knowledge to students. However, marketing education's ability to remain viable in this new millennium will be dependent upon marketing educators' abilities to stay in tune with their graduates' and employers' of graduates' perceptions as well their abilities to deliver quality courses and programs.

The data collected is based on a small sample of graduates and no attempt has been made to evaluate whether the subjects the students said were helpful corresponded to job roles or not. It is nevertheless held that the findings send strong messages to the marketing faculty regarding the application of subjects graduates are most likely to encounter in their first and early career posts.

To conclude it is suggested that the standards' knowledge and understanding component could be used to form the basis of a marketing curriculum that is recognized by employers as being relevant to the workplace. The outcomes and behaviors of effective performance could be used as the basis of development of learning outcomes and assessment criteria which go beyond testing knowledge alone

Limitations

Initially four of the top business schools of Karachi on the HEC list, namely IBA, CBM, Szabist and Iqra were selected. However

graduates from Iqra were not included as only 2012 directory was available for that institute.

Another problem faced was that e-mail addresses and cell numbers of many graduates, specially the batches of 2009-2010, were no longer in use so it was not possible to contact them. Another handicap faced was the tendency of people to discard e-mails from anonymous contacts.

Future researchers may consider the study from all the employers hiring university graduates.

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