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## **Critically Divided? How Marketing Educators Perceive Undergraduate Programmes in the UK**

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## **Critically Divided? How Marketing Educators Perceive Undergraduate Programmes in the UK**

### **Abstract**

**Purpose:** ‘Theory vs. practice’ and ‘rigour vs. relevance’ debates have long been a feature of the discipline of marketing, not least within the sub-field of marketing education, where authors have increasingly called for the adoption of more critical approaches as a means to enhance undergraduate degrees. To date however, little is actually known about how undergraduate programmes are perceived by those who deliver them. The aim of this research was to investigate educators’ views of the primary purpose of undergraduate degrees, and their perceptions and experiences of critical approaches.

**Methodology:** A series of 23 exploratory interviews was conducted, followed by a national survey of UK marketing educators. For the main phase of data analysis, multivariate techniques were employed.

**Findings:** Respondents generally agreed that intellectual rigour is a priority in marketing education, however significant differences in opinion were identified on (i) the extent to which degrees actually provide this, (ii) the extent to which students should be treated as customers and (iii) whether curricula should be driven by industry. In terms of critical approaches, the majority of staff rated such approaches as important to undergraduate programmes, and most had introduced at least one type in their own teaching. There were no significant differences in ratings and experiences of critical approaches between those respondents who emphasised industry relevance in marketing education and the rest.

**Value of Paper:** The divergence of views revealed by this research raises important questions about how marketing is currently positioned to different stakeholders, and how the discipline may evolve in future.

### **Keywords**

Critical marketing; marketing education; theory/practice; rigour/relevance

### **Type of Paper**

Research Paper

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## **Critically Divided? How Marketing Educators Perceive Undergraduate Programmes in the UK**

### **Introduction**

This paper reports an empirical study of UK marketing academics' views on undergraduate marketing education, and within this, their perceptions and experiences of critical approaches to teaching and learning. Somewhat belatedly in comparison with other business and management disciplines (Brownlie et al, 1998), the value of critical perspectives to marketing research and scholarship is increasingly being recognised (e.g. Burton, 2001, Saren et al, 2007), with advocates arguing that the deep, questioning stance of critical scholarship may improve marketing theory development (Burton, 2005), enhance research practices (Brownlie and Hewer, 2007), or change the relationship between academic and practitioner endeavours (Brownlie and Saren, 1997). Similarly, calls have been made for increased adoption of critical perspectives and approaches in the sphere of marketing education (Catterall et al, 1999; Catterall et al, 2002), to enhance students' cognitive and analytical skills (Celuch and Slama, 1998), or achieve a more fundamental broadening of students' intellectual horizons (Schroeder, 2007). As well as being part of the critical marketing agenda, these latter calls stem from long-standing debates about the general purpose and orientation of marketing education, where issues of academic rigour and industry relevance, the balance of theory and practice, and the status of students as customers, are often disputed. To date however, there has been very little empirical investigation of how educators themselves perceive the wider purpose and orientation of marketing education, and within this, the extent to which calls for adoption of critical approaches are being heeded. These issues are important not only for their impact on how marketing is presented externally as a taught subject, but also for their reflection of

how educators within the marketing academy perceive themselves and the discipline of marketing itself. Hence, the research reported here sought to provide insights into these important issues.

The paper begins with a review of some of the key debates within the discipline of marketing to which critical marketing has contributed, and a summary of how these debates have played out in the sphere of marketing education. This is followed by description of the methods and results of the empirical research, which comprised a series of exploratory depth interviews and a large-scale survey of UK marketing educators. The paper continues with discussion of the results and their implications for the key issues described above. The specific focus of the investigation was undergraduate marketing education, because it still represents the mainstay of teaching activity in most business schools, and may present particular challenges for the adoption of critical approaches. Throughout, ‘undergraduate marketing programmes’ is used to refer both to programmes specifically with ‘marketing’ in their titles, as well as those with broader titles that contain a significant component of marketing teaching.

### **Marketing, Critical Approaches and Education**

Of the different debates relating to the broad scope and direction of the marketing discipline, ‘theory vs practice’ and ‘rigour vs relevance’ are perhaps two of the most long-standing. Since at least the 1980s, authors have argued over the extent to which marketing scholarship should exist to serve the needs of particular constituencies, which in turn, has fuelled discussion of the nature and desirability of ‘relevant’ research. Some authors posit that as the marketing discipline is allied closely with

industry, academic research should be oriented towards servicing this constituency (e.g. Piercy, 2002; Katsikeas et al, 2004; Tapp, 2004). Others argue that researchers benefit from conscious detachment from the interests of business (e.g. Holbrook, 1985; Weick, 2001). Linked to this debate are arguments over what makes for 'rigorous' scholarship in marketing, particularly the extent to which rigour may be a feature of practice-led research (O'Driscoll and Murray, 1998; Cornelissen, 2002). Since the 1990s, exponents of the concept of critical marketing have also contributed to these debates. Key interests for many in this community involve deep questioning of social, political and economic structures that underpin marketing phenomena and practices (Bradshaw and Firat, 2007), and the location of marketing within such structures (Brownlie and Hewer, 2007). As such, critical marketers often advocate researcher independence from specific industry clients, although some contributors have also questioned whether academic rigour and practitioner relevance are in opposition at all (Brownlie and Saren, 1997; Brownlie, 2006). As the debates continue, strong and often impassioned views are expressed on both sides (for example, see contributions to the *Marketing Intelligence and Planning* special issue on the academic practitioner divide, edited by Brennan, 2004).

These scholarship debates also play out in the sphere of marketing education, where contributors discuss the purpose and orientation of teaching and learning, and similar tensions over 'theory vs practice' and 'rigour vs relevance' are raised. Some authors criticise marketing degrees for their poor ability to equip graduates with practical skills necessary for industry employment (Pearce and Bonner, 2000; Davis *et al.*, 2002; Evans *et al.*, 2002), whilst others express more concern about the lack of intellectual challenge and theory exposition (Burton, 2005; Holbrook, 2005;

Molesworth and Scullion, 2005). Trends towards treating students as customers are also debated, with concerns raised that these incentivise students towards perceived easy or entertaining courses, leading to a dilution of academic rigour (Clayson and Haley, 2005; Molesworth and Scullion, 2005). In reading materials too, authors criticize the popularity of textbooks rooted in the 1960s (O'Driscoll and Murray, 1998), whose theoretical content is insufficient and outdated (Polonsky and Mankelow, 2000; Burton, 2005).

It is against this context that calls have been made for more critical approaches to be adopted in marketing education. Broadly, these are forms of teaching and learning that encourage students towards deeper, more critical reflection of taught material, and/or exposure to alternative ways of looking at marketing issues (Schroeder, 2007). In practice, they may take different forms, for example, introducing students to non-managerialist perspectives on marketing topics (Mingers, 2001), or adopting learning strategies that encourage more critical reflection on marketing 'truths' (Catterall et al., 2002). Advocates argue that they may improve practical thinking, analysis and problem-solving skills (Braun, 2004; Celuch and Slama, 1998), or more fundamentally enhance academic rigour and challenge by encouraging students to look at problems from different theoretical perspectives.

Yet within the marketing education debates and calls for more critical approaches, no study to date has investigated empirically the extent to which such approaches are actually adopted in practice, and whether educators perceive or experience any of the proposed benefits. Therefore, a key objective for the research presented here was to gather this baseline information. However, as educators' perceptions of any specific



teaching approach may be closely related to their wider views about the purpose and orientation of education, a further objective was to gather views on marketing education more generally, to see if any relationships existed between the two phenomena. Such linkages may exist particularly for critical approaches, because of their derivation from, and association with, the specific scholarly community of critical marketing. Gathering wider views was also felt to be important in itself, for what the results could reveal about educators' positions on the broader scholarship debates within the marketing discipline. To summarise therefore, the precise questions for the empirical research were:

- (i) How do marketing educators view the purpose and orientation of undergraduate marketing programmes?
- (ii) How do marketing educators perceive and experience critical approaches in teaching and learning at undergraduate level?
- (iii) To what extent do relationships exist between educators' views of undergraduate programmes and their perceptions and experiences of critical approaches?

## **Methods**

The empirical research consisted of two components, qualitative and quantitative. The qualitative component involved exploratory interviews with 23 colleagues in nine institutions in the UK, all of whom had current or recent responsibility for undergraduate marketing teaching. To gain rich insights, the sample contained a proportion of individuals known to the researchers as having specific interests in critical marketing, with the remainder being a convenience sample of colleagues not

known to share such interests. Interviews were conducted either face to face or by telephone, typically lasting 30-45 minutes. Interviewees were asked to talk about their personal backgrounds, their views of the purpose and orientation of undergraduate marketing education, and finally their perceptions and experiences of critical approaches. Full tape recordings were not made of these interviews, instead notes were taken both during and after each interview, thereafter being compared and analysed thematically to arrive at a final synthesis.

The second component of the fieldwork comprised a national survey of staff involved in undergraduate marketing teaching in UK universities. The goals of the survey were first to establish whether the views expressed in the exploratory interviews held true across a larger population, and second to test quantitatively the relationship between educators' wider views of marketing education and their perceptions and experiences of critical approaches. The questionnaire itself comprised three main sections. First, respondents' profile information, including age, gender, academic position and relative time devoted to teaching, research and consultancy activities. Second, respondents' views on marketing education, including their perceptions of its overall purpose, focus of curricula, and indicators of quality. For each of these, respondents rated their agreement or disagreement with a series of statements developed from the exploratory interviewee testimonies, reflecting different educational positions or standpoints (e.g. 'theory' or 'practice' oriented standpoints). Finally, respondents were asked for their views on critical teaching approaches. Specifically, they indicated their perceptions and experiences of four types of critical approach identified from the exploratory interviews, culminating in a final rating of the overall importance of critical approaches to undergraduate marketing education.

The survey was administered via online self-completion questionnaire, piloted amongst colleagues at the authors' home institutions before distribution to the final sample, which was derived as follows. First, using the 2006/2007 Universities and Colleges Admission System (UCAS) listing, a database was compiled of all higher education institutions in the UK delivering undergraduate degrees in marketing or related subjects. Via scrutiny of these institutions' websites, email addresses were then gathered of all staff members indicated as being active in marketing scholarship. This list was cross-referenced with the 2006/2007 membership of the UK Academy of Marketing (AM), yielding an initial database of 494 email addresses. An email alert was then sent directly to each of these addresses, supplemented by a notice in the AM Newsletter. One follow up email and two newsletter reminders were issued. Following distribution of the first email alert, 165 addresses were eliminated from the database due to the address being defunct, or the recipient replying that they had no involvement in undergraduate teaching. This gave a final sample of 353 recipients. 179 usable questionnaires were returned from this sample, representing a response rate of 50.7%. The next sections report the results of the exploratory interviews and survey, respectively.

### **Results of Exploratory Interviews**

The participants in the exploratory interviews were first asked to describe their personal journeys to their current professional position. Two things were striking here. First, the subjects of interviewees' first post-school qualifications were very diverse, from sociology, geography and economics to science and engineering based subjects [1]. Second, and in contrast, the teaching and assessment formats interviewees had

experienced in their first degrees tended to be highly traditional, with very little project work or critical skills development, especially in early years. The exception was participants who took their degrees pre-1980s, where small class sizes and regular tutorial systems gave, in their view, the opportunity for more interaction and flexible learning. Overall, the findings highlighted how those who pursued experiential learning and critical skills development were generally not able to fall back on their own experiences as a student, nor rely on well-established module design materials. This implied that such individuals underwent extra effort to bring such approaches into their teaching, for example by drawing from non-standard textbook materials, compared with colleagues following more traditional lecture and textbook based approaches.

Interviewees were then asked their views about undergraduate marketing education. In synthesis, there was broad agreement that programmes should encompass a mix of both theoretical and practical elements. Beyond this however, more divergent views emerged on what the emphasis of this mix should be. Some strongly expressed the view that marketing is an applied subject, therefore the primary purpose of a degree is to provide graduates with a toolkit suited to their employment in relevant business positions: *“Marketing is not an academic discipline, it is an applied one”*. These interviewees saw close liaison with industry as very important to degree quality, and perceived outwardly work-related forms of learning, such as projects, simulations and industry placements, as the highlights of curricula. Others, meanwhile, felt strongly that marketing should be positioned more academically, as a traditional social science discipline. Rather than emphasizing toolkit provision for a specific form of employment, which risked simply *“tooling students up like plumbers”*, they felt that

the primary purpose of marketing education should be to broaden students' minds and encourage them to think differently: "*Am I producing 'better managers' through my teaching? No. My aim is to help people to think better, to see things in new ways*". These interviewees applauded teaching and learning that was seen to facilitate this, such as guided reading of seminal texts in cognate subjects, debates on controversial topics, and critical reflection on received wisdom in marketing.

Finally, interviewees were asked about their perceptions and experiences of critical approaches. In synthesis, interviewees' descriptions of such approaches could be grouped into four types. First, some felt that 'critical' denoted taking alternative, **non-managerialist perspectives** to the treatment of marketing topics, for example, by encouraging students to consider social and environmental impacts of marketing activity. For example, one interviewee described being critical as analysing "*the role of marketing in the world and how it impinges on wider society*". A second type involved encouraging a **questioning, challenging stance** towards material, for example, by asking students to critically analyse specific marketing texts: "*engaging with material in an academic or practitioner journal, to understand, analyse critically, and comment on it*". The third type of critical approach referred to exposure to **Critical Theory**, that is, a fundamental questioning of 'the way things are', with a view to proposing radical alternatives. Examples of interviewees' descriptions that fell into this category included "*introducing the big C – Habermas and the Frankfurt School*" and "*learning the ability to develop thinking for oneself, free from dogma or a present ideology*". Finally, some interviewees took 'critical approach' to mean the encouragement of critically **reflexive learning**, for example, experiential learning:

*“For me, it means learning by example, using case studies and project work to get students to consider the process of marketing as well as the outcomes”.*

In terms of actual experiences of these approaches, interviewees spoke of having introduced Types 1, 2 and 4 with some success at undergraduate level, albeit overwhelmingly in final year, and often with substantial costs and effort being required. Indeed, a number of interviewees expressed support in principle for critical approaches but did not adopt them because of practical obstacles. Type 3 (Critical Theory) contrasted with the others though, having been attempted by only one or two interviewees. The general view was that this perspective is either inappropriate for undergraduate students or at least very challenging to introduce satisfactorily, because of the need to intellectually prime students with appropriate material in the context of crowded curricula.

Overall, several interesting insights emerged from the exploratory interviews. Particularly intriguing was the apparent divergence in views over the purpose of undergraduate marketing education, with some interviewees advocating a practical, industry-relevant orientation compared with those who emphasised a more theoretical, ‘education for education’s sake’ orientation. These views seemed to echo some of the ‘theory vs. practice’ debates described earlier in the paper. Also interesting were the multiple types of teaching and learning approach that interviewees regarded as ‘critical’, which seemed to have different perceptions attached to them in terms of their appropriateness and benefit for undergraduate students. The next stage in the research involved taking these insights forward for quantitative investigation, the results of which are now presented.

## Survey Results

Table 1 presents the background and profile of the survey respondents.

**Table 1. Respondents' Profiles, Experiences and Activities (n=179)**

|                                    |                             | Frequency | %    |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|------|
| Gender                             | Male                        | 87        | 48.6 |
|                                    | Female                      | 92        | 51.4 |
| Age                                | <25                         | 4         | 2.2  |
|                                    | 26-35                       | 40        | 22.3 |
|                                    | 36-45                       | 48        | 26.8 |
|                                    | 46-55                       | 61        | 34.1 |
|                                    | >56                         | 26        | 14.5 |
| Current Position                   | Professor                   | 22        | 12.3 |
|                                    | Reader                      | 6         | 3.4  |
|                                    | Senior/Principal Lecturer   | 54        | 30.2 |
|                                    | Lecturer A/B, Senior        | 90        | 50.3 |
|                                    | Teaching/Research Assistant | 7         | 3.9  |
| Where first qualified              | Pre-1992 University         | 128       | 71.5 |
|                                    | Post-1992 University        | 40        | 22.3 |
|                                    | College or HE Institution   | 10        | 5.6  |
|                                    | Other                       | 1         | 0.6  |
| Worked ft or pt outside academia   | Yes                         | 142       | 79.3 |
|                                    | No                          | 37        | 20.7 |
| How perceive current academic role | Predominantly teaching      | 70        | 39.1 |
|                                    | Predominantly research      | 35        | 19.6 |
|                                    | Teaching & research equally | 74        | 41.3 |
| How often undertake consultancy    | Frequently                  | 42        | 23.5 |
|                                    | Occasionally                | 99        | 55.3 |
|                                    | Never                       | 38        | 21.2 |

Table 1 reveals that the survey sample is equally weighted by gender, but in terms of age profile, it is skewed towards more senior groups, with three quarters of respondents being aged 36 or more. Despite this predominance, only half the sample occupies promoted positions of senior/principal lecturer or higher. In terms of experience and activities, more than three quarters of respondents have undertaken work experience outside of academia (indeed a follow up question revealed almost half of these were engaged in such work for more than five years). Approximately three quarters of the sample reported undertaking consultancy activity on at least an occasional basis, and a similar proportion reported involvement in at least as much

teaching as research. Overall therefore, the survey sample is characterised by somewhat older, more experienced individuals largely active in teaching, the majority of whom have a track record of working outside of academia and also engage in consultancy activities. In comparison with previous surveys of UK marketing academics, it is noteworthy that this sample is different in terms of gender balance and age profile to that of Diamantopoulos et al. (1992), which was heavily male-dominated, and had a somewhat older profile. The present sample is more akin to Baker and Erdogan (2000), although greater proportions of professors and readers were represented in that study.

The second part of the questionnaire asked respondents for their views on undergraduate marketing education. These were elicited via a series of 18 statements reflecting different positions on three aspects of marketing teaching and learning: the overall purpose of marketing degrees; the focus of curricula; and indicators of quality in teaching and learning. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement or disagreement with each statement on a 5-point scale. Table 2 summarises the mean ratings for each statement.

**Table 2. Respondents' views of undergraduate marketing education (n=179)**

|   | Mean | St. Dev. |
|---|------|----------|
| <b>Overall purpose of a marketing degree</b>  |      |          |
| 1. The primary purpose of a marketing degree is to train students to become professional marketers  | 3.47 | 1.21     |
| 2. Marketing degrees should be about exposing students to theories and getting them to think critically about them  | 3.88 | 0.95     |
| 3. The notion that marketing degrees should become academically 'purer' like degrees in psychology, sociology or economics, should be resisted              | 3.22 | 1.16     |
| 4. Marketing degrees should have a predominantly practitioner orientation   | 3.83 | 0.97     |
| <b>Focus of curricula</b>   |      |          |
| 5. Marketing curricula should contain more on the effects of marketing (e.g. on society and the environment), not just how to make marketing more effective | 3.93 | 0.906    |



|  |      |      |
|--|------|------|
| 6. Ultimately, the best modules are where students apply their learning in a work related setting  | 3.55 | 1.00 |
| 7. Generally, marketing curricula impose the same degree of intellectual challenge on students as curricula of subjects such as psychology and economics | 3.15 | 1.15 |
| 8. At most undergraduate stages, textbooks alone are insufficient as essential reading material and need to be supplemented by journal articles          | 4.15 | 0.93 |
| 9. Assessments that require students to challenge, question or debate received wisdom are best   | 4.08 | 0.89 |
| 10. The internet has become more of a hindrance than a help to students preparing marketing assignments  | 2.89 | 1.25 |
| 11. It is important to deliver material that students expect, in a format that they expect   | 2.46 | 1.02 |
| 12. Multimedia teaching packages now attached to popular marketing textbooks have raised the standard of undergraduate marketing education               | 3.24 | 0.99 |
| <b>Indicators of quality in teaching and learning</b>  |      |      |
| 13. On marketing degrees, educators should practice what they preach and treat students more like customers  | 2.76 | 1.30 |
| 14. Marketing curricula should be developed and driven by the needs of industry  | 3.56 | 1.08 |
| 15. The success of a marketing degree can be judged primarily by how many of its graduates get top jobs in industry                                      | 3.25 | 1.08 |
| 16. When students are involved in the development of marketing curricula, quality is generally improved  | 2.79 | 1.13 |
| 17. Experience of working in industry, rather than academic research, equips marketing educators best  | 3.45 | 1.14 |
| 18. Marketing degrees with a high proportion of professionally affiliated teaching staff are generally superior to those with a low proportion           | 3.08 | 1.02 |
| <i>Scale: 1= 'strongly disagree'; 2= 'disagree'; 3= 'neither agree nor disagree'; 4= 'agree'; 5= 'strongly agree'</i>                                    |      |      |

As Table 2 shows, some of the clearest results relate to the need for intellectual challenge within programmes, as respondents agreed, on average, that textbooks generally represent insufficient reading material and that students should be required to question received wisdom in their assessments. At the other end of the scale, there was general disagreement with the view that the programme quality is enhanced by student intervention in the process and that students should be treated more like customers. Beyond these results however, average ratings for most questions fell close to the median point with many ratings having a standard deviation of  $>1$ , indicating ambivalence, for example, over the level of academic rigour of marketing

degrees, the best types of marketing modules, and how the success of degrees can be judged. We conducted bivariate tests to identify whether any of these differences were linked to respondents' profile characteristics. Although no relationships were found on respondents' age or gender, significant differences were identified according to respondents' roles and activities. For example, respondents in predominantly teaching roles agreed, on average, that marketing curricula pose sufficient intellectual challenge (statement 7), whereas the rest generally disagreed with this ( $p < 0.01$ ). Significant differences were also identified according to the level of consultancy that respondents engaged in. For example, respondents who engaged in frequent consultancy activity agreed, on average, that marketing degrees should be industry driven and oriented towards industry employment (statements 14 and 15), whereas the rest were neutral on these issues ( $p < 0.001$ ). We return to these differences in later data analysis.

The final section of the questionnaire gathered respondents' perceptions and experiences of critical approaches, using the four types synthesised from the exploratory interviews. For each type, respondents indicated whether they had adopted this approach in their own teaching, then answered follow up questions on the associated benefits and problems as appropriate. Finally, all respondents indicated their perceptions of the overall importance of critical approaches, and the barriers to greater usage of them at undergraduate level. Table 3 gives the topline results, with the responses to the follow up questions reported in the text below.

**Table 3. Respondents' perceptions and experiences of critical teaching approaches (n=179)**

|  |  |  | Frequency | % |
|--|--|--|-----------|---|
|--|--|--|-----------|---|

|  |   |   |                           |                           |
|--|---|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Type 1. Encouraging students to reflect on the relationship between marketing and society</b>                   | Have you ever taken this approach?            | Yes<br>No   | 132<br>47                 | 74<br>26                  |
| <b>Type 2. Encouraging students to take a questioning, challenging approach to material</b>                        | Have you ever taken this approach?            | Yes<br>No   | 111<br>68                 | 62<br>38                  |
| <b>Type 3. Introducing students to a Critical Theory perspective on marketing topics</b>                           | Have you ever taken this approach?            | Yes<br>No   | 59<br>120                 | 33<br>67                  |
| <b>Type 4. Giving students the opportunity to ‘learn by doing’, for example, simulation games or project work</b>  | Have you ever taken this approach?<br>(n=160) | Yes<br>No   | 120<br>40                 | 75<br>25                  |
| <b>Overall, how important are these types of learning in the broad context of marketing education?<br/>(n=155)</b> |   | V. unimportant<br>Unimportant<br>Neither unimpt. nor impt.<br>Important<br>V. important | 23<br>7<br>19<br>66<br>40 | 15<br>5<br>12<br>43<br>26 |

As can be seen, the most commonly adopted critical approach was Type 1 (societal), followed by Type 4 (experiential). Type 3 (Critical Theory) was the least adopted approach, although over a third of respondents stated they had tried introducing it, a surprisingly high proportion given the generally negative views of the exploratory interviewees towards this approach. We conducted bivariate tests to identify whether adoption of any of the approaches was linked to respondents’ profile characteristics. In fact, very few significant relationships were found on this. An exception was that a greater proportion of respondents with work experience outside academia reported adopting Types 1, 2 and 4 ( $p < 0.01$ ). The responses to follow up questions on each approach add more insights. For all the critical approaches, the most common level for adoption was third year/senior honours (70-80% of respondents), followed by second year/junior honours (30-50% of respondents) and introductory level (10-30% of respondents). Type 3 (Critical Theory) was, unsurprisingly, the least adopted approach at introductory level (only 10% of respondents), and Type 1 (societal) the

most adopted (30% of respondents). However, the majority of respondents who adopted Type 1 (societal) were found to only 'introduce' it in their modules, for example in one or two lectures. By contrast, three quarters of respondents adopting Types 2 (questioning) and 4 (experiential), reported developing the approach throughout the whole module. Overall, the results do indicate differences in when and how different types of critical approach are introduced in programmes.

In terms of the *costs* associated with adopting these critical approaches, it was Type 2 (questioning) that was perceived to incur costs by the largest proportion of respondents (63%). This proportion was even greater than that of Type 4 (experiential), for which the costs might be expected to be high because of the need to support live projects. However, the nature of the costs was remarkably similar across all four approach types, with 'maintenance', 'start up' and 'assessment' costs the most common, followed by 'increased contact hours' and 'financial' costs, respectively. There were also commonalities across the four approach types in the perceived *benefits* of their adoption, with 'encouragement of deeper thinking skills' and 'increased student enjoyment' being the most common. Beyond this, there were some interesting differences: for example, for Types 2 (questioning) and 3 (Critical Theory) many respondents rated 'distinguishes more clearly between strong and weak students' as a benefit, whilst in Type 1 (societal), 'fits with personal ethos' and 'greater teaching satisfaction' were common. The majority of respondents rated student reaction to these approaches as positive, particularly Type 4 (experiential). In terms of the reaction of colleagues to their efforts, respondents generally reported 'neutral' to 'supportive' reactions, with Type 3 (Critical Theory) registering the least

support. It is noteworthy that approximately 20% of respondents, on average, reported never discussing their teaching efforts with colleagues.

Respondents who stated that they had *not* adopted any of the critical approaches were asked what barriers prevented them doing so. The patterns of response across the four approaches were again remarkably similar, with ‘not appropriate for own module’, ‘practical (e.g. large class sizes)’ and ‘other demands on own time’ being the three most common barriers for all types. Thereafter, ‘lack of space in the curriculum’ and ‘not appropriate for undergraduate students’ were selected as barriers. Overall therefore, for most staff it is micro-level, practical difficulties that prevent adoption of critical approaches, although for a minority group, resistance seems to be based on more principled, deep-seated opposition. This is somewhat reinforced by responses to the final two questions of the survey where the *whole* sample was asked what the main barriers are to greater adoption of critical approaches, and the importance of these approaches in the broad context of undergraduate education (Table 3). Again, it was practical difficulties that were cited most often by respondents, and overall the majority (68%) rated critical approaches as either ‘important’ or ‘very important’ to undergraduate education. Nevertheless, a proportion of respondents with strongly negative perceptions was revealed. Specifically, 15% of the sample rated ‘inappropriate to or unimportant in curricula’ as one of the barriers to greater adoption, and 13% rated critical approaches overall as ‘very unimportant’. To explore these differences in perceptions further, we undertook multivariate analysis of the data, described in the next section.

## **Analysis of Survey Results**

As indicated by the descriptive results of the survey, areas of ambivalence existed in respondents' opinions about some key aspects of marketing education. Furthermore, although most respondents registered a positive disposition towards critical approaches in undergraduate marketing curricula, a small proportion conveyed quite strongly negative views about the importance of such approaches. In light of these apparent divergences in views, and the earlier proposition that educators' perceptions of specific teaching approaches may be linked to their broader opinions on education, we sought to examine whether a relationship existed between respondents' views on marketing education and their perceptions of critical approaches.

The analysis involved three steps. First, to examine the patterns of difference in respondents' views about marketing education, and to identify underlying dimensions that could explain any variations, factor analysis was performed on their ratings of the 18 statements in the second section of the questionnaire. Second, the mean factor scores were subjected to cluster analysis, to identify meaningful groupings of respondents based on their views of marketing education. The final step involved examining the responses of each cluster to questions on adoption of critical approaches and overall importance ratings of such approaches, to test for significant differences between the clusters. Overall, our tentative proposal was that respondents with a more theoretical orientation towards marketing education would take a more positive stance towards critical approaches, with the exception of the experiential learning approach, which we proposed would be more aligned with a practitioner orientation towards marketing education.

To undertake factor analysis on respondents' ratings of the 18 statements, the principle components extraction method was used (Hair et al., 1998), and the communalities of statements were examined to assess the extent to which each statement contributed to the explanation of the factors derived. A minimum communality level of 0.6 is normally deemed acceptable. In the initial analysis, four statements were found to have unsatisfactory communality levels ( $<0.5$ ). As a result, these were removed and the analysis re-conducted on the remaining 14 statements [2]. In this second analysis, three statements were found to have communality levels of  $<0.6$ . However, as it is undesirable to continue removing variables, and as all communalities were  $>0.5$ , these statements were retained. The analysis generated five factors by the eigenvalue criterion, altogether being found to explain 64.9% of the total variance (Table 4). Statements with high loadings on one factor are grouped together, and the loadings marked in bold type. Each factor represents an underlying attitude or position towards an aspect of marketing education, and may be interpreted as follows. As the statements loading high on the first factor all reflect an attitude that relevance to industry is important to marketing degrees, Factor 1 is named '*Industry Emphasis*'. In Factor 2, all the statements loading high reflect a preoccupation with the need for intellectual, academic challenge in marketing degrees, therefore it is named '*Academic Emphasis*'. In Factor 3, as the two statements loading high both imply a concern for students to be exposed to external perspectives and material in the real world, it is named '*External Emphasis*'. The fourth factor has two statements loading high on it, both of which indicate a belief in students taking an active role in programme development, hence Factor 4 is named '*Student Led Emphasis*'. Finally, the two statements loading high on Factor 5 both indicate a belief in the academic strength of existing marketing degrees, hence it is named '*Faith in Existing Rigour*'.

**Table 4. Factor loadings for respondents' ratings of statements on marketing education**

|  | Factor       |              |              |               |              |                  |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|------------------|
|  | 1            | 2            | 3            | 4             | 5            | h <sup>2</sup> * |
| The primary purpose of a marketing degree is to train students to become professional marketers  | <b>0.795</b> | 0.036        | -0.121       | 0.0011        | -0.009       | 0.648            |
| Ultimately, the best modules are where students apply their learning in a work related setting   | <b>0.764</b> | 0.041        | 0.096        | 0.087         | -0.047       | 0.587            |
| Marketing curricula should be developed and driven by the needs of industry  | <b>0.731</b> | -0.045       | 0.350        | -0.160        | 0.050        | 0.687            |
| Marketing degrees should have a predominantly practitioner orientation   | <b>0.659</b> | -0.121       | -0.002       | 0.276         | 0.225        | 0.575            |
| The success of a marketing degree can be judged primarily by how many of its graduates get top jobs in industry  | <b>0.628</b> | 0.074        | 0.508        | -0.249        | -0.079       | -0.727           |
| Assessments that require students to challenge, question or debate received wisdom are best  | 0.037        | <b>0.816</b> | 0.074        | -0.018        | -0.044       | 0.674            |
| At most undergraduate stages, textbooks alone are insufficient as essential reading material and need to be supplemented by journal articles             | -0.186       | <b>0.698</b> | 0.045        | 0.051         | 0.362        | 0.657            |
| Marketing degrees should be about exposing students to theories and getting them to think critically about them  | 0.074        | <b>0.612</b> | -0.238       | 0.384         | -0.047       | -0.587           |
| When students are involved in the development of marketing curricula, quality is generally improved  | 0.089        | 0.075        | <b>0.824</b> | 0.083         | -0.052       | 0.702            |
| On marketing degrees, educators should practice what they preach and treat students more like customers  | 0.038        | -0.136       | <b>0.637</b> | 0.055         | 0.323        | 0.533            |
| The internet has become more of a hindrance than a help to students preparing marketing assignments  | 0.024        | 0.063        | -0.229       | <b>-0.799</b> | -0.084       | 0.703            |
| Marketing curricula should contain more on the effects of marketing (e.g. on society and the environment), not just how to make marketing more effective | 0.087        | 0.349        | -0.131       | <b>0.716</b>  | -0.076       | 0.665            |
| Generally, marketing curricula impose the same degree of intellectual challenge on students as curricula of subjects such as psychology and economics    | 0.083        | 0.248        | 0.242        | 0.007         | <b>0.750</b> | 0.689            |
| The notion that marketing degrees should become academically 'purer' like degrees in psychology, sociology or economics, should be resisted              | 0.477        | -0.150       | -0.151       | 0.000         | <b>0.592</b> | 0.624            |
| Eigenvalue   | 2.873        | 1.786        | 1.704        | 1.483         | 1.241        |                  |
| Variance explained   | 20.518       | 12.757       | 12.712       | 10.50596      | 8.865        |                  |

\*h<sup>2</sup>=communality level



The next step in the analysis involved identifying whether respondents fell into meaningful groupings according to their factor scores. Cluster analysis was performed, according to the following procedure. First, aggregated mean factor scores were generated for all respondents, by calculating the average agreement score for each set of statements loading onto a factor. These aggregated mean factor scores were then used as the dependent variables in the cluster analysis, which ensured that the dependent variables were uncorrelated. A two stage analysis was performed. The first stage involved using a hierarchical analysis. This technique facilitates identification of the range of possible cluster solutions, and aids selection of the optimal solution for the analysis. Here, two and three cluster solutions were generated, but as the third cluster in the latter solution contained only five respondents, the two cluster solution was considered optimal. The second stage of the analysis was then run, employing the K-means optimization method to derive the two cluster solution. MANOVA tests subsequently performed on the clusters' factor scores and profile characteristics confirmed significant differences between the clusters ( $p < 0.001$ ). Table 5 presents the aggregated mean factor scores and selected profile characteristics for each cluster.

**Table 5. Mean factor scores and profiles for respondent clusters**

|   |           | <b>Cluster 1</b> | <b>Cluster 2</b> |
|---|-----------|------------------|------------------|
|   |           | 85 respondents   | 94 respondents   |
| Factor 1 ' <i>Industry Emphasis</i> '***        |           | 3.91             | 3.20             |
| Factor 2 ' <i>Academic Emphasis</i> '           |           | 4.09             | 3.99             |
| Factor 3 ' <i>Student Led Emphasis</i> '***     |           | 3.40             | 2.21             |
| Factor 4 ' <i>External Emphasis</i> '           |           | 3.35             | 3.46             |
| Factor 5 ' <i>Faith in Existing Rigour</i> '*** |           | 3.75             | 2.67             |
| Gender  | Male      | 45%              | 52%              |
|   | Female    | 55%              | 48%              |
| Age**   | <35       | 32%              | 18%              |
|   | 36-45     | 15%              | 37%              |
|   | 46-55     | 39%              | 30%              |
|   | >55       | 14%              | 15%              |
| Current position*                               | Professor | 12%              | 13%              |

|   |  |     |     |
|---|--|-----|-----|
|   | Reader   | 3%  | 3%  |
|   | Senior/Principal Lecturer                        | 24% | 36% |
|   | Lecturer A/B, Senior Teaching/Research Assistant | 53% | 48% |
|   |  | 8%  | 0%  |
| Where first qualified                       | Pre-1992 University                              | 67% | 76% |
|   | Post-1992 University                             | 23% | 22% |
|   | College or HE Institution                        | 9%  | 2%  |
|   | Other  | 1%  | 0%  |
| Worked ft or pt employment outside academia | Yes  | 84% | 76% |
|   | > 5 years (n=144)**                              | 73% | 49% |
| How perceive current role                   | Predominantly teaching                           | 48% | 31% |
|   | Predominantly research                           | 15% | 23% |
|   | Teaching & research equally                      | 37% | 46% |
| How often undertake consultancy**           | Frequently                                       | 34% | 14% |
|   | Occasionally                                     | 53% | 57% |
|   | Never  | 13% | 29% |
| *chi-squared = p<0.05                       |  |     |     |
| **chi-squared = p<0.01                      |  |     |     |
| ***chi-squared = p< 0.001                   |  |     |     |

ANOVA tests of the clusters' factor scores and profile characteristics revealed a number of significant differences between the two clusters, indicating that respondents are indeed distinguishable on the basis of their underlying views on marketing education. Specifically, chi-squared mean factor scores for clusters 1 and 2 reveal significant differences on Factor 1 '*Industry Emphasis*', Factor 3 '*Student Led Emphasis*' and Factor 5 '*Faith in Existing Rigour*'. Specifically, cluster 1 respondents were significantly more likely to agree that industry relevance should drive marketing degrees, that students should be treated like customers, and that current marketing degrees are academically rigorous. The lack of significant difference between the clusters on Factor 2 '*Academic Emphasis*' and Factor 4 '*External Emphasis*' indicates that respondents in both clusters agreed, with a similar degree of strength, that marketing degrees should be intellectually challenging to students, and that students be exposed to externally oriented material and perspectives.

In terms of respondents' profile, significant differences exist between clusters 1 and 2 on their current position (cluster 2 has a greater proportion of senior/principal

lecturers); consultancy activity (cluster 2 contains less respondents who have ‘frequently’ undertaken consultancy and more who ‘never’ do so); and work experience outside academia (cluster 2 contains less respondents who have worked for more than five years). Overall therefore, cluster 1 is characterised by respondents who tend to agree with drives towards industry relevance and customer orientation in marketing education. They are more likely to be in career grade positions, have longer term work experience outside academia, and engage more frequently in consultancy activities than cluster 2. In contrast, cluster 2 respondents, on average, are less positively oriented towards industry relevance drives and disagree with treating students as customers. They are more likely to hold senior appointments and to have an academic emphasis in their past and present work activities.

The final step in the analysis involved testing for significant differences between clusters 1 and 2 in terms of their perceptions and experiences of critical approaches. As cluster 2 respondents appeared less oriented towards industry relevance and more concerned about existing academic rigour of marketing degrees, our tentative expectation was that these respondents would be more likely to have adopted critical approaches in practice, and to perceive such approaches as very important in the curriculum. The exception, we proposed, would be experiential approaches (Type 4), because of their more obvious affinity with work-related learning and therefore with the orientation of cluster 1 respondents. Table 6 gives the results.

**Table 6. Respondents’ experiences and perceptions of critical approaches, by cluster (n=179)**

|  |                                    |     | <b>Cluster 1<br/>%</b> | <b>Cluster 2<br/>%</b> |
|--|------------------------------------|-----|------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Type 1. Encouraging students to reflect on the relationship between marketing and society</b> | Have you ever taken this approach? | Yes | 75%                    | 72%                    |
|  |                                    | No  | 25%                    | 28%                    |

|  |   |   |                               |                                |
|--|---|---|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
|  |   |   |                               |                                |
| <b>Type 2. Encouraging students to take a questioning, challenging approach to material</b>                        | Have you ever taken this approach?            | Yes<br>No   | 66%<br>34%                    | 59%<br>41%                     |
| <b>Type 3. Introducing students to a Critical Theory perspective on marketing topics</b>                           | Have you ever taken this approach?            | Yes<br>No   | 38%<br>62%                    | 29%<br>71%                     |
| <b>Type 4. Giving students the opportunity to 'learn by doing', for example, simulation games or project work</b>  | Have you ever taken this approach?<br>(n=160) | Yes<br>No   | 79%<br>21%                    | 71%<br>29%                     |
| <b>Overall, how important are these types of learning in the broad context of marketing education?<br/>(n=155)</b> |   | V. unimportant<br>Unimportant<br>Neither unimpt. nor impt.<br>Important<br>V. important | 15%<br>4%<br>9%<br>44%<br>28% | 14%<br>5%<br>16%<br>41%<br>24% |

Table 6 shows that, contrary to expectations, the experiences and perceptions of the two clusters were very similar. In particular, the proportion of respondents in both clusters having adopted Types 1 (societal) and 4 (experiential) were almost identical. The greatest difference between the clusters was on Type 3 (Critical Theory), although contrary to expectations it was cluster 1 that contained the greatest proportion of respondents taking this approach. However an ANOVA test confirmed the difference was not significant. Perceptions of the overall importance of critical approaches were also remarkably similar, with the majority of respondents in both clusters rating critical approaches either important or very important. Again, an ANOVA test confirmed no significant differences between the clusters on this issue.

To summarise therefore, the survey analysis found that respondents fell into two distinct groupings according to their perceptions of the purpose and orientation of undergraduate marketing education. One grouping, characterised by individuals holding career grade positions and exhibiting quite high levels of engagement with

industry, tended to approve of drives towards industry relevance and ‘students as customers’, and was optimistic about current levels of academic rigour in marketing programmes. The second grouping, which contained more senior academics who exhibited less engagement with industry, tended to dislike drives towards industry relevance and customer orientation, and was pessimistic about standards of rigour. With respect to critical teaching approaches however, both groupings professed similar levels of engagement across all types, and also perceived their overall importance to a similar level. Contrary to expectations therefore, the results imply no direct relationship between UK educators’ perceptions and experiences of critical approaches and their wider views about marketing education.

## **Discussion**

In this section, we draw together the key results from the empirical research and consider their implications for the on-going ‘theory vs practice’ and ‘rigour vs relevance’ debates in marketing, as well as calls for more adoption of critical approaches in education.

As highlighted in the opening sections of this paper, opposing and at times impassioned views are expressed in the marketing community about the extent to which scholarship and education should be oriented towards theory or practice (e.g. Piercy, 2002; Holbrook, 1985; Evans et al., 2002; Burton, 2005). This study has revealed strong echoes of these opposing positions amongst UK marketing educators, most notably through the identification of two distinct groupings, one practitioner oriented and the other academic oriented. Therefore the results indicate, for the first time, that it is not just a vocal minority that holds strong views on the purpose and

orientation of marketing education, and by inference, the wider discipline. 'Theory vs practice' issues are the subject of quite deeply held personal beliefs for a large number of educators, and also the source of divided opinions. In addition, the research also reveals, for the first time, that educators' views on such issues are linked to their personal backgrounds and profiles, as the survey found that individuals in the practitioner oriented grouping tended to have more extensive industry experience and engagement compared with the 'purer' academic background and research preoccupations of those in the academic oriented grouping. As marketing is a discipline that attracts educators and scholars from both academic and industry career paths, this may help to explain why the 'theory vs practice' debate is enduring and intense, as protagonists of the alternative positions base their arguments on educational and employment experiences that may differ greatly from each other.

The results of this study also make a contribution to 'rigour vs relevance' debates in marketing. In particular, it is noteworthy that both the academic *and* practitioner oriented groupings in the survey felt, to the same degree, that academic rigour is a priority in marketing education, despite being divided on the merits of developments such as increased industry engagement. Therefore, it is not the case that one grouping of educators is more preoccupied with academic rigour compared with the other. Rather, each grouping has a different view on the best educational approach to achieve the similarly held priority of rigour: one favouring work-related learning and practical skill development as the best route (Pearce and Bonner, 2000; Davis *et al.*, 2002; Evans *et al.*, 2002), the other preferring a more traditional 'social science' approach (Burton, 2005; Holbrook, 2005; Molesworth and Scullion, 2005). In addition, the results relating to perceptions of current levels of academic rigour are

intriguing, with the practitioner oriented grouping being positive about this, and the academic oriented grouping negative. One explanation is that educators in both groupings see a trend towards practitioner approaches in marketing programmes, for example via increased industry engagement. For those in the practitioner oriented grouping, such moves would give confidence about improvements in academic standards, because they accord with these educators' beliefs about the best route to rigour. For those in the academic grouping however, such moves could be seen as a threat to academic standards, as they erode the status and role of more traditional academic programme elements that these respondents feel are most strongly linked to rigour.

The research also sought to contribute understanding of how critical approaches to teaching and learning are perceived and adopted. In practice, the majority of both interview participants and survey respondents perceived such approaches as important, and also reported adopting at least one form in their own teaching and learning. This suggests that calls for greater adoption of critical approaches are indeed being heeded by UK marketing educators. Furthermore, although critical approaches were associated with a range of practical costs in delivery, they were also linked to numerous benefits and rewards, confirming the arguments of advocates such as Catterall *et al.* (2002), Braun (2004) and Celuch and Slama (1998). Contrary to expectations however, no significant differences were found between the two educator groupings with respect to their perceptions and experiences of critical approaches. This was surprising, as the academic grouping was expected to exhibit more experience of critical approaches (at least for Types 1-3), given the particular scholarly origins of such approaches. One explanation could be that educators take

different approaches to the ‘adoption’ of a critical approach. For example, for the survey respondents who reported adopting approach Type 3 (Critical Theory), those in the practitioner grouping may have done so by encouraging students to debate bribery or sexism in the context of a project case study, whereas those in the academic grouping may have introduced students to texts by the ‘big names’ in critical theory. Therefore, it is possible for critical approaches – even those most associated with the scholarly tradition of critical marketing – to be adopted in ways that accord with the wider teaching preoccupations and interests of different educators, including those with a practitioner orientation. This result may be viewed as a positive affirmation of the applicability of critical approaches across the spectrum of educators, rather than the rarified preserve of one particular type of scholar.

## **Conclusions**

To conclude, we reflect first on what the results imply for the role and status of critical approaches in undergraduate marketing education, and then for future developments in wider marketing education and scholarship. In practice, it seems that despite educators apparently heeding the calls to adopt more critical approaches, such approaches tend to be most commonly introduced at final year level, and often are not developed fully throughout a module or course. This suggests that they generally have the status of a perspective or method that is ‘added on’ to more traditional teaching and learning approaches. As a result, students may be missing out on their full benefits because, following the arguments of some advocates, critical perspectives require quite radical re-thinking of curricula to develop satisfactorily. Therefore, a key recommendation from this research is that future curricula are designed to embed critical perspectives and thinking from an early stage, making these a more explicit



and dedicated feature of the transferable skills package to students than is currently the case. Some institutions are now re-shaping their degrees to take account of such concerns. Future research needs to investigate how educators in such institutions feel about these developments and the extent to which they bring the anticipated benefits of a full critical approach that advocates propose.

In terms of implications for future developments in wider marketing education and scholarship, the quite strong divergences revealed in respondents' views on 'theory vs practice' and 'rigour vs relevance' issues could be viewed negatively, as the sign of a divided and uncertain disciplinary community, set in entrenched positions. However, this overlooks the fact that in the exploratory interviews, where participants were able to explain and qualify their views in more depth, optimal programmes tended to be seen as those offering a balance of both theoretical and practical elements, regardless of the personal teaching preferences of the interviewees themselves. This suggests the existence of more open-mindedness and readiness to accept diversity in the marketing community. Nevertheless, imbalances can perpetuate in any discipline where polarised positions exist on fundamental questions of disciplinary purpose and orientation, and where the perspectives of one position traditionally has taken precedence in terms of career progression, control of publication outlets, and so forth. Note, for example, that in the current study significantly more educators belonging to the academic oriented grouping held senior positions compared with the practitioner grouping, which implies some linkage between career progression and espousal of certain views on the 'theory vs practice' debate.

The results of the current research imply that one way to move forward in the on-going debates is to undertake deeper, more focused examination of how educators and academics interpret pivotal concepts, such as the concept of rigour. This study found that educators across the spectrum overwhelmingly aspire to rigour, but hold different views on how it should be achieved. This raises questions about what educators in one position assume is or is *not* rigorous about the alternative position – clearly different interpretations and assumptions are being made, yet to date they have been poorly circumscribed and analysed. Thus, future research should investigate the strengths and weaknesses that are assumed to accompany ‘theoretical’ and ‘practical’ forms of teaching and learning, and what the bases of these assumptions are. Such investigation of these concepts in the sphere of marketing education may usefully cross-over into in the domain of scholarship, to give a more holistic perspective of their interpretation and usage in the marketing discipline as a whole.

## Notes

[1] These insights into interviewee background contrast with other management disciplines such as accounting and finance, where at least 58% of academics have subject-related qualifications (Beattie and Goodacre, 2004).

[2] These were “*it is important to deliver material that students expect, in a format that they expect*” (0.339); “*experience of working in industry, rather than academic research, equips marketing educators best*” (0.434); “*multimedia teaching packages have raised the standard of undergraduate marketing education*” (0.467); and “*marketing degrees with a high proportion of affiliated teaching staff are generally superior to those with a low proportion*” (0.469).

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