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Marketing accountability and marketing's stature: An examination of senior executive perspectives

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ABSTRACT

The recovery of marketing's "seat at the boardroom table" is determined in part by the satisfaction of senior executives with marketing's contribution to firm performance. This study of senior executives in high-technology firms examines the relationship between top management perceptions of marketing performance measurement ability and marketing's stature within the firm. Confirming and extending earlier studies, results indicate that marketing enjoys a higher status among top management when it is perceived to be accountable. Findings underpin the importance of current research attention on marketing accountability and metrics.

1. Introduction

As a response to calls for research on marketing performance measurement (MPM) (e.g., Rust et al., 2004a), this study is underpinned by the increased pressure that practitioners are experiencing to account for marketing's contribution (Gupta and Zeithaml, 2006). Webster et al. (2005) observe that marketing has greatest stature and influence in firms where there are clear measures of marketing's contribution. Notwithstanding the significance of the relationship between marketing and other areas of the business, no studies have directly considered whether improved accountability actually contributes to marketing regaining its "seat at the table" (Webster et al., 2005). While recent studies (e.g., O'Sullivan and Abela, 2007; O'Sullivan et al., 2009) examine the issue from the perspective of senior marketers – evidence from top management – the audience we are meant to be accountable to – is both sparse and imperative (Verhoef and Leeflang, 2009). The perspectives of non-marketing senior executives are therefore examined in the current study.

Few studies have explored the aspects of marketing performance of interest to senior executives, or their views of the measures used to assess marketing performance (for a notable exception, see Ambler et al., 2004a). Furthermore, no studies have been undertaken to determine whether marketers and other senior managers have a common understanding of what marketing performance measures are important, or the challenges to be addressed in measuring performance. The distinctive contribution of this study is the comparative dimension that combines the perspectives of marketing and non-marketing senior executives.

While there is broad agreement as to the relationship between greater accountability and the stature of marketing, there is less consensus regarding what to measure and how to measure marketing performance (O'Sullivan and Abela, 2007). On the issue of what to measure, there are two general conceptualisations of marketing performance measurement. First, it is the measurement of the performance impact of marketing – viewed as a firm orientation. Second, it is understood as measurement of the contribution of the marketing function or department (Bonoma, 1989). Even if consideration is limited to this latter, narrower view of marketing, consensus is difficult to discern given the debate as to the role of marketing within the firm (e.g., Grigoriou, 2000; Webster et al., 2005; Zyman, 1999).

On the issue of how to measure marketing performance, the focus of research to date has been on identifying metrics in use (Ambler et al., 2004; Barwise and Farley, 2003); measuring marketing performance (Morgan et al., 2002; Rust et al., 2004b; Sevin, 1965); and measuring brand and customer equity (e.g., Aaker and Jacobson, 2001; Dyson and Farr, 1996; Keller, 1993; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Park and Srinivasan, 1994; Simon and Sullivan, 1993). Consequently, there is little consensus as to what activities should be included in the measurement of marketing performance.

A broad array of metrics has been deployed over several decades, including financial and non-financial measures (O'Sullivan and Abela, 2007). However, Clark (1999, 2000) notes that while the development of multidimensional measures has been fruitful for researchers, these same measures have proven impractical for marketers who are unable to implement successively more

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complicated measurement schemes. Ambler and Kokkinaki (1997) concur, observing that research on marketing performance is relevant only to the extent that the firm's objectives and those chosen by the researcher as dependant variables coincide. Similarly, others (Ogbonna and Harris, 2002; Morgan et al., 2002) have called for further research to bridge this gap between theoretical and managerial understandings of performance measurement. Reflecting this situation, the MPM ability scale developed by O'Sullivan and Abela (2007) is extended to capture the views of non-marketing senior mangers. A primary focus of the current study is determining whether the model proposed by O'Sullivan and Abela (2007), which links marketing performance measurement ability and marketing stature, is confirmed in a study of non-marketing senior executives (the original study looked only at senior marketers).

2. The study: setting, model, measures and sample

2.1. Research setting

The research setting is Chief Marketing Officers (CMOs) and senior executives in high-tech firms. This responds to demands for context-specific studies to deepen existing knowledge of the contingencies that affect the measurement of marketing performance. The high-tech sector is appropriate for a study of this kind for several reasons. First, the intense pressure to demonstrate the contribution of marketing to firm performance is recognised (Mohr and Shooshtari, 2003). Second, marketing's stature tends to be lower in high-tech firms (Davies and Brush, 1997); because firms in this sector tend to be engineering-dominated, marketing consistently struggles to establish its value and contribution (Mohr and Shooshtari, 2003). Finally, data from high-tech firms allows comparison with findings from previous work in the sector on the relationship between accountability and marketing stature (O'Sullivan and Abela, 2007).

2.2. Measures

Consistent with the recommendations of Malhotra (1996) and Churchill (1979) on scale development, expert screening was undertaken to capture the views of the CMO Council's MPM Steering Committee throughout the development of the survey instrument. Subsequently, each scale was piloted with a sample of non-marketing senior managers to test for completeness and comprehension. Four key issues were addressed: the stature of marketing among non-marketing executives; ability to measure marketing performance; the relative importance of sources of information for marketing performance; and perceived challenges to marketing performance measurement.

2.2.1. Marketing's stature

Marketing's stature is operationalised as senior executives' assessment of marketing's contribution to the business. Respondents were asked "How satisfied are you with marketing's contribution to the achievement of your company's business objectives?" The seven-point response scale was anchored by "very dissatisfied" and "very satisfied".

2.2.2. Marketing performance measurement ability

MPM ability was assessed using the 15 item scale proposed by O'Sullivan and Abela (2007). These items assess two aspects of MPM – activities and metrics. "Activities" assesses the ability to measure performance of a range of marketing activities. "Metrics" assesses the ability to assess marketing performance using an array of measures such as financial and non-financial. Overall MPM ability is the summed mean of these two subscales.

2.2.3. Relative importance of sources of information for measuring marketing performance

The relative importance of various sources of information for the measurement of marketing performance was ascertained by asking respondents to rate 19 items on a seven-point scale from "unimportant" to "very important".

2.2.4. Challenges to marketing performance measurement

Ten challenges for marketing performance measurement were identified based on a review of the literature and from preliminary interviews with marketers and senior executives. Respondents' assessments of the extent to which these factors were a challenge to marketing performance measurement within their firm were captured on a seven-point scale anchored by "unimportant" and "very important".

Following O'Sullivan and Abela (2007), two profiling questions related to firm size and age were included to allow for a finer level of analysis. Firm size is operationalised as the firm's annual revenue. Firm age is measured as the number of years the firm has been in business.

2.3. Sample

The study was undertaken in the USA. The sample frame was the membership of the Chief Marketing Officers Council, a US-based organisation for senior executives. For the purpose of this study, the sample was limited to members from high-tech firms. In the first phase, a survey questionnaire was administered online to 810 marketing executives by email notification. This was followed fourteen days later by a reminder email to non-respondents. Each email contained an embedded link to the survey. Total usable response was 214, representing a response rate of 26.4%. This response rate was highly satisfactory given that rates ranging from 12% to 20% are considered acceptable for cross-sectional samples (Churchill, 1979; Kohli and Jaworski, 1992). Survey responses were collected over a four-week period, a duration which is consistent with previous research (e.g., Wygant and Lindorf, 1999). After that time the sample frame was extended to a number of additional channels, most notably the BusinessWeek research panel. This produced an additional 288 responses. These additional responses comprised 98 CMOs and 190 senior executives, giving a total of 312 CMOs and 190 other senior executives.

3. Results

Results are presented as follows. First summary statistics are presented on senior executive perspectives of their firm's ability to measure marketing performance and on their satisfaction with marketing's contribution. Here the focus is on differences between senior marketers and non-marketing senior executives. Next, the relationship between marketing performance measurement ability and marketing's stature is considered. Next, variation in satisfaction with marketing performance measurement between senior marketers and other senior executives is assessed. This phase of the analysis considers whether satisfaction with marketing's contribution varies across the senior management team. Then, the priority that executives place on marketing metrics is analysed. Finally differences in executive assessment of the MPM challenges facing firms are considered. To focus more clearly on the main research issues, results variously split respondents between marketers and non-marketers or between non-marketing senior executives and CEOs.

3.1. Marketing performance measurement ability and marketing's stature

The mean for the entire sample was 4.75 on a seven-point scale. This is an evaluation that could reasonably be described as no more than moderate. The implications for marketing's influence based on how the function is perceived are discussed later. Marketing's stature was highest among CEOs and CFOs (mean = 5.01 and 5.07, respectively). Marketing's stature was lowest among Chief Sales Officers, Chief Information Officers and Chief Technical Officers (mean = 4.49, 4.48 and 4.37, respectively). Between-group comparison indicated that CEO and CFO assessment of marketing's contribution was significantly higher than for the rest of the executive team.

The satisfaction of non-marketing executives with their firm's ability to measure marketing performance was also assessed on a seven-point scale. Data in Table 1 show the divergence of views between those of the CMO and those of other non-marketing senior executives.

The first notable finding is that across the fifteen marketing activities examined, CMOs rate marketing performance measurement ability higher than the rest of the senior management team. As a source of tension between marketers and other managers relating to firm strategy, this is revealing.

For marketing specialists the ability to measure direct mail/email campaigns and website and internet presence scored highest with respective means of 4.78 and 4.60 on the seven-point scale. Non-marketing executives report highest levels of satisfaction for ability to measure web site and internet presence (mean = 4.38). *t*-Tests comparing satisfaction with ability to measure between CMOs and other senior executives were significant for direct marketing and telemarketing.

The activities for which both senior executives and CMOs rated their firm's performance measurement ability lowest were advertising and branding. While these are particularly complex to evaluate and control, branding and advertising communications are generally elevated in the literature as critical elements in strategic marketing and this finding must warrant further attention by researchers and practitioners alike. In effect, both CMOs and other executives view the more strategic dimensions of marketing as being the most difficult to measure. Conversely, those activities for which measurement ability is perceived as relatively higher – direct/email campaigns, website and internet presence – may be regarded as less strategic. Further, marketing budgets have progressively been directed towards those activities that are perceived to be most measurable.

3.2. Relative importance of sources of information and challenges in MPM

The variation between the perspectives of marketing and non-marketing executives regarding the relative importance of different sources of information for MPM are presented in Table 2. Responses indicate the prioritisation by CMOs of feedback from sales/channels and of revenue generated when assessing marketing performance. Leads generated, leads converted and campaign ROI also rate relatively high among CMOs. In contrast, other senior managers rate MPM information sources related to customer retention, loyalty and satisfaction as being most important when it comes to measuring their firms' marketing performance.

The lowest scoring sources of information for performance measures for both CMOs and non-marketing senior executives are stock prices and Wall Street reports. Word-of-mouth, customer retention loyalty and satisfaction and organisational enthusiasm were each rated higher in terms of importance by the senior executives than by CMOs; all other measures are ranked higher by the CMOs.

As indicated in Table 2, there were significant differences in the importance attributed by marketing and non-marketing executives regarding analyst influence, word-of-mouth, share of mind, cus-

Table 1
Satisfaction with ability to measure performance of marketing activities.

	CMO mean	CMO Std. deviation	Snr exec mean	Snr exec Std. deviation	*t*-Test
Marketing planning	3.65	1.77	3.50	1.77	0.97
Branding	3.23	1.81	3.11	1.76	0.73
Advertising	3.27	1.86	3.34	1.69	0.40
Direct mail/email campaigns	4.78	1.79	4.25	1.93	3.16*
Telemarketing and contact management	4.27	1.85	3.78	1.93	2.81*
Website and internet presence	4.60	1.58	4.38	1.74	1.43
Trade shows and events	4.05	1.77	3.93	1.72	0.79
Promotions	3.59	1.75	3.52	1.66	0.51
Sales and marketing collateral	3.24	1.62	3.27	1.50	0.23
PR and internal communications	3.95	1.72	3.85	1.72	0.59
Analyst and stakeholder relations	3.50	1.83	3.66	1.77	0.94
Channel marketing	3.24	1.80	3.27	1.70	0.19
CRM systems	3.28	1.90	3.57	1.70	1.10
Market research	3.33	1.83	3.40	1.74	0.41
Budgeting	4.29	1.87	4.22	1.78	0.39

1 = very dissatisfied, 7 = very satisfied.
* <0.05.

Table 2
Relative importance of sources of information for MPM: CMOs and senior executives.

	CMO mean	Std. dev	Snr exec mean	Std. dev	*t*-Test
Market share	4.39	2.30	4.61	2.14	1.10
Category position	4.78	2.14	4.69	1.96	−0.45
Feedback from sales and channel	5.25	1.93	5.19	1.75	−0.35
Qualified leads generated	5.54	1.97	5.32	1.82	−1.23
Qualified leads converted	5.38	2.06	5.39	1.81	0.02
Revenue generated	5.96	1.92	5.70	1.95	−1.45
Marketing program cost	5.07	1.92	5.09	1.66	0.090
Marketing program ROI	5.39	1.99	5.40	1.76	0.05*
Brand equity measures	3.65	2.01	3.81	1.88	0.88
Press coverage	4.59	1.93	4.61	1.78	0.11
Analyst influence	4.46	2.15	3.99	1.99	−2.45*
Website traffic and content viewing	4.63	1.93	4.75	1.73	0.71
Word-of-mouth and customer referral rates	4.50	2.01	5.17	1.84	3.76***
Share-of-mind and share-of-discussion audits	3.34	1.92	4.06	1.88	4.13***
Customer retention loyalty and satisfaction	5.32	2.06	5.73	1.72	2.31*
Organisational enthusiasm and cultural affinity	3.86	2.13	4.76	1.89	4.81***
Benchmarking surveys and perception studies	3.64	1.85	3.75	1.80	0.65
Competitive intelligence tracking	4.25	2.04	4.19	1.85	−0.32
Stock price	2.65	2.38	2.64	2.16	−0.06
Wall Street reports	2.90	2.28	2.54	1.95	−1.84

* <0.05.
*** <0.001.

Table 3
Perceived challenges to measuring marketing performance – CMOs and senior executive perspectives.

Challenge	CMO mean	CMO Std. deviation	Snr exec mean	Snr exec Std. deviation	*t*-Test
Linking customer response to individual marketing programs	4.84	2.16	4.51	2.12	−1.71
Availability of effective tools to capture and analyse results	4.81	2.10	4.71	1.82	−0.55
Budget to measure marketing performance	4.32	2.13	4.39	1.95	0.39
Availability of personnel to implement MPM	4.31	2.10	4.48	1.81	0.90
Performance measurement expertise	4.19	2.03	4.47	1.73	1.61
Availability of reliable data and information sources	4.87	2.06	4.89	1.74	0.11
Securing stakeholder buy-in and involvement	3.77	2.10	4.13	1.95	1.90
Identification of a core set of relevant metrics	4.41	2.10	4.79	1.72	2.12*
Securing senior management participation and commitment	4.19	2.22	4.47	2.11	1.42
Building trust in MPM metrics as valid measures of marketing performance	4.53	2.15	4.74	1.90	1.13

1 = unimportant, 7 = very important.
* <0.05.

tomer retention and loyalty, and organisational enthusiasm. The relative importance of each of the criteria for measuring marketing performance also varied significantly by firm size. Respondents from larger firms (as measured by annual revenue) tended to attribute a greater level of importance to each of the performance criteria. A hierarchy of information priorities for marketing performance may be discerned from these data. It is clear from the findings that in assessing marketing performance, senior executives in high-tech firms give primacy to marketing's direct contribution to the sales effort: revenues generated, feedback from sales and channels, and leads generated and converted are all directly connected with sales activity. The critical observation is that this prioritisation is coming from CMOs rather than non-marketing executives. Such a focus on marketing's sales support role is striking when compared to the broader range of performance measures advocated within the marketing literature (e.g., Clark, 2001; Rust et al., 2004b). While the findings here provide an insight into current perspectives in MPM, they also give an indication of the role of marketing within high-tech firms. The strong indication is that, contrary to the academic debate on marketing's broadened role, high-tech firms appear to see marketing in relatively narrow, sales-oriented terms. Or at least, they see the role of the marketing department in narrow terms.

The perspectives of respondents on the MPM challenges firms face are presented in Table 3. In terms of the importance of each challenge, both CMOs and other executives regard the availability of reliable data and information sources as the primary issue for MPM, with respective means of 4.87 and 4.89. The coincidence of concern with data and source reliability by both groups of respondents suggests an apprehension surrounding the integrity of both marketing performance metrics and the marketing performance measurement process. Further analysis to uncover the reasons for this is necessary. For example, it may be postulated that it is a sector-specific phenomenon reflecting fast-moving and changing business models in the high-tech arena rather than a commonly held position.

It is notable that CMOs perceive each MPM challenge as more important than their fellow executives. This may reflect their experience with the difficulties of MPM, and a concomitant relative naivety among non-marketers regarding the extent of the challenges involved. The greatest divergence is in the magnitude of the challenge of identifying a core set of relevant metrics, where marketers average 4.41 and other senior executives average 4.79. It would appear from this evidence that marketers underestimate the challenge of determining an acceptable set of metrics to be used in assessing marketing performance.

Paradoxically, the least challenging MPM issue – as perceived by CMOs – is in securing stakeholder buy-in and involvement. On the face of it, this finding indicates that marketing executives are relatively more confident about garnering the support of other managers for their work in this area than they are about the sources of data and the people and techniques to interrogate them. While rating the challenge higher (4.13 versus 3.77) non-marketing senior executives also see this issue as being the lowest of the surveyed challenges.

3.3. Testing the relationship between MPM ability and satisfaction with marketing's contribution

To isolate the key challenges and underlying factors, the data were subjected to exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation. A factor loading of 0.4 was set as the cut-off to establish themes and labels for the factors. This is consistent with previous studies (e.g., Freeman and Lessiter, 2003) and is the statistically significant level for a sample of this size (Watson and Hogart-Scott, 2003). In deciding which items would be used to compute a "factor score", Bedford's criterion of a primary loading being at least 0.2 greater than any cross-loading was also applied (Bedford, 1997).

Consistent with the recommendations of Gerbing and Anderson (1988), following exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis was used to further evaluate and refine the resulting scales. As part of this analysis, it was specified that two factors should be extracted rather than allowing for an unforced selection of factors. The resultant two factors explained 67% of the total variance. Varimax rotation identified the same factor structure as arrived at by the exploratory analysis. The two factors are labelled as follows:

Factor 1: Resources (six items): securing and effectively deploying resources to measure marketing performance ($\alpha = 0.879$).

Factor 2: Involvement (four items): gaining buy-in and trust of senior management ($\alpha = 0.873$).

Analysis of variation in the measurement and communications challenge indicate that each varies significantly by firm size. Perhaps unsurprisingly, larger companies rate each of the two factors more highly. In addition, there is significant variation between non-marketing senior executive roles regarding the extent to which the communication factor presents a challenge their firm's marketing performance measurement ($df = 4187, f = 3.55^{**}$). Comparing mean ranking of the communication challenge, CIOs, CTOs and CSOs attribute a higher rating to the communication challenge (5.12, 5.11 and 4.70, respectively) than do CMOs, CEOs and CFOs (4.34, 4.44 and 4.11, respectively). Interestingly, there is no evidence of significant variation by job title in perception of the degree to which the measurement factor presents a challenge. We take this as evidence that CMOs, CEOs and CFOs may underestimate the difficulty of selling marketing performance measurement and metrics to other members of the senior management team.

The critical relationship between ability to measure marketing performance and the stature (and therefore influence) of marketing is tested here as a function of the perceptions of non-marketing executives. Marketing stature is operationalised as the satisfaction of senior executives with marketing's contribution to firm performance. In O'Sullivan and Abela (2007), CMO's perceptions of CEO satisfaction was measured. Here, the study extends O'Sullivan and Abela (2007) to examine the perceptions of other non-marketing corporate officers and the satisfaction question is put to them directly.

Scales displayed good reliability; in all cases alpha exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). For completeness, tests for scale reliability and discriminant validity were undertaken for both the CMO sample and the senior executive sample. As the average variance extracted for each construct was greater than 0.5, which is the recommended threshold (Hair et al., 1998). In addition, the average variance extracted for each construct is higher than the squared correlation between that construct and any other construct. Following Fornell and Larcker (1981), we take this as evidence that discriminant validity does not appear to be a problem.

In Table 4 (Panel A) the findings from senior executives are shown to be are consistent with findings from the earlier study on CMOs. That is, MPM ability is significantly associated with senior executive satisfaction with marketing.

For a comparison with the O'Sullivan and Abela (2007) study focusing on CMOs' perception of CEO satisfaction with marketing, the analysis was repeated looking only at CEO respondents. The results hold for the CEO sub-sample. That is, CEO evaluations of their firms' ability to measure marketing performance is a significant predictor of CEO satisfaction with marketing. Results are presented in Table 4 (Panel A) column 2.

Following O'Sullivan and Abela (2007), next hierarchical regression was used to consider the impact of activities and metrics on satisfaction with marketing's contribution. This analysis was undertaken both for the full sample of senior executives and again to allow a closer comparison with the original study for the CEO sub-sample. As here the primary focus of attention is on whether metrics are incrementally informative over and above the impact of activities, the variables are entered into the model in two stages.

Table 4
Impact of MPM ability on senior executive satisfaction with marketing.

	Senior executive satisfaction		CEO satisfaction	
Panel A				
Model statistics				
Adjusted R^2	0.245		0.209	
F-Statistic	62.261		22.94	
d.f.	1188		1,82	
p-Value	<0.001		<0.001	
Final predictors	b	(t)	b	(t)
MPM	0.567	(7.891)***	0.497	(4.79)***
Panel B				
Model statistics				
Adjusted R^2	0.246		0.146	
F-Statistic	3.272		15.151	
d.f.	2, 187		1,82	
p-Value	<0.001		<0.001	
Final predictors	b[a]	(t)[b]	b	(t)
Activities	0.397	(3.806)***	3.166	(6.457)***
Metrics	0.209	(2.842)**	0.256	

[a] Standardized coefficients.
[b] t refers to the t-statistic for the estimated coefficients.
** $p < 0.01$.
*** $p < 0.001$.

First, activities and then metrics are included. As can be seen from the right-hand column of Table 4 (Panel B), for senior mangers as a whole metrics is incrementally informative. However, for the CEO sub-sample, metrics is not incrementally informative. Consequently, results for activities alone are presented in the right-hand panel of the table. While findings for CEOs are consistent with the earlier study in so far as metrics are not incrementally informative in a model containing metrics, findings for the full sample of senior mangers run counter to the original study.

4. Discussion

The real implications for marketing of the global financial crisis triggered in late 2008 will be revealed over time. Practitioners, observers and scholars will grapple with the shock of the unanticipated scale of change in markets, and the challenges of developing appropriate strategies relevant to new environmental conditions. Both theory and practice are impacted by these events. For marketing theory, the economic crisis has prompted a review of those business models that contributed to the crisis, and a search for effective models to replace them. The magnitude of the crisis indicates a multifaceted re-evaluation of assumptions, resource and asset deployment models and control mechanisms. For marketing practice, the immediacy of the impacts of market change for business organisations has been stark: shareholder value across multiple sectors has plunged, market relationships and networks have been destroyed, carefully planned strategies have been abandoned, and access to resources for survival has moved to the top of the corporate agenda.

In the context of business pressures activated by economic calamity, the fight for scarce resources to support business initiatives becomes critical. In contrast to the relatively easy access to credit that characterised the business expansion in developed economies in recent years, executives will find budgeting more complex. While budgeting is about resource planning, it may also be understood as a corporate political process in which some ideas triumph over others in securing the support of the organisation. It is in this context that marketing executives will increasingly face the intellectual and pragmatic challenges of their non-marketing peers. Claims on scarce and expensive firm resources for marketing will be decided in the context of its stature among non-marketing senior executives, and against competing claims for support from other areas of the business. Thus, marketing's relative stature and influence becomes especially critical when the entire business is under immediate and significant pressure. Of significant relevance, then, is how a collective understanding by senior corporate officers of marketing's contribution to firm performance could contribute to support for marketing initiatives and proposals; the analysis of marketing performance measurement ability here underpins this ultimate question of stature and influence.

Consensus in business is more likely to exist where evidence trumps opinion. However, there is considerable diversity of perspective, evidence and opinion within the marketing literature itself. This is borne out in matters of the definition and domain of marketing, in market orientation, in marketing strategy and in operational activities. This condition may be explained by the evolving understanding of the field, the continuous flow of research findings that challenge existing positions, and the enquiries of scholars and practitioners from multiple backgrounds bringing their distinctive viewpoints to the field. To date, this has largely been an internal discussion. It should not be surprising that there might also be a diversity of views about marketing from beyond the marketing community or academy. So, an understanding of perceptions of what marketing is and what marketing ought to be from outside of marketing would be useful. Capturing the commonalities and diversity would therefore constitute a meaningful contribution to understanding marketing's evolving role.

The marketing literature has multiple, albeit often overlapping, audiences and stakeholders. Among these are academics, educators, practitioners, public policy-makers and others. An important stream within the marketing literature specifically addresses one particular stakeholder – the shareholder. In the burgeoning literature connecting marketing to firm performance and shareholder value, the focus is predominantly on the shareholder and the CMO's role in that relationship. That literature has been elevated in recent years as the marketing academy has sought to put right the charge that marketing's inability to account for its performance has reduced the stature and influence of marketing among the executive team, and lost the discipline its place at the boardroom table.

One important stakeholder, whose views on marketing have been largely ignored in research terms, is the collective of other senior corporate officers. These include the Chief Executive Officer, the Chief Financial Officer, the Chief Strategy Officer, the Chief Information Officer, the Chief Technology Officer and the like. Compatriots of the CMO, their corporate interests coincide, their views and votes matter to marketing activity, and their ability to support or stymie marketing initiatives makes them an important target for marketing research. This study closes that gap by capturing the perspectives of non-marketing executives.

5. Conclusions

The principal contribution of the study is an empirical demonstration that MPM ability impacts on marketing stature as assessed by non-marketing senior managers. Senior management's satisfaction with the marketing function is significantly and positively associated with marketing performance measurement ability. This is an important finding which confirms the perceptions of CMOs reported in O'Sullivan and Abela (2007). These data are the first to directly link ability to measure marketing and CEO satisfaction with the marketing function.

In terms of the broader debate on how marketing can regain relevance and respect within firms (Kumar, 2004; Webster et al., 2005), the study contributes both intellectually and pragmatically. By soliciting and examining the views of this interested party with a stake in marketing's influence, the research informs the ongoing discussion regarding the evolving role of marketing. The critical view that marketing might best be understood not as what marketers perceive it to be but rather as what the firm's top management perceive it to be (Carson and Brown, 1994) is acknowledged and extended here. There is strong theoretical support for the position that the understanding within a firm of what marketing is will influence the measurement system put in place for measuring its performance (see, for example, Ambler et al., 2004b; Jaworski, 1988; Moorman, 1995; Webster, 1992). By reviewing measurement practices, priorities and challenges, the study provides further insight into the scope and responsibilities of the marketing function.

The results presented here also draw attention to the differences between the marketing-as-orientation and marketing-as-function perspectives. Within the existing MPM literature, marketing is understood both as a business orientation and as a functional activity. Results suggest that it is the functional perspective that dominates practitioner interest in MPM. While this may appear obvious, it is an important observation given that much of the research on MPM is justified as responding to practitioner demand for more accurate and relevant measures and measurement systems. For example, the Marketing Science Institute's identification of MPM as a research priority (MSI, 2002) is frequently cited. If this is the rationale for MPM studies, then at least in research focused on high-tech firms, it is a functional understanding of marketing that ought to be adopted. Yet, a review of the literature suggests that marketing, as a business orientation, is a common – even dominant – perspective (for a review of the literature, see, Clark, 2001). There is clearly a disconnect here between the legitimisation of research (i.e., responding to a managerial demand for measures of marketing's functional contribution) and the orientation perspective which dominates research. In management practice terms, the findings indicate a clear divergence between what CMOs and other executives regard as marketing's competencies and priorities. For instance, the discovery that marketing executives regard their ability to measure marketing performance higher than non-marketers on most the metrics proposed, points to a critical perceived competence fissure that must impact on marketing's stature and strategic influence.

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