



The changing body of students

A study of the motives, expectations and preparedness of postgraduate marketing students

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Abstract

Purpose – The aim of this paper is to assess the motives, expectations and preparedness of postgraduate marketing students, and discuss possible implications for postgraduate marketing education in the UK.

Design/methodology/approach – The research uses primary data collected from postgraduate marketing students at four British universities. Factor analysis is used to evaluate the convergent validity of the survey questionnaire and Cronbach's alpha coefficient to examine the internal consistency and reliability of the variables composing the major scales.

Findings – The results indicate that postgraduate marketing education today faces a culturally diverse student body coupled with a notable lack of relevant work experience. Students are found to have relatively low perception of their preparedness for postgraduate study and high expectations for support and practical experience in marketing.

Research limitations/implications – The sample used is relatively small although the high response rate achieved would help add validity to the study. Further research should examine the ways in which students draw on their prior-learning experience to make sense of their learning process.

Practical implications – This study should be of interest to postgraduate marketing programme and module leaders. It suggests that a realignment of curriculum design and various support activities on the part of postgraduate marketing education providers are needed to respond to the changing body of students.

Originality/value – The study offers a timely measure of the motives, preparedness, and expectations of postgraduate marketing students. The findings should be of immediate and practical value to postgraduate marketing educators in the UK.

Keywords Postgraduates, Higher education, Marketing, United Kingdom, Curricula

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Postgraduate marketing education in the UK has changed dramatically in the last decade. Internationalisation and growth in student mobility have resulted in significant changes in the postgraduate marketing student body and a quest for value for money from a British postgraduate qualification (Taylor, 2002). What is notable, in particular, is the growth in the number of international students on taught programmes.

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Furthermore, the marketing debate on the balance between theory and practice (Brennan, 2004; Cox, 2006) has enhanced the need for a closer examination of what and who the postgraduate marketing education is for in order to meet the needs of all stakeholders concerned these being students, educators, as well as employers who increasingly demand for “work-ready” marketing managers.

Employers of postgraduate students suggest that there are areas in which more could be done to ensure that postgraduates get maximum benefit from their investment in a postgraduate education and are well equipped to succeed in their chosen career (Universities UK, 2010). Accordingly, it is important that we ask how well we understand the variations in students’ pre-entry characteristics such as their motives, expectations, and preparedness in order to facilitate the teaching of marketing to an increasingly diverse student population. This study aims to determine the extent to which these variations fit in with marketing provision in the UK and suggest ways that the marketing curriculum could be made more relevant to the needs of these students. More specific questions asked by the study include:

- RQ1.* What are students’ motives for choosing postgraduate marketing education?
- RQ2.* What do students expect from postgraduate marketing education?
- RQ3.* How prepared are students with their knowledge, skills and personal attributes in relation to their study?

To answer the above questions, the remainder of the paper expands on the changing environment of the postgraduate marketing education in the UK, discusses the theoretical and methodological context of the study, analyses the results and discusses the ways in which postgraduate marketing education could be made more relevant to students’ needs.

Background: the changing postgraduate education environment

Earlier studies identified trends in the UK postgraduate education and predicted possible changes in the postgraduate qualifications (Taylor, 2002). Among the trends identified were the increasing student numbers on taught programmes, expansion in international student recruitment, and expansion in postgraduate activity in the post-1992 universities especially in taught programmes and part-time study. It was found that in proportionate terms, postgraduate numbers increased more than undergraduates; the nature and purpose of courses changed; and teaching methods were also transformed (Taylor, 2002). Some of the predictions have materialised as demonstrated in the latest statistics of HESA (2009). The number of postgraduate students during 2007-2008 stood at 501,135, an increase of 49.4 per cent from that of 335,325 in 1994-1995. The main area of postgraduate growth was found to be in taught programmes. Of the 202,010 students who obtained postgraduate qualifications in 2007-2008, 182,540 (90 per cent) obtained their qualifications after following taught programmes in comparison with only 19,470 (10 per cent) who completed their studies mainly by research. The growth might also be attributed to the current economic downturn as in the past postgraduate student demand often fluctuated in line with the employment prospects with numbers increasing at time of economic difficulty (Taylor, 2002).

Most critical to the picture of overall demand for UK postgraduate education is that from international students, who currently make up 41 per cent of all full-time students

on taught programmes (Universities UK, 2009). The number of international students has increased 4.1 times from 40,768 in 1994-1995 to 167,485 in 2007-2008 (HESA, 2009). The latest data from Universities UK (2010) show that taught postgraduate provision alone brought in income of over £1.5 billion for universities in 2008-2009. In comparison, UK-domiciled students are a minority among full-time taught postgraduate students (Universities UK, 2009). The growth continues to reflect a growing desire in international students for postgraduate qualifications to support their employment prospect and career development in their own country (Taylor, 2002). However, there have been signs of a slow-down with the growth in the UK due to competition from its European and American counterparts (British Council, 2009) as well as the development of domestic high education in the countries from which UK currently recruit taught postgraduate students, principally China and India (Universities UK, 2009). Moreover, it was suggested that potential students understand the concept of the student “cash cow” and the importance of the fee income they bring to the higher education institutions and are increasingly demanding “value for money” from their host institutions (Centeno *et al.*, 2008; Taylor, 2002). In evaluating the service quality of postgraduate marketing education, Centeno *et al.* (2008, p. 562) found a perceptual gap between students’ expectations and their perception of higher education services in the UK, “particularly when asked about their confidence on the money spent on higher education”. This largely concurs with the findings of Universities UK (2010) that, although the taught postgraduate market has in many ways been a success story – expanding substantially to meet demand and generating significant fee income for higher education institutions, there are some areas where the mechanism of the market does not work effectively, and where supply does not meet demand. As around half of international students coming to the UK take postgraduate qualifications (Universities UK, 2010), enhancing the educational experience of these students therefore will determine future success of the UK in the international higher education market.

Another striking growth is in the number of students taking postgraduate business and management programmes which rose 15.3 times from 6,429 in 1994-1995 to 98,530 in 2007-2008. Since 2003, business and management has remained to be the most popular subject area for international students coming to the UK (Universities UK, 2010). A significant number of these students chose to follow a marketing programme. For example, of the 98,530 students in business and management studies in 2007-2008, 4,110 chose to specialise in marketing with 85 per cent of them from non-EU countries and 15 per cent EU countries (HESA, 2009). The remaining students would study marketing modules as part of their business and management-related curriculum.

The impact of the above growth of activities on marketing education is significant and has led to various changes in the structure, content, and delivery of postgraduate marketing qualifications. To meet the needs of an overwhelming proportion of international students, business schools in the UK have rushed to develop new marketing programmes and modules at postgraduate level. Centeno *et al.* (2008) divided the programmes into four groups: first, the “vanilla” MSc in Marketing offered by 18 out of the 60 institutions examined by the authors; second, MSc in International Marketing (14/60); third, MSc in Marketing Management (13/60); and lastly, the various “specialist” programmes such as MSc Tourism Marketing and MSc Fashion Marketing.

Although business schools have had commercial successes, there are substantial questions about the relevance of their educational product (Pfeffer and Fong, 2002; Bruce

and Schoenfeld, 2006). Many postgraduate marketing offerings were found to offer a very similar curriculum to their undergraduate equivalents and some programme developments are production-led:

[...] in that a department of marketing will teach what it can, perhaps influenced by what is being offered at other institutions and only marginally by input from practitioners and past and potential students (Centeno *et al.*, 2008, p. 562).

Also understandably is the emergence of research on the impact of the growth on academic life (Warwick, 2007; Hall and Sung, 2009), learning, teaching and assessment (Clarke and Flaherty, 2002; Turner, 2006; Liu, 2009) and student experience (Moss, 2005; Cathcart *et al.*, 2006). However, there has been a lack of research in the prior motives, expectations, and preparedness of postgraduate marketing students and its possible implications for marketing education in the UK.

Theoretical context

Relevance of prior-learning experiences to learning

The theoretical orientation of this study lies in the “presage” aspect of the “presage-process-product” model of student learning (Prosser and Trigwell, 1999). The focus is on the prior-learning experiences of students and the notion that the transition from one context to another is not independent of students’ prior experience (Prosser and Trigwell, 1999). Students have been found to “approach their studies in relation to their perceptions of the context, and that approach is related to the quality of their learning outcome” (Prosser and Trigwell, 1999, p. 12). Similarly, Biggs (1996, p. 348) stated that the learner brought with them “an accumulation of assumptions, motives, intentions and previous knowledge” that could influence their learning situation and determine the quality of learning that might subsequently take place.

More recently, Byrne and Flood (2005) found that there is a clear consensus that learning approaches are not intrinsic characteristics of students, but rather they are dynamic and are influenced by the learning environment and an array of personal factors including students’ prior-learning experiences.

Based on the above notion of a positive relation between students’ pre-entry characteristics and the outcome of their learning, the question asked in this study is not whether students’ prior intentions, expectations, and experience affect their learning but rather what their perceptions are regarding the above factors, and how these perceptions may affect postgraduate marketing education. As Ridley (2004) stated, a fuller understanding of the differences in the expectations between lecturers and students are crucial in ensuring a smooth start of an academic programme. Furthermore, a better understanding of the issues is needed for a greater understanding of the role and purpose of marketing education (Centeno *et al.*, 2008) and to ensure that UK maintains its position as the one of the leading marketing education providers in the global higher education market.

Past studies have largely focussed on undergraduate students and other disciplines including accounting (Byrne and Flood, 2005); business and social work (Buchanan *et al.*, 2007); hospitality (Raybould and Wilkins, 2005) and MBA (Baruch and Leeming, 1996). There has been very little research on postgraduate marketing education.

The situation is further complicated by the presence of a growing number of international students in postgraduate marketing classrooms because of the environmental

changes described early in the paper. In the context of the UK and for the purpose of this study, international students are defined as non-UK domiciled students. Existing literature demonstrates that there are differences between home and international students in terms of culture, previous educational experience, learning styles, transition from undergraduate to postgraduate education, and perception of the effectiveness of the learning and teaching methods (Biggs, 1999; Egege and Kutieleh, 2003; Cathcart *et al.*, 2006; Sliwa and Grandy, 2006; Turner, 2006; Liu, 2009; Hall and Sung, 2009). For example, the learning transition for postgraduate students from East Asian countries such as China was found to be extremely hard to approach as the knowledge transitions in the region vary considerably from the Anglo-European conventions (Egege and Kutieleh, 2003). In another study, Chinese students were found to respond better to tutor-centred learning than to process-based, student-centred learning and many found it difficult to adapt to the British learning and teaching conventions (Liu, 2009). Research also found that lecturers and students hold differing perceptions of the reasons for these differences (Hall and Sung, 2009). Whilst lecturers regard language as the essential cause of East Asian students' difficulties, students recognise that, additionally, a lack of culturally related knowledge of British academic norms present a fundamental challenge to their learning (Hall and Sung, 2009).

Students' prior motives, preparedness, and expectations

In this study, the pre-entry characteristics of students are examined through their motives, preparedness and expectations. First, the factors that may motivate students to pursue postgraduate education can be divided into intrinsic, extrinsic and career related. The type of motivation may influence how students learn and how well they perform (Pintrich and Schunk, 1996). Existing literature suggests that intrinsic motivation is more desirable as it is more likely to lead to higher level of engagement and deeper approaches to learning (Paulsen and Gentry, 1995; Byrne and Flood, 2005). In comparison, an extrinsic motivation is associated with lower level of involvement and a more surface approach to learning (Paulsen and Gentry, 1995). Marketing education was previously found to be based on two distinct approaches regarding aims, usually denominated "instrumental" and "intrinsic" (Clarke *et al.*, 2006). The intrinsic or "liberal" approach is concerned with the development of individual potentialities or the development of intellect and character (Peters, 1970; Helgensa *et al.*, 2009), emphasising that education should equip students to make their own free, autonomous choices about the life they will lead (Bridges, 1992). The instrumental approach focuses on skills, implying that marketing subjects offered should give students the opportunity to develop and apply skills in order to enhance personal effectiveness and achievement at work (Bridges, 1992) and that business schools should teach students so they can hit the employment world fully trained (Clarke *et al.*, 2006). Here, education is not perceived as an end in itself, but as the mean to an end (Helgensa *et al.*, 2009). However, others argue that intrinsic and instrumental approaches should not be seen as being on the opposite ends of a spectrum (Dacko, 2006; Stringfellow *et al.*, 2006). In other words, students' motivations for undertaking postgraduate study are varied. Consequently, marketing education should focus, on the one hand, on developing students "for life" by developing their intellectual and lifelong learning capabilities and, on the other, developing students "for work" by equipping them with marketing knowledge and subject-specific skills.

With regard to the preparedness of students, postgraduate education expects students to develop a deeper understanding of the subject and foster a wider range of cognitive, practical and personal skills than undergraduate education. For international students who make up an overwhelming majority of the student body concerned, there is also the transition they have to make from the education environment of their home country to that of the UK. This can be daunting, as learning in the home country of some students has been found to be very different from that in the UK. For example, the transition of Chinese students to postgraduate marketing education in the UK was found to be held back by their learning styles, cultural background, low confidence with English language and more notably a lack of knowledge of British education conventions (Liu, 2009). As a result, they need to adapt to not only the wider cultural environment but also the pedagogies used in the UK. Any variation between students' expectations of the education and the reality is likely to exacerbate the difficulties associated with the transition (Byrne and Flood, 2005).

With regard to their expectations of marketing education, students as well as employers of marketing graduates have been found to have a relatively instrumental view focussing on a combination of skills and practical knowledge (Stringfellow *et al.*, 2006; Crisp and Carrington, 2005). The view appears to be largely shared by the marketing education community based on existing academic literature. Earlier research detected a relatively narrow perspective among employers, with an emphasis on generic skills (e.g. numeracy and literacy) and attitudes (e.g. punctuality) and least emphasis on general knowledge (Garneau and Brennan, 1999). Graduates should not only acquire skills and learn rules but to be capable and motivated to question established professional practices (Teichler and Kehm, 1995). More recent literature pointed towards an academic/practitioner divide in the marketing curriculum due to failures in various areas including a mismatched agenda for knowledge creation and application (Brennan, 2004). It was suggested that the British educational policy is driven by the idea that the value of education lies in the instrumental benefits with increased productivity in the workplace being the main aim and that marketing students should be encouraged to develop core skills and techniques of their profession and in addition the ability to critically evaluate these skills and techniques (Clarke *et al.*, 2006). The consensus appears to be that students need to be equipped with the sorts of transferrable skills and competencies required by the profession. Accordingly, marketing education should focus on preparing students for a career in marketing and this requires an explicit focus on developing students into practitioners. However, the reality of marketing education today can be rather different. The theory and practice divide may have widened as a new generation of academics joins the marketing education profession having gained their PhDs and often with limited or no practitioner experience in marketing (Cox, 2006). They tend to take a broader perspective with more emphasis on underpinning theory (Stringfellow *et al.*, 2006) which may lead to the marketing discipline losing its focus and distinctiveness and the opportunity to improve practice and drive relevant knowledge forward (Cox, 2006).

Situated in the multi-contexts outlined above, this study explores the issues identified from the contexts with postgraduate marketing students from UK universities. Since the make-up of this student body includes a significant proportion of international students, issues that concern these students will also be identified and discussed where appropriate.

Methodological context

The research is of an empirical nature with primary data collected from postgraduate marketing students at four British universities using a Likert-scale questionnaire. The method of self-administered, anonymous questionnaire was considered suitable due to the self-revealing nature of the study. Respondents may have been more encouraged to make themselves appear in a more favourable light about their pre-entry characteristics in a focus group or interview situation.

To strive for a more representative picture across the sector, the research focused on four British universities with distinctive features. The institutions can be characterised as follows: Institution C (Table I) is a big civic or red-brick university which achieved university status before First World War; Institution D is a new or “plate glass” university founded in the 1960s; and Institution A and B are ex-polytechnics which received university status in 1992. The percentage of the responses used from the three types of institutions is as follows: post-1992, 35 per cent; new or “plate glass” university, 21 per cent; and civic or redbrick, 44 per cent.

Another consideration in selecting participating institutions was that the institution offers postgraduate programmes with marketing as the only focus. The researcher initially identified six potential institutions, but a refinement using the programme title information available from the web site of these institutions led to the removal of two institutions that do not have marketing only programmes. The remaining four all offer programmes such as the “vanilla” MSc/MA in Marketing, MSc in Marketing Management, and MSc Consumer Marketing that constitute a representation of the major postgraduate marketing offerings in the UK (Centeno *et al.*, 2008).

The questionnaire was designed to capture the opinions of respondents regarding factors that might affect their educational experience namely their motives (why they chose to study marketing at postgraduate level), expectations (what they expected from their education) and preparedness (how prepared they were for their chosen programme of study). The factors were selected following a review of existing literature that points towards a positive link between the factors and the outcome of student learning (Biggs, 1996; Prosser and Trigwell, 1999; Byrne and Flood, 2005).

The questions asked in the questionnaire were divided into four thematic sections. Section One asked respondents to indicate why they chose to study a master’s degree in marketing by indicating their agreement or disagreement with each statement provided by ticking the box which best reflected their views (5 – strongly agree, 4 – mostly agree, 3 – neither, 2 – mostly disagree, 1 – strongly disagree). The motives listed could be broadly categorised into intrinsic, extrinsic, and career related. In Section Two, respondents were offered a list of knowledge, skills and personal attributes and were asked to evaluate how well they felt they were prepared for each item listed (5 – very well, 4 – well, 3 – neither, 2 – badly, 1 – very badly). The inventories of skills and abilities were

Institutions	No. of students on module	No. of Qs distributed	Means of distribution	No. of Qs returned	Percentage of response	No. of Qs usable
A	50	50	By e-mail	5	10	5
B	34	29	In class	29	100	28
C	47	45	In class	42	89	41
D	21	21	In class	21	100	20

Table I.
Summary of key data
collection statistics

drawn from Byrne and Flood (2005), the Quality Assurance Agency benchmarks, and relevant academic literature (Nguyen *et al.*, 2005; Buchanan *et al.*, 2007; Raybould and Wilkins, 2005; and Baruch and Leeming, 1996). Section Three asked respondents to indicate the level of their expectations from certain aspects of their study (5 – very important, 4 – important, 3 – neither, 2 – unimportant, 1 – very unimportant). The aspects evaluated were in the areas of curriculum design, learning, teaching and assessment, personal development and programme outcomes. Section Four gathered general information on respondents including their age, programme and mode of study as well as their nationality and employment status if any.

The collection of data took place during the first few weeks of respondents' enrolment for the academic year of 2009-2010. Initially, e-mail was used as the primary means of questionnaire distribution. However, the response rate was too low (10 per cent from Institution A as shown in Table I) for the study to be sustained and the researcher subsequently arranged with the programme leaders and marketing tutors of the four universities involved to administer the questionnaire in their classes. In doing so, the objectives of the study were explained face to face to respondents and any questions were answered. Respondents were also reassured of the ethical issues surrounding the study and advised that they did not have to participate if they were not happy to. Respondents were asked to return the questionnaire at the end of their class. In this way, the researcher managed to achieve a high response rate as shown in Table I and a relatively accurate picture of who the postgraduate students are today.

In total, 145 were distributed and 95 were returned representing an overall response rate of 66 per cent (96 per cent from Institutions B-D) which is deemed high given the very low return rate via e-mail from Institution A. Among the returned questionnaires, 94 were deemed as valid and usable.

The questionnaires were analysed using the following statistical tools: StatsDirect to report the mean, range, standard deviation and ranking of the variables and scales; factor analysis to combine students' pre-entry characteristics into a smaller number of principal factors and to evaluate the structure and convergent validity of the questionnaire used in relation to the size of the factor loadings (i.e. correlations between individual items and their underlying factor); and Cronbach's alpha coefficient to examine the internal consistency of the variables composing each scale in order to assess the reliability of the scales.

In conducting a survey of this nature, a number of limitations are inevitable. First, the study uses a single-quantitative method. While the method provides a quantifiable and objective view of students' opinions, it does not offer a more in-depth understanding of these opinions. Second, the study is limited to students from a set of British universities in a limited geographical area of the UK although efforts were made to select largely mainstream universities ranging from civic to post-1992 universities. Third, the sample used is relatively small although the high response rate achieved would help add validity and reliability to the study. Suggestions for future research based on these limitations are made at the end of the paper.

Outcomes

The characteristics of respondents presented in Table II show that 90 per cent of respondents study full time and 67 per cent are sponsored by their parents. About 62 per cent are females and the age groups of all respondents concentrate on 21-25

MIP	Variables	Sub-variables	Numbers	%
28,7	Age group	21-25	63	67
		26-30	28	30
		31-35	3	3
820	Gender	Over 36	0	0
		Male	36	38
	Nationality	Female	58	62
		UK	16	17
Study financed by	Other EU	China/Hong Kong/Taiwan	13	14
		Other Asia	47	50
		All others	14	15
		Parents	4	4
Mode of study	Employers	Yourselves	63	67
		Other sources	2	2
		Full time	26	28
Work experience in marketing (year)	Part time	0	3	3
		1-3	85	90
Current employment	Anticipated marketing area of employment	4-6	9	10
		7-10	47	50
		Over 10	31	33
		Full-time permanent	14	15
		Part-time permanent	12	13
Anticipated marketing area of employment	Product/brand management	Full-time temporary	3	3
		Part-time temporary	13	14
		N/A	52	55
		Marketing education	10	11
		Marketing research	1	1
		Sales	4	4
		General business and management	11	12
Marketing communication	11	12		
Others/not sure	Self-employed	Self-employed	12	13
		Others/not sure	3	3
			42	45

Table II.
General information
of respondents

(67 per cent) and 26-30 (30 per cent). Their nationality mix is diverse with international students accounting for 83 per cent of the total.

Although studying marketing at postgraduate level, half of the respondents have no practical work experience contrary to the suggestion of Ardley (2006) that postgraduate and mature students often have a reservoir of relevant experience that can be shared with other students and tutors and the idea of reflective practice would seem particularly pertinent to these students.

A total of 45 per cent of respondents are employed to varying extent echoing the findings that more full-time students are working (Byrne and Flood, 2005). However, the results seem to contract the view of McInnis (2003) that students increasingly expect their university to fit around their lives rather than vice versa as the respondents indicated that they are prepared to make their study a priority.

Motives, preparedness and expectations

The study sets out to determine the variations in the motives, expectations and preparedness of postgraduate marketing students in British universities. A total of 67 variables were used in the questionnaire survey and the mean differences, standard deviations and ranking orders of the data collected were examined using StatsDirect. In accordance with the research questions, the variables were then organised into three themes: students' motives, preparedness and expectations. The mean differences and rankings of these themes are shown in Table III and the major outcomes from them are discussed afterwards.

The self-reported scores of respondents with regard to their motives for postgraduate marketing education are grouped into clusters of intrinsic (Questions 2-5), extrinsic (Questions 7-11) and career-related factors (Questions 12-17). It is clear that, with a respective mean of 4.14 and 3.94, intrinsic goals and career-related aspirations were the main motives for the choice of postgraduate studies. Most respondents appeared to think that they would have access to better employment with a postgraduate qualification. Interestingly, however, there is evidence to suggest that some international students chose to study at postgraduate level because they wanted to spend more time in the UK (Question 20).

The level of students' preparedness for postgraduate studies are grouped into four clusters (Table III) namely marketing knowledge (Questions 22-24), marketing-related skills (Questions 26-33), study support skills (Questions 34-41), and personal attributes (Questions 42-48). An analysis of the clusters reveals a relatively higher level of preparedness in respondents' personal attributes (3.58) such as self-motivation, cultural sensitivity, and inquisitiveness followed by study support skills (3.56), marketing-related skills (3.52) and marketing knowledge and concepts (3.38). It is worth noting that the mean score for all items measured is lower than 4, which indicates a relatively low level of preparedness perceived by respondents.

The last outcome presented in Table III is to do with students' expectations of postgraduate marketing education. Partly underpinned by the ongoing debate on the role and purpose of marketing education discussed earlier in the paper, the questions put to respondents can be broadly divided into learning, teaching and assessment (Questions 54-56), learning resources and support (Questions 57-62), and practitioner-related expectations (Questions 50-53). The results suggest that respondents had high expectations of all areas measured. In particular, they recognised the importance of practical experience (4.01) and expected strong learning support and good resources (4.03).

Themes	Clusters	In questions	Mean	Rank
Motives	Intrinsic	2-5	4.14	1
	Career related	12-17	3.94	2
	Extrinsic	7-11	2.52	3
Preparedness	Personal attributes	42-48	3.58	1
	Support skills	34-41	3.56	2
	Marketing-related skills	26-33	3.52	3
	Marketing knowledge	22-24	3.38	4
Expectations	Changes in LTA from u/g	54-56	4.14	1
	Learning support/resources	57-62	4.03	2
	Practical experience	50-53	4.01	3

Table III.
Mean differences and
rankings of the principal
variable groups

However, the recognition of practical experience did not come as forcefully as that found in the postgraduate marketing alumni (Liu, 2010). This may be attributed to the fact that respondents who have not worked in marketing may not fully appreciate what are required of them in business life.

As discussed earlier, there are differences between home and international students in terms of culture, previous educational experience, learning styles, and transition from undergraduate to postgraduate education. Thus, a further analysis was carried out to explore any variations in the level of preparedness between these two groups. The results indicate that international students generally felt less prepared than their British counterparts did. The differences are many as shown in Table IV but more notably international students were found to be less prepared in the areas of critical thinking abilities (Question 27), oral presentation (Question 30), writing of business report (Question 32), dissertation completion (Question 33), interaction with lecturers (Question 35), passing examinations (Question 39), writing an academic paper (Question 40), research and data-handling skills (Question 41), and group effectiveness (Question 44). When the mean scores of the two groups were compared, international students were found to be particularly under prepared than their British counterparts in oral presentation (3.43 vs 4.55), business report writing (3.24 vs 4.35) and competing the dissertation (4.10 vs 3.20).

Factor and internal consistency analysis of the outcomes

In this study, factor analysis was used to evaluate the structure and convergent validity of the questionnaire in relation to the size of the factor loadings (i.e. correlations between individual items and their underlying factor). In addition, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to examine the internal consistency of the variables composing each scale. The factor loadings were based on the three themes shown in Table III and incorporated 51 of the original 67 variables. Each theme had a number of variables attached to it as shown in Tables V-VII.

The factor loadings were found to be generally strong with an overwhelming majority (45/51) of the variables loading satisfactorily on their intended factor which indicates that the commonly accepted degree of convergent validity was met overall (common

Qs	Variables	All students		International		UK	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
27	Critical thinking abilities	3.60	0.92	3.54	0.89	3.95	1.10
30	Oral presentation	3.62	1.10	3.43	1.18	4.55	0.60
32	Writing a business report	3.03	1.12	3.24	1.46	4.35	0.99
33	Completing dissertation	3.57	1.05	3.20	1.48	4.10	1.07
35	Interaction with lecturers	3.62	0.94	3.77	1.56	4.37	0.96
37	Time management	3.60	1.05	3.66	1.74	4.25	0.72
39	Passing all exams	3.78	1.00	3.68	1.90	4.30	0.73
40	Writing an academic paper	3.30	1.14	3.61	2.09	4.35	0.67
41	Research and data handling	3.44	0.91	3.59	2.13	4.28	0.89
43	Cultural sensitivity	3.80	0.84	3.81	2.33	4.25	0.55
44	Group effectiveness	3.66	0.95	3.80	2.46	4.10	0.72
49	Flexibility	3.68	0.91	3.89	2.99	4.35	0.59

Table IV.
Major mean differences in preparedness of international and home students

Table V.
Factor analysis
of students' motives
for postgraduate
marketing education

Item no.	Factor/variable	Factor loading	Variance (%)	Cronbach alpha
	<i>Factor 1: intrinsic factors</i>			0.54
1	I wanted to further develop my intellectual abilities	0.48	5.1	
2	I wished to study marketing in a more in-depth way	0.52	1.9	
3	I wanted the chance to broaden my horizons	0.39	15.0	
4	The course will prepare me well for the future	0.49	5.0	
5	The course will improve my self-belief	0.52	2.1	
	<i>Factor 2: extrinsic factors</i>			0.61
6	My parents expected me to gain a Masters degree	0.67	5.5	
7	All my friends were going to take postgraduate courses	0.45	16.1	
8	My employer required that I undertook postgraduate studies	0.52	9.0	
9	I was attracted by the marketing activities of my university	0.50	11.4	
	<i>Factor 3: career-related factors</i>			0.83
10	A British p/g qualification would look good on my CV	0.81	2.2	
11	Completing the course would enable me to get a good job	0.80	2.3	
12	Completing the course will increase my earning power	0.78	4.6	
13	The course would improve my professional status at work	0.74	8.2	
14	Completing the course would increase my chance of promotion	0.82	0.3	

accepted = 0.5, Petridou *et al.*, 2007). The low factor loadings (6/51) appear to indicate that they might not have been well designed and would require further refinement.

The internal consistency and reliability of the scales were examined using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The commonly accepted lower limit for alpha is 0.7 (Nunnally and Berstein, 1994). In the case of this study, the internal consistency coefficient was found to be higher than 0.7 in seven out of the ten scales. Of the remaining three, only one factor (Factor 1) was lower than 0.6. Overall, the internal consistency is deemed good.

Discussion

To provide postgraduate marketing students with a rewarding educational experience and to maintain UK's leading position in the global higher education market, marketing educators need to develop a greater understanding of their students' pre-entry characteristics. It is within this context that this study attempts to provide an enhanced understanding of students' motives, preparedness and expectations in relation postgraduate marketing education in the UK. The paper next discusses the outcomes of the study and suggests direction for future research.

Motives

Key outcomes on students' motives reveal the following: first, students were found to be motivated to the choice of postgraduate studies primarily by a combination of intrinsic goals and career-related aspirations with the former to a greater degree than the latter. Extrinsic influences such as the external "push" factors were found to be of low significance to students, which appears to contradict the view of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) that students, in particular international students are "pushed" to seek education by external forces such as their parents. Although occupationally oriented programmes such as marketing may have a particular problem with general education and instrumentality (Liu, 2010), students were found to have entered their programme of study by a desire for

Item no.	Factor/item	Factor loading	Variance (%)	Cronbach alpha
	<i>Factor 4: marketing knowledge</i>			0.85
15	Understanding of marketing theories and concepts	0.82	3.0	
16	Identification of marketing problems	0.77	7.7	
17	Application of theory to practice	0.84	0.5	
18	Understanding how marketing relates to other areas of business	0.80	5.3	
	<i>Factor 5: marketing-related skills</i>			0.81
19	Strategic thinking abilities	0.79	1.9	
20	Critical thinking abilities	0.75	6.0	
21	Use of typical marketing education techniques such as case studies	0.81	0.04	
22	Oral presentation	0.77	4.1	
23	Use of academic journal articles as important learning resources	0.78	2.9	
24	Writing a business report	0.77	3.4	
	<i>Factor 6: support skills</i>			0.81
25	Studying independently without much direction from a tutor	0.81	0.3	
26	Interaction with lecturers and fellow students in class	0.77	3.6	
27	Competence in effective reading	0.78	2.5	
28	Time management	0.79	2.0	
29	Information technology	0.79	1.8	
30	Passing all exams at first attempt	0.78	2.9	
31	Writing an academic paper	0.78	2.6	
32	Research and data-handling skills	0.79	2.1	
	<i>Factor 7: personal attributes</i>			0.85
33	Creativity	0.85	0.6	
34	Cultural sensitivity and awareness	0.81	4.4	
35	Group effectiveness (interpersonal teamwork)	0.83	1.9	
36	Influencing skills (leadership and management)	0.82	2.9	
37	Self-motivation and control	0.85	0.8	
38	An inquisitive mind	0.84	1.7	
39	Flexibility	0.83	2.1	

Table VI.
Factor analysis
of students' preparedness
for postgraduate
marketing education

greater depth of learning and the achievement of other intrinsic objectives. Therefore, it is not simply an either intrinsic or instrumental motivation but rather a combination of both that motivated students' choice of a postgraduate marketing degree.

Second, there is not enough evidence in this study to support the view of Centeno *et al.* (2008, p. 562) that students have a short-term focus as they do not appear to consider their programmes in terms of contribution to and preparation for a professional career, rather "they are internally focussed on the programme of study rather than seeing a bigger, true picture". A majority of students were found to see their postgraduate education as a beginning in an educational process rather than an end in itself.

Lastly and interestingly, there is evidence to suggest that some international students chose to study at postgraduate level because they wanted to spend more time in the UK.

Preparedness

The results on students' preparedness indicate that students had a relatively low perception of their preparedness. In particular, they felt under prepared with

Item no.	Factor/item	Factor loading	Variance (%)	Cronbach alpha
	<i>Factor 8: practical experience</i>			0.70
40	A balanced curriculum between marketing theory and practice	0.87	18.0	
41	Practical experience through fieldwork/ placement	0.37	31.1	
42	To be trained as a marketing practitioner	0.41	27.8	
	<i>Factor 9: changes in LTA from u/g</i>			0.65
43	The learning methods to be different from those of undergraduate studies	0.60	4.0	
44	The teaching methods to be different from those of undergraduate studies	0.40	24.4	
45	The assessment methods to be different from those of undergraduate studies	0.62	2.7	
	<i>Factor 10: learning support/resources</i>			0.80
46	Knowledge, support and empathy of lecturers	0.77	2.9	
47	Core textbooks are available from the library	0.75	4.7	
48	Core textbooks are available online	0.72	7.8	
49	Attractive and stimulating course content	0.76	3.3	
50	Clear assessment criteria and grading methods	0.81	1.0	
51	Clear and concise lecture handouts	0.78	1.8	

Table VII.
Factor analysis
of students' expectations
for postgraduate
marketing education

marketing-related knowledge and skills. What is also notable was the lack of practical marketing experience, which contradicts the view that postgraduate students often have a reservoir of relevant experience that can be shared with other students and tutors (Ardley, 2006).

The results on the preparedness of international students are consistent with previous findings on the differences between home and international students and the argument that international students are in need of more support (Turner, 2006; Liu, 2009; Hall and Sung, 2009). Given that the under preparedness was found to be in some of the major assessment and teaching conventions used in postgraduate marketing education in the UK, there is a clear need for marketing educators to assist international students with their transition to the British education environment.

Expectations

The results on students' expectations reveal that students had high expectations of all areas measured in the study. They expected a balanced curriculum between theory and practice and the application of marketing concepts under realistic conditions such as fieldwork or placement. This concurs with previous findings that students have a relatively instrumental view of education focussing on the combination of skills and practical knowledge that enable them to do the job (Stringfellow *et al.*, 2006).

In addition, the results support the view that internationally mobile students tend to appreciate not only an international diversity of the core functions of higher education but intensive guidance, advice and various kinds of administrative support (Teichler and Kehm, 1995), and echo the call for more support (Centeno *et al.*, 2008) and better value for money from international students (Universities UK, 2010).

Suggestions for future research

In an attempt to summarise some of the issues that have surfaced during the study but not been addressed, the study suggests two themes that deserve attention in further research: first, students from different world regions could differ widely in their perceptions. There is little doubt that their perceptions can be influenced by their respective cultural and educational background. Further research could be undertaken to study the impact of these influences on their pre-entry characteristics. Second, further research can examine the ways in which students draw on their prior-learning experience to make sense of their learning process. Third, the study uses a single quantitative method in data collection. Future research could investigate students' perceptions in more depth using a qualitative or quantified-qualitative approach that incorporates quantitative method in qualitative research (Carson *et al.*, 2001).

Conclusion and practical implications

This study offers a timely measure of the motives, preparedness and expectations of today's postgraduate marketing students in the UK. It shows that marketing educators today face a culturally diverse international student body who generally feel under prepared for postgraduate marketing study. Unlike the "traditional", part-time, post-experience postgraduate students, nearly half of the students surveyed were found to start postgraduate education straight after their undergraduate years with no work experience let alone practical experience in marketing.

The study has identified a number of issues that may have specific implications for postgraduate marketing education in the UK. First, in addition to intrinsic goals, students are clearly driven by career aspirations. Many expect to be trained as practitioners but in reality the academic/practitioner divide is enlarged as a result of a new generation of marketing educators joining the professional without any industry experience (Cox, 2006). Second, students' perception of their preparedness for postgraduate study is generally low with the exception of a few aspects. There is also clear evidence to suggest that international students feel less prepared than their home counterparts do. Although they have been found to be comfortable with their personal attributes relevant to postgraduate study, they seem to be less so with adapting to the learning, teaching and assessment conventions used in the UK. Many will struggle consequently. Third, the findings reflect the changing postgraduate education environment that Taylor predicted in 2002. There is a clear shift from the post-experience, part-time students to pre-experience, full-time students at postgraduate level. However, the marketing departments have been found to teach what they can rather than what is needed by students (Centeno *et al.*, 2008).

In concluding the study, three themes of practical implications emerge – those of student diversity, practical marketing experience, and students' under preparedness. The paper next discusses what can be learned in relation to the above three themes.

Recognising student diversity

Postgraduate marketing education providers should recognise the changes in the student body and those in the wider postgraduate educational environment. The cultural diversity in postgraduate marketing students provides opportunities and benefits for marketing education providers but difficulties may arise if managed unsuccessfully. As such, higher education institutions should clearly recognise that the needs of international students are different not only from undergraduate students but from their

British counterparts and that effective support mechanism should be set up at institutional level to meet these needs.

Addressing student under preparedness particularly that of international students

Students' preparedness indicates a clear need for marketing educators to provide the much needed support and reassurance during students' transition between different levels of study and different systems in the case of international students. Otherwise, these students are at risk of falling behind and the difficulties association with the transition may be exacerbated. Therefore, in addition to recognising the specific needs of these students, marketing educators need to develop a deeper understanding of different learner characteristics, the culturally related issues, and the cross-cultural learning and teaching strategies through institution-instigated staff development initiatives. At the programme management level, effort could be made during induction to assess students' initial familiarity with the British learning, teaching and assessment methods and, where needed, explain explicitly why these methods are used and how they can be developed more effectively during the programme of study.

Building practical experience into the curriculum

Owing to students' lack of practical marketing experience, it is important that business schools make effort to provide students with more direct contact with industry and build more career-focussed enhancements into their curriculum to prevent the dissatisfaction students may feel when they start employment. This can be achieved through company visits, live projects, shadowing activities, or work placements that may mean the extension of a typical postgraduate marketing programme from 12 to 18 months. This more "relevant" curriculum with the desired theory and practice balance would require institutions to be more proactive and build a more active relationship with the industry and professional bodies from which they could source the practical experience and skills needed.

Overall, this study suggests that a realignment of institutional policy, curriculum design and various support activities on the part of UK higher education institutions is needed in order to cope with the changing characteristics of today's postgraduate marketing students. Some of the practical implications suggested may be contestable given the very many challenges faced by today's postgraduate marketing education providers such as resultant workload, fear for change of academic identity and reduced government funding and staffing in the current financial climate. However, the standpoint of this study is that the institutions must pay attention to the quality and relevance of what they offer to maintain UK's leading position in the global higher education market and to enhance students' educational experience as well as the value of a British postgraduate marketing qualification.

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