



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2002

MARKETING INFORMATION ANALYSIS I (MIA I)

General Comments

1. This paper is designed to test basic skills relevant to marketing research. Students are asked to gain a general level of competence in these rather routine tasks. The format of the paper does not change from year to year (i.e. eight areas of the course are examined every session over eight questions). This paper bears a strong resemblance to those set in previous years. Students should know this and be prepared. For that reason, I guess I am disappointed that only 50 % achieved a pass grade on this occasion.
2. Marks are available in this paper irrespective of one's mathematical talent and one should use this fact to optimise one's performance. The variety of tasks can be made work to the advantage of those who have an aversion to numbers.

There are a number of descriptive questions, such as those relating to sample types, the design of research, research report writing or the meaning and use of particular statistics, which should suit candidates who are good at essay writing.

Other candidates, who have the ability to perform basic calculations using fairly standard formulae, could have found about 50 marks scattered over the eight questions. These might have involved the calculation of the mean, standard deviation, correlation, regression, time series and index numbers. All of this is fairly routine stuff. If one wished to be more adventurous (as was apparent in one of the regional centres), conducting tests of hypothesis are fairly routine and can generate pretty good scores.

The point to be noted is that, while the learning envisaged in this course ranges over a wide variety of issues, all of which are important, the exam at the end of the year must be passed. A pragmatic approach is required where a study of past papers will reveal where a particular candidate can gain most marks. She or he should then concentrate on those areas. In marketing it might be termed 'segmenting by aptitude', whereby you pick the questions that will generate the best scores for YOU.

3. The examiner cannot do any more than to encourage people to use past papers in their preparation. As many lecturers know well, the correlation of any paper with its predecessor is very high. Virtually all the questions have been asked in the past. Indeed, the examiner is hard pressed at times to find variety from one paper to the next.
4. It is possible to gain full marks in every question and so students should attempt all the sections of a particular topic. It is pleasing to report yet again that a few students are up to this challenge and can score very high marks in this subject. The best scored in the high 80's with 6% getting an A.

5. While some high grades were in evidence, it was also true that one in every five candidates could not even get 25%. Picking the topics and preparing answers is the only remedy I can suggest. If you want to be very well prepared and get an even broader view of the examiner's approach, get the papers for the past two years. In this way, you will come across most of the ways in which questions can be phrased.
6. Generally the standard was disappointing with all the usual mistakes making an appearance. These will be underlined in the following section.

COMMENTS ON INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

Question 1

This section relating to sampling is very popular and generally is well answered. The description of a sampling frame and systematic sampling were the two sections to generate most marks. Many however ignored the inclusion of business examples into their answers and so failed to gain full marks. The calculation of a 95 % confidence interval for the percentage of household having a home computer requires little more than putting numbers into a formula. It is a very simple task, which should be mastered by all marketing graduates. Neither should the translation of a percentage of households out of the total of 1.287 million into an actual number prove too difficult.

Question 2

This dealt with some of the most basic issue in statistics - i.e. calculation of the mean and the standard deviation for a table of data. Students should note that the number of properties rented is the frequency. Virtually all candidates attempted the calculation of the mean spending on food per week. Many, however, failed to sort out annual and weekly spending, in addition they were confused about the fact that urban plus rural households comprise the total. Very few students knew how to calculate and present a Lorenz curve. Neither did many include an interpretation in their answer.

Question 3

The deflation of actual earnings to produce 'real' wages was generally well done. Also, the answers for the index of relative wages of female to male earnings were OK.

Question 4

Time series analysis tends to be well performed by the majority of students. This year the trend was given 10 marks in error. This worked to the advantage of the students. As usual, students tend to throw marks away by failing to label their graphs. Each axis should have a label while the total chart should have a title.

Question 5

The correlation of ranked data is rather common in marketing research and so it continues to be included in these examinations. In this case, the only issue was the inclusion of tied ranks. It should be like 'shooting at an open goal'. (As you can guess the World Cup is upon us as I write). The second part of the question tried to relate miles per gallon (mpg) to the size of car engine in ccs. Many students had problems in identifying the dependent variable (Y) as mpg as it depends on the engine size (X).

Question 6

The short questions on probability distributions are still unpopular although they are quite basic and rather short.

Question 7

This year again relatively many tried the hypothesis testing question. Again, both sections have appeared before and could be studied to advantage. Remember that the better answers undertake a full hypothesis testing procedure. It is insufficient to merely make a few calculations and the pull. Quite a few students failed to complete either of these sections. Although they correctly calculated the standard error, they merely used this figure in place of the test statistic Z when they were making their judgement as to whether or not it was statistically significant.

Question 8

Weaker students failed to quote the relevant statistics (as requested) when analysing the tables presented. Generally, I would advise candidates to study this section more carefully as the answering was surprisingly poor. Section B related to preparing a written research report and here the answers were much better. Stronger answers describe the various sections within a research report as well as commenting on matters of style and focus on the target audience. The chapter on research reporting in any Marketing Research textbook should be consulted to gain good marks in this section.