



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2001

BUYER BEHAVIOUR

General Comments

The pass-rate this year was sixty-one percent, a meltdown relative to recent performances (seventy-three per cent last year, seventy-nine percent the year before that). This is the worst result for over a decade. It is clear that there was something seriously lacking with the manner in which many candidates prepared for the examination and/or presented their work in the examination. The ratio of higher grades to overall passes, at twenty-one percent, was also substantially lower than the standard of recent years (twenty-nine percent last year, fifty-seven percent the previous year). The proportion of pass students attaining "B" grades was nine percent (higher than the four per-cent of last year but worse than usual; it was eleven percent the year before last).

Fifteen percent of candidates did not correctly complete the requirements in relation to identifying the numbers of attempted questions, in the correct order, on the front of their answer papers, or by not starting their answers at the beginning of a page as required (up from seven percent last year).

Fifteen percent failed to attempt five questions (up from twelve percent last year). This indicates that a substantial number of candidates are not preparing properly. Many candidates only wrote a few lines as an attempt on individual questions and these are not included in these figures.

As regards legibility, it must be stressed that it is the candidate's responsibility to provide material that is capable of being marked with reasonable facility. Legibility was very poor this year in some scripts, but over-all it was good. General presentation was also poor in many cases. So also was the structuring and paragraphing of answers. The clear and appropriate use of headings and sub-headings improves the presentational appearance of answers, and attracts higher marks.

Many candidates ran out of time, which is quite silly at this level. And some of those wasted good time writing out the question on the answer paper. This is unnecessary and a serious waste of scarce time resources.

It is again worth noting that the attainment of higher grades is only possible by consistent high scoring in all questions. The overall level of higher grades as a proportion of all passes is substantially lower than the same proportion in nearly all the individual questions. This can only mean that while some candidates are scoring reasonably well in each question they are clearly not the same candidates across the examination as a whole. Candidates should have the

ambition of scoring in the eighties and seventies in five questions. In this examination, five percent of candidates managed to score an "A" in individual questions. Just one candidate managed to score an A in more than one question.

Questions should be answered in a full and comprehensive manner that attempts to examine the complexity of the subject matter and to elucidate its applications to marketing decision making. The subject is inherently concerned with marketing decision making; all answers should therefore be imbued with a marketing orientation. Those candidates who show the ability to apply what they learn in other marketing classes to the subject matter of this paper are developing the correct approach to the subject.

It seems that candidates are not thinking application and evaluation and where these are required, as they are in nearly every question, many flounder and too many founder.

Some candidates made very brief attempts at questions. At a professional practice level there is an expectation that more than the minimum will be offered to clients. The same requirement holds for professional examinations. For instance, it is not adequate to draw a diagram, however accurate, and assume that, without elaboration or comment, it answers a question on a paper such as this.

This year again the practical application of theories was emphasised by breaking most of the questions into separate parts. This seemed to help some candidates to focus on this aspect of their answers, but it highlighted other candidates' lack of preparation. Many failed to answer all question parts and effectively limited themselves to half or one third of the available marks.

Those who attained better grades, generally exhibited a more applied and also a more evaluative approach that did not solely rely on lists and categories. These papers were characterised by good coherent answers with a beginning middle and end, where key terms were defined as they were introduced and where the presentation was imbued with an evaluative and applications oriented approach

In some cases, topics that were not directly asked on the paper were produced, frequently without any "tailoring". Where prepared material is completely at variance with a question's main thrust, it is a waste of time to write it all down; more marks could be gained by making a genuine attempt at the question as posed, or by attempting a different question.

Where the prepared answers were apposite they were frequently not adequately directed to the precise point at issue. This approach can fortuitously lead to a pass result but it cannot generate better grades. To generate better grades, a more evaluative approach is required that does not solely rely on lists and categories.

Question 1

Just over half of those who sat the examination attempted Question 1. Fifty seven percent of those attained a pass grade. This is lamentably low for such a fundamental question. Just over half of those who passed attained a higher grade.

The quotation is from Page 6 of the text book. The thrust of this question should be familiar to any candidate who took the trouble to research past papers. Part (a) allowed candidates to show that they understood a very basic concept in the subject as well as the commonly accepted forms of marketing decision making. Too many answers failed to show any understanding and at best

consisted of lists or unexplained diagrams. There was no elaboration or elucidation or explanation, just bare, apparently reluctant, jottings. In many cases what was presented looked like notes which could be used as the bones of an answer; certainly few enough had the detail or depth which is expected at this (professional) level

What was required in (b) was the ability to relate marketing decision making on the one hand and consumer behaviour concepts on the other. Any marketing decision process could be chosen to illustrate how it might be affected by knowledge of any one element of the consumption process. This is an examination task that has recurred and will recur. Very few candidates answered this part of the question adequately.

Question 2

Just over two in every five candidates attempted Question 2, making it the second most unpopular choice. Only twenty-one percent achieved a pass standard, the second worst performance in this examination. It is difficult to accept that pass rates could ever be so low in a professional examination. Half of those who passed attained a higher grade.

The quotation in Question 2 is from Page 363 of the text-book where the issues dealt with are the information which consumers seek, indicators which are used to assess the extent of search, and factors which influence the extent of search. Two of these issues were addressed in the examination (indicators and factors). Candidates who showed a basic recognition of the external search topic tended to confuse the three issues and write about indicators as factors and factors as indicators or they chose to concentrate on the information which consumers seek (which wasn't asked at all). Very few tackled the evaluation aspect of the question or managed to tackle it meaningfully. There was little enough useful comment on internet search behaviour.

Some candidates chose to write on involvement, others wrote on Maslow (including carefully drawn diagrams) and indeed on motivation generally.

Question 3

Question 3 was the most unpopular choice of question, with less than one in five attempting it. It also had the worst pass rate at twelve percent. That is a success rate that is hard to imagine and more difficult to accept. Of those who passed, three in every four attained a higher grade (the best such performance in this examination). It is clear from these figures that for those who had a knowledge of the topic (unfortunately all too few) it was relatively easy to attain higher marks; for those who did not have a knowledge of the topic it was difficult to pass. Obvious if one thinks about it.

The concept of *affect* is dealt with throughout Mowen (and is one of the strengths of the book). The quotation in Question 3 is derived from Page 163 of the text book. There is a table on that page which shows the areas of application of affective processes, indicating the different parts of the book where further detail may be found. Not too many took the trouble to follow those indicators, or even apparently notice them. Part (b), in other words, was poorly answered.

Part (a) was the only section that was reasonably addressed, but most candidates produced just lists without context setting or discussion. The same criticism applies to the answers to Part (c); a list of items (marketing strategies in this case) cannot possibly "show how" something happens. Candidates must read the questions carefully.

The ever hopeful lost creatives reacted to the word "affective" by happily penning homelies on the need for effective marketing. And, as always, there were candidates who apparently believe

that if you don't really know what the question is about, you might as well write about motivation.

Question 4

This was by far the most popular choice with over four out of every five candidates attempting it. It had the second best pass rate at seventy percent. Of these, half attained a higher grade. Many candidates displayed a good basic knowledge of loyalty and loyalty schemes. This of course generated marks.

Candidates were less able to explain what is meant by loyalty, or to show any grasp of underlying theory. The whole area of customer retention, loyalty and developing relationships with consumers is current in the business press and is of substantial importance to marketers. One would not get that impression from many of the candidates who attempted this question.

There was a general tendency to take up too much time giving elaborate descriptions of what is involved in loyalty schemes, rather than focusing on evaluation as asked. To say that these schemes are becoming increasingly popular is not an evaluation in the terms required by Part (b) of the question.

When questions contain quotations, as in Question 4, it is desirable for candidates to refer to the quotation in their answer. Although the quotation (from Page 436 of the text) referred to repeat purchase behaviour, very few dealt with this issue.

The spelling "loyalty", rather like a virus, turns up regularly in the most unexpected (and always unwelcome) places.

Some home-made definitions :

"Brand loyalty is whereby a product is purchased on a conditional basis". What? "When a person shows brand loyalty it basically means that they are loyal to a brand". Thanks a million.

Question 5

This question was attempted by just less than two in every three candidates. Slightly over half of those achieved a pass grade. Such a low pass rate is not acceptable. One in three of those who passed attained a higher grade, the worst performance in this regard in this examination.

The prediction of behaviour from attitude measures is a common topic on these papers and it is a part of the course which should attract detailed consideration and study. It is ridiculous that only half of those attempting this topic should be able to achieve a pass grade.

The quotation is derived from Page 264 of the text. Part (a) was answered fairly well, but the answers were mostly just notes or lists without the context and elaboration required at this stage. Part (b) was very disappointing with many candidates not having any idea what the Behavioural Intentions model is but being prepared to offer outlandish suggestions of what it might be. Some wrote at some length about attitude functions or attitude change or multi-attribute models or whatever. Many did not attempt Part (b) at all.

Question 6

Question 6 was the third most popular choice with seven out of ten candidates attempting it. Seventy-seven percent of those achieved a pass grade, the best performance in this regard in this examination. Of those who passed, two out of every three achieved a higher grade (the second

best performance in this regard in this examination). It also had the highest number of As awarded (five percent of those who passed). The answers were generally well prepared, well presented and focussed on the topics asked in the question. This was a welcome relief in this dismal performance.

Question 7

Three out of every four of the candidates attempted Question 7, the second most popular choice in this examination. It had the third best pass rate, sixty-five percent of those attempting the question. Just over half of those who passed attained a higher grade.

The most common problem was that candidates did not know what family role structures are and confused them with family types or family life-cycles. Many candidates also confused family and household. And some were just confused. In the home-made definition category this one deserves special mention: "The family can be defined as the living elements within a unit".

Candidates must develop the ability to apply the concepts of Consumer Behaviour to marketing activity; it is never sufficient to suggest merely that marketers "must understand" role structures or whatever. Some candidates expressed fairly strange nineteenth century type views about the role of women in the family.

Question 8

This question was tackled by just over half of the candidates. The pass rate was thirty-three percent of those who attempted it. That is awful. Just over half of those who passed attained higher grades.

This was pretty poor stuff. Only one candidate attempted a definition of situation (successfully as it happened). Very few could even list situations other than time. Hardly any could suggest how marketers could use knowledge of situations in their strategies, other than of course that they "must understand" them.