



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2004

BUYER BEHAVIOUR

General Comments

The pass-rate this year was seventy-two percent, a considerable improvement on the sixty-six percent of last year. The ratio of higher grades to overall passes was forty-six percent (lower than last year's fifty-one percent). The proportion of pass students attaining "B" grades was four percent (as compared to seven percent last year and more than double that the year before). No candidate attained an A grade.

Most candidates prepared seriously for the examination and took the trouble to present their material clearly and carefully. Serious preparation is evident from the familiarity shown with the content and orientation of the set text, while overall the standard of presentation was very good indeed. Some candidates also showed familiarity with other relevant sources of information and this is most welcome.

Twenty-five 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 (slightly down from twenty-eight percent last year). This is an unacceptably high error rate which was as low as fifteen percent within the last few years.

Thirteen percent failed to attempt five questions (the same as last year and much better than the twenty-three percent of the previous year). Many candidates wrote only 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 poor this year in some scripts, but over-all it was very good. While most candidates did present their material clearly, there was a substantial minority who were quite slipshod in this regard. A good structure, good use of paragraphing, clear and appropriate use of headings and sub-headings, all improve the presentational appearance of answers, and attract higher marks.

Some 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. Some also spent much too much time on elaborate rough work schemes rather than getting down to the task at hand. Some allocated too much time to carefully drawing meticulous diagrams without adequate, or sometimes any, explanation.

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, twelve percent of candidates managed to score an "A" in individual questions (the same as last year; it was twenty percent the previous year). Yet only two candidates (the same number as last year) managed to score an "A" in more than one question, one of whom scored an "A" in three questions, relatively poorly in two others and finished with a "B" overall; the other candidate scored eighty percent in one question, ninety percent in another, yet finished with a "C" because the other two questions attempted (only four were attempted in total) were relatively poorly answered.

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.

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. Some 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.

Question 1

The thrust of this question should be familiar to any candidate who took the trouble to research past papers. The answer requires an understanding of Chapters One and Two of the textbook. Part (a) required a knowledge of the consumption process. The chosen wording allowed candidates to display any subtleties of understanding they may have acquired, by, for example distinguishing the general use of the 'consumption process' from more specific usage as in 'acquisition, consumption and disposition processes'. Many answered well and clearly; others

generated unexplained diagrams (particularly of the Organising Framework of the textbook), described the exchange process, summarised research perspectives but did not generate marks.

What was required in (b) was the ability to show how a knowledge of one aspect of the consumption process can assist marketing practice. Any type of marketing practice could be chosen to illustrate how it might be affected by knowledge of any one aspect of the consumption process. Illustration such as this cannot be accomplished by merely stating that it is 'important' or 'very important' or suchlike for marketers to know this.

Many answered this quite well showing a good grasp of the issues. Some answers failed to show any understanding and at best consisted of lists or unexplained diagrams. These displayed no elaboration or elucidation or explanation, just bare, apparently reluctant, jottings, without definitions or other clarity. In some cases what was presented looked like notes which could be used as the bones of an answer; certainly these did not have the level of detail or depth which is expected at this (professional) level.

Some attempted only one part of the question, thus reducing their possible marks by half. This question had the worst pass rate. The highest mark achieved was 80%.

Question 2

Most candidates who attempted this question knew that the field of study 'that analyses symbols and their meanings' is semiotics. Some thought it is 'semiotic' or 'semeotics' or (think about it) 'symbiotics'; some thought it is 'culture'.

Some gave good relevant practical accounts of current Irish marketing campaigns; many were able to describe the campaigns but could not relate them to semiotics or could not describe specific promotional usage of symbols. The highest mark achieved was 70%.

Question 3

This question had the highest rate of "A" grades (nine percent) as a percentage of those who passed. What was required in Part (a) was quite specific and it did not involve lengthy listings of the strengths and weaknesses of the Internet or detailed descriptions of perception theory; a good answer could have been quite brief, as many good answers were.

Part (b) was generally well answered and many candidates showed a good grasp of the meaning of information overload and its relevance to the theory of memory and learning.

Part (c) was less well answered and many candidates displayed little enough idea of the relevance of information overload to marketing managers. The highest mark achieved was 73%.

Question 4

The subject matter of this question is of considerable importance to Irish marketing professionals. Its contemporary relevance was well expressed in some very well informed and insightful answers.

Other answers were less relevant and certainly less insightful and lacked knowledge of what is meant by culture and what is involved in globalisation. Many did not address the question at all but delivered 'rants' on the European question and even on Iraq. Candidates should be familiar with MII Quarterly and watch out for relevant articles, particularly by recognised Irish authorities. The highest mark achieved was 90%.

Question 5

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.

Among those who passed, Part (a) was answered well, with diligent text-book based preparation evident. However, some answers consisted of just notes or lists without the context and elaboration required at this stage; in these answers, definitions of attitude were noticeably absent. An interesting addition to the literature was the ‘attitude against the object model’

Part (b) was also answered well, in the main, by those who attained a pass grade. Again, some candidates wasted valuable time, and the opportunity to gain marks, by writing at length about attitude functions or attitude change or even motivation theories. Many of those who did tackle both parts of the question reasonably well made little enough effort to relate them together. The highest mark achieved was 90%.

Question 6

Most candidates were able to give a general account of the changes that have occurred in Ireland in recent times. Many unfortunately had no clear grasp of what is meant by ‘socio-economic’ changes, particularly as was intended in the quotation. Discussion of socio-economic issues was frequently ignored and the related (but distinctly different) technological, demographic and religious changes were given precedence. It is important for candidates to keep up-to-date and be aware of what is written on relevant topics in the Irish media.

Where many candidates also fell down was in the ability to show, in Part (b), that they can appreciate the marketing applications of information that they have learned. 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’ or ‘must know’ socio-economic changes or whatever. This was the only Question where no candidate achieved an “A” grade.

Question 7

In answering Part (a) many candidates were able to display a minimum understanding but few showed a good grasp of what is involved in word of mouth communications.

Part (b) was generally poorly addressed with most unable to give clear directions on how marketers could utilise word of mouth influence. The highest mark achieved was 72%.

Question 8

Question Eight had the best pass rate at eighty-two percent. In regard to Part (a), while many had a good clear idea of the topic, some candidates were unable to clearly explain what is meant by loyalty (inexplicably but frequently rendered ‘loyalty’) or to show any grasp of underlying theory. Among those who attempted a definition (too few), the old mistake of using the term to be defined in the definition was quite prevalent (as in e.g. “loyalty is when a person stays loyal”).

As regards Part (b), many answers here were quite practical, sensible and well informed.

This was in marked contrast to Part (c) where answers were too often constrained by the absence of a good understanding of what loyalty is. The highest mark achieved was 76%.