

Complementary Views From Students Vs Employers in the Desired Curriculum of Mba (Marketing) in Thailand

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Abstract :

Universities in Thailand initiate several marketing strategies to draw interests from students while other groups of stakeholders such as employers are often not explicitly targeted to. In this study, the MBA (Marketing) curriculum is used to represent a focal product from a marketing viewpoint. The main research questions ask the respondents' satisfactions desires, and appropriate revisions regarding the curriculum. A survey was conducted with both students and employers. Data from student respondents indicate that they were most satisfied with human relationship skill, problem-solving skill, and self-study skill aspects of the current curriculum and what they desire most is an ability to learn in the future. They suggest the curriculum be revised to be up-to-date. They view that the number of credits should remain unchanged, however. If the curriculum is to increase the number of credits, they suggest the addition of more marketing-related courses. Regarding the employers' data, their top five desires for students' quality include care for service receiver, interest in and attention to work, responsibility, Thai communication skill, and strong determination for success. Courses most desired by employers include consumer behavior, service marketing, selling techniques and negotiations, statistics and data analysis, marketing management, modern retailing, marketing for SME, marketing creativity and innovation, and current issues in marketing. The research findings provide several implications for the higher education sector to design and deliver curriculums which better suit stakeholders' desires.

Key words: curriculum, students, employers, MBA, marketing

1. Introduction

Increasingly, universities around the globe are facing tougher time in recruiting new students due to the lower rate of birth and alternative education such as those available online or in social media. In addition, public universities tend to receive relatively less government funding. As a result, universities are turning to marketing in order to thrive or survive (Pinar et al., 2014) especially in terms of attracting new students.

Likewise in Thailand, universities are trying to draw more attention and interest from students and other stakeholders (Polyorat, 2011). Numerous universities initiate the use of several marketing practices as branding and sales promotions or special incentive in various forms including, for example, free laptop, heavy advertisements in various media, event marketing and sponsorships. These marketing tactics, while long and extensively used in consumer products and services, are until recently uncommon in Thailand. Moreover, numerous traditional public Thai universities (e.g., Khon Kaen University and Chiang Mai University) have become autonomous universities, thus resulting in a stronger need to attract more students in order to increase revenues for their institutions.

In addition to students, higher education institutes also cater to the need of various stakeholder groups which include employers, parents, local community, general public, and local and central government (Eldegwy et al., 2018). However, most of the higher education marketing practices appear to focus on one particular group of university consumers, namely students. Other groups of consumers or stakeholders, however, are often not explicitly targeted to. It is possible that different groups of stakeholders may have different perceptions and needs in a context of higher education. For example, Polyorat et al. (2012) found that, out of ten dimensions, employers have statistically different perceptions from those of other groups of stakeholders in the following seven dimensions of desired student quality: (1) human relationships and responsibility, (2) quantitative analysis, communication, and technology skills, (3) research skills, (4) social responsibility and art & cultural conservation, (5) national and international cognition, (6) physical and psychological well-beings, and (7) happiness and good environment. The results urge the need to carefully explore various groups of stakeholders. Similarly, drawing from brand personality framework, Khumkhainam and Polyorat's (2014) study revealed that 11 (out of the 42) personality traits of a local college: down-to-earth, real, wholesome, young, imaginative, unique, independent, successful, leader, confident, and rugged appear to be differently perceived among the 3 groups of stakeholders. That is, the college student sample is found with a better awareness of these 11 college personality traits than the college staff and the general public respondents. As a consequence, it is obvious that the need and want of different groups of stakeholders

may vary. Therefore, the consideration of students' need alone may not suffice for devising effective marketing strategies of the universities.

In Thailand, a university curriculum must be revised every 5 years (Polyorat & Jaratmetakul, 2012). In order to gain critical input from major stakeholders of the university, students and employers are surveyed for their opinions regarding the current curriculum as well as how to further develop it to better suit the desire of these two groups. In this study, the MBA (Marketing) curriculum was used to represent a focal product from a marketing viewpoint. From a managerial standpoint, the results from the present study can provide several implications regarding the curriculum development by taking into account the inputs from the important stakeholders.

2. Method

A survey research was conducted to collect data from 81 students (both current and alumni; 53.1% male) and 75 employers (61% located in Northeast) using purposive sampling. Several approaches of data collection were used with different groups of respondents. The questionnaires for the current students were distributed in the classroom. The questionnaires for the alumni were distributed via email and social media. For the employers, a combination of mail survey and telephone survey were used.

Students were asked to indicate their satisfaction with the current curriculum, and whether and how the curriculum should be revised. They were also asked what they desired from the curriculum. Employers were asked to indicate the desired quality of the students and the courses to be included in the curriculum. Several questionnaire items were mandatory and drawn from the office of higher education manual while the rest was specifically developed for the present study.

3. Results

3.1 Student data

In terms of satisfaction gained from studying in this curriculum (see Table 1), the three most satisfied aspects include human relationship skill ($M=3.85$), problem-solving skill ($M=3.83$), and self-study skill ($M= 3.75$). What students desire most from the curriculum (see Table 2) is an ability to learn in the future ($M=4.35$).

Furthermore, 71.6% of the student respondents indicate that the curriculum should be revised. The primary reason (see Table 3) is to be up-to-date with the current situations (47.0%). However for those who consider the curriculum revision unnecessary, the primary reason (see Table 4) is the current curriculum is still up-to-date with the current situations (38.7%).

Most students (75.3 %) view that the number of credits should remain unchanged whereas 11.1% and 13.6% suggest a decrease and an increase, respectively. If the number of credits is to increase, the majority of the respondents (54.5%) suggest the addition of more marketing-related courses while 45.5% suggested the non-marketing-related courses. If the number of credits is to decrease, the majority of the respondents (88.9%) suggest the removal of non-marketing-related courses while 11.1% suggested the marketing-related courses. Non-marketing or general business courses include subjects such as fundamental of business, statistics, finance, and accounting. Marketing courses include, for example, marketing research, strategic marketing management, and integrated marketing communication.

3.2 Employer data

Employers' desire for different aspects of students' quality is displayed in Table 5. In terms of work skills and abilities, the most desired qualities include Thai communication skill ($M=4.48$), work management and planning ($M=4.39$), and judgment and ability to make a decision ($M=4.37$). In terms of work responsibility, the most desired qualities include responsibility ($M=4.48$) and punctuality ($M=4.45$). In terms of work enthusiasm and care for service receiver, the most desired qualities include care for service receiver ($M=4.57$), interest in and attention to work ($M=4.52$), and strong determination for success ($M=4.47$). In terms of relationship with colleagues, the most desired qualities include good human relationship ($M=4.43$), ability to work with other people ($M=4.27$), and proper behavior ($M=4.21$). In terms of initiative, the most desired qualities include ability to learn and perform the work ($M=4.29$), and initiative and creativity ($M=4.08$). In terms of behavior and personality, the most desired qualities include good work attitude ($M=4.41$), ethics ($M=4.39$), and discipline ($M=4.36$).

Regarding the courses desired by employers (see Table 6), the most preferred topics include, for example, consumer behavior (97.3%) , service marketing (96.0%), selling

techniques and negotiations (93.3%), statistics and data analysis, marketing management, modern retailing, marketing for SME, marketing creativity and innovation, and current issues in marketing (92.0%).

4. Conclusion

In summary, data from student respondents indicate that they were most satisfied with human relationship skill, problem-solving skill, and self-study skill aspects of the current curriculum and what they desire most is an ability to learn in the future. They suggest the curriculum be revised to be up-to-date. They view that the number of credits should remain unchanged, however. If the curriculum is to increase the number of credits, they suggest the addition of more marketing-related courses. Regarding the employers' data, their top five desires for students' quality include care for service receiver, interest in and attention to work, responsibility, Thai communication skill, and strong determination for success. Courses most desired by employers include consumer behavior, service marketing, selling techniques and negotiations, statistics and data analysis, marketing management, modern retailing, marketing for SME, marketing creativity and innovation, and current issues in marketing.

The present study results provide several implications for curriculum development and revision. First, as the students' satisfaction in terms of time management skill, sufficient knowledge for real work, and communication skill are the lowest, the curriculum should pay more attentions to these 3 skills. This could be accomplished by, for example, adding more of these contents in the course description, designing a new course devoted specifically for the development of the time management skills and presentation skills, or attempting to include these two skills in every existing course.

Second, because "human relationship skill" is ranked the highest desired by the students and most of them indicate that the curriculum should revised primarily to be up-to-date with the current situations, the curriculum should be revised to be more in tune with this demand. For example, new courses in social media& marketing or changing consumer behavior & marketing in the social media era could be considered as these reflect of the changing of human relationships in the present day.

Third, as the student quality most desired by employers are caring for service receiver, interest in & attention to work, Thai communication skill, ,and responsibility the curriculum thus should make sure that these issues are included in the classroom instruction.

Fourth, the results indicate that students want the MBA curriculum to increase the number of marketing courses and reduce the number of non-marketing ones. The results from employers, also reveal this tendency. They prefer the curriculum to contain specific marketing courses including consumer behavior, service marketing, selling techniques and

negotiation. Therefore, more highly specialized or technical skills in marketing could be considered.

Finally, although the current study provides a number of findings in and implications on the curriculum development/revision from a marketing perspective, this research possesses some limitations which may suggest avenues for future studies. First, as the results come from relatively limited sample size which may not be a true representative of the whole population, future research may consider a larger sample size with various groups of research participants to provide a better understanding and generalizability of the findings. Next, the curriculum of other academic disciplines in business administration (e.g., finance, management, accounting) should also be examined. Furthermore, in addition to the survey, quantitative approach adopted in this study, future research may employ qualitative methods to complement the present findings to achieve a more comprehensive view of students' and employers' desire.

Acknowledgment

This study is financially supported by a research grant from the Faculty of Business Administration and Accountancy, Khon Kaen University.

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Table 1 :Students’ satisfaction

Aspects of students’ satisfaction	M	S.D.
Sufficient knowledge for real work	3.56	.95

Knowledge in the academic discipline	3.63	.83
Self-study skill	3.75	.87
Communication skill	3.60	.88
Presentation skill	3.62	.83
Time-management skill	3.52	.98
Leadership skill	3.67	.91
Problem-solving skill	3.83	.85
Human relationship skill	3.85	.78

(1=very unsatisfied, 5= very satisfied)

Table 2: Students' desire

Aspects of students' desire	M	S.D.
More maturity	3.93	.85
Ability to adapt to different environment	4.15	.73
Ability to change and accept new ideas	4.28	.78
Ability to learn in the future	4.35	.85

(1=very undesirable, 5= very desirable)

Table3:Reasons of curriculum revision

Aspects of reasons of curriculum revision	n	%
To be up-to-date to current situations	47	47.0
The former curriculum does not allow for student specialization	19	19.0
The old curriculum provides too few elective courses.	23	23.0
Some courses in the old curriculum are not suitable for a marketing degree.	7	7.0
Other reasons	4	4.0

Table4:Reasons of no need for curriculum revision

Aspects of reasons of no need for curriculum revision	n	%
The old curriculum is still up-to-date to the current situations.	12	38.7
The old curriculum has sufficient number of courses.	9	29.0
The old curriculum allows for specialization.	10	32.3

Table 5:Employers' desire for students' quality

Employers' desire for students' quality	M	S.D.
<i>Work skills and abilities</i>		
Ability to perform work with high quality	4.29	.69
Ability to perform work with high quantity	3.99	.80
Work management and planning	4.39	.73
Sufficient academic ability for work	4.01	.76
Ability to increase work skills	4.32	.74
Ability to learn and apply knowledge for work.	4.36	.71
Judgment and ability to make a decision	4.37	.75
Thai communication skill	4.48	.74
English communication skill	4.05	.91
Third language communication skill	3.36	.95
Ability to summarize data and make a presentation	4.11	.88
<i>Work responsibility</i>		
Responsibility	4.48	.67
Punctuality	4.45	.70

<i>Work enthusiasm and care for service receiver</i>		
Interest in and attention to work	4.52	.67
Strong determination for success	4.47	.68
Care for service receiver	4.57	.65
<i>Relationship with colleagues</i>		
Ability to work with other people	4.27	.77
Proper behavior	4.21	.79
Good human relationship	4.43	.72
<i>Initiative</i>		
Ability to learn and perform the work	4.29	.73
Initiative and creativity	4.08	.77
<i>behavior and personality</i>		
Willingness to take order, advice, and criticism	4.25	.74
Leadership	4.19	.69
Maturity	4.27	.72

Good work attitude	4.41	.66
Self-confidence	4.17	.72
Adaptability to work	4.31	.74
Discipline	4.36	.69
Modesty	4.28	.73
Ethics	4.39	.73

(1=very undesirable, 5= very desirable)

Table 6: Courses desired by employers

Courses desired by employers	n	%
Business fundamental	66	88
Statistics and data analysis	69	92
Marketing research	67	89.3
Supply chain and logistics	52	69.3
Strategic marketing	68	90.7
Accounting and finance for marketers	64	85.3
Marketing creativity and innovation	69	92.0

Local and global marketing	67	90.3
Marketing for society and non-profit organization	62	82.7
Marketing for small, medium, and large enterprise	69	92.0
Cross-cultural marketing	66	88.0
Service marketing	72	96.0
Selling techniques and negotiations	70	93.3
Current issues in marketing	69	92.0
Consumer behavior	73	97.3
Marketing management	69	92.0
Strategic branding and pricing	65	86.7
Integrated marketing communication (IMC)	67	89.3
Seminar in marketing	59	78.7
Direct marketing and electronic commerce	65	86.7
Modern retailing	69	92.0
Marketing consultancy	68	90.7

