



RESM8419: Research Methodology

Research Report

An exploration into the desired characteristics of marketing graduates entering the South African retail industry: a survey-based, quantitative, cross-sectional study.

21 October 2016

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Abstract

The South African economy is experiencing slow growth, which has a direct impact on the retail industry. For marketing graduates, finding a job in the South African retail industry is a highly competitive endeavor, and marketing students should therefore ensure that they prepare themselves in the best way possible to enter the industry whilst still at university.

The purpose of this research study was to determine the desired characteristics – specifically work experience, education and abilities, and personality traits – of marketing graduates entering the retail industry in South Africa, so as to equip marketing students with the necessary knowledge they to better prepare themselves for their entrance into, and finding employment in, industry upon graduation, and better position themselves for success in their careers.

With the current amount of research into the matter of desired graduate characteristics within the South African retail industry being relatively low, the amount of such valuable information available to marketing students is limited, further fueling the motivation behind this research study.

The researcher gained a comprehensive understanding of the existing literature that relates to the topic of the study, which, as part of a literature review, provides a solid background upon which this research study is based.

A cross-sectional, quantitative approach was used for this study, which is exploratory in nature, and the falls under the critical realist paradigm. Data was obtained by means of a number of self-administered surveys sent to marketing and branding professionals at a variety of retail corporations in Cape Town, South Africa, over a period of weeks in mid-2016.

Once the data was received and summarized, the researcher conducted a statistical analysis, attempting to identify patterns and trends in respondent answers.

As a result of a thorough analysis of the data, and after the results were interpreted, certain findings were determined, thus identifying the desired characteristics of marketing graduates entering the South African retail industry. The findings were grouped in terms of survey question type, detailed, and represented in the form of bar graphs and frequency tables.

The reliability, validity, and ethicality of this study were considered by the researcher before the research was conducted. While the study does have limitations, through its findings, it is able to contribute towards the broader body of knowledge about the South African marketing industry, and graduates entering the retail industry.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the study

1.1 Introduction

This chapter comprises an overview of the research study, including the background to the study; the research problem upon which the study is based; the research questions that the study aims to answer; and the objectives that the study aims to achieve.

The chapter also includes the study's statement of purpose and rationale; conceptualization of the main elements of the study; as well as the demarcation of the study, noting the boundaries of the research scope.

1.2 Background of the study

The South African marketing industry is diverse and competitive. The country has a large retail industry, which comprises numerous multi-national corporations which are driven, in part, by thousands of marketing and branding professionals. South Africa has an unemployment rate of 25%, according to conservative estimates, and many people struggle to find jobs and make ends meet (Rogan and Reynolds. 2015).

In recent times, the South African economy has experienced slowed growth and a decline in its global position (Schüssler. 2015). Its position in the World Economic Forum's competitiveness rankings has fallen, its Standard and Poor's credit rating has lowered, and the country's universities have dropped in terms of their international quality rankings (Schüssler. 2015).

All of these factors contribute towards an even more difficult situation faced by university marketing graduates who are seeking employment in South Africa. Jobs are harder to come by, and those which are attainable have higher numbers of suitable applicants.

This study aims to investigate the desired characteristics, as elaborated upon in section 8 of this proposal, of marketing graduates entering the South African retail industry, so as to ascertain what considerations students should make while still studying, in order for them to best set themselves up for success in the industry. The study will contribute to broader bodies of research into the South African marketing and retail industries.

1.3 Research problem

The research problem this study revolves around is an analysis of the desired characteristics of marketing graduates entering the South African retail industry.

The problem will be investigated using cross-sectional, quantitative methods, in the form of surveys.

Due to the fact that the South African economy, and by extension its marketing industry, have been facing tough conditions of late, the availability and competitiveness of marketing jobs in the retail industry have worsened. As a result, students, upon graduating with marketing degrees from South African universities, will find it even more difficult to find the type of employment that matches their qualifications.

Marketing students should, therefore, consider their personal brand, including aspects such as their qualifications, work experience, and personality traits, in order to best position themselves for success in the South African retail industry, before graduating.

By surveying marketing and branding professionals within various companies in the South African retail industry, this study aims to shed light upon some of the most important aspects which should be considered by marketing students who wish to find employment and grow in the industry. To achieve its objectives, the study will include a comprehensive quantitative analysis of survey findings, with the goal of determining what the features of the ideal graduate are in the minds of the majority of retail marketing professionals who participate.

1.4 Research questions

This study will be guided by the following research question:

- What are the desired characteristics of marketing graduates entering the South African retail industry?

The study will also aim to answer the following sub-questions:

- What type of work experience is desired of marketing graduates entering the South African retail industry?
- What level of education is desired of marketing graduates entering the South African retail industry?
- What kind of personality traits are desired of marketing graduates entering the South African retail industry?

1.5 Objectives

This study will comprise of exploratory research.

Exploratory research deals with researching an area of interest about which there is not much previous research, in order to expand the body of knowledge about it. Among others, its purposes are; to identify key concepts, identify key stakeholders, prioritize social needs, and obtain new insights (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout. 2014, p. 75).

The amount of research conducted into the matter of graduate characteristics within the South African retail industry, in the context of the current economic climate in the country, is still relatively low. Due to the South African marketing and retail industries' constant changes, continuous research is needed in order for university students to be able to effectively prepare themselves for their entry into industry after graduating.

This study aims to identify the desired characteristics, in the minds of retail marketing professionals, of marketing students at South African universities, who plan on entering the country's retail industry upon graduating.

In addition, the study also aims to answer a number of secondary questions relating to the aforementioned students, namely: the desired type of work experience, level of education, and personality traits, of the students.

1.6 Statement of purpose

The exploratory research conducted in this study will serve to identify the desired characteristics, including personality traits, qualifications, and work experience, of marketing graduates who are entering the South African retail industry. This information will allow marketing students to sufficiently prepare themselves for entering the industry upon graduation, making it easier for them to find jobs in the country's competitive marketplace.

Various marketing professionals, who are currently in industry, working at a number of different retail companies in Cape Town, will be surveyed. The professionals will be contacted either directly, or through the companies' human resources departments. Comprehensive surveys will aim to find out what the professionals, who have experience in and knowledge of the industry, think are the best characteristics to have when entering South African retail marketing for the first time, within the context of the current economic climate in the country.

The data obtained will be analyzed, with a focus on identifying trends in responses, so as to draw conclusions in terms of the commonly desired characteristics of marketing graduates entering the retail industry.

1.7 Rationale

This study aims to explore the desired characteristics of marketing graduates entering the retail industry in South Africa, so as to equip marketing students with the knowledge they require to better prepare themselves for their entrance into and finding employment in industry upon graduation, and better set themselves up for success in their careers.

Taking into account the fact job advertising dropped by 6% in the marketing sector in 2014 (BusinessTech. 2015), and that a high number of well-educated, young professionals are continuing to emigrate to safer, more prosperous, first world countries (Booyesen and Tswana. 2015), an investigation into what South African retail marketers expect of university graduates who want to work in the country has become even more important.

This study is also worthwhile conducting in that not much research exists on the topic of marketing graduates entering the South African retail industry in recent years. As South Africa's economy, as well as the marketing and retail industries in the country, have changed in recent times, an investigation into desirable characteristics of marketing graduates is even more relevant.

The knowledge gained from this study could be used to assist South African university students studying towards marketing and branding degrees by providing them with relevant information that they could use to align their own progress, in terms of their work experience, qualifications, and personality trait development, with what is desired by marketers in the retail industry. In doing so, these students could stand a better chance of finding a job and growing in the industry.

1.8 Conceptualization

Retailing relates to the selling of goods to consumers (BusinessDictionary. [Sa]). The retail industry comprises all the retail companies operating in a region, which in the case of this study is South Africa. Types of retailers can vary greatly, from sporting goods to groceries, and this study will be looking at the entire South African retail industry.

Marketing graduates are students who have completed a tertiary level qualification – falling between the NQF 5 and NQF 10 levels - at a university that has a marketing or marketing related specialization. Such students will be in possession of a degree certificate, and may have varying grades, areas of specialization, and conferring institutions.

Characteristics are features or qualities belonging to a particular person or object. This study will consider, as characteristics: graduates' education, including the level, grades, conferring institution, and area of specialization thereof; graduates' work experience, including the relevancy, length, references, and contributions thereof; and graduates' personality traits, including the suitability, types, and strengths and weaknesses thereof.

Time will be put into investigating which characteristics of marketing graduates are preferred by professionals in the South African retail industry.

1.9 Demarcation of the study

This study will relate only to marketing graduates – those students who have completed tertiary qualifications in the field of marketing – and not students who are still studying, or students with degrees in other areas of specialization.

The desired characteristics considered in the study will include only work experience, education, and personality traits, and not other elements, such as sociological preferences, for instance; age, race, nationality, and gender.

The study will pertain only to the retail industry, and not other industries that marketing graduates may be entering. The retail industry studied will be located in South Africa, and data will not be sourced from, nor will inferences be made about, regions outside South Africa.

1.10 Conclusion

Due to university students in South Africa finding it difficult, at times, to obtain employment in the country after graduating, it is imperative that they have access to as much information as possible about what the market is looking for, so as to best prepare themselves for entering the industry of their choice.

This research study will contribute to broader bodies of research into the South African marketing and retail industries. The study aims to investigate the desired characteristics of marketing graduates entering the South African retail industry, so as to enable marketing students to sufficiently prepare themselves for entering the job market, after they graduate.

2.1 Introduction

This chapter encompasses a review of previous literature relating to the research topic. Reviews of literature included in this chapter deal with the South African economy; the South African retail industry; and the characteristics chosen for the study, namely personality traits, education and abilities, and work experience.

Before undertaking a research study, it is important to have a comprehensive understanding of the existing literature that relates to the topic of the study. This literature review provides a solid background upon which the research study is based.

2.2 South African economy

Schüssler (2015) states that the South African economy is not performing as strongly as it used to, with its global rankings dropping as years go by. In 2014, South Africa had the 33rd biggest economy in the world, dropping almost 10 places over the 20 years prior. Schüssler (2015) suggests that this trend may continue, and that falling out of the top 40 largest economies would result in less foreign investment, and this would have a negative impact on the South African job market.

McGroarty (2014) supports Schüssler by stating that growth in South Africa has been slowing for several years thanks to economic uncertainty in key trading partners such as China and Europe, and a number of domestic problems, such as strikes and power outages. McGroarty (2014) also states that South Africa's growth rates are the lowest amongst the BRICS nations, namely Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.

McBride (2016) suggests that the BRICS nations run a higher risk of economic downturn and collapse in the near future, due to their high levels of short-term debt, which could result in currency crises. The aforementioned situation would also have a highly negative impact on the South African job market, including the retail sector.

Mawson (2015), in agreement with Schüssler, states that, according to the BankservAfrica Economic Transaction Index (BETI), South Africa's economy is shrinking. A Nielsen consumer confidence index report for the second quarter of 2015 showed that 73 percent of respondents believe that South Africa was already in an economic slump.

Some of the main reasons for the decline are power outages, lower commodity prices, and strike action, all of which mar economic growth. Such factors can lead to a recessionary period, which drives consumer confidence down further, negatively affecting businesses across industries (Mawson. 2015).

Jarrett (2015) suggests, in agreement with Mawson and Schüssler, that South Africa faces an economic crisis. As an example of industry-specific decline, Jarrett (2015) mentions that, despite South Africa once serving as the bread basket for the African continent, farming in recent years has been greatly reduced.

Jarrett (2015) states that South Africa faces great challenges in terms of creating jobs and reducing unemployment, and that the government has not done enough to assist with these matters. With the policies that have been put in place over recent years, relating to labor practices, visa requirements, and as a result of a general lack of small business support, the South African economy has not performed in keeping with its potential.

Dyer (2016) states, in agreement with Mawson and Schüssler, that the South African economy is not growing at the rate that it could be, with enough investment. Domestic growth is low, the rand is in free fall, and Standard and Poor's ratings firm has reduced the country's credit rating to BBB- status, with a negative economic outlook.

BBB status denotes a country that has adequate capacity to meet its financial commitments, but where adverse economic conditions or changing circumstances are more likely to lead to a weakened capacity to meet financial commitments (Standard & Poor's. [Sa]).

Dyer (2016), similarly to Jarrett, states that the government of South Africa has not done enough to combat economic decline, resulting in the country's economy not being able to meet popular expectations for rising living standards.

2.3 South African retail industry

Radebe (2013) states that the South African retail sector has the country's highest concentration of business, at 45%, making the industry highly competitive. Over the period of 2010 to 2013, the retail, wholesale and restaurant trade sector experienced a decline, with -3.1% growth, while the second and third largest sectors, construction and personal services, both saw positive growth during the same period.

Radebe (2013) also states that employers are also hiring fewer employees, with the average South African business employing 12.6 people, compared to 23.8 people in the nineties. The change can be attributed to technological improvements that decrease the demand for human capital.

The Oxford Business Group (2015), supporting Radebe's view, states that the South African retail sector has experienced a slowdown in recent times, as a result of factors such as a continued weak rand, rising consumer indebtedness and dropping consumer confidence.

The Oxford Business Group (2015) further states that rising inflation, as a result of a weak rand, was one of the factors that led to weak retail sales, and that expected increases in energy tariffs, drought, and more expensive imports have slowed down South African household consumption. These retail sales decreases threaten the jobs of those working in retail marketing, as well as the opportunities of those looking to work in marketing in the sector.

Mawson (2015) states that the majority of South Africa's economy is driven by consumer spending, which accounts for more than 60 percent of GDP. With a weak rand and a declining economy, consumers will naturally not have as much disposable income, and this will decrease consumer spending. A decrease in consumer spending will have a direct negative impact on the profits of South African retail companies.

Van Niekerk (2016), in agreement with Radebe, and the The Oxford Business Group, states that South Africa has been experiencing poor retail sales, which is one of the factors contributing towards the weakened rand.

ABSA (2016) states that South Africa's retail sector remains under considerable pressure, with no noticeable improvements on the cards for the short to medium term. Retail sales and growth have declined over the past two years, impacting a wide variety of retailers. ABSA (2016) further states that the growth decline in non-durable goods was greater than the decline for durable goods.

The retail sector decline is expected to continue, due to four main factors. Firstly, consumers are being burdened with ever-increasing living expenses, including higher food, fuel, and electricity costs. Secondly, the depreciation of the rand is making imported food more expensive. Thirdly, unsecured lending is being reined in by both banks and retailers, resulting in consumers not having access to additional funds to spend. Finally, a lackluster pace of job creation is also a major factor (ABSA. 2016).

ABSA (2016) also states, in agreement with Mawson, that as much as 58% of South Africa's gross domestic product comes from consumer spending, of which the retail sector represents a considerable portion.

Mahlaka (2016) states that international retailer Spar, which operates under the Spar, Tops, and Build it brands in South Africa, is looking to a number of foreign countries to bolster its sales and act as a buffer from South Africa's declining retail market sales.

Similarly to ABSA, Mahlaka (2016) suggests that South African consumers are facing sustained rising costs, higher interest rates, and a slowing economy, which is decreasing their spending. This has resulted in grocery retailers such as Pick n Pay, Shoprite, Woolworths, and Massmart experiencing a more difficult trading environment.

2.4 Characteristics

2.4.1 Personality traits

Estrin (2014), when speaking about strong digital marketers, states that, while marketers come in all kinds of packages, at their core, they all have some key qualities in common.

These qualities include: an ability to work well in teams and draw from reliable partners; an ability to accept failure and move forward despite it; being able to see things through the lens of the customer; being open to new ideas and changing opportunities; being a lifelong student and continuously open to growing; being willing to experiment; understanding the bigger picture; and being able to merge tactical and strategic thinking to achieve goals.

Those in marketing need to be able to prioritize behavior before the message they put out; develop more, smaller ideas in conjunction with focusing on the overall purpose or strategic goals; and focus on the lasting impact of marketing efforts, rather than campaign or advertising impacts in the moment (Horry. 2013). Horry (2013) also states, similarly to Estrin, that marketers should be able to work well in teams, and adapt their plans whilst embracing uncertainty.

In order to be successful in industry, marketing students need to possess a combination of several personality traits. Although successful marketing professionals come from different backgrounds there are some personality qualities they tend to have in common. Marketers need to be: creative and self-motivated, very detail oriented, good at planning, but also open to last minute changes, a leader at times and a follower when necessary, able to stay up-to-date with trends, optimistic, able to understand their consumers, and, as suggested by Estrin and Horry, able to work well in a team environment (International Student. [Sa]).

Sheridan (2014) suggests that a number of essential qualities of successful marketing managers are: a goal-oriented mindset; a passion for writing and clear communication; an ability to understand people and what motivates them; and, in agreement with International Student, an ability to be creative and think outside the box.

Hays ([Sa]), in agreement with Sheridan, states that marketing professionals should possess a few specific personality traits, including: creativity when it comes to problem solving; self-motivation; determination; and optimism.

Lord (2014) posits that certain personality traits set marketing professionals up for success. Marketing professionals should be curious, having a drive to learn and improve.

They should be adventurous, being willing and able to take risks. Marketing professionals should also be accountable, detail driven, and humble.

Smith (2011), in support of Estrin, suggests that successful marketing professionals need to be customer centric, being able to understand every aspect of the customers' traits, such as their likes, dislikes, and drivers.

2.4.2 Education and abilities

Estrin (2014) states that marketing graduates should have some knowledge outside marketing, such as people skills provided by political science courses. Horry (2013) supports Estrin's view, by stating that marketing graduates should be able to see beyond their specialization. In agreement with both Estrin and Horry, Hussein (2012) suggests that marketing students should focus on having knowledge of topics that extend outside the realm of marketing.

In agreement with both Estrin and Horry, marketing graduates should take time to pursue learning outside their area of specialization, as doing so may enhance their skillset for a work environment they may one day find themselves in.

Marketing graduates should gain work experience, as this suggests, when they are applying for jobs, that they are work ready and more likely to fit into a role quickly (Baker. 2015).

Baker (2015) suggests businesses should look for marketing graduates who have a strong ability to communicate clearly and effectively, and that, depending on the company, a graduate's writing and brief interpreting abilities may be preferential to a confident, engaging personality.

Davis ([Sa]) posits that, in order to be successful in the retail industry, marketers need to be able to perform research using a number of different methods; assess marketing strengths and weaknesses and keep up-to-date with industry trends; develop formal marketing plans to focus marketing efforts; and, in similarly to Estrin, interact with consumers and gain an in-depth consumer perspective.

Completing a marketing degree isn't enough, and most marketing students aren't adequately prepared for the real world (Hussain. 2012).

In terms of academics, marketing students should focus on statistics at university level, and be prepared to deal with numbers often when they begin working. Students should also not think that their classroom environment mimics a work environment in industry, as the two are very different.

Sheridan (2014) states that marketing managers should possess a number of essential skills in order to be successful. These skills include analytics, social media, video editing, copy editing, and interview skills. Sheridan's position supports Estrin's view that marketing graduates should have knowledge outside the field of marketing.

Linton ([Sa]) states that the skills needed for success in marketing are consistent across the career spectrum, from marketing consultancies, to corporate marketing, to advertising. Good marketing people are first-class communicators, and good team players, with excellent analytical and creative skills.

Linton ([Sa]) also suggests that marketing professionals should have good project management abilities, and be able to establish a realistic schedule for projects, coordinate the work of different specialists and suppliers, allocate a budget, ensure that a project meets its targets, and deliver results on time.

Hays ([Sa]) suggests that marketing professionals should have a good understanding of modern technology and how aspects such as social media and search engine optimization (SEO) fits into companies' futures. Marketing professionals should also possess good people skills and a desire for and commitment to lifelong learning.

Lord (2014) suggests that great marketing departments are led by strong leaders, and that these leaders should have a number of abilities, including: being able to see two steps ahead; being good communicators; being able to help out with various, unrelated tasks; and being able to deal well with leading and managing people.

Smith (2011) suggests that marketing professionals should have strong strategic thinking abilities, being able to understand market trends, develop a targeted marketing strategy, and meet company goals.

Marketing professionals also need to be able to establish a strong vision for what they want to accomplish in the short- and long-term, as well as possess a good understanding of the fundamentals and influencers of business in order to improve growth through innovative business solutions.

Graduate Prospects (2015) states that degrees in marketing, advertising, public relations, journalism, communications, business, economics, computer science, and event management may be advantageous in terms of getting a marketing-related job.

The Chartered Institute of Marketing ([Sa]) states that a marketing-related qualification provides those who want to work in marketing with a substantial advantage, and that those who don't have a marketing degree should consider doing a short course in marketing.

2.4.3 Work experience

In terms of experience, marketing students should focus on what their contributions were during their internships, rather than merely the fact that they completed one, or numerous internships. Students should also find ways to portray themselves as unique, such as through unique hobbies, and a unique résumé layout (Hussain. 2012).

Having an account of how each task was approached is essential for job interviews. Students should therefore begin documenting their achievements during internships early on, so as to have a document that they can take to interviews, to make job applications easier (Wilson. 2012).

Marketing students should focus on networking with anyone who may be useful knowing in the future, and should not be afraid of being wrong and moving forward despite making a mistake (Hussain. 2012).

Hussein (2012) also states that marketing students should understand that marketing is, over and above being about brand awareness, about thinking critically, considering and satisfying the wants and needs of consumers, making money, and measuring return on investment.

Baker (2015) states that marketing graduates should also keep track of what is happening in the industry, and commercially aware graduates have are more able to assess the marketing strategies of businesses.

Graduate Prospects (2015) suggests that an internship is a strong step towards full-time employment. Students should try to find vacation placements as early as their first year in university, as well as take part in open days, taster experiences, and short introductory courses that companies have to offer.

Graduate Prospects (2015) also states that marketing students should try to find marketing-related work at voluntary organizations, work in a marketing or communications role within their university's student unions, clubs, and societies, and search for marketing-related work experience online.

In support of Hussein, Graduate Prospects (2015) states that marketing students should build up a network of contacts, as smaller businesses and marketing agencies may use informal recruitment practices to find candidates. The Chartered Institute of Marketing ([Sa]) supports this view, stating that students should go to events being held by universities, as well as social events, where they might be able to gain contacts and meet industry representatives.

The Chartered Institute of Marketing ([Sa]) also posits that relevant work experience is highly attractive to prospective employers, and that if students' degree curricula don't include a work placement in a relevant company or position, they should look for suitable opportunities online, or approach local companies for holiday work in marketing functions.

The Chartered Institute of Marketing ([Sa]) recommends that students should keep their approaches broad, looking for relevant work experience at both large and small companies.

International Student ([Sa]) states that having a marketing internship can be the key to marketing students getting jobs post-graduation, with internships serving to provide students with industry experience and knowledge. It is rare for employers to hire students with no marketing experience, making internships essential.

Marketing internships better prepare students for when they begin their professional careers, and provide students with the opportunity to make mistakes and learn from them in a situation that isn't a formal job.

Internships also provide an opportunity to network and establish relationships with both business professionals and clients, who could be called on for a recommendation for a future job. Marketing students should try to meet as many people as possible, establish business relationships when possible, and always ask for a business card (International Student. [Sa]).

International Student ([Sa]) suggests that marketing students should look for at least an eight week internship, preferably with a full-time schedule. Students should try to make sure that they will be able to learn important skills and gain industry knowledge from their supervisors and the internship experience. The internship should involve tasks such as collecting and analyzing data, and marketing research, as such skills are important in terms of becoming a successful marketing professional.

Students should look for internships at their universities' career services offices and websites, as well as ask their professors and alumni. Students should also search internship-related websites and the careers sections of the websites of major companies for opportunities to gain work experience (International Student. [Sa]).

Inside Careers ([Sa]) states, in agreement with International Student, that marketing students should gain as wide a marketing experience as possible, gaining experience in a number of different marketing activities, and becoming familiar with all the various channels marketers use to communicate effectively.

2.5 Conclusion

Previous literature suggests that the South African economy has, for some time now, been experiencing slowed growth. This has had a negative impact on the South African retail industry, wherein weaker retail sales, more expensive imports, and lowered consumer confidence and spending is a reality. Employers are also hiring fewer employees compared to years past.

Existing sources also suggest that it is vital that marketing students take strongly into consideration the education, work experience, and personality traits which are required by their respective industries, in order to experience a smooth entry into the job market.

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to detail the specific methodology used to conduct this research study. Research methodology considers mainly the ways in which data is collected and analyzed as part of a research study (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout. 2014, p. 289). This chapter also encompasses the study's research paradigm; research design; population; and sampling method.

This study aims to identify the main characteristics that are desired of marketing graduates entering the South African retail industry. In order to accurately ascertain these characteristics, the researcher has had to consider the research methodology used carefully, so that the results are reliable, and the findings useful.

3.2 Research paradigm

This study conforms to the critical realist paradigm. Critical realism holds that reality changes over time and attempts to empower people to build a better world for themselves (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout. 2014, p. 31).

This study follows a critical realist approach in that it is aimed at finding out the desired characteristics of marketing graduates entering the retail industry in South Africa. The information obtained through surveys could assist marketing students in developing their personal brands, so as to prepare themselves for a successful transition into industry upon graduation.

3.3 Research design

3.3.1 Research survey

This research study is based around the obtaining of information by means of a number of self-administered surveys sent to marketing and branding professionals at a variety of retail corporations in Cape Town, South Africa. These companies include: Woolworths Holdings Limited, Pick n Pay, Shoprite Group, Clicks Group Limited, and Triumph International.

The study is therefore quantitative in nature. Quantitative research involves the processing of data via statistical techniques, objective measurements, and aids in generalizing from a sample of people to a larger population (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* 2014, pp. 21-27).

Survey respondents have provided the researcher with answers to a number of open- and closed-ended questions, which have been analyzed after having been received.

This study uses a cross-sectional time dimension, where survey respondents have been questioned once each. After all participants completed and returned their surveys, the data

obtained underwent a statistical analysis, with the researcher looking for patterns in their responses.

Research performed in this study follows an inductive line of reasoning. Inductive reasoning makes broad generalizations from specific observations (Bradford. 2015). Throughout the course of the data analysis, many observations were made, so as to discern a pattern, make generalizations, and subsequently infer a theory.

3.3.2 Survey pilot

Testing the data collection method before conducting the official study can provide valuable insights into the research process, which the researcher can use to fine-tune the collection method before beginning the study.

In the case of this study, the survey has been sent to three people, who have completed it and detailed their experience with the survey, including informing the researcher of how long the survey took to complete, how easy the survey was to complete, and whether or not the completion of the survey was an enjoyable experience in general.

The aforementioned feedback was used to uncover whether there were any problems with the survey's design and instructions, and relevant adjustments to such were made, before the final survey was sent to participants.

3.4 Population

The units of analysis for this research study are the individuals – marketing professionals at Cape Town retail corporations – who are surveyed.

The target population for this study comprises all marketing professionals at South African retail corporations. The accessible population comprises those marketing professionals who replied to the communication, sent out via e-mail, seeking participants to be surveyed as part of the research study.

The population parameters relevant to this study are: professionals who have been working in the retail marketing industry for at least four years; and marketing professionals who work at retail corporations in Cape Town.

3.5 Sampling

The research study follows a non-probability sampling method, as it is difficult to gain access to the entire population. With non-probability sampling, each unit within the population does not stand an equal chance of being selected as part of the research sample (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* 2014, p. 137). The researcher has therefore used their judgment in selecting participants in a way that is not random.

The researcher has made use of purposive sampling. With purposive sampling, the elements which are desired to be included in the sample, based on a set list of characteristics, are purposely chosen (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* 2014, p. 142).

The researcher has selected marketing professionals in Cape Town, with at least four years' experience, from a variety of retail corporations.

Said marketing professionals have been selected with the assistance of an employee working in the human resources departments of each of the companies approached. This way, the HR representatives have been able to properly advise who suitable candidates were for taking part in the survey, as well as facilitate the process; providing contact details, introducing the researcher, and following up on responses for the researcher to assist with ensuring that the submission deadline was met.

The sample size could be determined prior to the research and was determined once the researcher felt that enough individuals have been included in the study. The sample used in the study needed to be large enough to provide a broad spectrum of insights and enable response patterns to be observed. The researcher continued to survey marketing professionals until the data saturation point was reached, with no new insights being gained and patterns within responses being clear.

The minimum number of people, from various retail companies, that the research study aimed to obtain information from was 10.

3.6 Data collection method

Data was collected by means of surveys sent, via e-mail, using SurveyMonkey, to selected retail marketing professionals. The researcher ensured, by means of communicating with the human resource departments, that each professional contacted had the requisite number of years' experience. Arrangements were made with respondents for a suitable deadline for completed surveys to be submitted. Respondents were requested to submit their completed surveys within two weeks of receiving the link in an e-mail.

Surveys contained an introduction, explaining the purpose of the study, a number of open- and closed-ended questions, and a conclusion, thanking respondents for their participation in the study.

Respondents were informed that their identities would remain confidential, and that they were welcome to abstain from answering any questions which they felt were inappropriate. Respondents were, however, asked to answer as many questions as possible, so that as much information as possible could be obtained. Potentially sensitive questions were included at the end of the survey, so that earlier answers were still usable.

The survey comprises 10 questions, divided amongst numerous sections, with each section on a different page.

Section A pertains to details about respondents, featuring two questions aimed at finding out where the participants work, and how many years of marketing experience they have. These two questions confirmed that participants were suitable for the survey, falling within its intended parameters.

Section B relates to marketing graduates' education factors, and features three questions dealing with graduate industry preparedness, levels of education, and types of education.

Section C relates to marketing graduates' work experience factors, and features three questions dealing with graduate work experience type and duration.

Section D pertains to marketing graduates' personality factors, and features two questions dealing with marketing graduate personality traits and personality development.

For the majority of graduate-related questions, survey participants were asked to provide reasons for their chosen answers in elaboration boxes. Sections B, C, and D combined provided the researcher with the necessary data to, through analysis, draw information about current expectations and preferences for marketing graduates, that exist amongst South African retail marketing professionals.

3.7 Data analysis method

The data obtained from the surveys was analyzed by means of a statistical analysis.

A statistical analysis involves analyzing a body of data to discover underlying patterns and trends (SAS Institute. [Sa]), so as to be able to make inferences as to the outcome with quantifiable confidence.

Steps involved as part of a statistical analysis include:

- Describing the nature of the data to be analyzed;
- Exploring the relation of the data to the underlying population;
- Summarizing the data, which involves the use of grouping, and visualization methods, such as graphs, including bar charts, pie charts, and line graphs, chosen in accordance with the data obtained (Brooks. 2014); and
- Interpreting results and making conclusions based on findings (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* 2014, p. 206).

In keeping with the chosen data analysis method, the researcher collated all the surveys once they were returned and, after summarizing the data therein, using the aforementioned methods, began looking for patterns and trends in question responses, from which inferences were made.

For quantitative data analysis, tables are an effective way of presenting the data to show patterns, which in turn can be used to make predictions. Tables should be kept simple, with each table possessing a clear heading to outline its contents (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* 2014, p. 305). As such, the data obtained from respondents has been represented in the form of frequency tables in the following section of this report.

Furthermore, the data analysis aids in grouping data from each section of the survey, so as to ascertain patterns within the focus areas, namely graduate work experience, graduate education, and graduate personalities.

Due to the fact that the SurveyMonkey survey was set up so as not to allow respondents to submit their surveys unless all the sections had been completed, missing data was not a factor in the data analysis.

3.8 Conclusion

Sufficient planning in terms of the research methodology has ensured that the correct paradigm and research designs were followed, with the survey having been structured appropriately, the correct sample having been surveyed, and a suitable data analysis method having been chosen. Ensured as well is the fact that the research conducted was both reliable and valid.

The research methodology used informs the section of the study which follows – data analysis – which details the findings of the research study.

Chapter 4: Data collection, analysis, and findings

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to detail the specific data collection methods and data analysis techniques used to conduct this research study. Furthermore, this chapter comprises an analysis and interpretation of the data obtained during this study, as well as a section dealing with the study's findings, which is aimed at answering the study's main and secondary research questions.

In particular, this study aims to identify the main characteristics that are desired of marketing graduates entering the South African retail industry. In order to ensure that the data obtained during this study is of value, the researcher considered the appropriate data collection methods.

In order to ensure that the findings of the study were accurate and unbiased, the researcher subsequently considered the ideal data analysis methods to be used to interpret the data.

4.2 Data collection method

The data obtained during this study was collected by means of an anonymous survey, using SurveyMonkey. A link to the survey was sent via e-mail to selected retail marketing professionals. The researcher ensured, by means of communicating with the human resource departments and marketing professionals directly, that each professional contacted had the necessary number of years' experience.

A contact at each of the companies approached as part of the study was asked to, once completing the survey themselves, forward it to a number of their colleagues, whom they thought would be able to participate, whilst still maintaining the original survey selection criteria.

Respondents were requested to submit their completed surveys within two weeks of receiving the link in an e-mail.

Surveys contained an introduction, explaining the purpose of the study, a number of open- and closed-ended questions, and a conclusion, thanking respondents for their participation in the study.

The survey contains 10 questions, divided amongst three sections, with each section on a different page. Each section groups a number of related questions.

The figures referred to below can be found in Appendix A, at the end of the research report, which shows an example of a completed survey.

The survey begins with an introduction, as shown in Figure 1. The introduction outlined the structure of the survey, as well as its purpose, to provide the respondents with context. The introduction then thanked participants for taking the time to complete the survey.

Section A pertains to details about respondents.

As can be seen in Figure 2, two questions follow the introduction on the first page, aimed at finding out what the position and place of employment of each participant is, as well as the number of years' of retail marketing experience they have. The latter question was used to ensure that data was not used from surveys completed by marketing professionals who did not meet the required 4 year experience minimum of the study.

Section B relates to marketing graduates' education factors, and features three questions.

As can be seen in Figure 3, question 3 relates to the workplace preparedness of marketing graduates currently entering the South African retail industry, and asks respondents to provide an answer of "yes", "no", or "to a degree", as well as provide a reason for their answer.

As shown in Figure 4, question 4 deals with graduate levels of education, with respondents asked to check a level ranging from "high school" to "doctorate", or select "other" and specify another answer.

As depicted in Figure 5, question 5 of the survey relates to graduates' knowledge of fields unrelated to marketing. Respondents were asked to select an answer of either "yes" or "no", as well as provide a reason for their answer.

Section C pertains to marketing graduates' work experience factors, and features three questions.

As can be seen in Figure 6, question 6 of the survey deals with whether or not graduates should gain work experience while studying. Respondents were asked to select an answer of either "yes" or "no", as well as provide a reason for their answer.

Figure 7 shows question 7 of the survey, which is a follow-up question to question 6, and pertains to the duration of graduate work experience. Participants were asked to select an answer ranging from "less than 3 months" to "more than 24 months".

As shown in Figure 8, in question 8, which is also a follow-up question to question 6, respondents were asked to detail the type of work experience that they thought was most important for a graduate to have.

Section D pertains to marketing graduates' personality factors, and features two questions.

As shown in Figure 9, question 9 of the survey relates to the importance of graduates possessing certain personality traits. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of each personality trait from 1 to 5, with 1 being not important, and 5 being highly important.

As shown in Figure 10, question 10 of the survey deals with whether or not someone can be developed into a retail marketing professional in terms of their personality, or if that personality needs to be natural. Respondents were asked to select and answer of either “needs to be natural” or “can be learnt over time”, as well as provide a reason for their answer.

Sections B, C, and D collectively provided the researcher with the requisite data to, through analysis, draw information about current expectations and preferences for marketing graduates that exist amongst South African retail marketing professionals.

4.3 Data analysis method

Due to the fact that the nature of this study is quantitative, the data obtained from the surveys was analyzed by means of a statistical analysis. A statistical analysis involves analyzing a body of data to discover underlying patterns and trends (SAS Institute. [Sa]).

A statistic is the value of an attribute that is calculated from sample data. This study makes use of statistical inference, whereby the findings from the sample data are used in order to draw conclusions about the population (Maree. 2016).

Applying statistical analysis to a set of data removes the guesswork from the interpretation of the data. As a result, conclusions that are objective and defensible can be drawn from the analysis. Objectivity relates to the fact that the conclusions are devoid of bias, whilst defensibility pertains to the conclusions being reliable (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* 2014, p. 206).

Statistics encompasses aspects of:

- gathering data, including formatting questionnaires, encoding, and recording data;
- analyzing data, including finding basic characteristics of data sets and exposing patterns within the data;
- interpreting data, including attributing the patterns within the data to the external parameters;
- formatting and presenting data, including data summaries and graphical representations; and
- projections derived from data, including forecasts, predictions, and systems modeling (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* 2014, p. 206).

The analysis of the data involved collating all the surveys once they were returned, summarizing the data therein, and subsequently looking for patterns and trends in question responses, from which inferences were made.

Tables were used in order to present the data and show patterns, which in turn can were used to make predictions. Tables should be kept simple, with each table possessing a clear heading to

outline its contents (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* 2014, p. 305). The data obtained from respondents has been represented in the form of frequency tables in the following section of this report.

Data analysis also aids in grouping data from each section of the survey, so as to ascertain patterns within the focus areas, namely graduate work experience, graduate education, and graduate personalities.

Due to the fact that the SurveyMonkey survey was set up so as not to allow respondents to submit their surveys unless all the sections had been completed, missing data was not a factor in the data analysis.

4.4 Analysis and interpretation of data

10 valid respondents in total completed the survey correctly. Examples of respondent positions are; marketing campaign manager, loyalty manager, product managers, marketing research coordinator, and brand manager. The wide range of positions ensures there is no bias in terms of the types of positions that respondents held.

Two participants were from Clicks Group Limited, one from Shoprite, two from Checkers, one from Woolworths, one self-employed after working at both Woolworths and Clicks Group Limited, two from Pick n Pay, and one from Triumph International. The fact that seven different companies are represented in this study ensures that there is no bias in terms of the companies surveyed.

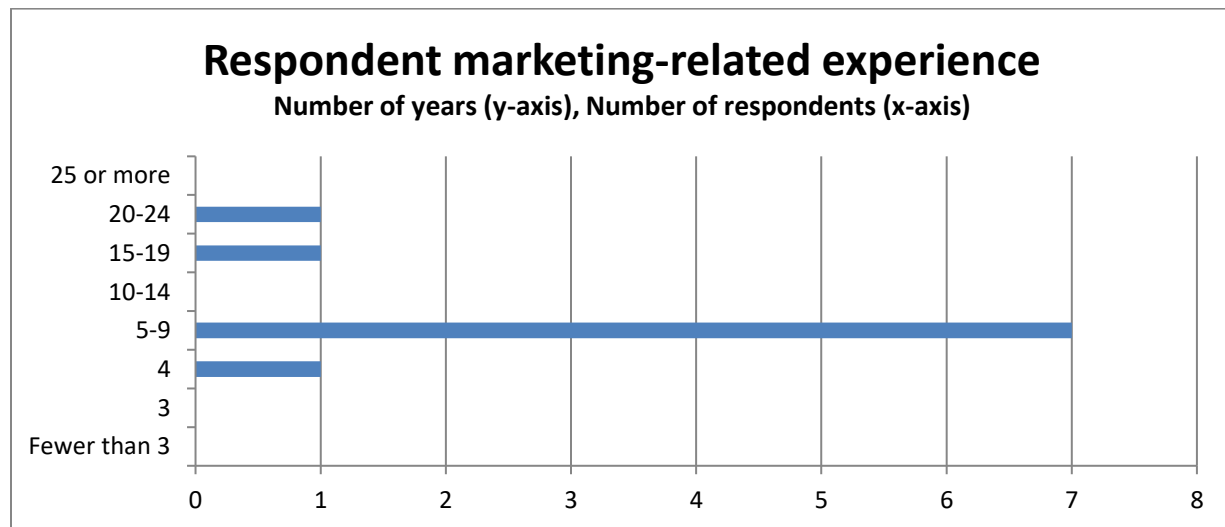


Figure 11: Respondent experience bar graph

As can be seen in Figure 11, most respondents fell within the 5 to 9 year experience range. While one participant had four years of experience, one had between 15 and 19 years', and one had

between 20 and 24 years', seven participants had between five and nine years' marketing-related experience. This affects the study positively, as the more respondents with higher levels of experience, the more trustworthy the data, as more experience will provide marketers with more marketing knowledge and a better view of the industry.

4.4.1 Question 3

Would you say that marketing graduates who are currently entering the SA retail industry are well-prepared for the workplace?

Question 3 frequency table

Survey answer	Frequency
Yes	1
No	2
To a degree	7

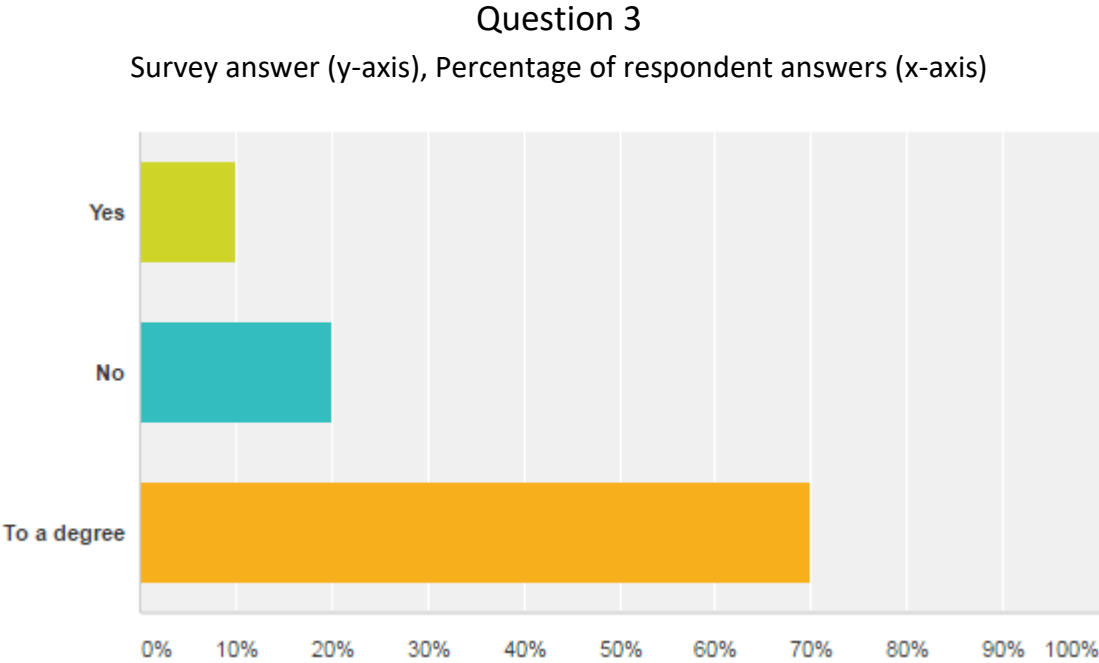


Figure 12: Question 3 bar graph

As can be seen in the above frequency table and Figure 12, of the 10 respondents, one answered “yes”, two answered “no”, and seven answered “to a degree” for question 3.

Therefore, 10% of respondents think that marketing graduates are well-prepared for the retail workplace, 20% think they are not, and a significant 70% think that they are, but only to a degree. In other words, the majority of respondents think that marketing graduates are partially prepared for the retail workplace.

Some respondents stated that the type of marketing course affects how well-prepared a graduate is, with not all courses being equal in this regard. A number of respondents stated that marketing graduates are prepared for the retail workplace upon graduating from university, so long as they have gained some kind of relevant work experience during their years of study.

4.4.2 Question 4

What level of education do you think is sufficient for graduates wanting to be successful in retail marketing?

Question 4 frequency table

Survey answer	Frequency
High school	0
Higher certificate	0
Diploma	4
Degree	4
Master’s Degree	1
Doctorate	0
Other (please specify)	1

Question 4

Survey answer (y-axis), Percentage of respondent answers (x-axis)

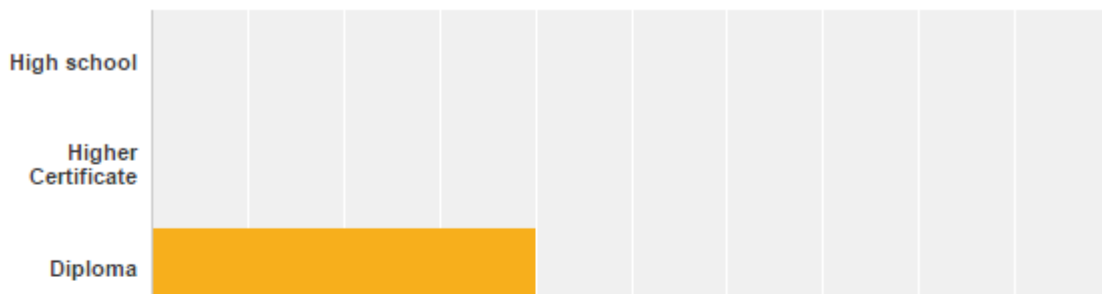


Figure 13: Question 4 bar graph

As can be seen in the above frequency table and Figure 13, of the 10 respondents, four answered “diploma”, four answered “degree”, one answered “master’s degree”, and one answered “other”, specifying an honors degree, which was intended by the researcher to be included in the “degree” answer.

No respondents answered “high school”, “higher certificate”, or “doctorate”. 100% of the respondents thought that marketing graduates require at least a diploma, which is at NQF level 6, in order to be successful in the retail marketing environment.

4.4.3 Question 5

Do you think that marketing graduates should ensure to have knowledge of fields not related to their core discipline (e.g. politics, journalism, IT)?

Question 5 frequency table

Survey answer	Frequency
Yes	9
No	1

Question 5

Survey answer (y-axis), Percentage of respondent answers (x-axis)

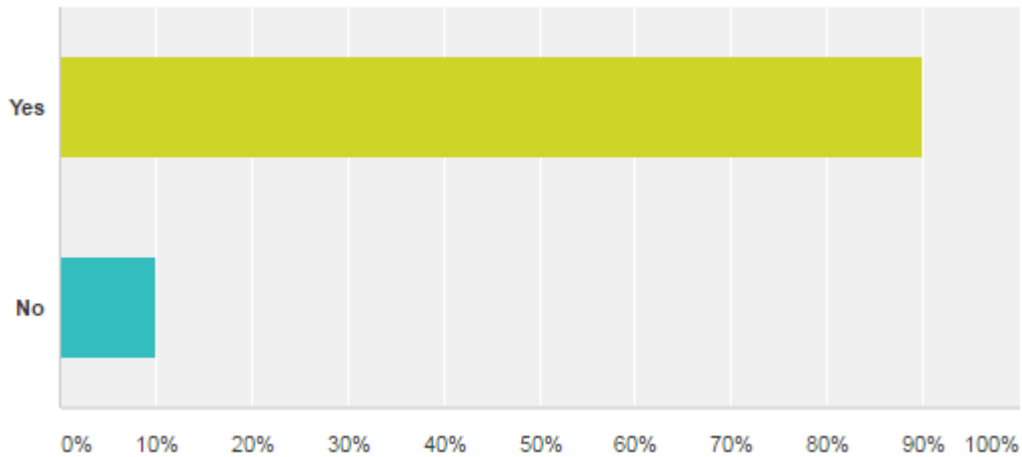


Figure 14: Question 5 bar graph

The above frequency table and Figure 14 show that 9 out of the 10 respondents, or 90% of participants, stated that they think marketing graduates should gain knowledge of fields outside of their core discipline. One respondent, or 10% of participants, stated that they think doing so is not necessary.

A number of respondents stated that gaining knowledge of fields other than marketing provides graduates with an overview of some of the factors that influence marketing, and allows graduates to view marketing within the context of the broader business environment, improving their general performance at work.

4.4.4 Question 6

Do you think that marketing graduates should ensure to gain marketing-related work experience (internship/part-time) whilst studying?

Question 6 frequency table

Survey answer	Frequency
Yes	10
No	0

Question 6

Survey answer (y-axis), Percentage of respondent answers (x-axis)

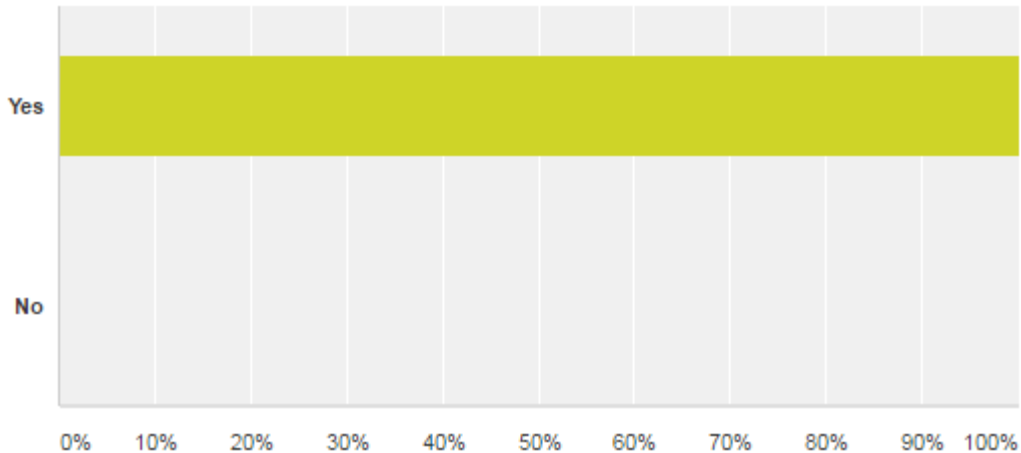


Figure 15: Question 6 bar graph

The above frequency table and Figure 15 show that 10 out of the 10 respondents, or 100% of participants, stated that they think marketing graduates should gain marketing-related work experience whilst studying. No respondents, or 0% of the participants, stated that they do not think that doing so is necessary.

A large number of respondents stated that gaining work experience while studying enables graduates to have a head start in terms of knowing how to apply the theory they have learned at university, within the context of a workplace.

Respondents also stated that gaining work experience while studying makes it easier for graduates to secure employment, setting them apart from candidates who have no practical experience.

4.4.5 Question 7

If you answered yes to Q6, how much work experience?

Question 7 frequency table

Survey answer	Frequency
Less than 3 months	0
3-6 months	3
6-12 months	5
12-24 months	2
More than 24 months	0

Question 7

Survey answer (y-axis), Percentage of respondent answers (x-axis)

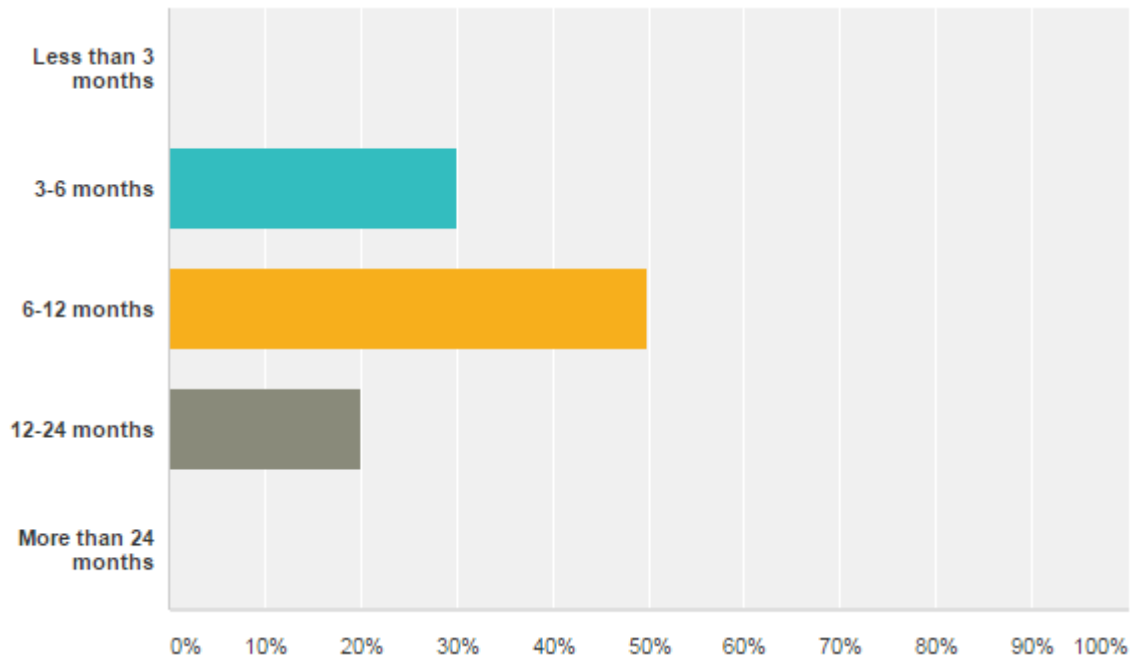


Figure 16: Question 7 bar graph

As can be seen in the above frequency table and Figure 16, three respondents, or 30% of participants, answered “3-6 months”, five, or 50%, answered “6-12 months”, and two, or 20%, answered “12-24 months”. No respondents, or 0% of participants, answered “less than 3 months” or “more than 24 months”.

Therefore, according to the distribution of the data, 100% of the respondents think that marketing graduates should have between 3 and 24 months of work experience gained whilst they were studying, in order to better prepare them for the retail work environment.

4.4.6 Question 8

If you answered yes to Q6, what kind of work experience do you think is most important for graduates to have?

Question 8 frequency table

Survey answer	Frequency
Irrelevant	2

Retail	4
Advertising	1
All business and marketing areas	1
Report writing and presentation	1
General, monitored, with targets to reach	1

As can be seen in the above frequency table, four of the respondents, or 40% of participants, stated that the experience that graduates gain should be retail-related. Two of the respondents, or 20% of participants, stated that the type of experience is irrelevant. One respondent, or 10% of participants, stated that graduates should gain advertising experience.

One respondent, or 10% of participants, stated that graduates should gain experience in all areas of business and marketing.

One respondent, or 10% of participants, stated that graduates should gain experience with report writing and presentation. One respondent, or 10% of participants, stated that graduates should gain any type of experience that comprises monitored tasks involving graduates having to strategize and reach targets.

4.4.7 Question 9

Please rate how important you think the following personality traits are for marketing graduates to have.

Question 9

Survey answer (y-axis), Weighted average of respondent answers (x-axis)

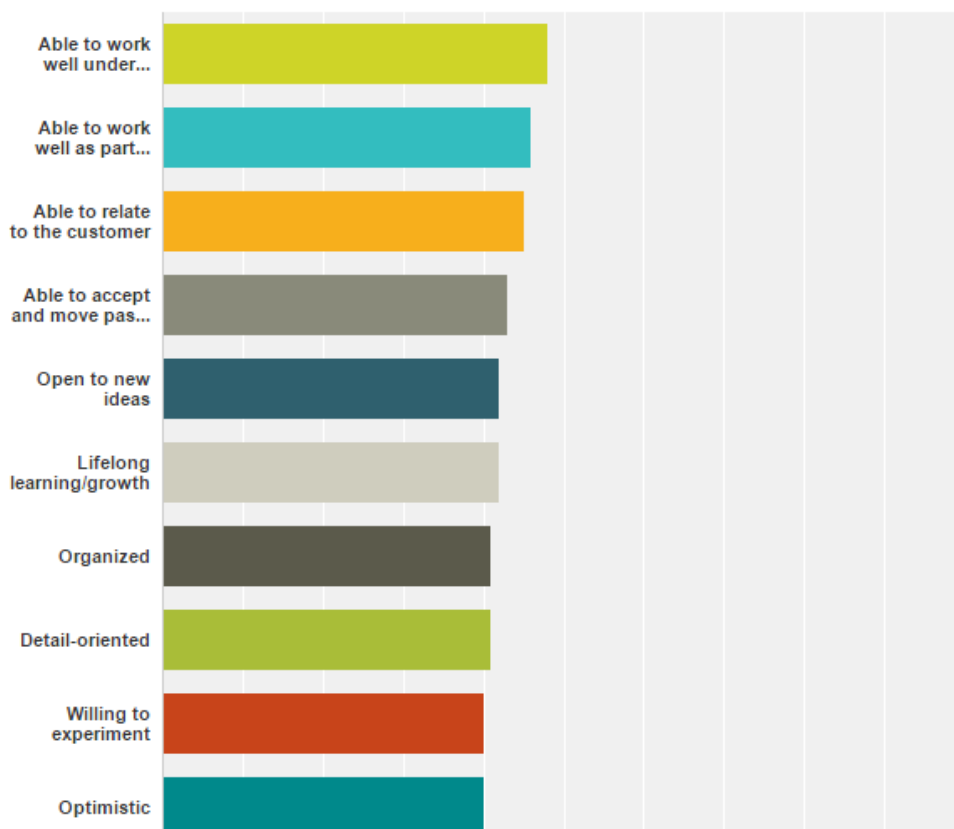


Figure 17: Question 9 bar graph

	1 (Not important)	2 (Somewhat important)	3 (Moderately important)	4 (Very important)	5 (Highly important/Critical)	Total	Weighted Average
▼ Able to work well under pressure	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	10.00% 1	0.00% 0	90.00% 9	10	4.80
▼ Able to work well as part of a team	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	40.00% 4	60.00% 6	10	4.60
▼ Able to relate to the customer	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	50.00% 5	50.00% 5	10	4.50
▼ Able to accept and move past failure	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	10.00% 1	50.00% 5	40.00% 4	10	4.30
▼ Open to new ideas	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	10.00% 1	60.00% 6	30.00% 3	10	4.20
▼ Lifelong learning/growth	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	20.00% 2	40.00% 4	40.00% 4	10	4.20
▼ Organized	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	20.00% 2	50.00% 5	30.00% 3	10	4.10
▼ Detail-oriented	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	20.00% 2	50.00% 5	30.00% 3	10	4.10
▼ Willing to experiment	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	20.00% 2	60.00% 6	20.00% 2	10	4.00
▼ Optimistic	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	10.00% 1	80.00% 8	10.00% 1	10	4.00
▼ Strategic thinking	0.00% 0	10.00% 1	10.00% 1	50.00% 5	30.00% 3	10	4.00
▼ Analytical	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	30.00% 3	50.00% 5	20.00% 2	10	3.90

Figure 18: Question 9 frequency table

Figures 17 and 18 show how the 10 respondents ranked the 18 personality traits they were asked about. In Figure 17, the personality traits are ordered from most important to least important, top to bottom, according to the grouped ratings.

Figure 18 shows the frequency of answers for each rating of each personality trait. The last column in the table shows each personality trait's weighted average.

With a weighted average, the item being averaged is multiplied by a number (weight) based on the item's relative importance. The result is summed and the total is divided by the sum of the weights (BusinessDictionary. [Sa]).

The weighted average indicates, numerically, the importance of each personality trait, as deemed by the respondents. The table in Figure 18 is ordered according to the weighted average, from highest to lowest.

According to the respondents, graduates' ability to work well under pressure is the most important personality trait, with a weighted average of 4.8, and nine out of the 10 respondents, or 90% of participants, rating the trait as highly important for graduates to possess.

Design thinking is the least important personality trait, with a weighted average of 3.3, and eight out of the 10 respondents, or 80% of participants, rating it as moderately important.

The top five personality traits, in order of importance, are; able to work well under pressure, able to work well as part of a team, able to relate to the customer, able to accept and move past failure, and open to new ideas.

The bottom five personality traits, in order of importance, are; patient, independent, confident, good leader, and design thinking.

4.4.8 Question 10

Do you think that it takes a certain kind of person to be a retail marketing professional, or can the right personality be developed in the workplace over time?

Question 10 frequency table

Survey answer	Frequency
Needs to be natural	2
Can be learnt over time	8

Question 10

Survey answer (y-axis), Percentage of respondent answers (x-axis)

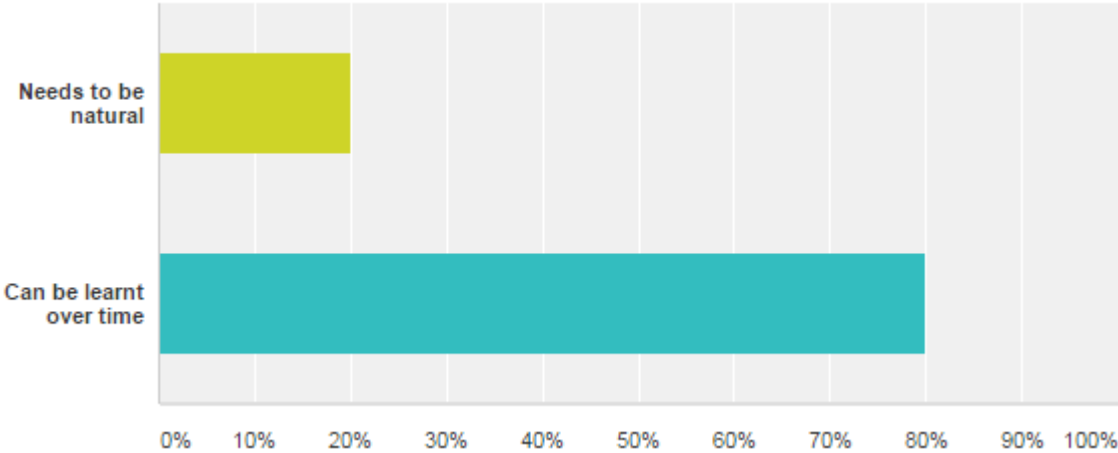


Figure 19: Question 10 bar graph

The above frequency table and Figure 19 show that a strong majority - eight out of the 10 respondents - or 80% of participants, think that the right personality for a retail marketing

professional can be developed by graduates in the workplace, over time. Two out of the 10 respondents, or 20%, think that the personality needs to be natural to the graduate.

One of the two respondents who stated that the right personality needs to be natural to graduates further stated that graduates need to have a passion for marketing, which can't be developed over time, while the other such respondent stated that graduates need to possess people skills naturally, which can't be developed.

One of the respondents who stated that the right personality can be developed in the workplace over time, further stated that so long as graduates maintain a positive outlook, they will succeed, while another such respondent stated that there is a good person-organization and person-team fit, with the graduate's values and work ethics aligning with the company's and team's culture, development is possible to set the candidate up for long term success.

4.5 Findings

As a result of a thorough analysis of the data, and after the results were interpreted, certain findings were determined as part of this study, thereby identifying the desired characteristics, amongst South African retail marketing professionals, of marketing graduates entering the South African retail industry.

In terms of **education**, 70% of the respondents think that graduates are only prepared for the workplace to a certain degree, with some stating that certain university courses are not adequately preparing graduates for entering the South African retail marketing environment.

100% of the respondents stated that, in order to be successful in retail marketing, marketing students should graduate with at least a diploma, and that it is not necessary to obtain a certification higher than a master's degree.

90% of the respondents indicated that marketing graduates should ensure that they have knowledge of fields which are not related to their core discipline.

In terms of **work experience**, 100% of this study's participants stated that they think marketing graduates should gain marketing-related work experience whilst studying, with a large number of them stating that the gaining of work experience whilst studying provides graduates with a head start in terms of knowing how to apply the theory they have learned at university in a work environment.

100% of the respondents think that marketing graduates should gain between 3 and 24 months of work experience whilst they are studying, in order to better prepare them for the retail marketing environment.

40% of the participants stated that the experience that graduates gain should be retail-related, while a further 20% of stated that the type of experience gained by graduates is irrelevant.

In relation to **personality traits**, the top personality trait is the ability to work well under pressure, with 90% of the respondents rating the trait as highly important.

In order of importance, said trait is followed by the ability to work well as part of a team; the ability to relate to the customer; the ability to accept and move past failure; and being open to new ideas.

The least important personality trait is design thinking, with 80% of the participants rating the trait as moderately important. Following on in order of least importance are good leader; confidence; independence; and patience.

80% of the study's respondents think that the right personality for a retail marketing professional can be developed by graduates in the workplace, over time. This, according to some respondents, is true provided certain basic criteria are met, such as graduates maintaining a positive outlook, and graduates' values and work ethics aligning with the company's and team's culture.

4.6 Conclusion

Due to the fact that the researcher considered the appropriate data collection and analysis methods, conducted an in-depth analysis of the data obtained from the respondents involved in the study, and interpreted the data accurately and without bias, worthwhile findings were able to be determined.

Said findings were able to answer the research question which guided this study, as well as the related sub-questions. As a result, the study was a success, and the information produced can be used to contribute towards the greater body of knowledge relating to the retail marketing industry. Additionally, the information can serve to assist marketing students who wish to ensure that they are well positioned for success in the retail marketing industry upon graduating from university.

Chapter 5: Conclusion of the study

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to conclude the research study, summarizing the research findings detailed in chapter 4. This chapter also discusses the ethical considerations, reliability and validity, limitations, and anticipated contributions of the study.

The aim of this research study was to determine the desired characteristics of marketing graduates entering the South African retail industry. By means of conducting a cross sectional, quantitative, survey-based study, the researcher obtained data from a number of marketing professionals, working for a variety of retail companies in Cape Town, South Africa.

Analysis of the data was performed, and, subsequently, findings were formed, which served to answer the study's main research question, as well as its sub-questions.

5.2 Conclusive discussion of research findings

10 valid respondents in total, all of whom had four or more years of marketing experience, completed the survey used in this study correctly. From their responses, research findings were established. The research findings of this study, described in the preceding chapter, show a

number of patterns in respondent answers, which may prove useful to graduates entering the field of retail marketing in South Africa.

The findings also answer this study's main research question – what the desired characteristics of marketing graduates entering the South African retail industry are – as well as its sub-questions which relate to the desired work experience, level of education, and personality traits of said graduates.

In terms of **education**, 70% of the respondents think that graduates are only prepared for the workplace to a certain degree, and 100% of the respondents stated that, in order to be successful in retail marketing, marketing students should graduate with at least a diploma.

90% of the respondents indicated that marketing graduates should ensure that they have knowledge of fields which are not related to their core discipline, in agreement with the positions of Estrin (2014), Horry (2013), and Hussein (2012), as detailed in the Literature Review section of this study.

It is clear from these findings that marketing graduates are perceived to be only partially prepared for the retail marketing workplace, and need to focus on filling the relevant gaps in their education in order to best prepare themselves for entering the job market.

Marketing-related education is important in terms of potential career success, and students should ensure that they have at least a diploma, if not a degree in marketing, if they want to work in retail marketing in South Africa.

Marketing students should also ensure that, by the time they graduate, they have obtained a notable amount of knowledge in fields that are unrelated to marketing, such as journalism, politics, and IT.

In relation to **work experience**, 100% of this study's participants stated that they think marketing graduates should gain marketing-related work experience whilst studying, in agreement with The Chartered Institute of Marketing ([Sa]), Graduate Prospects (2015), and International Student ([Sa]), whose positions are that relevant work experience can be the key to students getting jobs after graduating.

100% of the respondents think that marketing graduates should gain between 3 and 24 months of work experience whilst they are studying; and 40% of the participants stated that the experience that graduates gain should be retail-related, while a further 20% of stated that the type of experience gained by graduates is irrelevant.

The research findings indicate that marketing students should ensure that they obtain between 3 and 24 months of marketing-related work experience while studying, and consider focusing that experience on the retail industry if they wish to work in retail marketing.

In terms of **personality traits**, the top personality trait is the ability to work well under pressure, with 90% of the respondents rating the trait as highly important. The least important personality trait is design thinking, with 80% of the participants rating the trait as moderately important. 80% of the study's respondents think that the right personality for a retail marketing professional can be developed by graduates in the workplace, over time.

Numerous personality traits were rated as highly important, which agrees with the views of Estrin (2014), Horry (2013), and International Student ([Sa]), that marketing students need to possess a combination of several personality traits in order to be successful in industry.

Marketing students should ensure that they have the ability to work well under pressure, as this is a skill that is used frequently in South African retail marketing. Students should take into account that there is a strong possibility that they will be able to develop a suitable personality in the workplace that will allow for success in retail marketing.

5.3 Reliability and validity

In order for data that is part of a research study to be of value, it must be both reliable and valid.

Reliability relates to the repeatability of findings (The University of California, Davis. 2007). Specifically, reliability pertains to whether the same results would be yielded were the study to be conducted by a different researcher, using the same method (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* 2014, p. 254). The researcher ensured the reliability of this study by phrasing the survey questions in such a way that there was little room for interpretation, and therefore misunderstanding, by participants.

Validity relates to the credibility of the research – whether the research measured what it was intended to measure (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* 2014, p. 256). Validity is divided into internal and external aspects. The internal validity of this study was ensured via confirming that the survey used was well designed and would serve to answer the study's research questions, and that suitable marketing professionals were chosen to participate.

The external validity of this study was ensured through making sure that the research instrument remained the same throughout the course of the study, and that a variety of participants were included, from multiple different South African retail establishments.

The researcher also made sure to outline the proper research practices which were to be followed during the study, before the study commenced. The practices followed are reported in detail as part of this research report.

5.4 Ethical considerations

The research conducted in this study does not involve a topic that is considered controversial in nature. Significant consideration has been given to the ethicality of the study as a whole, and more specifically, the methods used to conduct it.

Ethics are crucial in research, as they can have an impact on all the stakeholders of the study, including the participants, the researcher, and the broader public (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout. 2014, p. 263).

By means of an introduction to the survey; e-mail; and thank you letter, the participants involved in the study were informed as to the survey's purpose, as well as the purpose of the study as a whole. Participants were informed that they had the option of not answering any questions that they deemed to be inappropriate, and were informed that their personal details would be kept confidential.

The researcher drew up a personal ethical code of conduct, applicable specifically to this research study, which was followed throughout the duration of the study.

The researcher also ensured to obtain the necessary ethical clearance prior to undertaking the study, and ensured to make use of the appropriate methods of data collection and analysis, and to omit personal bias when interpreting the data, so as to preserve their professional reputation.

5.5 Limitations of the study

Limitations are constraints in a research study, and can arise as a result of a number of different factors outside the control of the researcher. Limitations can cause the scope of research to be redefined, can surface due to shifts in conditions during the course of a study, guide the researcher in the reporting of findings, and support the reliability and validity of research findings within the scope of a study (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* 2014, pp. 275-276).

There are a number of limitations which apply to this research study, the first of which is the time that was available to conduct the study. Having to conduct the study within a specific period of time resulted in the researcher having to limit the number of respondents who took part in the study.

Another limitation was the limited access to respondents. The fact that participants were working professionals who had to be approached through specific business departments, and who took time to respond to communication, and the surveys used in the study, meant that fewer respondents could be accessed than if the aforementioned conditions did not apply.

The amount of information that respondents were willing and able to provide was a further limitation of this study. Surveys could not be of a length that made participants unable or unwilling to complete them, due to time constraints.

While the aim of this research study is to contribute to the body of knowledge about graduates entering the retail marketing industry in South Africa, due to the previously mentioned time constraints, the surveys used to gather data were only sent to marketing professionals working in Cape Town. This may limit the degree to which inferences can be made from the research findings. The research context needs to be taken into account when the findings of this study are read and built upon in the future.

This study provides information about the desired characteristics of graduates entering the retail marketing industry in South Africa at a specific time.

As the South African economy, marketing industry, and retail industry are constantly changing, continuous research is needed in order for university students to be able to successfully prepare themselves before entering industry after graduating.

5.6 Anticipated contribution of the study

By providing an exploration into the desired characteristics of marketing graduates entering the South African retail industry, this study will contribute to the broader body of knowledge about the South African marketing industry, and graduates entering the retail industry.

With the current amount of research into the matter of desired graduate characteristics within the South African retail industry being relatively low, the amount of such information available to marketing students is limited. The information that this study provides will enable marketing students to better prepare themselves for their entry into industry upon graduation, and better position themselves for success in their careers.

This study will also provide insights which will allow marketing professionals, and the corporations they work for, to have a better understanding of the state of marketing education and graduate preparedness in South Africa. Such information can be used to, for instance, develop in-house training programs to fill the gaps caused by a lacking university curriculum.

Information provided in this study can also be used by universities in order to improve upon marketing course content, so that marketing students gain exposure to the situations, and develop the skills, that retail marketing professionals deem to be of value.

5.7 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to identify the desired characteristics, in the minds of retail marketing professionals, of marketing students at South African universities, who intend to enter the country's retail industry upon graduating.

This study was exploratory in nature. Exploratory research involves researching an area of interest about which there is not much previous research, in order to expand the body of knowledge about it (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout. 2014, p. 75).

In keeping the value of this research study in mind, the researcher has ensured to conduct the study in an ethical manner, using the most appropriate methods of data collection and analysis, interpreting the data without the influence of personal bias, and considering the study's limitations.

In order to accomplish the study's aim, after consulting previous research into the study's topic, the researcher conducted survey-based, quantitative, cross-sectional research, gathering data from a number of experienced retail marketing professionals from a variety of South African companies. The data was collated, analyzed by means of a statistical analysis, and interpreted.

A number of patterns were identified in the survey responses, and the study's findings successfully answer its main and sub-questions.

The information provided by this study has a number of uses, including assisting South African retail marketing professionals and the companies they work for with planning for the taking on of recent marketing graduates; assisting South African universities in building their curricula around the expectations of retail marketing professionals; and, most importantly, enabling marketing students to better prepare themselves for their entry into and growth within the South African retail marketing industry.

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Appendix A

Survey example



This short (10 question), anonymous survey will form part of my Vega BCom honors research study on the desired characteristics of marketing graduates entering the South African retail industry. Thank you for taking the time to provide your valuable insights.

Figure 1: Survey introduction

1. Which company do you currently work for, and what is your position? (Eg. Brand Manager at Woolworths)

Marketing Manager at Clicks

2. Approximately how many years of marketing-related experience do you have?

Fewer than 3

3

4

5-9

10-14

Figure 2: Section A of a completed survey

3. Would you say that marketing graduates who are currently entering the SA retail industry are well-prepared for the workplace?

- Yes
- No
- To a degree

Why?

They have the theory and are creative but they need time to adjust to working at a slower creative pace than vars

Figure 3: Question 3 from Section B of a completed survey

4. What level of education do you think is sufficient for graduates wanting to be successful in retail marketing?

- High school
- Higher Certificate
- Diploma
- Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctorate
- Other (please specify)

Figure 4: Question 4 from Section B of a completed survey

5. Do you think that marketing graduates should ensure to have knowledge of fields not related to their core discipline (eg. politics, journalism, IT)?

Yes

No

Why?

It allows them to perform better in the work place, especially if you want to expand your marketing career in vario

Figure 5: Question 5 from Section B of a completed survey

6. Do you think that marketing graduates should ensure to gain marketing-related work experience (internship/part-time) whilst studying?

Yes

No

Why?

It will ensure that they know how to apply their theory in the real world appropriately and not come in with a textbo

Figure 6: Question 6 from Section C of a completed survey

7. If you answered yes to Q6, how much work experience?

Less than 3 months

3-6 months

6-12 months

12-24 months

More than 24 months

Figure 7: Question 7 from Section C of a completed survey

8. If you answered yes to Q6, what kind of work experience do you think is most important for graduates to have?

an internship covering all aspects of the business and marketi

Figure 8: Question 8 from Section C of a completed survey

9. Please rate how important you think the following personality traits are for marketing graduates to have.

	1 (Not important)	2 (Somewhat important)	3 (Moderately important)	4 (Very important)	5 (Highly important/Critical)
Confident	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Independent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Able to work well as part of a team	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Able to relate to the customer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Able to work well under pressure	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Able to accept and move past failure	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Open to new ideas	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Willing to experiment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lifelong learning/growth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strategic thinking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Design thinking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Analytical	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Detail-oriented	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Creative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Good leader	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Optimistic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Organized	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Patient	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Figure 9: Question 9 from Section D of a completed survey

10. Do you think that it takes a certain kind of person to be a retail marketing professional, or can the right personality be developed in the workplace over time?

- Needs to be natural
- Can be learnt over time

Why?

If you do not possess people skills then you will not make it in the field. One cannot be taught people skills, you e

Figure 10: Question 10 from Section D of a completed survey