

# GEN Z's Conception of Marketing

Scott R. Swanson and J. Charlene Davis

**Purpose of the Study:** This study provides current information on how marketing is understood by Generation Z undergraduate students. It also identifies if business majors differ in those perceptions relative to non-business majors and if there are significant differences across different business majors in their perceptions regarding marketing.

**Method/Design and Sample:** Generation Z undergraduate students (n = 1,027) registered for principles of marketing courses provided their personal definitions of marketing as well as a discussion of their provided definitions. Content analysis was used to classify the discrete references contained within each definition and associated clarifying statements. Intra- and inter-rater reliability was demonstrated.

**Results:** A total of 10,248 discrete units were placed into 14 categories. The total number of categories noted by each respondent ranged from 1 to 12 (mean = 7.24, SD = 1.91). The average number of categories discussed in the initial definition (mean = 3.67, SD = 1.56) was substantially fewer than those provided by respondents when discussing their definitions (mean = 6.30, SD = 2.07). There were few statistically significant differences identified across the initial definitions, discussions, or total count categories based on business major or if the respondent was a non-business major.

**Value to Marketing Educators:** This is the first study we are aware of that identifies what the term *marketing* signifies to Generation Z undergraduate students. Understanding Generation Z perceptions about marketing can aid professors in developing curriculum and reshaping course content to tackle mistaken beliefs while strengthening relevant perspectives.

**Keywords:** Generation Z; undergraduates; marketing; content analysis; perceptions

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## INTRODUCTION

*How to be a great teacher: Know your students.  
Know your subject. Make it relevant.  
Dee Henderson*

*We need to remember across generations that there  
is as much to learn as there is to teach.  
Gloria Steinem*

The quote from best-selling author, Henderson (1995), suggests that effective teaching comes not simply from our mastery of content, but from also knowing the student. The quote from social political activist, Steinem (2005), serves as a reminder to us as professors that we need to learn in order to teach. More specifically for marketing professors, are we following some key principles of our discipline, namely, knowing your target market and tailoring our product to suit them? That is not to say students should dictate curriculum, but shouldn't their present knowledge and perceptions be a baseline for constructing a course? In other words, as we begin a semester, do we know what our students do or do not know about marketing and what are their perceptions of marketing? Just as a doctor conducts a baseline assessment of a new patient's current health, health history, and expectations for professional interactions, professors with a greater understanding of

students can provide more constructive and engaging pedagogy that addresses knowledge and perceptions (and misperceptions) to foster enhanced learning opportunities. Thus, the purpose and contribution of the current study is to provide academicians greater insights into Generation Z students' perceptions of the marketing discipline so that important pedagogical decisions can be made, such as course content and course delivery that is appropriately tailored to create learning experiences that balance student perceptions that are accurate and address misperceptions. This study also examines potential differences in perceptions across business majors and with non-business majors, extending previous studies that examined these issues among Millennial generations. To the extent that Generation Z has sometimes been treated as "Millennials 2.0", a study focused on this cohort may be useful to educators who are now teaching this group.

Generational cohorts are a useful lens through which to study changes in attitudes and behaviors based on the group being examined. Current traditional-age undergraduate students are part of Generation Z and have been described as "true digital natives" (Dimock, 2019; Fromm & Read, 2018; Ketchen, 2019; Twenge, 2017), for whom smart phones, constant connectivity, social media and the internet, have always been present in their lives.

Described as mobile-only, not mobile-first, in terms of device preference, Generation Z views smart phones as their personal portals linking their online and offline lives (Fromm & Read, 2018). Selingo (2018) notes that some campus leaders continue to talk about millennials as the typical undergraduate student, but Generation Z students are now the ones who are enrolling, and institutions need to educate themselves on this group, both for admissions recruitment and to better understand learning styles and student expectations.

Ferrell and Gonzalez (2004) sought to add to marketing education literature by addressing the dearth of studies that looked at student perceptions and beliefs about marketing. Swanson (2019) extended and updated their study in a more comprehensive look across marketing and business majors with a focus on Millennials (although the sample also included participants from Generation X and Baby Boomers). The principles of marketing course is often part of a school/college of business' core curriculum and, as such, a course taken by all business majors. Understanding the perceptions of students in this course and working to refine or correct those perceptions to more accurately depict the discipline has the potential to create better understanding across functional areas, which would in turn enhance organizational interactions when students graduate and find professional employment (Swanson, 2019).

Generation Z consumers are emerging as frugal, shaped in part by watching financial losses of their parents during the Great Recession. They have high expectations that brands support causes and demonstrate a commitment to sustainability that goes beyond packaging and product contents to the notion of resale and sharing services (Du & Milligan, 2019). As a group, they have been surrounded by advertising and marketing all their lives and are accustomed to it. The barrage of messaging becoming "white noise" makes it more challenging for marketers to engage them (Ketchen, 2019). As the largest generational cohort, their impact will be significant, making it essential to research and understand the unique attributes of this group and not treat them as Millennials 2.0 (Ketchen, 2019). Understanding Generation Z perceptions about marketing can be used to reshape course content as well as suggest pedagogical strategies that allow students to effectively confront and analyze the veracity of those beliefs. It is to that end that this study investigates the following research questions: 1) how Generation Z undergraduate students perceive marketing as a function of organizations, 2) if business majors differ in those perceptions relative to non-business majors, and 3) if there are significant differences across different business majors in their perceptions regarding marketing. Following the suggestion of Swanson (2019) this research examines initial student definitions of marketing and the subsequent clarifying statements regarding those definitions to provide a fuller understanding of student views of marketing. This approach can also provide insights into how the methodology used may impact findings.

The rest of the study is organized as follows. The next section provides a literature review of generational cohorts, specifically Generation Z, with emphasis on them as learners and on their marketing experiences as consumers. Then, research methodology and results are presented. A discussion of the findings, limitations, and future research directions concludes the study.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Generational Cohorts**

Generational cohorts consist of individuals born within a given time period who experienced significant events during a similar period of their development (Fromm & Read, 2018). Researchers also characterize the latter as significant events that occur during a cohort's formative or "coming of age" years (Dimock, 2019; Fromm & Read, 2018; Schewe & Meredith, 2004). The four most recent generational cohorts are: Baby Boomers, the only generation designated/named by the U.S. Census Bureau (Dimock, 2019), born between 1946 and 1964; Generation X, born between 1965-1978; Millennials (aka Generation Y), born 1979-1995; and Generation Z, born between 1996 and 2010 (Dimock, 2019; From & Read, 2018).

However, assigning birth years to a specific cohort, when one stops and another begins, is as much an art as a science, depending on the researcher's perspective on the salience of events significant to a group. But there is agreement to within one to two years on most of these groupings as seen in comparisons across researchers. The Pew Center reports that the boundaries are not "arbitrary," that they attempt to make them comparable in age span to the previous generation (Dimock, 2019). Twenge (2017) makes that acknowledgment as well and underscores the necessity and usefulness of making specific cutoff points, while understanding that the closer one is to a beginning or endpoint, the more likely there is to be some fuzziness as to which generational cohort they are most like. Depending on cutoff points, this group is described as one of the largest at 61 million (Ketchen, 2019). They already wield a great deal of spending influence (Du & Milligan, 2019), which will only continue to grow with Generation Z projected to make up approximately 40% of U.S. consumers by 2020 (Fromm & Read, 2018).

### **Generation Z**

Who is Generation Z and what attributes make them unique from previous generations? Recurring comments about events and circumstances that have shaped and formed this group include the following insights (Fromm & Read, 2018; Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Twenge, 2017):

- *Have never known a world without war*
- *Technology that is always on and available*
- *Are digital only, not digital first, in their device preferences*
- *Social media proliferation*
- *Information saturation*
- *Protected*

- *Primary and secondary education of being taught to the test*
- *The first African American President elected*
- *The Great Recession*
- *Rise of terrorism, at home and abroad*

As a result, researchers are seeing specific instances of behavior and attitudes that make this group different as learners and consumers. The behavior of one cohort is influenced by previous cohorts, thereby providing context that highlights differences and similarities (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). In comparison to Millennials, Generation Z is described as more fearful, anxious, and lonely, as well as more pragmatic, thrifty, less hedonistic, better behaved, globally oriented, and diversity-minded (Dimock 2019, Twenge, 2017). But what do these characteristics mean for this cohort as consumers and learners?

### **Generation Z as Consumers**

As consumers, Generation Z is not as widely studied as previous generational cohorts, and much of what has been studied primarily focuses on retail preferences, communication, and brand engagement (Fromm & Read, 2018; Woo, 2018). Early reports indicate Generation Z consumers are drawn to thrift stores and shared ownership (Du & Milligan, 2019), perhaps driven by their sense of frugality and sustainability as well as lower levels of hedonism than previous generations. Unlike prior cohorts, Generation Z is comfortable with *not* owning new items or not *owning* items at all; material goods as messages to others is less important to them (Twenge, 2017). They also don't feel the need to buy brands or products in order to impress others (Twenge, 2017), although other studies note the high degree to which social media influencers shape their interest in specific products (Fromm & Read, 2018). Despite being digital natives, a survey by Profitect reports that 42% of Generation Z respondents prefer in-store shopping to online experiences and that point-of-purchase displays were highly influential in their purchase selections. Thirty-four percent indicated they equally prefer online and in-store shopping, and only 24% reporting they prefer online-only shopping ("Differences Between", 2018). For retailers, crafting an in-store retail experience for Generation Z is critical for future success. Their pragmatism also suggests they want an efficient purchase experience and one that is tailored to them (Fromm & Read, 2018; Twenge, 2017).

A second notable difference for Generation Z consumers is communication speed; modality and message content must adapt to accommodate this groups' needs and preferences. Generation Z expects to be a collaborator in a variety of experiences, specifically marketing communication and education (From & Read, 2018, Twenge, 2017). For marketers, this means providing authentic opportunities to contribute to the message content, through Snapchat or Instagram (the group's current preferred platforms), where they can share their own unique experiences visually (Perlstein, 2017). Speed and timeliness of communication is essential to a group that is almost exclusively mobile-only in their habits (Fromm & Read,

2018). To break through the messaging "white noise," marketers have to provide information that is valuable, meaningful, or entertaining (Fromm & Read, 2018; Ketchen, 2019). While not yet cynical about marketing and advertising, Generation Z responds to campaigns that align a brand story and purpose with their own sense of values and causes (Fromm & Read, 2018).

### **Generation Z as Learners**

What makes Generation Z unique as learners? It is worth noting that the typical age of college professors places many faculty as Baby Boomers and Generation X'ers (McNally & Stagliano, 2018; Mohr & Mohr, 2017). The difference in age and cohorts offers insight as to motivation to learn, optimal learning styles, and differences in preparation based on elementary and secondary educational experiences. To create meaningful and productive learning environments, faculty must understand these differences and use them to inform their pedagogy. Unlike previous cohorts, Generation Z's educational experiences are likely to include less reading (Fromm & Read, 2018; Twenge, 2017), having been taught to a standardized test (Haydon, 2019), and having had access to vast amounts of information through the internet, allowing for a learning-on-demand mindset (Mohr & Mohr, 2017; Selingo, 2018).

Generation Z students want faculty who are facilitators and collaborators in the learning process (Seemiller & Grace, 2016), faculty who are guides in the process (Selingo, 2018), and who challenge them with relevant and active problem solving (Fromm & Read, 2018; Selingo, 2018; Thacker, 2016). One of the biggest challenges faculty will face with Generation Z students is how to engage them (Fromm & Read, 2018; McNally & Stagliano, 2018; Mohr & Mohr, 2017; Twenge, 2017). Having lived with a bombardment of information throughout their lives, Generation Z's attention span is 6 seconds. Rather than view this as a negative, Twenge (2017) interprets this as a coping mechanism, a way of quickly sifting through information to focus on what is deemed relevant. DeSimone and Buzza (2013) report that the inclusion of experiential activities can improve the learning of domain-specific material. Recent findings by Shoemaker and Kelly (2015) also support the use of experiential activities, indicating "that a large number of business students process and internalize new information best when they see or actively participate in what they are learning" (p. 223).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The word *marketing* can denote a variety of things: "a management philosophy (customer centricity), an organizational function (the marketing department), and a set of specific activities or programs (the marketing mix)" (Hanssens & Pauwels, 2016. p. 173). There is no research that we are aware of that identifies what *marketing* signifies to Generation Z undergraduate students.

## Sample

A total of 1,062 undergraduate students enrolled at a public university located in the north central United States participated in the study. Participants were enrolled in principles of marketing courses of an AACSB-accredited college of business. Respondents over the age of 23 years ( $n = 35$ ) were eliminated from the analysis as they are not part of the Generation Z cohort. The remaining 1,027 participants ranged in age from 19 to 23 years (mean = 20.63,  $SD = .84$ ) and were somewhat more likely to be male (55.5%). Most participants were juniors (74.6%), with seniors making up 18.9%, and sophomores representing the remaining 6.5% of the respondents. Non-business majors represented 9.8% of the respondents ( $n = 101$ ). The 926 students with business majors represented a variety of business disciplines: management (29.9%), marketing (16.7%), accounting (13.8%), business administration (11.2%), finance (10.7%), and information systems (7.7%). The percentage of each major identified in the sample closely mirrored the percentages of majors across disciplines as reported by the college of business where the study took place.

## Measurement

On the first day of class, students were asked to provide a written definition of marketing. This was done prior to examination of the topic or provision of any course materials. Specifically, several minutes were provided for students to provide an answer to the question, "What is Marketing?" Students were next asked to provide a written discussion related to the definition that they had just created. The students were given several more minutes to provide an explanation of their answer to the "What is Marketing?" question by "considering the definition of marketing you just provided, please discuss, comment, and/or clarify (i.e., explain the meaning of your definition)." Coded student responses to the initial question are *definitions*, while their coded reply to the follow-up question are classified as being *discussions*. Finally, they were asked to provide their major, age, class standing, and gender.

Like Ferrell and Gonzalez (2004), qualitative content analysis was used to classify the responses to the two open-ended questions into categories. All the student responses were first read to provide a sense of the whole (Tesch, 1990). Each response was then revisited and read word-by-word to identify text that captured specific concepts or beliefs. This process resulted in the emergence of coding labels and an initial coding scheme. Related codes then formed emergent categories. The unit of analysis could include either the overall definition and discussion or discrete components contained within each (Kassarjian, 1977). Rather than classifying overall definitions, discrete references contained within each definition and associated clarifying statements were focused on to best maintain the specificity of the provided information. For example, consider a definition in which a student stated that "marketing involves selling to make a profit by attempting to convince people that your product or

service is the best". That definition would be coded as containing three units: sales ("selling to make a profit"), persuasion ("attempting to convince people"), and product ("product or service"). The next step was to break down the 1,062 definitions and corresponding discussions and place the identified discrete components into categories. To help ensure that the identified categories provided an accurate depiction of undergraduate Generation Z student perceptions of marketing, it was important to demonstrate both intra-rater reliability and inter-rater reliability for the coding process.

Intra-rater reliability was determined utilizing a test-retest approach with two full professors of marketing experienced with content analysis as raters. Intra-rater reliability (Weber, 1990) involves conducting the same assessment by the same rater on multiple occasions. Correlation is then used to compare the different ratings to determine whether the same raters classified the same phenomena into the same categories over time. Both raters independently created mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories based on both the initial definition and student definition discussions provided for the first 100 responses. Ninety days after completing this task the same raters repeated this process and compared the findings to the previous coding effort. Both raters exceeded the recommended .80 cutoff (Keaveney, 1995). As such, the independently created categorization drafts were shared and used to create a single consistent classification system.

Inter-rater reliability represents the level of agreement between raters (Hunt, 1983). For example, if all (none of) the raters agree when classifying the same phenomena into the same categories, the inter-rater reliability would be 1.00 (.00). Inter-rater reliability ( $I_r$ ) was established utilizing the procedure identified by Perreault and Leigh (1989). This inter-rater reliability metric was developed specifically for determining the quality of judgment-based nominal scale data that involves multiple raters. Utilizing the previously identified categories, three different professors of marketing acted as raters and independently classified all the discrete responses for the entire sample into the categories provided by the first two raters. The subsequent three raters were instructed to create new categories if appropriate. No new categories emerged during this classification process, suggesting that additional analysis was not needed (Keaveney, 1995). There was a suitable level of inter-rater reliability ( $I_r = .94$ ). Responses on which there were disagreement were resolved by discussion between the three raters.

## RESULTS

A total of 10,248 discrete units (3,768 definition-based; 6,480 discussion-based) were placed into 14 categories identified through the coding process. A list of the identified categories is provided in Table 1 with their definitions.

**Table 1: Marketing Categories and Definitions**

Category	Definition
Product	Respondent stated that marketing involves providing products in general or offering customers one or more of the more specific forms of a product: goods, services, and/or ideas.
Sales	Respondent stated that marketing involves sales, selling, revenue generation, or creating profit for an organization.
Advertising	Respondent stated that marketing involves advertising and/or is the responsibility of marketers.
Customers	Respondent stated that marketing involves understanding and/or knowing the needs and wants of customers.
Communication	Respondent stated that marketing involves communication and/or is important for the sending and sharing of information.
Branding	Respondent stated that marketing involves the creation and maintenance of a consistent unique image, or actions that increase brand recognition or improves the image of a brand.
Attention	Respondent stated that marketing involves creating and capturing the attention of consumers.
Strategy	Respondent stated that marketing involves strategies, processes, tactics, or plans of actions designed to help the business or organization to achieve success.
Media	Respondent stated that marketing involves providing a means to transmit information through different media channels (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, magazines, newspapers, outdoor displays, radio, television, TicTok, Twitter).
Persuasion	Respondent stated that marketing involves trying to convince, influence, motivate, or persuade someone to do something or to change their mind.
Pervasive	Respondent stated that marketing is constantly encountered, always present, global, common or widespread.
Analytics	Respondent stated that marketing involves the collection, analysis, interpretation of data or statistics to gain information or knowledge.
Relationships	Respondent stated that marketing involves developing, fostering, building, managing relationships and connecting with customers for the long-term.
Dishonest	Respondent stated that marketing is a bad, deceptive, dishonest, manipulative, unethical, practice that creates false impressions to pervert truth in order to deceive consumers and/or society.

Marketing identified as providing products in general or offering customers one or more of the more specific forms of product (e.g., goods, services, ideas) was the most noted perception (88.1%). Also getting high recognition was the view of marketing being sales (78.1%), advertising (77.5%), and understanding customers (69.3%). Marketing being dishonest was the least likely to be noted (15%). The total number of categories noted by each respondent ranged from one to twelve (mean = 7.24, SD = 1.91). The average

number of categories discussed in the initial definition (mean = 3.67, SD = 1.56) was substantially fewer than those provided by respondents when discussing their definitions (mean = 6.30, SD = 2.07). The number and percentage of responses classified in each of the identified marketing categories is provided in Table 2. Please note, the sequential ordering of the categories is in descending order based on the total frequencies/percentages.

**Table 2: Marketing Categories with Frequencies and Percentages**

Marketing is...	Definition		Discussion		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Product	734	71.5	790	76.9	905	88.1
Sales	542	52.8	679	66.1	802	78.1
Advertising	426	41.5	748	72.8	796	77.5
Customers	422	41.1	599	58.3	712	69.3
Communication	361	35.2	527	51.3	642	62.5
Branding	200	19.5	570	55.5	603	58.7
Attention	190	18.5	491	47.8	548	53.4
Strategy	249	24.2	453	44.1	540	52.6
Media	106	10.3	503	49.0	536	52.2
Persuasion	261	25.4	400	38.9	521	50.7
Pervasive	64	6.2	222	21.6	253	24.6
Analytics	111	10.8	196	19.1	246	24.0
Relationships	66	6.4	161	15.7	191	18.6
Dishonest	36	3.5	141	13.7	154	15.0

Note: Provided statistics based on 1,027 respondents

At the Marketing Principles stage in academic careers the course work for both business and non-business majors is quite similar. Yet business students may demonstrate differences in their perceptions of what is entailed in a particular business discipline (i.e., marketing) relative to non-business majors based on knowledge differences associated with interest in business. This is based on findings by Malgwi, Howe and Burnaby (2005) who found interest in a subject was the most important factor that impacts a student's choice of college major. Tan and Laswad (2009) suggest that once made, major choice tends to remain relatively stable. That is, a non-business major might have different perceptions of marketing as a discipline relative to students who have specifically chosen a to pursue their studies in business.

The chi-square test of independence was utilized to identify possible statistically significant differences between non-business majors and business majors

across each of the 14 categories (see Table 3). Interestingly, the only statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) were for media ( $\chi^2 = 3.94$ ,  $p = .04$ ) when discussing the provided definition, and pervasive for both the discussion ( $\chi^2 = 3.97$ ,  $p = .04$ ) and total ( $\chi^2 = 4.66$ ,  $p = .03$ ). Specifically, non-business majors were less likely to associate marketing with media (39.6%) than business majors (50.0%), as well as with marketing being reported as pervasive (business major = 22.5%, non-business major = 13.9%) when discussing the definition that the respondent provided. Non-business majors were also overall less likely to identify marketing as being pervasive (15.8%), relative to business majors (25.6%). The overall number of constructs noted by business relative to non-business students did not significantly differ ( $p > .05$ ) in the initial definitions, associated discussion of the definitions, or total response categories.

**Table 3: Inclusion of Marketing Categories**

Marketing Categories	By Definition				By Discussion				By Total			
	Major (%)		$\chi^2$	p	Major (%)		$\chi^2$	p	Major (%)		$\chi^2$	p
	BUS	Non-BUS			BUS	Non-BUS			BUS	Non-BUS		
Product	71.3	73.3	.17	.67	77.0	76.2	.03	.86	88.1	79.5	.00	.99
Sales	52.3	57.4	.97	.32	65.5	71.3	1.33	.24	77.4	84.2	2.41	.12
Advertising	42.3	33.7	2.82	.09	73.1	70.3	.36	.54	77.5	77.2	.00	.94
Customers	40.6	45.5	.91	.33	57.8	63.4	1.17	.27	69.0	72.3	.45	.49
Communication	35.7	29.7	1.45	.22	51.4	50.5	.03	.86	63.0	58.4	.80	.37
Branding	19.2	21.8	.38	.53	55.5	55.4	.00	.99	58.5	60.4	.13	.71
Attention	18.7	16.8	.20	.64	48.5	41.6	1.74	.18	54.2	45.5	2.74	.09
Strategy	24.3	23.8	.01	.90	44.5	40.6	.56	.45	52.9	49.5	.42	.51
Media	10.3	10.9	.03	.84	50.0	39.6	3.93	.04	53.0	44.6	2.61	.10
Persuasion	25.3	26.7	.10	.74	39.2	36.6	.25	.61	51.1	47.5	.46	.49
Pervasive	6.7	2.0	3.46	.06	22.5	13.9	3.97	.04	25.6	15.8	4.66	.03
Analytics	10.8	10.9	.00	.97	18.6	23.8	1.58	.20	23.7	26.7	.47	.49
Relationships	6.4	6.9	.04	.82	15.1	20.8	2.21	.13	18.0	23.8	1.97	.16
Dishonest	3.7	2.0	.77	.38	13.7	13.9	.00	.96	15.0	14.9	.00	.96

Note: Percentages represent a category being included in the provided marketing definition, associated discussion of that definition, and both (combined).

*Business major type by marketing definition categories.* A chi-square test of independence was performed for business major by each of the 14 categories for the provided definitions of marketing, discussions of marketing, and the definition combined with the discussion (see Table 4). The analyses of the definitions identified only one statistically significant difference between business major and marketing definition category: analytics ( $\chi^2 = 17.23$ ,  $p = .004$ ). Marketing majors were most likely to make this connection (19.2%).

Examination of respondent discussions suggests that marketing majors are most likely to note the importance of relationships ( $\chi^2 = 22.34$ ,  $p = .000$ ), and least likely to report that marketing is dishonest ( $\chi^2 = 11.10$ ,  $p = .049$ ). Sales was also identified as significantly differing ( $\chi^2 = 13.14$ ,  $p = .022$ ) between the majors, being noted most often by marketing majors

(71.5%) and least often by business administration majors (53.0%).

The number of dimensions noted by a respondent was not found to be significantly associated with the type of business major ( $p > .05$ ) for the initial definition of marketing ( $F = 1.20_{5,919}$ ;  $p = .307$ ), the definition discussion ( $F = 1.90_{5,919}$ ;  $p = .092$ ), or the total mentions ( $F = .987_{5,919}$ ;  $p = .425$ ).

Newell, Titus and West (1996) found "differences between marketing and nonmarketing business students in their perceptions of marketing" (p. 65). The current study sought to determine if there were significant differences in the perceptions of marketing based on business major. Considering the initial definition with the associated discussion, four categories were found to differ between the business majors: analytics, honesty (i.e., dishonest), relationships, and sales. First, marketing majors were

substantially more likely to note analytics as being a part of how marketing is defined ( $\chi^2 = 17.23$ ,  $p = .004$ ), definition discussed ( $\chi^2 = 10.18$ ,  $p = .070$ ), and overall ( $\chi^2 = 14.64$ ,  $p = .012$ ) in comparison with any other business major. Although marketing being defined as dishonest in nature was rarely noted, significant differences were found regarding dishonesty across business majors when discussing the definitions ( $\chi^2 = 11.10$ ,  $p = .049$ ) and overall ( $\chi^2 = 11.69$ ,  $p = .039$ ). Specifically, marketing majors were least likely to identify dishonestly as part of the discipline (discussion = 7.6%, total = 8.7%), while information systems majors were most likely to make this association (discussion = 21.5%, total = 22.8%). Marketing including the building of customer relationships was also found to differ

across the investigated majors for both discussion ( $\chi^2 = 22.34$ ,  $p = .000$ ) and total ( $\chi^2 = 19.12$ ,  $p = .002$ ). In each case, marketing majors were substantially more likely to note the importance of relationships compared to respondents with any other business major. Finally, although sales was widely noted as being part of marketing by all the business majors, there was a significant difference in the mention of sales during the discussion of the provided definitions ( $\chi^2 = 13.14$ ,  $p = .022$ ). Specifically, business administration majors were substantially less likely (53.0%) to include sales when discussing marketing than any other business major (discussion<sub>accounting</sub> = 69%; discussion<sub>finance</sub> = 67.3%; discussion<sub>information systems</sub> = 70.9%; discussion<sub>management</sub> = 63.5%; discussion<sub>marketing</sub> = 71.5%).

**Table 4: Inclusion of Marketing Categories by Business Major Type**

Marketing Categories	Business Major (%)						$\chi^2$	p
	ACCT	BSAD	FIN	IS	MGMT	MKTG		
<b>Product</b>								
<i>By Definition</i>	71.1	67.0	70.9	72.2	70.0	76.7	3.83	.57
<i>By Discussion</i>	79.6	74.8	78.2	79.7	74.9	77.9	2.10	.83
<i>By Total</i>	88.0	85.2	88.2	89.9	86.6	91.9	4.09	.53
<b>Sales</b>								
<i>By Definition</i>	51.4	47.8	56.4	46.8	53.1	54.7	3.10	.68
<i>By Discussion</i>	69.0	53.0	67.3	70.9	63.5	71.5	13.14	.02
<i>By Total</i>	79.6	73.0	80.0	81.0	75.9	78.5	3.16	.67
<b>Advertising</b>								
<i>By Definition</i>	49.3	37.4	40.9	38.0	41.4	44.2	5.03	.41
<i>By Discussion</i>	77.5	70.4	67.3	75.9	72.6	74.4	4.20	.52
<i>By Total</i>	80.3	76.5	70.0	79.7	77.9	79.1	4.73	.44
<b>Customers</b>								
<i>By Definition</i>	38.7	41.7	41.8	35.4	40.7	43.0	1.62	.89
<i>By Discussion</i>	58.5	55.7	53.6	55.7	58.0	61.6	2.20	.82
<i>By Total</i>	66.2	70.4	69.1	62.0	69.1	73.3	3.88	.56
<b>Communication</b>								
<i>By Definition</i>	31.7	38.3	26.4	36.7	36.2	42.4	8.95	.11
<i>By Discussion</i>	50.7	47.8	42.7	46.8	54.7	56.4	7.66	.17
<i>By Total</i>	61.3	64.3	53.6	59.5	66.8	64.5	6.87	.23
<b>Branding</b>								
<i>By Definition</i>	18.3	20.9	21.8	21.5	18.6	17.4	1.45	.91
<i>By Discussion</i>	56.3	57.4	63.6	53.2	52.4	54.7	4.54	.47
<i>By Total</i>	57.7	62.6	64.5	57.0	55.7	58.1	3.56	.61
<b>Attention</b>								
<i>By Definition</i>	23.2	17.4	16.4	21.5	18.6	15.7	3.89	.56
<i>By Discussion</i>	57.0	47.8	52.7	44.3	45.0	47.1	7.19	.20
<i>By Total</i>	60.6	53.0	54.5	54.4	52.1	52.9	3.03	.69
<b>Strategy</b>								
<i>By Definition</i>	23.2	25.2	28.2	17.7	24.1	25.6	3.05	.69
<i>By Discussion</i>	52.1	34.8	41.8	46.8	43.3	47.7	9.09	.10
<i>By Total</i>	59.2	43.5	48.2	53.2	53.1	57.0	8.46	.13
<b>Media</b>								
<i>By Definition</i>	11.3	9.6	10.0	6.3	9.8	12.8	2.82	.72
<i>By Discussion</i>	43.0	52.2	41.8	53.2	55.4	48.8	9.93	.07
<i>By Total</i>	45.8	54.8	48.2	54.4	57.3	53.9	6.52	.25
<b>Persuasion</b>								
<i>By Definition</i>	19.7	30.4	22.7	21.5	29.0	23.3	7.52	.18
<i>By Discussion</i>	43.0	40.0	34.5	34.2	41.4	37.2	3.59	.60
<i>By Total</i>	50.0	53.9	46.4	45.6	54.7	49.4	4.19	.52

Pervasive

Marketing Categories	Business Major (%)						$\chi^2$	p
	ACCT	BSAD	FIN	IS	MGMT	MKTG		
<i>By Definition</i>	7.0	8.7	10.0	5.1	7.2	2.9	7.07	.21
<i>By Discussion</i>	21.1	22.6	23.6	24.1	23.8	19.8	1.37	.92
<i>By Total</i>	23.9	27.8	30.0	25.3	27.4	19.8	5.19	.39
Analytics								
<i>By Definition</i>	6.3	10.4	10.9	7.6	9.1	19.2	17.23	.00
<i>By Discussion</i>	19.7	15.7	13.6	25.3	16.0	24.4	10.18	.07
<i>By Total</i>	24.6	20.0	19.1	26.6	19.9	33.7	14.64	.01
Relationships								
<i>By Definition</i>	5.6	10.4	5.5	2.5	4.9	9.3	9.02	.10
<i>By Discussion</i>	12.0	13.9	8.2	12.7	14.0	26.2	22.34	.00
<i>By Total</i>	14.1	22.6	11.8	13.9	16.0	27.9	19.12	.00
Dishonest								
<i>By Definition</i>	3.5	2.6	2.7	5.1	5.9	.6	9.88	.07
<i>By Discussion</i>	16.2	13.0	11.8	21.5	15.0	7.6	11.10	.04
<i>By Total</i>	17.6	13.9	11.8	22.8	16.9	8.7	11.69	.03

Notes: ACCT = Accounting, BSAD = Business Administration, FIN = Finance, IS = Information Systems, MGMT = Management, MKTG = Marketing. Percentages represent a category being included in the provided marketing definition, associated discussion of that definition, and both (total).

## DISCUSSION

So, what do we now know about Generation Z students' perceptions of the marketing discipline and what contribution does the study make to pedagogical decisions such as course content? The current study replicates and extends recent findings regarding millennial business student perceptions of marketing (Swanson, 2019). A survey of 1,027 Generation Z students registered for principles of marketing courses provided their personal definitions of marketing as well as an explanation/discussion of their definitions. This information provides current information on how marketing is understood by Generation Z undergraduate students. As a cohort that has gone largely unnoticed by educators and business organizations until recently, this insight into Generation Z offers an important initial look at this group and how they perceive marketing. For marketing educators seeking to better understand current student beliefs, the study provides some interesting findings. Analysis identified 14 categories that Generation Z reports as representing the marketing discipline. Student perceptions of marketing as product, sales, and advertising are consistent with student beliefs about marketing from prior research (e.g., Ferrell & Gonzalez, 2004; Swanson, 2019). However, the provided definitions and corresponding discussions offered by students in this study suggest that Generation Z undergraduates have a more well-rounded view of marketing than has been identified with undergraduates of past generations (c.f., Celuch & Salma, 1998; Dailey & Kim, 2001; Ferrell & Gonzalez, 2004; LaBarbera & Simonoff, 1999; Swanson, 2019). This study provides current information on how marketing is understood by Generation Z undergraduate students. In general, all of the categories identified in the study are reflected in current textbooks (Grewal & Levy, 2019; Kerin & Hartley, 2019; Kotler & Armstrong, 2018; Pride & Ferrell, 2020) sold for use in the principles of marketing course. Of particular note is the recognition of marketing

being strategic and numbers-driven (i.e., analytic) in nature. It is also worth noting that two key marketing content areas were not identified by Generation Z: distribution and pricing. These findings offer marketing faculty additional direction in areas of course content that may need more or less coverage.

Insight into student perceptions of marketing can help those who teach marketing to focus on supporting correct assumptions and attempting to change the incorrect ones. Camey and Williams (2004) suggest that "student attitudes toward marketing as a discipline can be improved if teaching faculty will apply their knowledge of marketing in their classroom presentations. If professors genuinely believe that the discipline is an important, dynamic component in the global marketplace, then classroom exposure should present supporting evidence that marketing is a useful, relevant, and desirable major" (p. 160). Instructors are encouraged to conduct their own research on students' preliminary understanding of marketing in the Principles of Marketing course. Using this knowledge to determine topic areas that may need additional emphasis or clarification, students can then be sampled again at the end of the course to see if and how their perceptions of marketing have been changed in response to course pedagogy. Prior to the first day of class, faculty can send out a "welcome to principles of marketing" email, and in it, ask students to not read chapter one – yet. During the initial class session, students are asked to write their definition of marketing. In the next class session, the faculty can use the American Marketing Association's definition of marketing and ask students to share what they've written. This exercise is an opportunity for students to hear the perceptions of their classmates and often prompts a lively discussion, especially when there are differences of opinion. At the end of the semester, asking students the same question as part of the final exam, may provide a way to broadly measure whether the priority and coverage given to concepts and topics was useful in expanding students' perceptions of marketing. An additional measurement



could also take place in students' final semester to gauge the impact of the provided curriculum.

Dailey and Kim (2001) have suggested that the strength of student preconceived perceptions may be too ingrained for a single marketing course to alter. Twenty years ago, Hugstad (1997) noted that campus marketing departments need to be proactive to more effectively market marketing. One way to do this is by gaining access to students earlier in the college experience to better "showcase marketing as a discipline and career opportunity" (LaBarbera & Simonoff, 1999, p. 9). In the provided student discussions, 149 of the respondents specifically stated if they had previously taken a marketing class ( $n = 49$ ) or if this was going to be their first formal exposure to the topic ( $n = 100$ ). Interestingly, this was not found to impact the reported number of topics that marketing consisted of ( $p > .05$ ) in the initial definitions, the associated discussion of the definitions, or total response categories. However, those who did have a prior marketing class were less likely (4.1%) than those who had not previously taken a marketing course (16.0%) to report that deception was a part of marketing in their discussion ( $\chi^2 = 4.389$ ,  $p = .036$ ). Surprisingly, previous exposure to a marketing course was not significantly related to the respondent being a (non)business major ( $\chi^2 = .170$ ,  $p = .681$ ) or to a particular business major ( $\chi^2 = 6.757$ ,  $p = .344$ ).

The current study identified undergraduate Generation Z student perceptions of what marketing is. The findings demonstrated a wider range of perceptions relative to previous studies (e.g., Celuch & Salma, 1998; Ferrell & Gonzalez, 2004; Swanson, 2019). Results in the current study suggest that simply by having respondents expound on their initial responses can provide valuable information. The number of unique definitional categories provided was almost double for the discussion relative to the initially offered definition of marketing. Seeking additional clarification can provide further insights and greater understanding of student perceptions of marketing.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The current research provides a useful snapshot into Generation Z perceptions of marketing. It should be noted that the respondents were recruited from a single university which limits the generalization of the findings.

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It is generally accepted that findings generated from a single stand-alone investigation are seldom sufficient and ought to be followed up by additional research. Replication is the repeating of research as a way to better determine if findings are generalizable across situations and time. That is, additional research is needed to examine the findings across different conditions such as by the spatial dimension (place) and temporal dimension (time). For example, to verify the conclusions of the current study additional research with students representing (non)accredited, private, and public colleges of business from other universities and at different times as more Generation Z students enter college need to be carried out.

With respect to the generalizability of the findings, knowing more about students' exposure to information pertaining to marketing would be helpful. If students take an introductory business course prior to taking their first marketing course, then the introductory business course could be a source of bias. Although no introductory business course is offered at the university where the study was conducted, this does not rule out that some students may have taken one elsewhere. In the current study a number of respondents self-reported if they had, or had not, previously taken a marketing class. The findings provide some insights, however, information regarding prior exposure to a marketing or introductory business course was not formally requested in the study. As such, future researchers may wish to pursue this area to provide greater clarification regarding the findings in the current paper.

Finally, results indicate that Generation Z undergraduates' perceptions of marketing have become more nuanced relative to what was reported in the past. The current study provides a snapshot of these perceptions, but without a longitudinal study it is not known how Generation Z students' uneducated perceptions of marketing may be changing over time. How the naïve understanding of marketing may evolve for Generation Z is a limitation in this research and provides a potential opportunity for additional investigation moving forward. Future studies may wish to measure perceptions of marketing across the arc of the semester as well as at the completion of a student's marketing program to explore the degree to which those perceptions shift with exposure to marketing concepts and topics.

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