

The Influence of Student-Imparted Marketing Skills and Knowledge Instruction on Small Businesses' Satisfaction: A Service Learning Programme in South Africa

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Purpose of the Study: This study examines the effectiveness of a service learning program (SLP) in South Africa from the perspective of small businesses that received student input. The study also highlights important issues in developing and implementing SLP programs.

Method/Design and Sample: The study provides a descriptive evaluation of a SLP via a quantitative research approach and empirical survey. Small businesses that had participated in the SLP over a five-year period were surveyed and data was received from 107 participants via a structured questionnaire. The data was analyzed via a Generalized Linear Model, Wald chi-square and Bonferroni post hoc measures.

Results: Most small businesses that participated in the SLP were satisfied with the marketing skills (computer, Microsoft Office, website and Facebook) and knowledge instruction (marketing, sales promotion, and advertising) received from the marketing students. Many of these small businesses also reported an increase in sales, new customers, brand awareness and customer loyalty.

Value to Marketing Educators: This study shows that students can be used to successfully impart marketing skills and knowledge to community partners via SLPs, which not only provides students with the opportunity to apply marketing fundamentals to practical problems, but has the potential to make a meaningful difference among the participating small businesses in local communities. Considering the multiple benefits of this SLP, it could be expanded to other local and international universities, but lessons can also be learnt from the SLP's shortcomings.

Keywords: marketing skills, marketing knowledge instruction, small business, satisfaction, service learning programme

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Introduction

Traditionally, a high value was placed on pure research and disciplinary knowledge in education. In recent decades, this notion has been challenged by societal demands for accountability and relevance (O'Brien, 2005; Matzembacher et al., 2019). The implication is that academic programmes strive to produce competitive graduates who are able to function effectively in an emerging global market-driven economy, while also being involved citizens who are able and willing to address local community challenges (O'Brien, 2005; Matzembacher et al., 2019). These changes have led to an increased interest in service learning programs (SLPs) in South Africa (du Toit et al., 2019; Du Plessis, 2020; Balfour, 2020; Bhagwan, 2020; Christopher et al., 2020; Jacobs, 2020; Botha & Bezuidenhout, 2020). Service learning is defined as "...a teaching and learning strategy that integrates

meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities" (National Service Learning Clearinghouse, 2009). For the most part, this has been due to government pressure on universities to become more responsive to the developmental needs of local communities. Specifically, the South African Government has encouraged universities to form partnerships with other community agencies to address issues like poverty, unemployment, sickness, and crime (National Department of Education, 1997a; 1997b; 2001), which is particularly evident in South Africa.

South Africa currently has one of the highest unemployment rates in the world, which is officially 34.9% (QLFS, 2021). There are several reasons for South Africa's high unemployment rate, namely: poor training and education for a large percentage of the population (which is an enduring legacy of apartheid),

an oversupply of unskilled or low-skilled workers, many years of recession/low economic growth, and most recently the Covid-19 pandemic, which has resulted in one million South Africans losing their jobs in the formal sector over last year (GCIS, 2014; QLFS, 2021). Although many are looking to the small business sector to supply much-needed jobs, over 70% of small businesses are struggling to survive past the first year (Business Tech, 2021). Bushe (2019) proposed that a number of factors have led to the failure of small businesses, which include entrepreneur incapacity and involve a lack of business knowledge, skills and aptitudes to successfully grow the business. This is especially true in South Africa, where a number of small businesses lack the marketing skills and knowledge to expedite business growth and sustainability (Massiera et al., 2017; Oji et al., 2017a; Rambe, 2017; Mbatha & Ngwenya, 2018; TGS SA, 2020). In fact, it has been argued that the absence of requisite marketing knowledge or skills can lead to the demise of the business (Van Scheers, 2018). Yet, it has been found that small businesses can survive longer, grow and produce employment if they adopt strategic management practices such as marketing (Iwu, 2017; Ritz et al., 2019; Sadiku-Dushi et al., 2019). For this reason, there have been calls to increase the number of programmes designed to support small businesses with marketing and skills, and improve existing SLPs through evaluation research (Soke & Wild, 2016; Kallier, 2017; Rambe, 2017; Mbatha & Ngwenya, 2018; Higuchi et al., 2019). Accordingly, SLPs could be used as a potential avenue to assist small businesses with essential marketing skills and knowledge to facilitate growth. Interestingly, international research has revealed that SLPs have numerous performance and growth benefits for small businesses (Vizenor et al., 2017; Volschok, 2017; Do Amaral, 2019; Rinaldo et al., 2019). Although SLPs have been in operation for more than two decades in South Africa, there are few evaluation studies that make mention of SLPs serving the needs of small business community partners (Paphitis & Pearse, 2017; Mokoena & Spencer, 2017; Scholtz, 2018).

The triad SL model reveals that SL involves a three-way partnership between several stakeholders. The stakeholders include communities, external service providers/agencies, and the university, comprising students, academic staff, and the institution as a whole (Mouton & Wildschut, 2005; Timur & Getz, 2008; Longart et al., 2017). However, most recent research focuses on evaluating SLPs from a student perspective (Chiva-Bartoll et al., 2021; García-Rico et al., 2021; Gipson et al., 2021; Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2021), whereas there is a lack of research that evaluates SLPs from a community perspective (Merkey & Palombi, 2020; Naik et al., 2020; Jordaan & Mennega, 2021), especially in terms of marketing skills and knowledge in South Africa (Mokoena & Spencer, 2017; Paphitis & Pearse, 2017; Scholtz, 2018; Cromhout et al., 2021). Additionally, there is a dearth of studies that investigate community partner instruction provided by the students (Sprague & Hu, 2015; Miller et al., 2017; Mitchell, 2018),

and there is an absence of evaluations where students provide training in terms of marketing-related skills and knowledge. Therefore, in order to address these gaps in research and serve the needs of South African community partners more effectively, this study seeks to evaluate a SLP in terms of the satisfaction that small businesses experience from the student-imparted marketing skills, knowledge instruction and perceived business impact.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SLP Background Information

SL is an active teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with academic instruction and reflection. The goal is to meet identified community needs, while also giving students an opportunity to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995). SL has been implemented by many universities as a means of pursuing the aforementioned goals. In 1999, the Joint Education Trust (JET) introduced the Community Higher Education Service Partnerships (CHESP) initiative, which aimed to encourage SL in South African higher education to monitor progress and conduct research, which could inform higher education policy makers of the benefit of the triad SL model stakeholders, viz. the university (students and academics), communities, and external service providers (HEQC, 2006a; Lazarus et al., 2008). The CHESP Implementation Grant Strategy of 25 January 2001 states that each SLP should (Mouton & Wildschut, 2005:122):

- “Address some community development priority.
- Integrate teaching (and learning), research, and service.
- Be developed in partnership between the university (academic staff and students), the service sector, and the community (refer to Figure 1).
- Be credit-bearing and require that a minimum of 20% of the notional hours of the course be made up of community-based learning experiences.”

Therefore, it is evident that the CHESP initiative places significant emphasis on the relationship between the three primary stakeholders to ensure the effective development and implementation of SLPs.

Service Learning Conceptual Framework

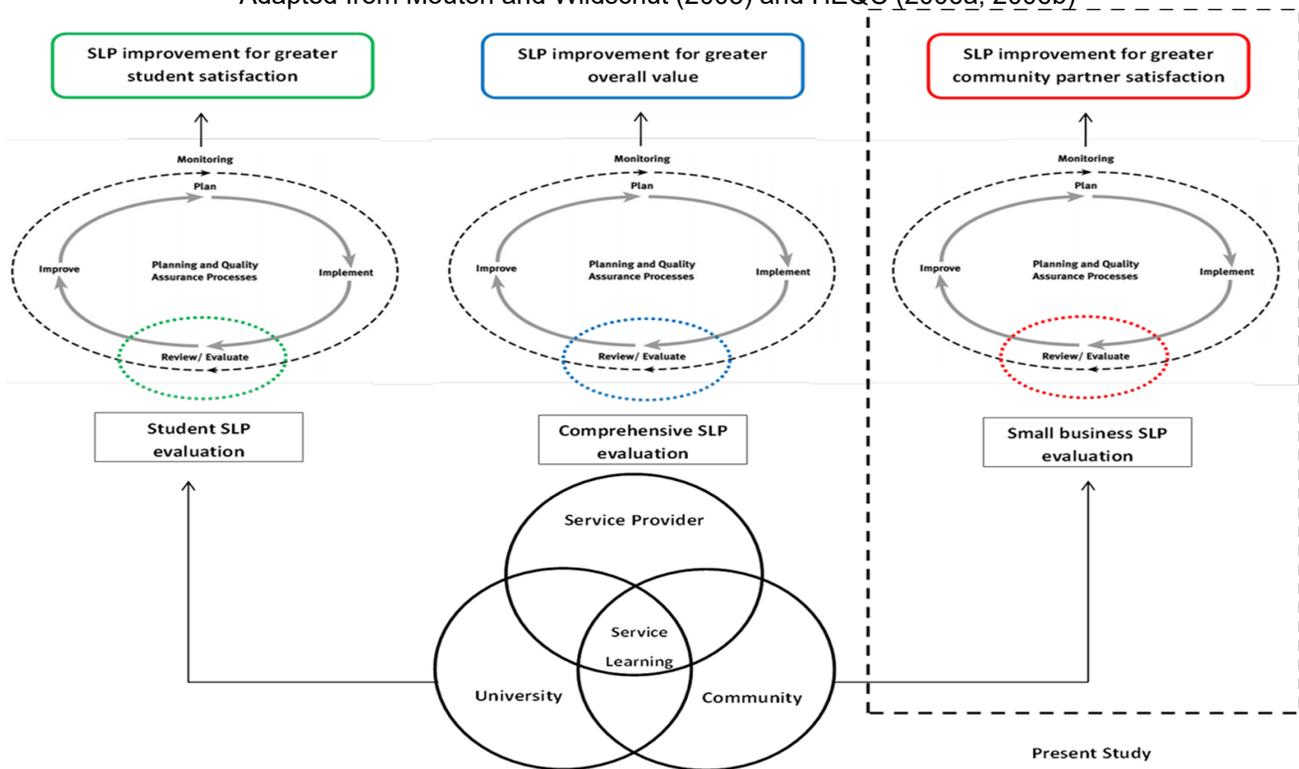
The SL quality cycle and triad SL model collectively serve as the theoretical framework of this study. In order to ensure planning and quality assurance in SL, the Higher Education Qualifications Committee (HEQC) introduced a SL quality cycle model (planning, implementing, evaluating and improvement), which is designed to improve SLPs with the completion of each cycle (HEQC, 2006b). A key aspect of the quality cycle is the review/evaluation of the SLP, which is the focus of this study. As can be seen in Figure 1, the quality

assurance cycle is an ongoing process designed to improve SLPs. In a comprehensive SLP evaluation (refer to the middle column of Figure 1), the value of an SLP is determined for all the above-mentioned stakeholders, and SLP improvements are implemented to serve the needs of all stakeholders. In a student-side SLP evaluation (which is the most common, and is exhibited in the first column of Figure 1), the student satisfaction is determined and recommendations are put forward for SLP improvements that would primarily serve the needs of students. The final column represents the present study, which focuses specifically on the satisfaction of community partners in order to identify SLP improvements that would better serve their needs.

The influence of SL in South Africa is certainly growing and has been the focus of much recent local

research (du Toit et al., 2019; Du Plessis, 2020; Balfour, 2020; Bhagwan, 2020; Christopher et al., 2020; Jacobs, 2020; Botha & Bezuidenhout, 2020), but few are marketing-related (Mokoena & Spencer, 2017; Paphitis & Pearse, 2017; Scholtz, 2018; Cromhout and Duffett, 2022), and there is also a lack of discourse that consider student-imparted marketing skills and knowledge instruction on small businesses satisfaction. Miller et al. (2017) and Mitchell (2018) suggest that small business community partners experience satisfaction due to the knowledge imparted by students, but these studies do not specifically consider marketing training. Hence, this study seeks to improve Cape Peninsula University of Technology's (CPUT) SLP by evaluating the small business community partners' satisfaction in terms of marketing skills and knowledge training received from the marketing students.

Figure 1: Service Learning Conceptual Framework
Adapted from Mouton and Wildschut (2005) and HEQC (2006a; 2006b)



Service Learning in Marketing Education

As the business environment changes, marketing curricula need to keep up with those changes in order to provide students with the skills needed to be competitive in the marketplace (Mishra et al., 2017). Marketing educators seem to be placing more emphasis on the use of experiential methods of teaching and learning (Dahl et al., 2018). Berry and Workman (2007:21) noted that SL provided an ideal opportunity to apply discipline knowledge in marketing: "SL is a particularly relevant pedagogy for marketing classes because marketing as a discipline is concerned with a broad range of social causes. SL is an academically rigorous pedagogy that combines traditional course content with the opportunity for

students to experientially use their classroom knowledge and theory in real-world settings." Whether an organization needs to market products, services, or ideas, marketing tools are needed. For most organizations, marketing plays a critical role in developing marketing strategies, creating marketing communication (MC), identifying and targeting key market segments, and providing customer service. In particular, small businesses and non-profit organizations (NPOs) often themselves lack the minimum requisite marketing capacity, and generally do not have the funds to outsource the work (Soke & Wild, 2016). SL can meet this need while also providing students with the opportunity to apply marketing skills to practical problems (McIntyre et al., 2005). Most

marketing-related SLP research in South Africa only makes a passing mention of the community partner experience, and does not consider their satisfaction, while the research effort focused on student experiences (Palmer, 2005; Holtzhausen et al., 2007; Paphitis & Pearse, 2017).

Several business-related SLP studies examined the viewpoints of small business community partners (Niehm et al., 2015; Vasbinder & Koehler, 2015; Miller et al., 2017; Mokoena & Spencer, 2017; Mitchell, 2018). However, the aforementioned studies were conducted in the US, with the exception of Mokoena and Spencer's (2017) research, which was conducted in South Africa. These SLPs assisted small businesses in areas such as marketing, branding, and management consulting (Niehm et al., 2015; Moekoena & Spencer, 2017), research and analysis (Niehm et al., 2015; Vasbinder & Hoehler, 2015; Mokoena & Spencer, 2017), business planning (Niehm et al., 2015; Miller et al., 2017; Mokoena & Spencer, 2017), business mentorship (Miller et al., 2017), and website development (Mitchell, 2018). It was promising to find a growing number of SLPs affiliated with small businesses, but these studies were generally void of findings relating to student-imparted marketing skills and knowledge instruction, and the influence on small business satisfaction. This study was designed to remedy this situation via an investigation on the influence of student-imparted marketing skills, knowledge instruction and perceived business impact on satisfaction among small businesses that participated in a South African SLP.

Small Business Marketing and Education

Cant (2012) argues that although all the functions of a business are important, the marketing function is the one that focuses on sales and income generation, and for this reason the success of a business largely depends on the application of marketing skills. The importance of marketing for small businesses has been widely highlighted because of its ability to identify what the marketplace needs and then provide for those needs in ways that outperform competitors (Van Scheers, 2018; Lamb et al., 2020). However, small businesses are often constrained by financial, physical, and human resources (Van Scheers, 2018; Odoom & Mensah, 2019), as well as frequently lacking the necessary marketing expertise and skills needed to plan and implement effective marketing strategies (Massiera et al., 2017; Oji et al., 2017a; Rambe, 2017; Mbatha & Ngwenya, 2018; Van Scheers, 2018; Bacon & Schneider, 2019; TGS SA, 2020).

In addition, the marketing orientation of small businesses is greatly dependent on the marketing skills and knowledge of the owner, and is therefore often reactive to environmental changes rather than facilitated in a systematic and strategic way (Pérez-Luño et al., 2014; Van Scheers, 2018). Interestingly, it has been shown that small business owners do recognize the importance of facilitating marketing in a strategic and systematic way (Franco et al., 2014), but do not have the skills, time or resources (Gellynck et al., 2012; Van Sheers, 2018). For example, Henninger and

Alevizou (2017) investigated the practical implementation of social media and MC in small businesses, which are managed by the owners. The study shows that the businesses engaged in MC in a haphazard, non-strategic and short-term way that did not consider the customer's information needs. The study concluded that the small businesses showed a deficiency in basic marketing knowledge, which was necessary to develop MC strategies. Thus, Henninger and Alevizou (2017) recommended that small businesses should receive practical skills in order to improve their marketing proficiency.

Prior research suggests that training can have a positive effect on small businesses' performance and profitability (Bruhn et al., 2018; Ertan & Sesen, 2019; Higuchi et al., 2019; Hsu & Chen, 2019), productivity and growth (Abdul, 2018; Bruhn et al., 2018), efficiency and reduced costs (Higuchi et al., 2019) and goal attainment (Ahmad et al., 2019; Barrios et al., 2019). Additionally, several other studies posit that training has a favorable influence on general business and management practices (Higuchi et al., 2015; Higuchi et al., 2019), business knowledge (Yusoff, 2019), and marketing (Lekhanya, 2015; Mramba, 2015; Henninger & Alevizou, 2017; Bruhn et al., 2018). However, McKenzie (2021) revealed that business training does not necessarily lead to the practices that are taught in the training being implemented by businesses. Additionally, McKenzie (2021) revealed that business training only leads to small increases in sales and profits and posit that it is difficult to determine the size of the gains derived from training. The study also concludes that different types of businesses consider different types of business training more beneficial (i.e. there is no one ideal type of training).

The key element of CPUT's SLP is that students need to provide marketing-related skills and knowledge training so that the small business can maintain and further develop marketing-related strategies upon conclusion of the SLP. Hence, the present study aims not only to highlight the marketing-related skills and knowledge perceptions and experiences of small businesses, but also to report on the satisfaction small businesses derive from the SLP. Consequently, the main research question of the study is as follows: What influence do student-imparted marketing skills, knowledge instruction and perceived business impact have on small businesses' satisfaction?

CPUT Marketing SLP Overview

In response to the ever-pressing need for effective and wide-spread support for community development in South Africa, a SLP was developed by the CPUT's Marketing Department in 2010. The CPUT SLP is implemented in the marketing students second year of study. A local advertising agency provides students with additional support (in addition to the course coordinator) as the service partner. The students receive a comprehensive brief that provides details about the SLP, and are required to form mini-agencies (five marketing students and one graphic design student). The students then approach, initiate and foster a

relationship with a small business in their local community (mainly located in the retail sector), which has little marketing and advertising in place, so that they can actualize a real-world marketing scenario. Students are mandated to select small businesses in the community where they reside (especially small businesses that they may even frequent, e.g. the local hairdresser) to ensure their safety. The students are required to develop marketing-related (especially marketing communication) strategies, which include advertising, sales promotion, consumer research, and marketing (particularly digital such as social media and websites) in a bid to increase sales, brand awareness and customers. Additionally, the students are mandated to assist small businesses with the digital skill development and training (e.g. computers, Microsoft Office, Internet and email). The student teams also need to train small business staff in the use of marketing-related strategies and tools so that they can continue to facilitate effective marketing and MC upon the conclusion of the SLP.

Prior to participating in the SLP, the students are required to partake in a social responsibility project in their first year of studies, where they are trained by the Communication lecturer on how to work with community partners. The SLP carries a weight of 40% (8 credits), which equates to 80 notional hours that each student is required to work on the SLP (mainly in the second semester). Students are guided and assisted by the course coordinator through each SLP phase via smaller assessments. Students are required to submit these smaller assessments to the course coordinator prior to sharing these with their small business clients. Hence, these smaller tasks enable the course coordinator to guide, direct and correct the students work to ensure that the small businesses receive services, skills and knowledge that are practical, relevant and realistic (and provide the greatest chance of having a positive impact on the businesses). The students' first assessment is to conduct a situational analysis of their community partners' businesses, which includes a problem/opportunity statement, environmental and competitor analysis, communications arena of the brand, product/brand analysis, target market analysis and primary research among the small business consumers to assist in identifying potential gaps in marketing skills and knowledge. The final SLP projects are presented to the service partner (i.e. the advertising agency), which provides the students with additional feedback before the final presentations to their small business clients. Since its inception, this SLP has served the needs of more than 700 small businesses with marketing-related services in South Africa.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The complexity of the topic under inquiry and the need to appreciate the context of the phenomenon necessitated the use of a quantitative descriptive research design (Cohen et al., 2007). The design was used to enable description of the satisfaction

experienced by small businesses as a result of the SLP. The study can also be classified as an evaluation research approach. Evaluation research is concerned with reviewing the performance of a project or programme that has already been implemented (Bhattacharyya, 2006). The study did not attempt to engage in a comprehensive SLP evaluation (which would include evaluating every aspect of the programme and analyze its impact on all the parties involved), but it did explore the satisfaction of the participating small businesses (community partners).

Sample and Procedure

The research population included a total of 294 small businesses, since only small businesses that participated in the SLP over a five-year period, and had given feedback in terms of their SL experience were eligible to participate in the study. However, there were no contact details for 14 small businesses so these were excluded from the list, which left a sample frame of 280 small businesses. All of the small businesses that participated in the SLP were considered eligible for inclusion in the study, so it was decided to conduct a census due to the relative small size. Ethical approval was sought and received from the Faculty of Business and Management Science's research ethics committee to conduct the study (clearance certificate no. FBREC2522015). Each small business was contacted telephonically and asked if there was a person that had worked with the students during the course of the SLP programme and was available to complete the questionnaire on behalf of the business. A total of 107 small business owners and/or managers gave permission for the research to be conducted. Data was collected via a face-to-face administered structured survey.

Research Instrument and Data Analysis

The questionnaire was largely adapted from Schachter and Schwartz (2009) research and permission was received from the authors to use their research instrument. A screening question, namely: "Did you participate and personally assist the marketing students in CPUT's marketing communication service learning programme?" was asked immediately before the interview commenced to ensure that the participant had in fact worked with the students during the SLP. In most cases, the person who represented the small business was the owner. The next section used multiple response questions to elicit information on the types of skills and knowledge the business received from CPUT students. The first question in this section was as follows: "What marketing skills training did the student team impart to your business? (Check all the boxes that apply)", and the list of options included computer, Microsoft Office, email, internet, website, Facebook, Twitter and no training. The second question was as follows: "What marketing knowledge did the student team impart to your business? (Check all the boxes that apply)", and the list of options included marketing, sales promotion, strategy, advertising, research, consumer and no new knowledge. The following section consisted

of primary structured questions on marketing skills and knowledge instruction satisfaction and the perceived business impact of the SLP. A single-item 4-point scale (very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, satisfied and very satisfied) was used to assess the level of satisfaction with the SLP. The perceived business impact question was as follows: "What was the impact of the marketing skills training and knowledge instruction imparted by student? (Check all the boxes that apply)", and offered the following multiple options: increased sales, new customers, increased brand awareness, increased customer loyalty, increased business efficiency, increased competitive advantage, increased employee motivation and no positive impact. Open-ended response options were also included in order to give respondents an opportunity to offer suggestions for the improvement of the SLP. The last section of the questionnaire sought to garner demographic information about the small business demographics in terms of age, employee numbers, legal form and annual turnover (refer to the findings section for an overview of the small business demographic descriptive characteristics).

Upon conclusion of the survey, the questionnaires were checked, coded and captured in SPSS (version 25). First, descriptive statistics were computed in the form of frequencies, means and standard deviations. Next, the marketing skills and knowledge instruction satisfaction scale was used as the dependent variable in order to conduct cross tabulation with the independent variables, namely marketing skills, knowledge instruction and perceived business impact. A Generalized Linear Model (GLM) was employed (based on the Wald chi-square measure) to conduct the statistical analysis, which allowed for the simultaneous analysis of multiple response options. A post-hoc test, viz. Bonferroni, was used to determine the pair-wise comparisons of estimated marginal means and reveal specific significant differences between the independent variables.

FINDINGS

Small Business Demographic Descriptive Characteristics

Several small business demographic characteristics were collected to describe the sample. The largest group of small businesses were 2.5-5.49 years old (33.3%), followed by 5.5-10.49 years (28.6%), older than 10.5 years (27.6%), and less than 2.49 years (10.5%). Most of the small businesses employed between 0 and 4 people (61.8%), followed by 5 and 19 employees (37.3%), and 20 and 49 employees (1%). A large portion of the small businesses were legally constituted as a sole proprietor (43.1%). Other forms of legal ownership included closed corporations (26.5%), Pty (Ltd) (22.5%), partnerships (6.9%), and joint ventures (1%). More than half of the small businesses generated less than \$12 499 (52.9%) in sales per annum, a third earned between \$12500 and \$62 499 (33.3%), and a minority's turnover was more than \$62 500 (13.8%) per year.

Marketing Skills and Knowledge Instruction Satisfaction Descriptive Characteristics

A large proportion of the 107 small business participants (84.1%) expressed a positive overall satisfaction (satisfied 58% and very satisfied 26.1%) with the marketing skills and knowledge imparted to their businesses versus a small segment (15.9%) that displayed negative satisfaction sentiments (dissatisfied 10.2% and very dissatisfied 5.7%).

SLP Descriptive Variables

Small business participants reported a range of marketing skills that were imparted by the marketing students. More than half of the participants (54.7%) stated that students had divulged Facebook-related skills to their business. Other technical skills shared by the students included: managing a website (21.7%), handling business email (19.8%), and using the Internet (14.2%). A little more than a third of participants (34.9%) stated that no marketing skills had been received from the students.

Considering the educational nature of the SLP, a large majority of the small businesses (74.8%) indicated that some form of marketing-related knowledge was shared by the students. The largest proportion of knowledge was in the area of advertising (50.5%). Other primary forms included marketing (40.2%), sales promotion (35.5%), and research (19.6%). A quarter of participants (25.2%) stated that no new knowledge was shared with their business.

A large majority of small businesses (86.7%) felt that the marketing skills and knowledge imparted by marketing students had a positive impact on their businesses. More than half (51.8%) believed that the marketing skills and knowledge instruction facilitated an increase brand awareness. Additionally, the marketing skills and knowledge instruction helped increase sales (48.2%), gain new customers (42.2%), increase customer loyalty (28.9%), and increased business efficiency (26.5%). A small percentage (13.3%) felt that the marketing skills and knowledge instruction had no positive impact on their businesses.

Refer to Table 1 for an overview of the SLP descriptive statistics.

Marketing Skills, Marketing-related Knowledge and Perceived Business Impact Satisfaction Analysis

The Wald χ^2 measure (based on the overall GLM) revealed that there was a significant difference at $p < 0.001$ for satisfaction ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 0.767$) due to the marketing skills and knowledge instruction provided by the marketing students, and the perceived business impact on small businesses. The Bonferroni correction pairwise comparisons of estimated marginal means disclosed significant differences for many of the SLP independent variables (the significant differences were based on small businesses' satisfaction, where higher mean values indicated higher satisfaction levels and lower mean values indicated lower satisfaction levels).

Marketing skills: Small businesses that received computer ($M = 3.22$, $SE = 0.403$, $p < 0.001$), Microsoft Office ($M = 3.02$, $SE = 0.326$, $p < 0.01$), website ($M =$

2.90, SE = 0.357, $p < 0.05$), and Facebook (M = 3.14, SE = 0.363, $p < 0.05$) marketing skills from the marketing students experienced greater satisfaction than those that did not receive computer (M = 2.24, SE = 0.318, $p < 0.001$), Microsoft Office (M = 2.44, SE = 0.378, $p < 0.01$), website (M = 2.56, SE = 0.335, $p < 0.05$), and Facebook (M = 2.87, SE = 0.373, $p < 0.05$) marketing skills. Unsurprisingly, small businesses that were not given any marketing skills by students (M = 2.47, SE = 0.364, $p < 0.01$) experienced lower satisfaction than those that did receive marketing skills (M = 3.00, SE = 0.350, $p < 0.01$).

Marketing-related knowledge: Small businesses that were educated in the areas of marketing (M = 2.94, SE = 0.351, $p < 0.001$), sales promotion (M = 2.94, SE = 0.355, $p < 0.001$), and advertising (M = 2.88, SE = 0.350, $p < 0.01$) experienced higher levels of satisfaction with the knowledge received from the marketing students than those that did not receive marketing (M = 2.52, SE = 0.335, $p < 0.001$), sales promotion (M = 2.52, SE = 0.329, $p < 0.001$), and advertising (M = 2.59, SE = 0.334, $p < 0.01$) knowledge. As expected, small businesses that were not educated in any area by the marketing students (M = 2.47, SE =

0.359, $p < 0.01$) experienced a lower level of satisfaction with knowledge than those that did receive such an education (M = 2.47, SE = 0.359, $p < 0.01$).

Perceived business impact: Small businesses that perceived an increase in sales (M = 3.09, SE = 0.364, $p < 0.05$), new customers (M = 2.87, SE = 0.354, $p < 0.05$), brand awareness (M = 2.90, SE = 0.341, $p < 0.01$), and customer loyalty (M = 2.94, SE = 0.331, $p < 0.01$) from the marketing skills and knowledge instruction experienced a higher level of satisfaction than those that did not perceive an increase in sales (M = 2.92, SE = 0.369, $p < 0.05$), new customers (M = 2.60, SE = 0.334, $p < 0.05$), brand awareness (M = 2.57, SE = 0.345, $p < 0.01$), and customer loyalty (M = 2.53, SE = 0.359, $p < 0.01$). Unsurprisingly, small businesses that perceived no positive impact from the marketing skills and knowledge instruction (M = 2.82, SE = 0.372, $p < 0.05$) experienced a lower level of satisfaction than those that did perceive a positive impact (M = 3.19, SE = 0.376, $p < 0.05$).

Refer to Table 1 for an overview of the above-mentioned discussion of the marketing skills, marketing-related knowledge and perceived business impact satisfaction analysis.

Table 1: SLP Descriptive Statistics and Satisfaction Significance Levels

SLP independent variables		n	%	Wald χ^2	p
Marketing skills	Computer	7	6.6	13.765	0.000***
	Microsoft Office	7	6.6	8.045	0.005**
	Email	21	19.8	0.401	0.527
	Internet	15	14.2	0.026	0.871
	Website	23	21.7	4.848	0.028*
	Facebook	59	54.7	5.645	0.018*
	Twitter	2	1.9	0.067	0.796
	No training	37	34.9	7.025	0.008**
Marketing-related knowledge	Marketing	43	40.2	12.122	0.000***
	Sales promotion	38	35.5	14.280	0.000***
	Strategy	19	17.8	1.785	0.182
	Advertising	54	50.5	6.609	0.010**
	Research	21	19.6	3.057	0.080
	Consumer	14	13.1	0.202	0.653
	No new knowledge	27	25.2	8.470	0.004**
	Perceived business impact	Increased sales	45	42.2	3.242
New customers		52	48.2	4.204	0.040*
Increased brand awareness		55	51.8	7.782	0.005**
Increased customer loyalty		31	28.9	7.966	0.005**
Increased business efficiency		28	26.5	0.619	0.431
Increased competitive advantage		18	16.9	0.080	0.777
Increased employee motivation		21	19.3	0.000	0.984
No positive impact		14	13.3	4.521	0.033**

* Wald χ^2 revealed a significant difference at $p < 0.05$

** Wald χ^2 revealed a significant difference at $p < 0.01$

*** Wald χ^2 revealed a significant difference at $p < 0.001$

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A large majority of the small businesses were satisfied with the marketing skills and knowledge instruction received from the marketing students during the SLP. Other studies affirm the satisfaction that local communities experience because of knowledge provided by students (Jorge, 2003; Sprague & Hu, 2015; Miller et al., 2017; Mitchell, 2018; Gipson et al., 2021). Jorge (2003) found that there was a mutually beneficial knowledge exchange in many instances between students and community members in a SLP, but especially in terms of increased motivation and self-esteem among the community partners. Sprague and Hu (2015) indicated that a number of organizations reported ongoing benefits from the business-related knowledge imparted by students long after they had left, which support the results of this study. Considering that most South African small businesses do not have much of a budget for marketing (Lekhanya, 2015; Dos Santos & Duffett, 2021), students should specifically train them in the use of digital marketing tools that are either free or very low-cost. Therefore, students should be trained and well-versed in the use of a variety of cost-effective digital marketing tools before the SLP commences. However, the findings of this current study (and the mandatory community partner feedback) revealed that the students often lacked necessary digital skills to effectively assist the small businesses. Consequently, the marketing students now receive website development training and are also required to complete Google and social media-related certificate courses prior to the commencement of the SLP.

Small businesses that received computer, Microsoft Office, website and Facebook training experienced higher levels of satisfaction with these marketing skills received from the marketing students. Oji et al. (2017a) posited that online marketing technologies could boost the capability and strategic sustainability of small businesses in South Africa. However, a number of South African small businesses lack knowledge of online marketing technologies, and how to use these for marketing purposes (Oji et al., 2017b; Rambe, 2017). It has therefore been recommended that small businesses increase their digital technology knowledge and skill levels in order to improve their marketing strategies (Rambe, 2017). Websites, email, and Facebook are effective and affordable digital marketing tools (Mitchell, 2018; Belch & Belch, 2021; Dos Santos & Duffett, 2021), so it makes sense that small businesses associated high levels of satisfaction with the digital marketing skills they received from students.

Not surprisingly, the surveyed small businesses that received no training experienced lower levels of satisfaction with the training. Since most organizations that participate in SLPs have certain expectations of the students, it is logical for them to experience dissatisfaction if the students do not fulfill their expectations (Sprague & Hu, 2015; Goertzen et al., 2016). This is a major shortcoming of SLPs, since students may not be able to practically apply the appropriate theoretical concepts to the participating

organizations (generally small businesses and NPOs), and may also not have the necessary expertise or knowledge to effectively train or advise their community partners/clients. Students could be given additional training (besides certificate courses, website communication community partner training) in order to learn how most effectively to transfer their skills to the small business staff. In terms of this study, the local advertising agency (service partner) provided some mentoring, but this support could be expanded to ensure an increase in student competence. This is especially important, since as mentioned above, students may lack the essential proficiency and/or competence, which may result in no added value for the community partner businesses or even have a negative impact. Hence, marketing coordinators should also clearly define the role of service providers in order to take advantage of their vast experience and expertise, which is generally offered freely as a form of social responsibility. For example, a formal memorandum of understanding could be used to identify and formalize the roles and responsibilities between the service providers and SL marketing coordinators (e.g. expectations; training/mentoring content and schedules; and human resources and time commitments). In this way, service providers' professional services could be more effectively used to increase the value of SLPs among the students and community partners. It is also recommended that marketing course coordinators initiate protocols as a means to frequently monitor the students' work in a bid to reduce non-compliant students. The students, community partners, service partners and marketing course coordinators could also sign a memorandum of understanding to increase accountability among all of the stakeholders, which should also outline the major outcomes to ensure that the community partners have clear expectations of the SLP outcomes. The marketing coordinators could also follow-up with each small business to ensure that the marketing students have actually trained them in the use of relevant marketing tools, and not solely rely on the written report submitted by the community partners upon conclusion of the SLP, which is too late to identify and/or remedy potential problems.

Small businesses that received advertising, marketing and sales promotion knowledge from the marketing students experienced higher levels of satisfaction. Suseno et al. (2019) found that small businesses prefer informal workplace-based instruction by an external training provider, so it is a reasonable notion that the small businesses experienced a significant level of satisfaction with the knowledge received from the students relating to marketing, sales promotion, and advertising. Organizations that gained no marketing-related knowledge from students experienced lower levels of satisfaction. Considering the many benefits of marketing-related education and knowledge (Henninger & Alevizou, 2017), as well as the high expectations that community partners have regarding SLPs (Sprague & Hu, 2015; Goertzen et al., 2016), it is a fair supposition that small businesses

experienced lower levels of satisfaction in situations where no new knowledge was imparted to them by the students. Students should first be found competent in terms of the basic marketing theories and practice before being allowed to participate in the SLP, so that they are able to convey the necessary marketing principles to the small business staff. Hence, it is recommended that the students should first pass the Marketing 1 course (where the basic marketing theories and principles are taught in their first year of studies) as a prerequisite for the second year course and participation in the SLP. Additionally, the marketing coordinators could develop content in multi-media format (e.g. a series of videos that could be placed on YouTube), which students could use to continually revise their marketing knowledge, but could also use to assist with the transfer of important marketing knowledge to the small business staff.

Small businesses that perceived an increase in sales, new customers, brand awareness and customer loyalty, expressed higher levels of satisfaction regarding the marketing skills and knowledge instruction provided by the marketing students. Van Vuuren and Botha (2010) confirmed a statistically significant relationship between knowledge and new customers, business performance, sales, profitability and staff motivation for small businesses in South Africa. In addition, Kunaka and Moos (2019) and Higuchi et al. (2019) also found significant relationships between small business mentoring and training and a number of business outcomes. Galbriath (2018) showed that staff training could result in increased customer loyalty, customer retention and competitive advantages as a result of improved employee performance and motivation.

The findings of this study affirmed that some small businesses perceived no positive impact from the marketing skills and knowledge instruction, which yielded lower levels of satisfaction. Several other studies reveal that students do not all devote the same amount of time and effort to SLPs (Sprague & Hu, 2015; Goertzen et al., 2016). Similarly, not all students have the same amount of knowledge and expertise to share (Sprague & Hu, 2015; Vizenor et al., 2017). Therefore, the form of instruction, the effort of students, participation of small business staff, training delivery, and knowledge of students could have contributed to the lack of positive impact from marketing skills and knowledge instruction received by small businesses, which resulted in lower levels of satisfaction.

In order to ensure that small businesses experience long-lasting performance benefits through marketing-related skills and knowledge from the SLP, students need to be clear about how various forms of skills and knowledge (that were identified in the initial the situational analysis of the SLP) can translate into specific business performance benefits. Additionally, the selection of appropriate community partners/clients (i.e. must have little marketing and advertising and be classified as a small business) is also pivotal in the success of future marketing SLPs, since larger businesses and those that already have extensive

marketing communications expectations often exceed the abilities of the students. Consequently, the community partners' expectations are not met, which ultimately leads to dissatisfaction with SLPs. However, it is also important that the students do not attempt to provide too many (imparted superficially) or unnecessary marketing skills and knowledge that are unsuited to the small businesses, which may result in information overload and/or overwhelm the owners. Students should rather focus on imparting several primary principles well and in great detail. In addition, the SLP coordinators need to monitor the marketing skills and knowledge transfer activities of students to ensure that they are taking place effectively and actually result in increased performance on the part of the small businesses.

Furthermore, a number of students only participate in SLP since they are mandated to do so, and so they may only put a minimal amount of effort into the SLP in order to pass the course, which may result in no or little benefit for the community partners or even be detrimental to their organizations. Hence, it is important that students recognize the importance of SLP in terms of the partner organizations' needs and perceive that their work adds to the greater good of society. Therefore, students should be encouraged to select small businesses in sectors that are of interest them and may even have a vested interest (e.g. a small business that they frequently patronize in their community) to ensure enthusiastic participation and a high standard of work. However, some students do not deliver a high quality of work due to a lack of work experience and knowledge (Sprague & Hu, 2015; Vizenor et al., 2017), which may result in the community partners exhibiting high dissatisfaction levels. Accordingly, possible remedies may include comprehensive best practice guidelines and holistic support systems to support students. A student readiness checklist or an assessment (e.g. a SLP entrance test) could be developed by marketing course coordinator prior to the commencement of the SLP to confirm that the students have the necessary marketing skills and knowledge to effectively assist the small businesses. The marketing coordinator and service partner could also develop a student/community partner/client handbook (print or in a multi-media format) and/or protocols that include: a comprehensive brief of the SLP requirements for the students and community partners, SLP assessment rubric, student orientation and training, teamwork and team leadership, student SLP code of conduct, SLP business services and processes, student and community partner roles and responsibilities, community partner/client selection policies, SLP outcome goals, work hours/timesheets, planning and meeting templates, community partner checklist/report template. Weekly student team meetings, minutes, reports and/or presentations could also be used to continually update the course coordinator on the marketing skills and knowledge that are being imparted to community partners. Additionally, small businesses should also provide continual feedback to serve as control mechanism, especially as

a means to identify students that are not providing effective service. The feedback from the community partners could take the form of a monthly checklist/report (that should be quick to complete owing to small business time constraints, but should also make provision for open-ended comments), which could be submitted directly to the SL marketing coordinator as an additional monitoring mechanism.

CONCLUSIONS

Small businesses that were trained in the use of low-cost or free digital marketing technologies experienced higher levels of satisfaction with the marketing-related skills received from students during the SLP. Small businesses that did not receive any marketing skills from students experienced dissatisfaction. There was strong likelihood that small businesses would experience greater satisfaction when they received new skills from the students related to Facebook, Twitter, websites, Internet, email, computer applications, Microsoft Office, and so forth, especially in respect of using these tools for marketing purposes. Hence, it is imperative that marketing students spend time training small business staff because of the benefits associated with these small business marketing-related skills (Oji et al., 2017a; Do Amaral, 2019).

Small businesses that engaged in this SLP and received education in marketing, sales promotion, and advertising specifically experienced higher levels of satisfaction with the education. Small businesses that did not receive any marketing education from students experienced dissatisfaction with this aspect of the SLP. Since many South African small businesses have a lack of knowledge and experience when it comes to designing and implementing marketing strategies, sales promotions, and advertising campaigns (Lekhanya, 2015), and considering that a lack of education and training is a key constraint for entrepreneurship in South Africa (Herrington et al., 2015), it is imperative that students invest time and effort in conveying marketing-related knowledge to small businesses throughout the duration of the SLP.

Small businesses that received marketing-related skills and knowledge from students during the SLP perceived greater satisfaction with a number of performance-related benefits, which included: increased sales, new customers, increased brand awareness and increased customer loyalty. Organizations that perceived no impact resulting from marketing skills and knowledge imparted by the students experienced dissatisfaction with this aspect of the SLP. Based on the high failure rate of South African small businesses, it is vital that the SLPs are able to

transfer skills and knowledge instruction to their unique contexts (Harrington, 2014; Kunaka & Moos, 2019; Suseno et al., 2019).

Tyron and Stoecker (2008) indicated that SL coordinators rarely monitored the students' progress during the programme. CPUT's marketing SLP is assessed by the course coordinator via several assessments during the course of the programme, but additional monitoring should be used to increase the quality of work. Hence, marketing course coordinators should develop procedures and mechanisms to continually monitor the students' standard of work during the SLP (a number of recommendations and examples are provided in the previous section). Finally, this SLP should involve the implementation of the aforementioned recommendations and improvements, and then conduct additional empirical research to evaluate the influence of these changes and interventions on the small businesses. The ensuing limitations and future research section also provides avenues for further improvement and research.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study was not without limitations, which provided avenues for further inquiry. The sample size was fairly small (despite a relatively good response rate) and the SLP sample was also limited to a single South Africa university. Therefore, future research could draw larger sample sizes by examining a number of SLPs across several countries and universities in order to improve the generalizability of the research findings. The study was conducted at a single point of time for small businesses that participated in the SLP over a five-year period. Therefore, it is likely that the respondents' perceived business impact sentiments and experience with the SLP would not be fresh in their minds, especially for those who had participated in the earlier years. Accordingly, future inquiry should be conducted at intervals for each new year of participants. For example, during the SLP, directly after the completion of the SLP, half a year and one year afterwards, which should result in more accurate recall, reduce response bias and increase the robustness of the results. This research only provided a community partner evaluation in terms of the clients' perceptions and experiences of the outcomes, outputs and inputs relating to the SLP. Further investigation could provide a more comprehensive evaluation of SLPs by considering every aspect of the quality cycle model and all of the stakeholders, namely client organizations, university staff, students, and service partner/agency employees to provide a more comprehensive SLP evaluation.

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