REQUIRING STUDENTS TO GATHER SURVEY DATA: AN EXPLORATORY ATTITUDINAL INQUIRY

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study was focused on students' attitudes toward participating in gathering survey data in marketing research classes and on their attitudes toward various ways in which faculty may use such data. Results indicate that, while most students do not object vehemently to interviewing assignments, a noteworthy percentage does object strongly; and most students question an instructor's right to require them to conduct telephone or personal interviews. Nevertheless, students seem willing to let instructors base scholarly articles on such data.

INTRODUCTION

The practice of assigning projects in marketing research courses that require students to gather survey data via personal or telephone interviewing is common. However, it may be ill-advised because, to the extent that students find interviewing assignments distasteful, they may shy away from courses taught by faculty known to impose such requirements. Interviewing assignments may also create anxieties, which can impede learning; and misgivings about being required to conduct interviews are likely to be reflected in students' teaching evaluations. Furthermore, requiring students to gather data raises ethical questions when instructors use such data for purposes that benefit them personally. Marketing research faculty may claim, of course, that data gathering assignments are perfectly appropriate, regardless of how the data are used, simply because data gathering should be no less a part of the marketing research course than developing questionnaires and analyzing data. In addition, they may argue that benefits they derive from publishing articles based on such data are shared indirectly with students. After all, a school's reputation and, in turn, the prestige and value of degrees awarded depend substantially on research produced by faculty.

The reported exploratory study was focused on (1) students' attitudes toward personal and telephone interviewing, (2) the right of marketing research instructors to require students to conduct personal or telephone interviews, (3) the right of instructors to sell data gathered by students or to sell reports based on such data, and (4) the right of instructors to base articles intended for scholarly journals on such data. Attitudinal differences among various sample subsegments were also explored. Although the reported study is exploratory rather than conclusive, it brings issues to light that should be of interest to instructors who use or have thought of using students to gather survey data.

METHOD

While in class, 142 students were asked to respond to the eight items shown in the column labelled "Item" in Table 1, below, by indicating the extent of their agreement on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly agree" (7) to "strongly disagree" (1). They were told to read each item carefully and were cautioned to distinguish between "should" and "should not." Also, they were told to respond to the first seven items first and that instructions for responding to the last item would be provided after everyone had completed Items 1 through 7. Regarding Item 8, the following statement was read to them:

> The value of your degree depends substantially on the reputation of the college or university that granted it; and a school's reputation depends largely on the research published by faculty. Now, please read Item 7 again, think about what I have told you, and answer Item 8 accordingly.

Thus, by comparing replies to Items 7 and 8, an assessment could be made of the persuasiveness of arguments to the effect that, while instructors may benefit from using data gathered by students, students also benefit.

The convenience sample of 142 students consisted of 85 students who majored in marketing and were enrolled in a marketing research course at the time that the questionnaire was administered. Of these 85 marketing research students, 43 were enrolled at the Weber State University in Ogden, Utah, which offers advanced business degrees only in accounting; and 42 were enrolled at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, Utah, which offers MBA and doctoral degrees in accounting, economics, finance, manage-

ment, and marketing. The remaining 57 students, of whom less than 10 percent majored in marketing, were enrolled in a basic marketing course at the Weber State University. In the tables, below, these overlapping groups are identified, respectively, as "All Subjects," "All Research Students," "WSU Research Students," "Utah Research Students," and "Basic Marketing Students." "N" denotes group size.

RESULTS

Results are summarized in Tables 1 through 4. In Table 1, the mean level of agreement (strongly agree = 7; strongly disagree = 1) is shown for the entire sample and for each segment. Standard deviations, which indicate response variability, are also noted.

TABLE 1
MEANS & STANDARD DEVIATIONS BY GROUP[a]

	Item	All Subjects N = 142	Basic Marketing Students N = 57	All Research Students N = 85	WSU Research Students N = 43	Utah Research Students N = 42
1	I dislike interviewing strangers in person.	4.07 (1.72)	4.44 (1.76)	3.82 (1.66)	3.95 (1.62)	3.69 (1.72)
2	I dislike interviewing strangers over the telephone.	4.80 (1.82)	5.12 (1.80)	4.58 (1.80)	4.60 (1.76)	4.55 (1.86)
3	Marketing research instructors should be permitted to choose class projects that require students to conduct telephone interviews.	3.52 (1.80)	3.28 (1.95)	3.68 (1.68)	3.77 (1.60)	3.60 (1.77)
4	Marketing research instructors should be permitted to choose class projects that require students to conduct door-to-door in-person interviews.	3.29 (1.87)	3.12 (1.85)	3.40 (1.89)	3.35 (1.81)	3.45 (1.99)
5	Marketing research instructors should be permitted to ask for volunteers to gather data using questionnaires in return for extra credit.	5.54 (1.81)	5.65 (1.87)	5.47 (1.77)	5.91 (1.39)	5.02 (2.01)
6	Marketing research instructors who choose class projects that require students to gather survey data should not be allowed to sell such data or to sell reports based on such data.	5.44 (1.78)	6.05 (1.57)	5.04 (1.80)	4.63 (1.90)	5.45 (1.61)
7	Marketing research instructors who choose class projects that require students to gather survey data should not be allowed to use the data students have gathered in writing articles for scholarly journals.	3.43 (1.92)	3.54 (2.00)	3.35 (1.87)	2.84 (1.68)	3.88 (1.93)
8	After being told that faculty research enhances a school's reputation and the value of degrees: Marketing research instructors who choose class projects that require students to gather survey data should not be allowed to use the data students have gathered in writing articles for scholarly journals.	2.84 (1.92)	2.98 (1.95)	2.83 (1.91)	2.56 (1.87)	3.31 (1.89)

[a]Standard deviations appear in parentheses. Scale values: strongly disagree = 1; strongly agree = 7.

Table 2 provides percentage breakdowns by scale point and by group for each questionnaire item. It provides details obscured by the summary statistics given in Table 1. In Table 3, t-tests for related samples are reported by group for response differences between various pairs of items, such as telephone vis-à-vis personal interviewing [Emory and Cooper 1991, p. 544]. Table 4 shows t-statistics significant beyond the .05 level for response differences between subjects enrolled in a basic marketing course at WSU ("Basic") and all subjects enrolled in a marketing research course ("All Research"), subjects enrolled in a basic marketing course at WSU ("Basic") and subjects enrolled in the WSU marketing research course ("WSU"), and subjects enrolled in the WSU marketing research course ("WSU") and subjects enrolled in the University of Utah marketing research course ("Utah").

TABLE 2
RESPONSE PERCENTAGES FOR EACH SCALE VALUE ITEM AND BY GROUP

	Strongly disagree 1	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly agree 7
ITEM 1: *Dislike personal interviewing*							
All Subjects	3.52	23.24	12.68	16.90	16.31	17.61	7.75
Basic Mktg. Students	1.75	21.05	7.02	19.30	15.79	22.81	12.28
All Research Students	4.71	24.71	16.47	15.29	20.00	14.12	4.71
WSU Research Students	2.33	23.26	16.28	18.60	18.60	16.28	4.65
Utah Research Students	7.14	26.19	16.67	11.90	21.43	11.90	4.76
ITEM 2: *Dislike telephone interviewing*							
All Subjects	2.82	12.68	13.38	9.86	17.61	21.83	21.83
Basic Mktg. Students	1.75	8.77	17.54	3.51	12.28	28.07	28.07
All Research Students	3.53	15.29	10.59	14.12	21.18	17.65	17.65
WSU Research Students	2.33	18.60	4.65	13.95	27.91	16.28	16.28
Utah Research Students	4.76	11.90	16.67	14.29	14.29	19.05	19.05
ITEM 3: *Instructors should be permitted to require telephone interviewing*							
All Subjects	16.90	16.20	17.61	19.01	13.38	11.27	5.63
Basic Mktg. Students	24.56	17.54	14.04	19.30	7.02	8.77	8.77
All Research Students	11.76	15.29	20.00	18.82	17.65	12.94	3.53
WSU Research Students	6.98	18.60	23.26	11.63	20.93	18.60	.00
Utah Research Students	16.67	11.90	16.67	26.19	14.29	7.14	7.14
ITEM 4: *Instructors should be permitted to require personal interviewing*							
All Subjects	24.65	17.61	11.27	15.48	17.61	8.45	4.93
Basic Mktg. Students	24.56	24.56	7.02	19.30	12.28	7.02	5.26
All Research Students	24.71	12.94	14.12	12.94	21.18	9.41	4.71
WSU Research Students	20.93	18.60	16.28	6.98	25.58	9.30	2.33
Utah Research Students	28.57	7.14	11.90	16.05	16.67	9.52	7.14
ITEM 5: *Instructors should be permitted to offer volunteers extra credit*							
All Subjects	7.04	4.23	2.82	4.23	17.61	23.24	40.85
Basic Mktg. Students	7.02	5.26	1.75	3.51	15.79	17.54	49.12
All Research Students	7.06	3.53	3.53	4.71	18.82	27.06	35.29
WSU Research Students	2.33	2.33	2.33	4.65	13.95	32.56	41.86
Utah Research Students	11.90	4.76	4.76	4.76	23.81	21.43	28.57
ITEM 6: *Instructors should not be allowed to sell data gathered by students*							
All Subjects	2.11	7.75	7.75	11.27	11.27	16.90	42.96
Basic Mktg. Students	3.51	3.51	1.75	3.51	10.53	17.54	59.65
All Research Students	1.18	10.59	11.76	16.47	11.76	16.47	31.76
WSU Research Students	2.33	16.28	13.95	13.95	16.28	11.63	25.58
Utah Research Students	.00	4.76	9.52	19.05	7.14	21.43	38.10
ITEM 7: *Instructors should not be allowed to base articles on data gathered by students (before hearing the statement read by the survey administrator)*							
All Subjects	16.20	23.24	21.83	8.45	9.86	11.27	9.15
Basic Mktg. Students	15.79	26.32	12.28	12.28	10.53	12.28	10.53
All Research Students	16.47	21.18	28.24	5.88	9.41	10.59	8.24
WSU Research Students	23.26	23.26	32.56	4.65	4.65	6.98	4.65
Utah Research Students	9.52	19.05	23.81	7.14	14.29	14.29	11.90
ITEM 8: *Instructors should not be allowed to base articles on data gathered by students (after hearing the statement read by the survey administrator)*							
All Subjects	29.58	24.65	11.27	12.68	7.04	7.75	7.04
Basic Mktg. Students	29.82	22.81	12.28	15.79	3.51	7.02	8.77
All Research Students	29.41	25.88	10.59	10.59	9.41	8.24	5.88
WSU Research Students	37.21	30.23	9.30	4.65	4.65	9.30	4.65
Utah Research Students	21.43	21.43	11.90	16.67	14.29	7.14	7.14

DISCUSSION

This study must be considered exploratory rather than conclusive because data were gathered using

convenience sampling and only two schools participated in the survey. Accordingly, whether the findings noted in this section can be generalized is a question that can be answered only by replicating the survey numerous times. Indeed, somewhat different attitudes are apt to prevail at various other schools due to such factors as different admission standards and students' cultural values and orientations [Garreau 1981].

TABLE 3
TWO-TAILED t-TEST VALUES FOR SELECTED PAIRS OF QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS[a]

Panel	Item	All Subjects N = 142	Basic Marketing Students N = 67	All Research Students N = 86	WSU Research Students N = 43	Utah Research Students N = 42
A	1 I dislike interviewing strangers in person. 2 I dislike interviewing strangers over the telephone.	4.06[b]	-2.42[b]	-3.24[b]	-2.03[b]	-2.59[b]
B	3 Marketing research instructors should be permitted to choose class projects that require students to conduct telephone interviews. 4 Marketing research instructors should be permitted to choose class projects that require students to conduct door-to-door in-person interviews.	1.38	.59	1.30	1.28	.49
C	3 Marketing research instructors should be permitted to choose class projects that require students to conduct telephone interviews. 5 Marketing research instructors should be permitted to ask for volunteers to gather data using questionnaires in return for extra credit.	-9.30[b]	-8.70[b]	-6.54[b]	6.32[b]	-3.33[b]
D	4 Marketing research instructors should be permitted to choose class projects that require students to conduct door-to-door in-person interviews. 5 Marketing research instructors should be permitted to ask for volunteers to gather data using questionnaires in return for extra credit.	-9.10[b]	-6.82[b]	-6.26[b]	-6.56[b]	-2.98[b]
E	7 Marketing research instructors who choose class projects that require students to gather survey data should not be allowed to use the data students have gathered in writing articles for scholarly journals. 8 After being told that faculty research enhances a school's reputation and the value of degrees: Marketing research instructors who choose class projects that require students to gather survey data should not be allowed to use the data students have gathered in writing articles for scholarly journals.	3.81[b]	2.77[b]	2.83[b]	1.32	2.34[b]

[a]Scale values: strongly disagree = 1; strongly agree = 7.
[b]Statistically significant beyond $\alpha = .05$; the mean of the item listed second was subtracted from that of the first.

However, these acknowledged limitations do not render the study atypical or fruitless. In fact, educational inquiries, such as those into students' evaluations of faculty (e.g., [Clayson and Haley 1990] [Wheeler and Geurts 1986]), are often based on samples drawn from one or just a few schools. Moreover, faculty who teach marketing research may be more interested in whether findings similar to those reported in this article characterize their students' sentiments than in whether the reported findings can be generalized across all sorts of diverse universities and colleges. This study provides them with insights into how their students may feel and guidelines for conducting studies of their own to assess their particular students' attitudes toward interviewing assignments.

Personal and Telephone Interviewing (Items 1 and 2)

Results shown in Table 1 suggest the surveyed students, on average, did not intensely dislike interviewing strangers in person or over the telephone. The noted means are somewhat deceiving, however. Specifically, regarding the first two questions, the percentages shown in Table 2 reveal that more than 25 percent of the total sample circled the scale values 6 or 7 to register a noteworthy dislike for conducting personal interviews; and likewise, more than 40 percent indicated a strong dislike for telephone interviewing. Accordingly, even though the "average" student may not object vehemently to interviewing assignments, a substantial percentage does seem to dislike them. Such dislikes, as noted earlier, may induce anxieties that impair learning and may induce students to give research instructors requiring such projects low ratings. Some students may simply avoid such courses altogether.

I expected telephone interviewing to be much less objectionable than personal interviewing because telephone interviewers do not confront subjects face to face. However, Panel A of Table 3 shows that across all groupings, telephone interviewing actually is disliked more intensely than personal interviewing. Accordingly, instructors who think they may be doing students a favor by settling for telephone interviews in lieu of personal interviews are likely to make matters worse rather than better.

Requiring Interviewing (Items 3, 4, and 5)

Regarding Items 3, 4, and 5, insofar as the scale midpoint is 4.0, the response means shown in Table 1 suggest the "average" student leans slightly toward disagreeing with the proposition that instructors should be permitted to require students to conduct telephone or personal interviews. But, as Table 2 and Panels C and D of Table 3 indicate, offering extra credit to entice students to volunteer for interviewing projects seems quite acceptable. Interestingly, the right to impose personal interviewing assignments

questioned slightly more than the right to impose telephone interviewing assignments, even though the latter type of assignment is disliked more intensely. Perhaps, the noted difference, which is small and statistically nonsignificant (see Panel B of Table 3), reflects only random error, or it may reflect concerns for personal safety.

Again, the mean response values seem somewhat misleading insofar as Table 2 indicates a substantial percentage of those surveyed questioned the instructor's prerogative to coerce them into conducting interviews. Specifically, more than 33 percent of all subjects responded to Item 3 by circling scale values of 1 or 2, indicating substantial disagreement with the proposition that marketing research instructors should be permitted to impose class projects requiring personal interviewing. Likewise, more than 42 percent responded to Item 4, which was focused on the right to impose telephone interviewing assignments, by circling scale values of 1 or 2. In contrast, only 11 percent registered strong doubts about the practice of offering extra credit as a means of inducing students to volunteer for interviewing assignments. Students who doubt an instructor's right to impose interviewing assignment may consider such assignments unfair; Clayson and Haley's [1990] research shows a strong negative relationship between perceived unfairness and students' evaluations of faculty.

Selling Data or Reports (Item 6)

Most respondents, as Tables 1 and 2 show, agreed that instructors who require students to gather survey data should not be allowed to sell such data or to sell reports based on such data. The biggest surprise was that the results were not more intensely one-sided.

Publishing (Items 7 and 8)

As Tables 1 and 2 indicate, few respondents objected strongly to faculty using data collected by students in writing scholarly papers and publishing them. With the exception of Weber State marketing research students, telling respondents that a school's reputation and the value of a degree depends largely on faculty research increased the level of approval by a small, but statistically significant, amount (see Panel E of Table 3). Perhaps, Weber State's marketing research students were already aware of the connection between publishing and academic reputation or they did not find the argument persuasive.

Variability Among Sample Segments

The statistically significant response differences among sample segments shown in Table 4 suggest that different types of students do hold somewhat different attitudes with regard to some of the issues on which this study was focused. Accordingly, it may be inappropriate to conduct further research into student attitudes toward interviewing assignments with the intent of developing generalizations across schools. More may be learned from administering a questionnaire similar to the one used in this study to marketing research students at numerous different schools, developing attitudinal profiles for each school, clustering schools according to profile similarities, and then ferreting out variables that discriminate most significantly among clusters. The findings *might* show, for example, that student attitudes toward interviewing assignments vary notably by geographic region and among "research" and "teaching" schools. Or perhaps, other systematic differences would be identified.

TABLE 4
STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT PAIR-WISE GROUP DIFFERENCES[a]

Item	Basic v. All Research	Basic v. WSU	WSU v. Utah
1 Dislike personal interviewing	Basic $\bar{X}$ = 4.44 All Res. $\bar{X}$ = 3.82 t = 2.11	-	-
5 Instructors should be permitted to offer volunteers extra credit	-	-	WSU $\bar{X}$ = 5.91 Utah $\bar{X}$ = 5.02 t = 2.36
6 Instructors should not be allowed to sell data gathered by students	Basic $\bar{X}$ = 6.05 All Res. $\bar{X}$ = 5.04 t = 3.47	Basic $\bar{X}$ = 6.05 WSU $\bar{X}$ = 4.83 t = 4.09	WSU $\bar{X}$ = 4.83 Utah $\bar{X}$ = 5.45 t = -2.16
7 Instructors should not be allowed to base articles on data gathered by students	-	-	WSU $\bar{X}$ = 2.84 Utah $\bar{X}$ = 3.88 t = -2.67

[a]All t-statistics are significant beyond α = .05; no other pairings are significant at the .05 level.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

This exploratory study provides professors who teach marketing research courses with some insights into how their students may feel about the pervasive practice of assigning projects requiring personal or telephone interviewing and the practice of using such data in ways that benefit instructors personally. Although the "average" subject in the reported survey did not seem to dread such assignments, a substantial percentage of the participants did dislike them rather intensely. Also, contrary to what one might have expected, students objected more to telephone interviewing than to personal interviewing; and

subjects leaned toward disagreeing with the contention that instructors should have the right to require them to gather survey data. Accordingly, such assignments may cause friction between students and instructors. They also may scare students away from marketing research courses and, perhaps, from majoring in marketing. Moreover, negative attitudes toward assignments, Clayson and Haley's [1990] research suggests, may very well develop into negative attitudes toward instructors. However, offering extra credit to students for conducting interviews seems much less objectionable.

By and large, students seem willing to let their instructors use data collected by students for scholarly publishing purposes. Telling them that they, as well as the instructor, benefit indirectly from publishing research led to slightly stronger levels of approval among most sample segments. Nevertheless, it seems doubtful that "sales pitches" focused on mutual benefits can greatly improve students' attitudes toward interviewing assignments.

Even though the reported results are exploratory and quite tentative, professors who teach marketing research courses and require students to conduct interviews or who have thought of imposing such assignments, seemingly, are well-advised to replicate portions of this study to learn how students at their particular schools feel about interviewing assignments and the various ways in which data gathered by students may be used. Also, further research might be conducted to delve into such matters as whether students develop a more favorable attitude toward interviewing when they participate fully in designing the study, developing the questionnaire, and analyzing the data than when they are merely given a questionnaire to administer.

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