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Shannon Cummins

*University of Nebraska at Omaha, [scummins@unomaha.edu](mailto:scummins@unomaha.edu)*

Jeff S. Johnson

*University of Missouri-Kansas City*

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# The Impact of Live Cases on Student Skill Development in Marketing Courses

Shannon Cummins, University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, NE, USA  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7634-4940>

and

Jeff S. Johnson, University of Missouri–Kansas City, Kansas City, MO, USA

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## Abstract

Live cases, where students work directly with an outside organization to solve real-world problems, can be an immersive learning experience for marketing students. Current scholarship on live case usage in marketing is limited to small samples from a handful of live case devotees. This article draws from a large, international sample of 169 marketing educators to investigate the perceived educational impacts of live cases on student skill development. Specifically, the paper explores student teamwork, conflict handling, time management, presentation, communication, and critical thinking skills. Additionally, the article explores how student skill development is affected by the amount of course time dedicated to the live case as well as faculty experience with live cases.

## Keywords

client-based projects, learning approaches and issues, marketing education issues, skill development, teamwork/projects/issues, critical thinking, skills/trait development in marketing education, time-management, oral communication

Imagine two similar soon-to-be college marketing graduates being asked about their marketing experience in a professional job interview. Candidate 1 responds, “I worked at Subway and coached a youth baseball team.” Candidate 2 responds,

I led a consulting team for a Fortune 200 company looking to improve their cross-sectional marketing lead utilization. Using Tableau and Salesforce, my team utilized primary and secondary data sources to develop a strategic plan for sales and service units to work collaboratively and presented a plan that was implemented within a business unit.

The difference? Candidate 2's marketing class used live cases.

Marketing is a discipline in transition due to long-term technological, socioeconomic, and geopolitical trends ([Rust, 2020](#)). Due to these changes, marketing education is evolving to ensure the continued success of students. Providing students with experience managing complex, dynamic systems and developing people skills are key focus areas for marketing educators ([Rust, 2020](#)). Marketing scholars have explored many excellent pedagogical techniques as shifts in the desired skill set continue (see [Cummins et al., 2020](#); [Gray et al., 2012](#), for reviews of this literature). However, calls for more research into what works in marketing education remain, including calls to study the promising area of client project pedagogy ([Bacon & Stewart, 2021](#)).

Live cases (also known as client-based projects) are class projects where students interface directly with an outside organization to solve real business problems ([Burns, 1990](#)). The classroom interaction is dynamic as information is presented in real-time and subject to the uncertainties of the real world. Live cases can benefit the student experience, foster learning, and enhance skill development ([Elam & Spotts, 2004](#); [Popovich & Brooks-Hurst, 2019](#); [Tofighi, 2021](#)). Yet studies supporting these beliefs are small in sample size, and other studies find live cases are no better at developing student skills and learning than more traditional teaching techniques ([Maher & Hughner, 2005](#); [Parsons & Lepkowska-White, 2009](#)).

Marketing scholars are prolific in terms of integrating experiential methodologies into the classroom, and live case usage is growing as more business schools seek to improve curriculum relevance and community engagement ([Bacon & Stewart, 2021](#)). Many of these scholars have detailed their own experiences using live cases to bolster learning and improve real-world applicability (e.g., [Bove & Davies, 2009](#); [Clark et al., 2012](#); [Laukkanen et al., 2013](#); [Lopez & Lee, 2005](#)). However, there remains no large-scale examination across courses, universities, or instructors of the learning benefits to students of implementing live case pedagogy.

This article addresses this gap by surveying a diverse international sample of 169 marketing faculty that have utilized live cases in 3,546 separate course semesters (terms) across the marketing curriculum to understand the perceived benefits of live

case education on the development of a range of student skills. Our sample allows us to empirically assess perceived student skill development from using live cases and test factors that may exacerbate the impact of live cases on skill development to provide quantifiable insight into this up-and-coming pedagogical technique.

## Literature Review

Live cases are a type of experiential learning where students interact with an organization to solve a current business problem. Live cases are realistic, providing immediate access to the company and key decision makers ([Elam & Spotts, 2004](#)), and are temporally relevant as they do not become outdated ([Markulis, 1985](#)). In the reciprocal relationship created, students benefit from the real-world learning and networking and the partner organizations garner insights and work-product ([Petkus, 2000](#)).

In many ways, marketing can be viewed as leading the movement toward experiential learning and live case utilization due to the practical nature of the discipline ([Brennan, 2014](#)). Marketing is home to the largest single live-case project—the Google Ad Grants Online Marketing Challenge. Implemented across at least 58 countries, Google currently matches 1,000 student teams per year with a partner organization. While team sizes vary, 20,000 students participated between 2008 and 2010 ([Tuzovic et al., 2011](#)).

While experiential learning in general, and live cases in specific, are widely advocated for and utilized in marketing, scholars note they are not without their drawbacks. [Brennan \(2014\)](#) utilized learning theory to explain why experiential learning methods are sometimes found to be less effective than expected. [Elam and Spotts \(2004\)](#) describe how live cases are difficult for instructors to plan and challenging for instructors and students to execute due to their complex and dynamic nature which can increase confusion and the risk of failure for students. Also, students may attribute failure to the instructor rather than internalizing their actions and assumptions in the project ([Elam & Spotts, 2004](#)). In short, experiential learning, including live cases, creates a real-world pressure-filled experience for students.

Research on live case usage in marketing has largely focused on small-scale studies and observations by faculty using live cases and problem-based curriculums. [Table 1](#) provides a review of applicable studies, samples, methods employed, outcomes studied, and overall findings. This table was sourced using a snowball method. First keyword searches (*live case, client-based*) in the *Journal of Marketing Education*, *Marketing Education Review*, and *Journal for the Advancement of Marketing Education* were used to identify articles for review. Citations in these articles resulted in the inclusion of additional articles. Finally, a Google search of keywords *marketing education* and *live case* or *client-based* was conducted.

These studies, which focus on live case utilization in marketing classes and included investigated outcomes, are generally positive toward the approach and the potential to deliver student growth and learning; although there are outliers that find live cases are not superior pedagogical options ([Maher & Hughner, 2005](#); [Parsons & Lepkowska-White, 2009](#)). Some scholars utilize direct measures of student learning ([Huser & Munoz, 2008](#); [Tofighi, 2021](#)) or draw conclusions from qualitative analysis of student reflections ([Vinuales & Harris, 2017](#)). Many utilize course evaluations ([Bove & Davies, 2009](#); [Rhee, 2018](#); [Tofighi, 2021](#)) or alumni surveys ([Valdez & Cervantes, 2018](#)) to draw conclusions about student learning or satisfaction with live case usage. Some authors include control sections of classes or control students not utilizing live cases as a means of assessing live case outcomes. Sometimes these control sections are different courses ([Bove & Davies, 2009](#)) or taught by different faculty ([Parsons & Lepkowska-White, 2009](#)). Sample size is a concern across most of this literature with sample sizes as small as 5 students and generally measuring fewer than 50 students taught using live case pedagogy. Studies also typically represent the experiences of one or, at best, a few instructors who are interested enough in live cases or problem-based curriculum to write a peer-reviewed study on the topic.

The most common outcomes studied are the development of student skills—ranging from soft skills, like teamwork, to hard skills, like data analysis. Scholars also study student grade performance ([Huser & Munoz, 2008](#); [Tofighi, 2021](#)) marketing concept and application abilities ([Preston, 2018](#)), satisfaction with the course and value of

course components ([Rhee, 2018](#)), and more community-minded aspects like knowledge or interest in community benefit or university prestige ([Cadwallader et al., 2013](#)).

**Table 1.** Live Case Research in Marketing with Studied Outcomes.

Author(s), year	Sample	Method	Outcomes studied	Key findings
Present study	1546 Course terms using live cases; 169 marketing professors	T-tests and multiple regression	Critical thinking, presentation, teamwork, communication, time management, and conflict-handling skills	Use of live cases across marketing curriculum leads to perceived improvement in all studied skill areas as assessed by faculty. Improvements in conflict handling, time management, and communication were found to be larger. Percent class time allocated to the live case and previous live case experience enhance these benefits.
Bilions (2021)	Unknown	Observation	Self-efficacy, issue awareness, application of theory	Use of 1-day workshop used since 2015 increases outcomes studied as assessed by instructor.
Tolft (2021)	Two course sections using live cases, two control sections; one instructor	Multiple regression	Performance in course, course evaluations, perceptions of soft/hard skill development	Use of client-based approach resulted in higher course performance in terms of midterm, final, and overall grade. Client-based project students perceived higher intellectual growth and skill development. Interviews with students showed client-based approach students perceived they developed higher academic confidence, career confidence, hard skills, and soft skills than students in the nonclient-based section.
Popovich and Brooks-Harris (2019)	Two course sections using live cases, one control section	PLS-SEM and T-tests	Marketing knowledge, critical thinking, teamwork, contribution to community, course satisfaction	Student participants in live cases/service-learning describe learning about marketing research, developing critical thinking skills, gaining value in working with others, and contributing to the community and these contribute to higher course satisfaction.
Preston (2018)	Five students using live cases	Observation	Marketing knowledge, ability to conduct promotional marketing activities	Group interaction and project work accounted for a large portion of the total learning of the course material. Importance of team communication, leadership, and ongoing revision discussed.
Rhee (2018)	Three course sections using live cases; five control sections; one instructor	T-tests	Intellectual challenge, critical thinking, problem solving, value of class discussions, teaching effectiveness	Course evaluations showed students rated community-based learning (CBL) sections higher on measures of intellectual challenge, development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, value of class discussions to the course, and teaching effectiveness. Qualitative comments from evaluations showed positives and negatives of CBL.
Yaltes and Corvanes (2018)	One course section of retail lab plus 70 graduates; 10 control students	T-tests	Learning motivation and satisfaction, skill and capability development across hard and soft skills	Students involved in the retail lab showed program satisfaction and motivation for learning. The program increases student learning interest and learning value, and promotes workforce required capabilities such as critical thinking, analytical and decision-making skills.
Vinuales and Harris (2017)	One course section using live cases, one control section	T-tests	Overall learning, overall skills, career confidence	Live case students reported greater perceived learning and greater perceived career confidence compared to control students. Qualitative coding of a student reflection assignment resulted in more positive and less negative comments for the live case group.
Cadwallader et al. (2013)	Four course sections using live cases; two control sections using service-learning only	T-tests and multiple regression	Self-benefit, prestige to the university, job-search advantage, career enhancement and helping community	CBL is better alone (than coupled with service-learning) at improving business student awareness of, and perceived benefits of, community service. Live case students perceived higher levels of studied outcomes than students who also were required to complete volunteer service.
Laukkanen et al. (2013)	Four courses using live cases	Observation	Development of a framework to use live cases as a tool for teaching, industry collaboration, and research	Five lessons learned for using the framework developed including selling the approach to industry partners and students, start early, be selective about industry partners, and work with colleagues who share theoretical interests to find overlap where projects across courses will be mutually beneficial.
Srinivas (2011)	Unknown; one instructor using live cases	Observation	Learning outcomes including problem solving, presentation, time management, teamwork, and communication skills	Presents a course approach where student teams are assigned four graded challenges. Grades are based on actual results or the team's competitive rankings as judged by clients. Students are perceived to gain problem solving, presentation, time management, teamwork, and communication skills.
Bow and Daxen (2009)	Three course terms using live cases	Observation	Research and consulting skills, overall learning	Presents the results of a 3-year trial of using live cases in a quantitative marketing course. Course evaluations suggest students feel that live case projects provide opportunities to develop consulting and research skills. Quantitative course evaluations are presented without significance indicators.
Parsons and Lepkownka-White (2009)	Eight course sections using live cases; 11 control sections using traditional cases; 3 instructors	Multiple regression	Learning Motivation, Project as Learning Device, Project Contribution to Area Knowledge, and Skills and Personal Benefits	Live cases were not found to be better than traditional cases in most cases, and in some were found to be worse according to students. Students view traditional cases as better developing their teamwork, report preparation, and interpersonal skills than client-based approaches.
Huser and Munoz (2008)	Live case course sections over a 3-year period	Correlation analysis	Presentation, research, analysis, and teamwork skills	Project grades were positively correlated with student perceptions of general skill development (outcomes studied) related to the live case project.
Maher and Hughtner (2005)	One course section using live cases, 1 section using simulations	Multiple regression	Perceptions of project and learning	Both formats were effective in fostering student perceptions of reality, favorable project evaluations, and enhanced perceptions of learning. Live cases did not perform better than simulations.
Lopez and Lee (2005)	Unknown	Observation	Implementation of live case projects	Present five principles for success with live cases: provide periodic and productive feedback, manage and set high expectations, plan in advance, design projects of varying scope and select clients with care.
Blam and Spotts (2004)	Three course terms using live cases	Qualitative	Marketing concepts, management and communication skills	Questionnaire of current students and follow-up survey of past students resulted in qualitative data suggesting students gained general skills and specific knowledge. Student evaluation differences were insignificant, but lower than nonlive sections.
Wise et al. (2003)	One cohort of first-year students enrolled in live case-based curriculum	Observation and descriptive statistics	Marketing concepts, teamwork related skills, various other "entry-level" skills	Presents the creation and implementation of a business school's problem-based learning (PBL). First-year students reported positive perceptions about the impact of PBL on their learning and skill development.
Kennedy et al. (2001)	Two courses working together using live cases	Observation	Skill development including: creativity, problem solving, and critical thinking	Instructors discuss many benefits of using live cases to develop job-relevant student skills and ways to overcome many obstacles for faculty when implementing live case pedagogy.

This study draws on the existing literature to identify the most commonly studied and purported benefits of live case usage to student learning in marketing—the development of meta-skills applicable across courses and in professional work settings. These skills are critical thinking ([Popovich & Brooks-Hurst, 2019](#); [Rhee, 2018](#); [Valdez & Cervantes, 2018](#)), communication ([Strauss, 2011](#)), presentation ([Huser & Munoz, 2008](#); [Strauss, 2011](#)), teamwork ([Huser & Munoz, 2008](#); [Wee et al., 2003](#)), and interpersonal skills such as conflict-handling ([Parsons & Lepkowska-White, 2009](#)) and time management ([Strauss, 2011](#)).

Based on this review of the literature, we hypothesize the student learning outcomes of live case pedagogy. Importantly, we test these hypotheses in a diverse sample of 169 marketing faculty from across the globe representing 3,546 separate course semesters (terms) taught with a live case approach. This cross-sectional survey represents the first attempt to understand the learning outcomes observed in a large sample, and not only from live case devotees but from marketing faculty who may have used and abandoned the technique due to the myriad issues in live case implementation. The conclusions are useful for educators and administrators interested in driving student skill development, for those who utilize live cases in their classes, and for those who may be interested in developing a live-case-based course.

## **Hypotheses**

Meta-skills are broad-based skill types that apply to all jobs in businesses and include skills such as teamwork, communication and presentation abilities, time management, and problem solving ([Schlee & Harich, 2010](#)). Because meta-skills are those that are applicable across all business jobs, they should also be able to be developed and learned in any marketing course—from marketing research to integrated marketing communications. Thus, in this article, we focus on the ability of live cases, regardless of the marketing course utilized in, to impact student meta-skill development. In the below hypotheses, we investigate if live case usage is perceived to impact student learning and development of teamwork, conflict handling, time management, presentation, communication, and critical thinking skills.

## **Live Cases' Impact on Student Skills**

## ***Teamwork***

Hallmarks of teamwork include working together to reach consensus, articulation, and allocation of tasks across the group, provision of encouragement and support, and empowering others to make decisions ([Lamont & Friedman, 1997](#)). Business education at its best prepares students to engage in dynamic, team-based problem solving where information is incomplete and the competitive landscape changes rapidly. Indeed, working in teams is critical for business school graduates ([Cunningham, 1995](#)). Yet criticism persists that the marketing curriculum falls short of ensuring students develop essential leadership and teamwork skills needed in entry-level marketing positions ([Doyle, 1995](#); [Polonsky & Mankelow, 2000](#)).

The call for curricular and pedagogical changes in marketing education to emphasize teamwork development as a necessary skill and the shift to peer-based learning is more than two decades old ([Lamont & Friedman, 1997](#)). In response, marketing educators have presented many avenues to improve students' abilities to work in teams. Group project approaches are believed by business faculty and practitioners to provide value and rely on practicing teamwork in class-based groups ([Bowen et al., 1994](#)). Recent research has connected training in improvisation to perceptions of group collaboration among marketing students ([Mourey, 2020](#)).

While teamwork is a skill acquired through practice, marketing educators must also deliver discipline-specific content. As [Lamont and Friedman \(1997\)](#) note, "a true integration of the teamwork process with meaningful content" is required of modern marketing education. Among the approaches that answer this call are team-based learning (TBL) and problem-based learning (PBL) ([Chad, 2012](#); [Wee et al., 2003](#)). TBL is where students work together to progress through the stages of learning from knowledge and comprehension to application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation ([Roy & Macchiette, 2005](#)). PBL is based on stimulating learning by providing students with real situations. The problem is realistically "fuzzy," and students then work in teams to identify the problem, brainstorm, identifying, and learning about applicable concepts from sources including professionals, peers, faculty, or self-study ([Barrows, 2000](#); [Wee et al., 2003](#)).



Live cases are a form of both TBL and PBL completed in teams with ensured access to professional resources and current problems. Scholars find that PBL improves student assessment of their ability to work in teams ([Wee et al., 2003](#)) and objective measures of learning are improved by working in TBL teams ([Chad, 2012](#)). Also relevant to live cases, [McCorkle et al. \(1999\)](#) outline how group work can allow students to tackle more complex and real-world problems and, in the process, practice “interpersonal and group management skills” ([Williams et al., 1991](#), p. 48). Studies using small samples and observational papers suggest that live case usage in marketing courses can benefit student teamwork skills (e.g., [Popovich & Brooks-Hurst, 2019](#); [Strauss, 2011](#)).

- **Hypothesis 1a:** Professors perceive live cases to increase student teamwork skills.

### ***Conflict Handling***

Conflict is an inevitable part of the decision-making and problem-solving processes ([Lang, 2009](#)). Indeed, businesses have largely abandoned efforts to eliminate conflict and instead focus on managing it effectively ([Hignite et al., 2002](#)). Thus, developing conflict/problem resolution skills is critical to students preparing for entry-level roles ([Analoui, 1995](#)). Students need conflict management skills to manage their internal functioning, make decisions, and work effectively in today’s team-based work environment ([Jassawalla & Sashittal, 1999](#); [Pfeffer & Veiga, 1999](#)). We contend live cases can aid in the development of student conflict handling skills and build on prior research investigating the impact of live cases on the development of the broader category of interpersonal skills ([Parsons & Lepkowska-White, 2009](#)).

Prior research has detailed how individual faculty should or should not intervene in group conflict within live case management ([Bove & Davies, 2009](#); [Kennedy et al., 2001](#)). This advice is not coincidental. Live cases are almost always completed using groups or teams. While the initial briefing or the final presentations may be completed in large groups (i.e., the entire class), primary research gathering (e.g., interviews or site visits) and analysis efforts are typically conducted in small groups. Thus, live cases force students to work alongside others when synthesizing questions and arguments,

solving problems, negotiating group outcomes, and preparing documents and presentations.

As noted, live cases are difficult for students due to their complexity and dynamic nature. Thus, live cases can lead to confusion and the risk of failure for students ([Elam & Spotts, 2004](#)). This confusion and doubt may cause free-riding behavior. Also, students may attribute failure outward, either to the instructor ([Elam & Spotts, 2004](#)) or to their peers rather than internalizing their actions and assumptions, causing further peer conflict. In short, live cases create a real-world pressure cooker for student teams that can easily lead to group conflict. Instructor options and student preferences toward detecting and punishing free-riding are wide-ranging ([van den Herik & Benning, 2021](#)). Some faculty even give students the ability (burden) of dealing with this conflict by allowing groups to expel free-riding members ([Bove & Davies, 2009](#)). While an extreme outcome, the existence of such solutions is indicative of the amount of conflict possible in live case groups.

As collegiate training in handling conflict is largely absent in business schools ([Lang, 2009](#)), we assert that live cases can be an effective stand-in by providing students an opportunity to confront and address conflict under the direction of a faculty member. Students will encounter conflict when negotiating work assignments, quality levels, and outcomes in conditions of uncertainty. As the faculty member also does not have “all the answers,” students must negotiate the conflict themselves and, in the process, resolve disagreements and conflict. As live cases are often allocated a large percentage of the course hours and grades, students are incentivized to engage in the conflict and thus practice negotiation, coping, and resolution skills. Giving in to the conflict and becoming nonfunctional as a group is not a viable option.

- **Hypothesis 1b:** Professors perceive live cases to increase student conflict handling skills.

### ***Time Management***

While teamwork is omnipresent in business schools, there remain issues regarding students' satisfaction with and acceptance of working in teams. This reticence can be

traced to finding teamwork difficult, frustrating, time-consuming, and an ineffective means of learning ([Lancellotti & Boyd, 2008](#)). Live cases can improve the value students gain from investing time in group work and increase student interest and motivation ([Williams et al., 1991](#)).

As discussed, live cases are a form of TBL where students work together to progress through the stages of learning from knowledge and comprehension to application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation ([Roy & Macchiette, 2005](#)). TBL, such as live cases, is shown to be effective in overcoming previous student issues with team activities ([Chad, 2012](#)). When used as a long-term project in the class, live cases encourage accountability including preparation for class and input during teamwork-time ([Michaelsen et al., 2002](#)), both aspects of student time management. Because live cases involve many iterations of team output and members divide work across individuals, timely feedback becomes a necessity. Similarly, TBL makes students accountable to one another and their student-led learning, which motivates students to prepare for (i.e., read) and attend classes ([Chad, 2012](#)).

Live cases, as a form of experiential learning, are believed to improve student engagement ([Gentry, 1990](#)) and observational research has posited an association between live cases and time management ([Strauss, 2011](#)). Student engagement is defined as “the active involvement, commitment and sense of belonging that dictates the time and effort students devote to educationally purposeful activities” ([Cleary & Skaines, 2005](#), p. 1). Active learning, present in live cases, is shown to increase student engagement in marketing courses ([Chi, 2009](#)) and to impact time management skills such as development and revision of timelines and project management ([Darlan & Coopersmith, 2001](#)). Thus, we expect that live cases will drive the academic time management of participating students.

- **Hypothesis 1c:** Professors perceive live cases to increase student time management skills.

### ***Presentation***

Active assessment of communication of oneself and others, including providing constructive criticism of peers, is a skill with which professionals and students alike struggle ([Dyrud, 2001](#); [Peterson, 2001](#)). Advances in sales education have attempted to improve student presentation skills through experiential learning activities such as live role-plays and real-time feedback (see [Cummins et al., 2013](#), for a review). While much work has been done in the sales domain to describe activities that improve sales presentation skills, the skill set is similarly useful and desired in the larger realm of marketing and business roles ([Schlee & Harich, 2010](#)).

High-quality presentations “convey stories effectively without wasting time” ([Hammer et al., 2011](#)). At the same time, these authors recognize a hurdle to accomplishing this goal is often a plethora of information and a lack of structure to organize it. Scholars from sales ([Rocco & Whalen, 2014](#); [Spiller, 2018](#)) to medicine ([Hammer et al., 2011](#)) have employed storytelling and theatrical improved techniques as a means of improving student presentations. Traditional case-based education is shown to benefit student skills of oral persuasion ([Conant, 1996](#)). Live cases in marketing were observed to enhance presentation skills ([Strauss, 2011](#)). Additionally, [Huser and Munoz \(2008\)](#) correlated live case project grades with student perceptions of their presentation skills.

Much literature based on the sociocognitive theoretical perspective toward self-regulated learning links observational learning to the instruction of oral presentation skills ([Bandura, 1997](#); [Schunk, 2001](#)). Simply by observing others, learners can access their oral presentations and evolve their presentation skills to better match exemplars or standards ([Sadler, 1989](#)). Important in this process is the presence of high-quality exemplars or standards of presentation quality. Typically in live cases, students meet in groups or as a class with a leader within the partner organization. This leader’s presentation skills become the defacto exemplar or standard, setting a bar for the students.

Additionally, during the project, students present their findings to peers, faculty, and professionals and are offered feedback. These opportunities for both internal and external feedback help students evaluate and calibrate their presentation skills to achieve presentation skill growth in the context of productive self-regulated learning

([Topping, 1998](#); [Winne, 2004](#)). Because live case projects do not show an example of the “correct answer,” students must assess their (group’s) presentation quality before delivering it. This approach demands self- and peer-presentation assessment that is shown to result in a more active involvement of students in their learning process ([Ozogul & Sullivan, 2009](#)) and thus, improved presentation skills through observation and assessment.

- **Hypothesis 1d:** Professors perceive live cases to increase student presentation skills.

### ***Communication***

Like traditional written cases, live cases require students to practice a variety of written and oral communication skills such as speaking, listening, asking and answering questions, debating, and writing. Unlike many written cases, students are not afforded the luxury of reading the case in advance. Instead, there is often a briefing by faculty or a professional followed by an opportunity to question the focal organization’s leader(s). What ensues is a dialogue in real-time where students must think on their feet. Some students may be afraid to ask a “dumb question” and thus make assumptions and leave important information on the table. Others may be uncomfortable with inherent ambiguity and waste time clarifying unimportant details, leaving strategic questions unanswered.

The ability to communicate effectively and efficiently not only with a business professional but also with one’s peers if a line of questioning is redundant or unnecessary is put to the test in a live case. The practice of active listening and thinking under pressure involved in live cases, both when talking with professionals and peers, enhances oral communication skills ([Karns, 1993](#); [Kennedy et al., 2001](#); [Mauffette-Leenders et al., 2000](#)). In addition to active listening and oral communication skills, individual and collaborative writing skills are enhanced by completing the written live case analysis (Henson et al., 2003; [Mauffette-Leenders et al., 2000](#)). This argument is supported by qualitative research conducted by [Elam and Spotts \(2004\)](#) indicating that students participating in the live case perceived gains in communication skills.

- **Hypothesis 1e:** Professors perceive live cases to increase student communication skills.

### ***Critical Thinking***

Critical thinking and problem-solving skills are among the holy grail of business pedagogy goals, both of which are believed to be enhanced by experiential learning techniques ([Kennedy et al., 2001](#); [Popovich & Brooks-Hurst, 2019](#); [Rhee, 2018](#); [Valdez & Cervantes, 2018](#)). Situations lacking a known endpoint or solution force students to consider a wide array of issues and ask more questions to contend with myriad unknowns. These situations are the core of PBL that has been shown to improve the critical thinking skills of students ([Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005](#)).

In live cases, the business leaders that provide information to students are grappling with a problem. These leaders do not have full or complete information. Thus, the students must also grapple with real-world ambiguity. The ability to recognize information holes and work through them “helps students learn to solve complex and unstructured problems” ([Kennedy et al., 2001](#), p. 147). Live case encounters with incomplete information cause students to develop qualitative and quantitative frameworks to analyze data and make decisions in novel contexts beyond their current experience set ([Henson et al., 2003](#)). As students are challenged through this process, they build critical thinking skills that can be utilized in future business and management roles ([Mauffette-Leenders et al., 2000](#)).

- **Hypothesis 1f:** Professors perceive live cases to increase student critical thinking skills.

## **Factors Affecting the Efficacy of Live Case Usage on Student Skills**

### ***Course Time Dedicated to Live Cases***

For learning to be robust using any pedagogy, the faculty implementing it must be committed to its use. A throw-away attempt to include any new teaching method is likely time wasted. For live cases specifically, instructors must dedicate course time to educate students on how the project will work (group expectations, grading, interaction

with a partner organization, outputs, instructor as resource, etc.). As many students are accustomed to rote-learning, this change to a learner-centered approach requires classroom time to explain ([Kennedy et al., 2001](#)).

For success using this pedagogy, course-specific content must be delivered within and according to the live case project. As [Lamont and Friedman \(1997\)](#) note, there must be an integration of the learning process with meaningful domain-specific content. In practice, course content is often delivered in conjunction with work-time for students to conduct additional research, apply concepts discussed in the live case, or discuss approaches with faculty. While some faculty advocate for a concurrent structure (where concepts and application take place at the same time) and others prefer a succedent approach (where all content is covered prior to application in a live case project), the literature consistently presents live cases as a major course component around which much of the content hours are focused ([Bove & Davies, 2009](#); [Lopez & Lee, 2005](#); [Shanahan et al., 2019](#)). As student meta-skill development is predicated on practicing these skills in the course as discussed in the above hypotheses, we expect the following hypothesis:

- **Hypothesis 2a-f:** Percentage of course time dedicated to the live case project (0% to 100%) will increase perceptions of student skill development in (a) teamwork, (b) conflict handling, (c) time management, (d) presentation, (e) communication, and (f) critical thinking.

### ***Faculty Experience With Live Cases***

Teaching is a skill honed through practice and the live case approach is no different. Most recent articles providing commentary on live cases in marketing describe lessons learned over multiple iterations of live case inclusion (e.g., [Clark et al., 2012](#); [Elam & Spotts, 2004](#); [Jaskari, 2013](#), [Kennedy et al., 2001](#); [Laukkanen et al., 2013](#); [Lopez & Lee, 2005](#); [Shanahan et al., 2019](#)). These authors provide sage advice based on their own experience introducing live case pedagogy within courses, observing and reflecting on the process and outcomes, and adjusting planning and delivery in subsequent projects.

Scholars have studied the link between pedagogical acumen and student performance, finding that educator proficiency and comfort with pedagogical techniques correlate positively with student learning outcomes ([Doherty & Hilberg, 2007](#)). Scholars of live case/community-based learning have demonstrated that providing instructors with a structure and training in partner-based projects can impact the student experience ([Lebrón & Talbek, 2018](#)). Similarly, research in the scholarship of teaching and learning domain suggests that instructor reflection and repetition of pedagogical techniques is a preferred method of developing teaching effectiveness ([Moskal, 2015](#)). This literature is based on the need for repetition to achieve skill acquisition ([Haraldseid et al., 2015](#)). Consistent with this reflective practice of educators to engage in “a dialogue of thinking and doing through which I become more skilled” ([Schön, 1987](#), p. 31), we propose the following hypothesis:

- **Hypothesis 3a-f:** Faculty experience implementing live cases will increase perceptions of student skill development in (a) teamwork, (b) conflict handling, (c) time management, (d) presentation, (e) communication, and (f) critical thinking.

## Methodology

### Measures and Pretest

We created our measures for the examination using insights gained from prior research in the domain of live marketing case pedagogy (e.g., [Bove & Davies, 2009](#); [Elam & Spotts, 2004](#); [Kennedy et al., 2001](#)). Specifically, student learning outcomes germane to the development of students' communication, teamwork, presentation, conflict handling, critical thinking, and time management skills were included in the collection. Each of these items began with “Please indicate your assessment of how including live cases affected the following:” and the items all captured their respective outcome “Student communication skills,” “Student teamwork skills,” “Student presentation skills,” “Student ability to deal with conflict,” “Student critical thinking skills,” and “Student time management skills.” All these items were measured using a slider in an online survey ranging from –100 to 100 whereby the professor could indicate a place on the slider corresponding to their assessment as to if the inclusion of live cases in their marketing classes drastically decreased these skills (–100), had no impact on these skills (0), or



drastically increased these skills (+100). Professors' prior experience with live marketing cases was measured as a sum of their number of total course terms taught using live cases over their career. Respondents were asked "Please indicate how many terms you have used live cases in the following undergraduate (graduate) courses over the course of your career," then entered the corresponding numbers. The percent of class time allocated to the live case portion of the class was measured as a percentage from 0% to 100% of the class time. Respondents were asked, "What percent of in-class time do you allocate to the live case project? (0 to 100)."

We performed a pretest of our instrument to assess respondent comprehension of items and identify any issues in our operationalization. We gathered 14 surveys from marketing academics familiar with live case pedagogy. In addition to responding to the items, we included open-ended text blanks on each page where the respondents could indicate any issues they were experiencing. These data were only used in analyzing the pretest and were not included in the main sample used for the analysis that was composed of all new respondents. We incorporated the feedback from the respondents in developing our final instrument for the main collection.

### **Main Collection**

To inform on this important pedagogical topic and test our hypotheses, we collected cross-sectional survey data from marketing professors. We developed our sampling frame by contacting all editorial review board members from the *Journal of Marketing Education*, *Marketing Education Review*, and *Journal for Advancement of Marketing Education* as well as authors publishing in the *Journal of Marketing Education* during the past 10 years. This sampling frame was selected to provide a wide cross-section of pedagogically oriented marketing professors from around the world. In total, 447 emails containing a link to the online survey were successfully delivered to this sample of marketing professors (33 were undeliverable) requesting their participation in the survey. Fifty-one percent of those reached (227) filled out the survey. Out of these respondents, 27 had never used live cases in their classes and thus were removed from the sample. Additionally, 41 respondents started the survey but chose not to complete it. Accordingly, our final sample was composed of 169 marketing professors (37.8% overall of those contacted).

While our response rate compares favorably to many survey collections in marketing research and, specifically, those involving collection from marketing academics (e.g., [Bailey et al., 2012](#)), we sought to both minimize and assess nonresponse bias. First, 3 weeks after our initial email, we sent a follow-up email to nonrespondents soliciting their participation. Second, we assessed nonresponse bias using the split-group technique (i.e., early and late respondents) advanced by [Armstrong and Overton \(1977\)](#). The sample was divided into respondents who replied within 7 days after the day the email was initially sent and those that replied after that timeframe. Comparison of all variables of interest with this examination revealed nonsignificant results in all cases ranging from  $p = .20$  to  $p = .98$ .

The obtained sample comprises relatively experienced marketing professors in terms of years teaching (mean = 20.71 years) with an average age of 51.05 years. Different ranks within the academic hierarchy were represented with 34.3% of the sample full tenured professors, 39.1% associate tenured professors, 9.5% assistant tenure-track professors, and 8.3% nontenure-track professors.<sup>1</sup> Respondents also came from a wide variety of schools including R1 institutions (very research intensive—13.0%), R2 institutions (high research activity—14.2%), balanced institutions (research is expected, but teaching is equally valued—55.6%), and teaching institutions (low research expectations, teaching is highly valued—7.7%).<sup>2</sup> There was a strong representation of genders with 44.59% female and 55.41% male for those willing to disclose gender. Means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables of interest in the collection are provided in [Table 2](#).

**Table 2.** Correlation Matrix.

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Learning element	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Teamwork skills								
2. Conflict handling skills	.66**							
3. Time management skills	.55**	.60**						
4. Presentation skills	.65**	.69**	.46**					
5. Communication skills	.71**	.60**	.46**	.68**				
6. Critical thinking skills	.60**	.64**	.52**	.60**	.58			
7. Percent class time	.22*	.21*	.21*	.24**	.21*	.24**		
8. Previous experience	.18*	.06	.08	.16	.21**	.17*	.15	
Mean	57.11	45.83	46.97	59.03	50.97	61.03	34.03	21.36
Standard deviation	31.83	30.97	31.71	28.63	29.58	29.60	21.40	29.97

\*Significant at .05. \*\*Significant at .01.

## Analysis and Results

We analyzed our data using the SPSS 26 software package. Hypotheses 1a-f predicts that the usage of live cases increases perceptions of student skill development. To assess Hypotheses 1a-f, we used one-sample *t* tests to determine if the values obtained were significantly different than zero. As our sliding scale ranged from drastic decrease (−100) to no impact (0) to drastic increase (+100), values significantly different from zero support that live cases are perceived as positively impacting student skill development. The results show strong support of all hypotheses with large *t* values all significant at the <.001 level (Hypothesis 1a, *t* = 21.97; Hypothesis 1b, *t* = 16.61; Hypothesis 1c, *t* = 17.77; Hypothesis 1d, *t* = 25.26; Hypothesis 1e, *t* = 20.96; Hypothesis 1f, *t* = 25.83). [Table 3](#) provides a summary of the results.

**Table 3.** Do Live Cases Improve Student Skills?

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Learning element	<i>M</i> <sup>a</sup>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Teamwork skills	57.11	31.83	21.97 <sup>b</sup>	<.001
Conflict handling skills	45.83	30.97	16.61	<.001
Time management skills	46.97	31.71	17.77	<.001
Presentation skills	59.03	28.63	25.26	<.001
Communication skills	50.97	29.58	20.96	<.001
Critical thinking skills	61.03	29.60	25.83	<.001

<sup>a</sup>Ranges from −100 (drastically decreased) to 0 (no impact) to +100 (drastically increased). <sup>b</sup>Tested using a one-sample *t* test.

To test Hypotheses 2a-f and Hypotheses 3a-f, we used multiple regression tests on our data. Results show universal support for Hypotheses 2a-f with percentage of course time allocated to live cases and teamwork skills (Hypothesis 2a,  $\beta = .19$ ,  $p < .05$ ), conflict handling skills (Hypothesis 2b,  $\beta = .20$ ,  $p < .05$ ), time management skills (Hypothesis 2c,  $\beta = .18$ ,  $p < .05$ ), presentation skills (Hypothesis 2d,  $\beta = .21$ ,  $p < .05$ ), communication skills (Hypothesis 2e,  $\beta = .19$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and critical thinking skills (Hypothesis 2f,  $\beta = .21$ ,  $p < .05$ ) all possessing significant and positive coefficients. Hypotheses 3a-f predicted a positive impact from an instructor's previous experience teaching live cases and perceived student skill development. Results support Hypotheses 3a-f with coefficients on teamwork skills (Hypothesis 3a,  $\beta = .21$ ,  $p < .05$ ), conflict handling skills (Hypothesis 3b,  $\beta = .21$ ,  $p < .05$ ), time management skills (Hypothesis 3c,  $\beta = .25$ ,  $p < .01$ ), presentation skills (Hypothesis 3d,  $\beta = .23$ ,  $p < .01$ ),

communication skills (Hypothesis 3e,  $\beta = .26, p < .01$ ), and critical thinking skills (Hypothesis 3f,  $\beta = .18, p < .05$ ), all significant and in the hypothesized positive direction. [Table 4](#) summarizes the results of Hypotheses 2a-f to Hypotheses 3a-f.

**Table 4.** Regression Results.

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Independent variables	Teamwork	Conflict	Time management	Presentation	Communication	Critical thinking
Percent class time	.19*	.20*	.18*	.21*	.19*	.21*
Previous live case experience	.21*	.21*	.25**	.23**	.26**	.18*
R <sup>2</sup>	.09	.09	.10	.11	.11	.09

\*Significant at .05. \*\*Significant at .01.

## Discussion

Live cases are rated among the most preferred and effective teaching methods by students ([Karns, 2005](#)), yet they are not commonly researched or routinely implemented in marketing. Existing research is limited to small sample sizes, often with single instructors using the technique repeatedly in a single course. This study shows that live case usage drives the perceptions of development of student meta-skills regardless of marketing course (Hypotheses 1a-f). This result was consistent across all six skill areas studied.

In addition to the support found for our hypothesized relationships between student live case usage and student skill development, we also conducted a post hoc comparison of means to explore the differential impacts on each metaskill studied. Results showed that three skills were developed significantly more due to live case pedagogy. Faculty perceived students to develop significantly enhanced competency in conflict handling, time management, and communication skills as compared with teamwork, presentation, and critical thinking skills using paired samples *t* tests. [Table 5](#) provides the results of this post hoc comparison.

**Table 5.** Post Hoc Mean Comparison.

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Learning element	1 <sup>a</sup>	2	3	4	5
1. Critical thinking skills					
2. Presentation skills	1.44 <sup>b</sup>				
3. Teamwork skills	1.84	.79			
4. Communication skills	4.67 <sup>a</sup>	4.13 <sup>a</sup>	3.40 <sup>a</sup>		
5. Time Management skills	6.26 <sup>a</sup>	5.15 <sup>a</sup>	4.90 <sup>a</sup>	1.94	
6. Conflict-Handling skills	7.37 <sup>a</sup>	5.93 <sup>a</sup>	5.05 <sup>a</sup>	1.96	.03

<sup>a</sup>Comparisons assessed using paired samples t tests. <sup>b</sup>t value.

<sup>a</sup>Significant at .01.

While not hypothesized, we suggest this may be the result of live cases being replicative of learning outcomes stemming from other pedagogical techniques used in marketing classes. For example, live cases were comparatively viewed as less impactful in developing critical thinking skills. It may be that other more widely used teaching techniques, such as traditional written case analysis, are already targeting critical thinking skills in the classroom. In fact, considerable evidence shows that traditional written cases can improve critical thinking ([Klebba & Hamilton, 2007](#)). Thus, the addition of a live case is viewed as a shared driver of skill growth with other classroom teaching techniques. Similarly, there may be many opportunities for students to present to one another and work in teams throughout the class outside of the live case project; thus, the live case is not viewed as the sole driver of student skill development in these areas.

In contrast, it may be that faculty view other pedagogical techniques as being less adept at improving specialized skills such as time management or conflict handling. Thus, the impact of live cases on these skills is viewed as greater. Communication skills may be viewed as an umbrella term encompassing oral and written communication to more diverse audiences such as professionals and community members. In this case, the metaskill of communication may not be commonly affected by other classroom techniques more widely applied in marketing causing faculty to attribute student growth in this area to the use of live cases.

This study also explored the impact of faculty actions and attributes when implementing live cases. As faculty increase the contact hours dedicated to the live case, faculty perceive greater student skill development (Hypotheses 2a-f). Additionally, when faculty

have more experience conducting live cases, they perceive greater student skill growth in the six metaskills measured (Hypotheses 3a-f).

### **Implications for Marketing Educators**

As business schools continue to look for meaningful ways to deliver content while developing job-ready students, live cases provide a clear opportunity. The [Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business \(2020\)](#), widely considered the gold standard of business school accreditation, added a new focus for membership in 2020—societal impact. To achieve societal impact, business schools are encouraged to focus on five areas, the first three of these are as follows: (1) connecting businesses, community, and government to deliver results; (2) solve problems based on knowledge-sharing and research; and 3) develop purpose-driven leaders with the vision to tackle the toughest challenges. Based on this research, live cases provide a compelling opportunity to address the goal of business school-driven societal impact. Specifically, live cases connect students and faculty in real-time with members of the community. Whether project partners are for-profit businesses, nonprofit organizations, or governmental entities, students and faculty work with these community partners. Both parties share knowledge and research—with partners providing practitioner know-how and faculty and students leveraging scholarly research. Based on this research, the outcome of live cases in marketing classrooms is the development of future leaders with experience working in teams to solve real-world problems with societal impact.

This study also suggests that marketing educators should consider live cases as part of their portfolio of teaching techniques. The post hoc analysis suggests that live cases, while perceived as beneficial for all skills studied, is perhaps an option that is partially replicative of other more commonly used techniques. That is, most educators use other techniques to develop critical thinking or presentation skills, but these techniques might do less to develop conflict-handling proficiencies. Educators should consider if implementing a live case would come with added benefits such as conflict-handling, time management, and communication development as compared with other pedagogical techniques they are using. Live cases are often not easy additions to a class, and thus, considering their additive benefit to student growth and learning is key.

Finally, as noted above, faculty interested in taking the leap to include live cases should consider their level of commitment. This study shows that perceived skill development is enhanced by the amount of class time faculty dedicate to the technique and the amount of faculty experience with the technique. In order to see the benefits, advance planning should be undertaken. Converting to a live case format is likely not a small shift in the syllabus or course calendar. It also requires advanced work to solicit, vet, and secure community partners. Chairs and deans looking to improve outreach to the community, enhance service- or community-based learning offerings, and real-world experiences for students should strive for consistency of teaching schedule and format so that faculty can be assured a move to a live case format is rewarded with the ability to iterate and develop pedagogical experience with live case pedagogy.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Work**

This study has limitations that future research may address. The study is a survey of current or former practitioners of live cases in marketing classes. The data does not assess when faculty utilized live cases or if they are current practitioners of the technique. Future studies that solicit faculty to try live cases could investigate if first-time faculty perceive similar patterns in student skill development.

Additionally, there are limitations with the measures in our examination that warrant consideration. First, the items used in our examination are single-item measures. While single-item measures may be a concern, we believe they are appropriate in our context. Single items are especially useful when the construct of interest is relatively straightforward. For example, turnover intention is commonly assessed in the marketing literature using a single item directly inquiring about turnover intention (e.g., [Jaramillo et al., 2006](#); [Spector, 1985](#)). Our constructs of interest are likewise straightforward and share the same lead-in (please indicate your assessment of how including live cases affected the following) with the skills (e.g., student teamwork skills, student communication skills, etc.) listed subsequently. As such, a single item measures exactly what we are looking for (e.g., live cases' effect on critical thinking skills) and is amenable to our study. Future research could include multi-item scales to assess reliability and measure impacts of live case usage.

Second, the perceptions of student skills were provided by our survey participants (169 marketing professors). While we believe a multilevel professor–student sample would be a valuable way to collect data for this topic, we were unable to ask for matched professor and student data in our collection. That said, perceptual measures are used quite commonly in the marketing literature. For example, while assessing customer satisfaction from the customer would be ideal, many studies are unable to obtain this data and thus rely on perceived customer satisfaction (e.g., [Ata & Toker, 2012](#); [Kadic-Maglajlic et al., 2018](#); [Sleep et al., 2015](#)). As noted in [Sleep et al.'s \(2015\)](#), p. 479) use of a single-item, perceptual satisfaction measure, “although objective measures are preferable, a perceptual measure can be used when an accurate objective measure is not available.” Future research could be conducted on a smaller scale with a multilevel collection.

Third, the student skill performance outcomes are self-reported by the professors. As such, professors with a lot of experience with live cases and/or allocating a lot of class time to live cases may possess an escalated commitment to live cases and thus overestimate their efficacy. However, research has shown that self-report performance data is a viable proxy for objective data. For example, in the sales literature, objective performance data is a substantial challenge for researchers. As such, researchers have collected self-reports of performance extensively (e.g., [Behrman & Perreault, 1984](#); [Friend et al., 2019](#); [Homburg et al., 2011](#); [Shannahan et al., 2013](#)). Furthermore, meta-analytic evidence shows that self-report performance data is comparable to that provided by others (e.g., managers and peers; [Churchill et al., 1985](#)). As such, self-report performance data can be a concern, however, it is still useful and amenable to answering research questions such as ours. Future research using other performance measures (e.g., student surveys or actual learning instruments) could continue the discussion on this important topic.

Last, this work explored if students’ skills were perceived as being developed or diminished when live cases are included in marketing courses. As noted, prior research on live case usage conducted on smaller sample sizes has found both positive and negative outcomes for students. Based on prior research focused on the pitfalls and dark side of implementing live cases in marketing ([Elam & Spotts, 2004](#); [Jaskari,](#)



[2013](#); [Kennedy et al., 2001](#); [Lopez & Lee, 2005](#); [Shanahan et al., 2019](#)), continued research is needed to address, in a large and diverse sample, how to best conduct live cases in the classroom. Such research could inform why some scholars have found insignificant ([Maher & Hughner, 2005](#)) or negative student perceptions ([Parsons & Lepkowska-White, 2009](#)) of skill development and learning when implementing live cases. Additionally, further research illuminating what drives students' perceptions of live cases and their learning from these classroom experiences would be valuable to marketing educators.

## **Conclusion**

“Given the clear advantages of client-sponsored research projects, it is surprising that they are not adopted more widely” ([Bove & Davies, 2009](#), p. 232). Based on this study, live cases are perceived as increasing student meta-skill development in the areas of teamwork, time management, conflict handling, presentation, communication, and critical thinking skills. This is found across marketing courses, universities, and faculty. Thus, as marketing scholars and teachers, we must ask ourselves, why live cases are the exception and not the norm across the marketing curriculum?

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## **Notes**

1.8.8% Did not specify rank.

2.9.5% Did not specify school type.

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