# Factors that influence students choosing a Marketing course

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**Abstract**

This paper uses two attitude-measuring models in comparing the attributes of the marketing education program, observable and abstract, in terms of their relative importance to what factors influence students' and the impact of these attributes on students' choosing a marketing course. The data was analyzed by using SEM techniques. The findings are that students' are influenced by factors closely related to the program's observable attributes and to the abstract attributes. The findings should facilitate in developing a promotional campaign which will incorporate and emphasize the significantly important attributes of the marketing program. The findings also demonstrate the effectiveness of the models to measure student attitudes in any vocational area.

## Introduction

The purpose of this study was to measure students' evaluations and attitudes towards the marketing course and also to measure how these factors influence them to choose a marketing course. This student-based research can provide information to educators about students' evaluations, attitudes and expectations of the marketing program so that they can develop the appropriate promotional packages to inform and attract students. Through these discoveries, educators can adjust or modify their marketing programs better preparing them for the future, using effective models to measure factors that impact a students' choice. This makes available to researchers specific details that educators and other scholastic decision makers can easily apply on an continuing basis to improve the awareness of the program. Student based research can recognize and support in explaining issues in education programs that have led to declining enrollments that may be due to students' insight about courses and their career path.

It is clear that there is more competition within the higher education sector and therefore meeting the requirements of students is placing a greater burden on academic organizations to address these needs (Binney, Kennedy & Hall, 2004; Cheng &Tam, 1997). A marketing concept in which the consumers' expectations are expected to be met, the student is regarded as the consumer and ongoing studies of student satisfaction (Elliot and Shin 2002; Gremeler & McCollough 2002) are some of the quality assurance guidelines methods used to oversee this concern in higher education (Centre for Education and Development and Support 2004; King et al. 1999). There are many complex issues that are presented when studying large classes, (Cuseo 2007) as large classes are usually a combination of students across various disciplines. Thus, the view may be a bit distorted as students may have a different reason or point of view about the

marketing class they are taking since marketing is not their major field of study. This paper focuses solely on students who are in an upper level marketing class whose major field of study is business.

Marketing theory and research support that consumers' attitudes toward product attributes influence their purchasing behavior toward those products. Consumers form those attitudes based on their image of the product from the dual perspectives of its observable and abstract attributes.

Attitude toward the behavior is defined as "a person's general feeling of favorableness or unfavorableness for that behavior" (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980),  Lutz (1981, p. 234) definition of attitude is one expressing hidden feelings of liking or not liking towards an object, person, issue, or behavior. Attitude toward behavior is a function of the product of one's belief that performing the behavior will lead to certain outcomes and an evaluation of the outcomes i.e., positive feeling towards a career in marketing will shape a students' attitude towards the marketing program. Attitudes over a period are learned by individuals interacting directly with the brand or product (marketing course) or by attaining the details about the brand or product (marketing course). Consumers use attitudes that are learned as a guide to their behavior with respect to the attitude object, thereby establishing constantly positive or negative forms of behavior. Measuring attitude can offer some dimension of a consumers' inclination towards a particular brand or product. The presumption is that attitudes are a sign of behavior (Hatzious, 1996). If a person is favorably motivated towards an object (brand or product) the perception is that it would favor positive behaviors with regards to the object, or in this respect encouraging behavior towards the marketing program. Although the TRA/TPB model is used noting that attitudes towards the marketing program; either negative or positive, is formed by the students' opinions, evaluations and attitude of the benefit to them of the marketing program. And this advantage is simply the perception of their career after graduating.

This study identifies how students feel about particular attributes of the marketing education program and then assesses the association of each of those attributes towards students' choosing a marketing course. The findings will also demonstrate the effectiveness of the programs from a student's perspective and thus help educators to develop effective promotional campaigns to attract and retain students in the program.

# Literature Review

Attracting students to the marketing major has been a topic of discussion for a number of years (Hugstad 1997; LaBarbera and Simonoff 1999). Unfortunately, discussion vs. research has been almost the sole focus on this issue. Little has been done to improve the situation in marketing departments across the country (Carney and Williams 2004). In fact, little has been required because of the growth cycle of colleges and education. And what was measured tended to be towards a particular course and the course material, but not towards the students' perception of the fit of the course towards their career.

Camey and Williams (2004) suggested that by examining student beliefs about marketing in general and the expected impact of the material learned in a Principles of Marketing class that it would have an impact on their education and personal life. Most of the business students choose a major that has an image of a demanding and professional career path. And thus career opportunities are significant factors in the selection of a business major for these students.

Other articles (Kimberly, 2003) focus on skills needed in the workplace such as: job search skills-resume writing, interview skills, professional business image/dress, salary negotiations, networking, communication and listening skills, written communication, and oral presentation skills.

While some assess the effects of technology on learning (Sprague and Dahl, 2010) through measuring student attitudes and preferences and identifying student performance outcomes relating to the use of technology.

Another article (Ackerman, Gross and Perner, 2003), focus on how to better improve the quality of teaching by not only focusing on the past strategies of firms, but giving more thought to anticipating and adjusting to marketplace changes. Although both educators and employers are concerned about this disconnect, little is known about how instructors should address it.

Aggarwal, Vaidyanathan and Rochford (2007) analyzes of the state of the marketing discipline as characterized by the quality of incoming students choosing to major in marketing. Compared to other business majors, marketing is apparently attracting among the lowest quality students. One question raised by their study is whether the lower quality of marketing students is a new phenomenon or whether marketing students have consistently performed at low levels on standardized tests.

McCorkle, Payan, Reardon and Kling (2007) provide an analysis of both student perceptions about creativity and their levels of creativity. The results indicate that creativity is important to their career. However, marketing students placed greater importance on creativity than other business students and found that the marketing and other business students believed that creativity is a skill that can be learned.

Based on these findings, educators can adjust or modify their marketing programs for better results. This, research-based information can provide vocational educators with information about students' attitudes and expectations of the marketing program so that they can develop the appropriate promotional packages to inform and attract students. Most empirical analyses of the quality of marketing students seem to lump them together with all other students. In addition, many conclude that the quality of marketing students is based on an analysis of the perceptions of faculty or their evaluation of a course.

Theory of reasoned action is based on the proposition that an individual's behavior is determined by the individual's behavioral intention (BI) to perform that behavior, which provides the most accurate prediction of behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Behavioral intention is a function of two factors: one's Attitude toward the behavior (A) and Subjective Norm (SN).

Attitude toward the behavior is defined as "a person's general feeling of favorableness or unfavorableness for that behavior" (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Subjective Norm is defined as a person's "perception that most people who are important to him think he should or should not perform the behavior in question" (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Attitude toward behavior is a function of the product of one's salient belief (B) that performing the behavior will lead to certain outcomes and an evaluation of the outcomes (E), i.e., rating of the desirability of the outcome.

Variables that are external to the model are assumed to influence intentions only to the extent that they affect either attitudes or subjective norms (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). The theory of reasoned action has been successfully applied to a large number of situations in predicting the performance of behavior and intentions, such as predicting turnover (Prestholdt et al., 1987), education (Fredricks and Dossett, 1983) and breast cancer examination (Timko, 1987). In a meta-analysis of research on the theory of reasoned action, Sheppard et al. (1988) concluded that the predictive utility of the theory of reasoned action was strong across conditions.
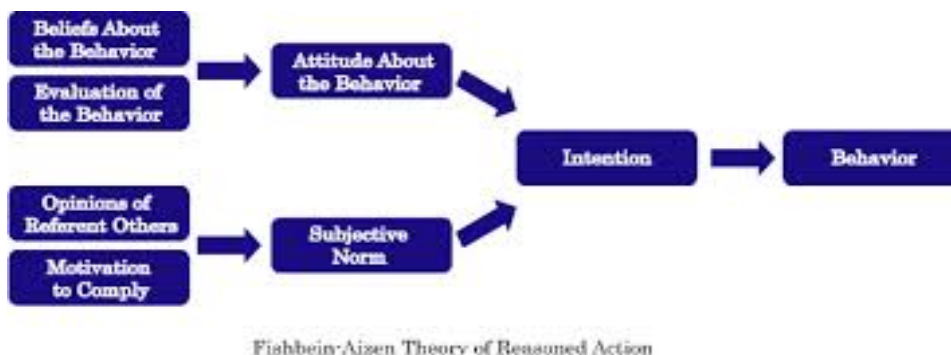


Fishbein-Aizen Theory of Reasoned Action

Figure 1: Theory of Reasoned Action

Definitions of the model's factors are as follow:

* Attitude is how we feel about the behavior and is generally measured as a favorable or unfavorable mind-set.

* Subjective norm is defined as how the behavior is viewed by our social circle or those who influence our decisions.

* Intention is defined as the propensity or intention to engage in the behavior.

* Behavior is the actual behavior itself.

Figure 2, a generic theoretical framework, shows that a curriculum must first attract students' attention to the program before they will consider choosing (*behavior*) the courses. However, unless the students have a high level of interest (*intention*), confidence in their learning, a measurable method to evaluate the course objectives (*attitude*) or measured value towards their career and a method to compare other courses (*subjective norms*), they are unlikely to consider taking these courses. According to the model, any given behavior is most likely to occur if one has a strong intention to perform the behavior, if they have the necessary skills required and if there are no constraints preventing from performing the behavior. If a person has a strong intention to perform the behavior then there is a high probability that the behavior will be performed.
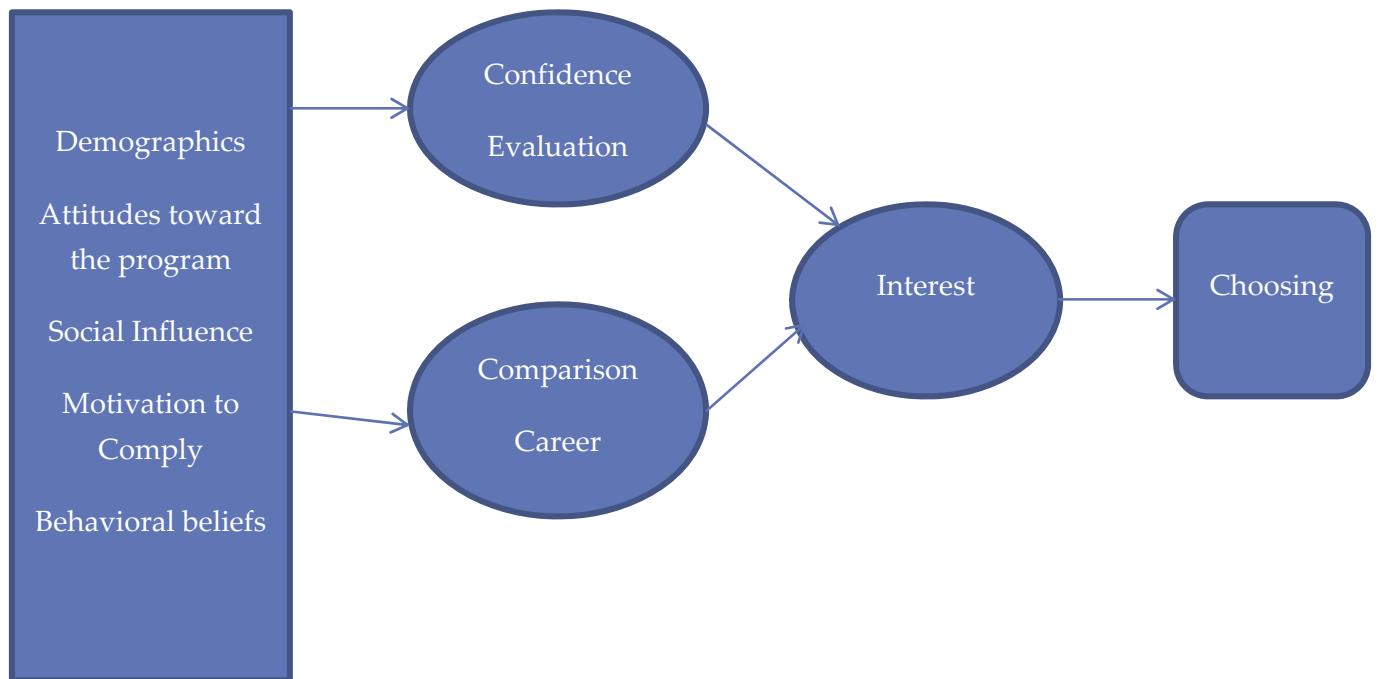


Figure 2: Key factors in measuring perception relationship to TRA, a generic theoretical framework

The first implication in using the theoretical framework is to identify that behavior is the target for choosing a course. The definition of behavior involves several elements; the action (taking/attending), the target (marketing course) and the context (required course of action).

Individual behavior is suggested to be the result of thoughtful reflection - a cognitive process of evaluating what action is appropriate in a specific situation. This idea establishes the basis for incorporating an individual's intentions and beliefs as factors that influence his or her resulting behavior. This led to the development of TRA as a model for predicting individual behavior. TRA, as originally conceived, applies to behaviors under a person's volitional control (Ajzen, 1988). Though all behavior may not always be voluntary (ie. behavior may be mandated or obstacles may exist that prevent the adoption of the behavior (Ajzen, 1991)).

TRA was developed by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) to guide research concerning consciously intended behaviors. According to TRA, the performance of a specified behavior is determined by the individual's intention to perform that behavior, which, in turn, is determined by the individual's attitude towards the behavior and his or her perceptions of social pressures (Le. subjective norm) for performing (or not performing) the behavior in question (Ajzen, 1988). TRA has received considerable empirical support (Sheppard et al, 1988) and provides a suitable model for this research because trusting behaviors involve an individual's intention to trust in a given situation.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify how students at a university feel about particular attributes of the marketing program and their attitudes towards the marketing courses. Specifically, the study addresses the following research objectives:

1. Students' confidence in their marketing ability
2. What is their evaluation of the marketing course offered in the program?
3. How do the marketing course compare to other business courses?
4. What is their view of marketing as a career?
5. What is their interest in the marketing course offered in the program?
6. Why did they choose a marketing course?

# Methodology

## Instrumentation

The research study was empirical in nature with a questionnaire being used, sent via e-mail to students in the upper level marketing course at the end of the semester. Two basic sets of information were required in the development of the instrument: observable and abstract attributes of the marketing education program, as recognized by students. As well, an overall student evaluation and attitude toward marketing as a career was required. To gauge both the students' observable attributes of the program and the abstract attributes of the program, a questionnaire consisting of variables that measured their overall evaluation and attitudes toward the marketing course was designed.

## Attributes

A comprehensive set of attitude statements with regards to the marketing program was created from literature review. The attributes were developed concentrating on the findings from a wide-ranging assessment of related literature from educators in both marketing and other business areas. The resulting instrument was endorsed by a panel based on their on their experience and knowledge in conducting marketing research and survey research in the past.

The focus group interview was conducted with the experts in the field to focus the instrument in the direction of understanding the marketing students and measuring the program from their point of view. The panel consisted of five academics at the current university across various disciplines as well as six marketing executives from several agencies in the business community, all of whom were fluent in English.

## Observable Attributes

One section of the questionnaire consists of the observable attributes of the program. So that the observable attributes of the program could be measured, a scale was designed which has been used previously to successfully measure self-perception and self-expression of the marketing course. The ideal self-perception was obtained by asking students questions as to why they chose this marketing course, how confident they are in what they are learning and their evaluation of the course taken. The idea of self-expression is obtained when students rate how they compare the marketing course to other business courses and their interest in the course and the relevance to their career. For this attribute, several measurement scales were used, from strongly disagree to strongly agree, scale of 1-5, as well as a very unlikely to very likely, scale of 1-5. Then they were questioned as to the degree to which they thought that the marketing education program influenced each construct under this attribute.

## Abstract Attributes

This part of the questionnaire measures the students' perceptions of the abstract attributes with respect to the marketing course. The students were asked to indicate on the questionnaire their significance assessment of their perception of the program with regards to their career. For this attribute, the measurement was from strongly disagree to strongly agree, scale of 1-5. Then they were questioned as to the degree they thought that the marketing program influenced this construct under this attribute.

## Student Research Analysis

The research was conducted on six main levels, namely:

1. Students' confidence in their marketing ability
2. Students' evaluation of marketing courses
3. Students' comparison of marketing courses to other business courses
4. Students' perspective towards a career in marketing
5. Students' interest in marketing
6. Students' reason for choosing a marketing course

For all the following data analysis, the number and percentage represent the students who answered in the positive for each question, either agree/strongly agree or likely/very likely.

### Students' confidence in their marketing ability

Table 1: Confidence in Marketing Ability …

| Response | Mean |
|---|---|
| Understanding of marketing concepts | 3.97 |
| Ability to write about marketing concepts | 3.65 |
| Ability to explain about marketing through discussion | 3.79 |
| Analyzing case studies | 3.70 |
| Understanding concepts through the business examples | 4.44 |

Students were asked about their understanding and ability to discuss marketing concepts.

Although many students were confident in their understanding of marketing, some also have the skills and knowledge to analyze and explain marketing concepts.  The variety of answers given suggested that students have some confidence in the subject and that they understand the concepts but it also suggests that students seek knowledge through business examples.

**Students' evaluation of marketing course**

Table 2: Evaluation of Marketing Course …

| Response | Mean |
|---|---|
| Reading the text | 4.14 |
| Doing assigned homework | 3.16 |
| Research on Internet | 3.75 |
| Participating in class discussion | 3.97 |
| Writing reports | 3.91 |
| Working on final project | 4.12 |

Students were asked to evaluate the marketing course on their learning.

Although many students evaluated the course based on their learning, most indicated that reading the text was helpful in their learning, while some indicated that assigned homework was of little help to them. The variety of answers given suggests that students have a preference for the method of learning as some preferred to read while some preferred to use the Internet.

**Students' comparison of marketing course to other business courses**

Table 3: Comparison of Marketing Course to Other Business Courses…

| Response | Mean |
|---|---|
| Marketing course was more challenging | 4.36 |
| Marketing course was more interesting | 4.16 |
| I learned more in this marketing course | 3.71 |
| I had more control over the pace of learning in this course | 3.02 |
| I had to prepare more for this marketing course | 3.33 |
| I would take more marketing courses | 4.01 |
| I would recommend this course to other students | 3.95 |

Students were asked to compare the current marketing course to other business courses taken previously.

Many students evaluated the course based on how challenging, interesting, and demanding it was compared to other business courses. Most indicated that they strongly agree that the course was as challenging as other courses, while less indicated that they had control of the pace of the course. The variety of answers given suggests that students didn't see much difference between the marketing course and other business courses and that most will recommend the course to other students.

**Students' viewpoint towards a career in marketing**

Table 4: Viewpoint Towards a Career in Marketing …

| Response | Mean |
|---|---|
| Course helps in understanding marketing concepts | 4.23 |
| Helps in choosing a career path | 4.02 |
| Find a job after graduating | 3.75 |
| Advances chosen career field | 3.95 |
| Useful in the future | 4.26 |
| Some marketing knowledge is required | 4.45 |
| I will pursue a career in marketing | 3.96 |

Students were asked their point of view towards a career in the marketing field.

Although many students evaluated the course based on their career path and how the marketing course will help them in the future, most indicated that they strongly agree that the course helps them in their understanding of marketing concepts, even though they would not pursue a career in marketing. The variety of answers suggests that students had many reasons to believe that choosing this marketing course would be either helpful in the future or with their careers.

**Students' interest in marketing**

Table 5: Interest in Marketing …

| Response | Mean |
|---|---|
| Understanding principles of marketing | 3.41 |
| Understanding advances in marketing | 3.21 |
| Pursuing a career in marketing | 4.14 |
| Using marketing knowledge in the future | 4.70 |
| Working on assignments/projects | 3.05 |

Students were asked what their actual interest is in the subject of marketing.

Although many students were interested in understanding the basics of marketing, some are interested in marketing because of career choices or using the knowledge in the future. The variety of answers given suggested that students have some interest in understanding the subject, but it is at best rather fragmented, as some are interested because of the subject matter and some because of career choices.

**Students' reasons for choosing a marketing course**

Table 6: Reasons for Choosing this Marketing Course…

| Response | Mean |
|---|---|
| Course was more interesting | 3.78 |
| It provides a wider career base | 3.94 |
| Allows flexibility to specialize in my career | 3.95 |
| Fits in with other courses | 4.27 |
| Prior knowledge of marketing | 3.15 |
| It is a popular subject | 3.13 |
| It was compulsory | 2.95 |
| It was recommended to me | 2.98 |

Students were asked the reason why they chose their current marketing course.

Although many students evaluated the course based on how interesting and convenient the marketing course was to them, most indicated that they strongly agree that the course would be helpful to their careers and would provide a better career base for them. The answers given suggest that students had a variety of reasons to choose the marketing course and that most chose to take them because of career reasons rather than curriculum selection or recommendations.

## Measuring Intent

What happens when an intent question is asked? Does this affect the students' choice selection process? Most students follow a simple three-stage model of choice proposed by Nedungadi, Mitchell and Berger (1993). First, students will generate alternatives, in a stimulus-based manner, a memory-based manner, or most likely, some combination of the two. Second, students will determine which alternatives to consider selecting. Lastly, they will then select/choose. Thoughts, such as attitudes and intentions may not as yet be fully developed at each of these stages. However, as students' progress through each stage of choice process, it becomes increasingly likely that they will form these cognitions. The effects of asking an intent question may well depend on the stage of the choice process in which the student is engaged.

These stages that the students are progressing through are measured by the factors that are derived from taking a marketing class. As the student moves through the various cognitive stages their learning increases and so do their attitudes and eventually their intentions, which in this circumstance is choosing a marketing course. These measurements of Confidence, Evaluation, Comparison, Career, Interest, and Choosing are all observable and abstract attributes that direct a student to a specific behavior.

Noted, that there are behavioral consequences of measuring intentions for a large group of students who presumably were at different stages in the decision-making process. Two reasons for this suggestion were first, asking intent questions will in some cases make a preexisting attitude more accessible, second, measuring intentions will lead students to engage in thinking that will lead to changes in attitude, behavior or choosing.

In this study, the focus is on students that are currently taking a marketing course and engage in some cognitive process during the class. These cognitive processes will, when measured, attempt to assess their intentions about the course. Measuring this intent to choose is important on two bases: first, choosing may make underlying course related judgment, such as attitudes, or behavior more reachable; second, measuring choosing a course can lead the respondents to engage in thinking that may result in the changing or creating of these judgments. In either scenario the respondents thought process about the courses may be stimulated to the point of positive intention towards choosing a marketing course.

## Personal factors

### *Confidence*

Confidence involves measuring students' self-belief that there is a cognitive process associated with the content of marketing courses, regardless of whether being included in a group or by oneself. It outlines the purpose for being in the class.

### *Evaluation*

Evaluation pertains to the method used in the learning process while attending marketing classes that may or may not be already known to or available to the students.

### *Comparison*

The ability to compare marketing courses to other business courses will give the student an overall guideline in assessing the courses from a thought-provoking and stimulating perspective.

### *Career*

This involves the abstract attributes about a students' perception of the marketing course with regards to career opportunities and career development. This adds knowledge to our thought process about our choosing the courses.

## Interest

Interest involves having some personal feelings about the marketing courses being offered. Whether or not choosing is the final outcome, interest simply measures a students' liking for taking the courses.

## Choosing

An individual assessment of the marketing courses will directly impact their future intentions, not only towards other marketing courses, but the overall marketing curriculum. The overall assessment of the marketing program is directly related to future behavior that is being predicted.
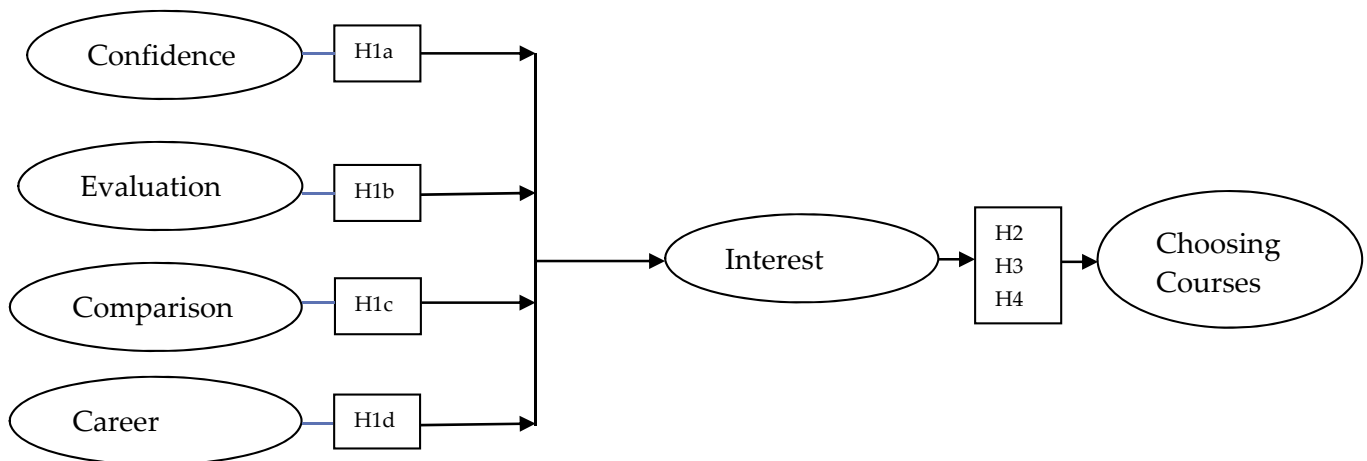


Figure 3: Conceptual model. The measurement model for the study based on TRA

## Research Hypotheses Concepts

1. Students' confidence in their marketing ability
2. Students' evaluation of marketing courses
3. Students' comparison of marketing courses to other business courses
4. Students' perspective towards a career in marketing
5. Students' interest in marketing
6. Students' reason for choosing a marketing course

The research hypotheses are directly related to the student's various course assessments and the choosing of marketing subjects. The research attempts to measure if there is an association between the students' course assessments and the choice of classes within these observable and abstract attributes.

The following hypotheses were developed based on the assumption that students base their intention to choose and benefits sought (behavior) in terms of overall assessment of (attitude) and the personal factors (subjective norm) of a marketing course. Thus:

The structural paths for the model (Figure 1) represent the following hypothesis to be tested.

*H1a: Highly confident students who amass marketing concepts are more likely to have a favorable interest towards choosing a marketing course.*

*H1b: Students evaluating a marketing course who amass new learning skills and knowledge are more likely to have a favorable interest towards choosing a marketing course.*

*H1c: Students comparison to other business courses with regards to challenging and demanding course work are more likely to have a favorable interest towards choosing a marketing course.*

*H1d: Students perceptions that the marketing courses will have a positive future impact on their career are more likely to have a favorable interest towards choosing a marketing course.*

*H2: Highly interested students are more likely to be more favorable towards choosing a marketing course if it provides a wider career base for them*

*H3: Highly interested students are more likely to be more favorable towards choosing a marketing course if it allows flexibility to specialize in their career*

*H4: Highly interested students are more likely to be more favorable towards choosing a marketing course if it fits in with other courses*

## Methodology

### Sample and data collection

The data for the study was gathered through an undisguised questionnaire. It was pre-tested several times among various faculty members, business associates (focus group members) as well as students in the marketing department in order to verify face validity of the items. The purpose of the pretest was to address any misunderstanding in the wording of the questions.

The questionnaire method was selected for its low-cost outlay and ease of issue, especially in the student research survey. Personal interviews, although considered the most reliable method for qualitative data research, were not considered feasible due to their high cost in terms of time needed. The survey instrument was made up of 2 parts: the introductory/general questions and the demographics information. For part 1 all questions were measured on a 5 point interval scale. The student questionnaire was given to all students in the upper level marketing class, 989 students, in their final week in the course. It consisted of a combination of both open and closed questions, including a few of a qualitative nature, making a total of 45. This was answered by the students, and then sent to me via e-mail, with a response rate of 87 per cent.

**Data analysis**

In analyzing the questionnaire, means, frequencies and reliability were initially calculated using SPSS software and content validity of the questionnaire was established by reviewing existing literature. The test for 'goodness of fit' structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed. The multivariate technique of SEM was chosen for this study because, it can:

- analyze the relations between both the unobservable (latent) and observable variables;
- test the validity of the causal structure

The technique has two stages. The first is the measurement model, which specifies how well the constructs are measured in terms of the observed variables. The second is the structural model, which focuses on the relationships among the constructs.

Our research model has several mediators and tests multiple complex relationships. Because of this, (SEM) is a suitable technique. Partial Least Squares (PLS) was chosen because it handles both formative and reflective indicators, whereas other SEM techniques do not. In addition, PLS is prediction oriented and it does not assume multivariate normality unlike SEM techniques such as LISREL. PLS Graph Version 3, Build 1130 (Courtesy of Dr. Chin, University of Houston) was the software tool used to conduct the analysis.

Before analyzing the data, an examination of the results was performed describing the sample:

| Variable | | Male 392(45.58) | Female 468(54.42) | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | 19 | 32 (3.72) | 0 (0.0) | 32 (3.72) |
| | 20 | 16 (1.86) | 8 (0.93) | 24 (2.79) |
| | 21 | 56 (6.51) | 200 (23.26) | 256 (29.77) |
| | 22 | 192 (22.33) | 156 (18.14) | 348 (40.47) |
| | 23+ | 96 (11.16) | 104 (12.09) | 200 (23.26) |
| Year of Study | 2 | 48 (5.58) | 0 (0.0) | 48 (5.58) |
| | 3 | 40 (4.65) | 32 (3.72) | 72 (8.37) |
| | 4 | 304(35.35) | 436 (50.70) | 740 (86.05) |
| Major of Study | Marketing | 260 (30.23) | 312 (36.28) | 572 (66.51) |
| | Management | 64 (7.44) | 8 (0.93) | 72 (8.32) |
| | Other | 68 (7.91) | 148 (17.21) | 216 (25.12) |
| Hours preparing for Marketing course | <5 | 304 (35.35) | 284 (33.02) | 588 (68.37) |
| | > 5 | 88 (10.23) | 184 (21.40) | 272 (31.63) |
| Hours preparing for all courses | <5 | 88 (10.23) | 96 (11.16) | 184 (21.40) |
| | 5-10 | 180 (20.93) | 244 (28.37) | 424 (49.30) |
| | 11-15 | 68 (7.91) | 64 (7.44) | 132 (15.35) |
| | >15 | 56 (6.51) | 64 (7.44) | 120 (13.95) |

Table 7: *Demographics of Study Sample-860 Subjects*

# The measurement model: Testing for internal consistency

## Reliability Analysis

PLS (Partial Least Squares) was used to assess the reliability of the measures in addition to the Cronbach's alpha - SPSS (See Table 8). The Cronbach's alpha evaluates the proportion of variance attributable to the true score of the variable the researcher intends to measure. It reflects the consistency of the measure and the homogeneity of the items in the scale.

| Construct/Latent Variables | Mean | Reliability Cronbach's alpha |
|---|---|---|
| *Confidence   cn1, cn2, cn3, cn5* | | .8953 |
| Understanding marketing concepts | | |
| Ability to write about marketing concepts | | |
| Ability to explain [marketing concepts] through discussions | | |
| Succeeding in a university [marketing/business] course | | |
| | | |
| *Evaluation  ev1, ev2, ev4, ev6* | | .7934 |
| Reading the textbook | | |
| Doing assigned homework | | |
| Participating in classroom discussion | | |
| Writing reports/final project | | |
| | | |
| *Comparison  cm1, cm2, cm3, cm7* | | .7446 |
| Marketing course was more challenging | | |
| Marketing course was more interesting | | |
| I learned more in this marketing course | | |
| I would recommend this course to other students | | |
| | | |
| *Career  ca2, ca3, ca4, ca5* | | .8598 |
| Helps in choosing a career path | | |
| Find a job after graduating | | |
| Advances chosen career field | | |
| Useful in the future | | |
| | | |
| *Interest  in1, in3, in4, in5* | | .7299 |
| Understanding principles of marketing | | |
| Pursuing a career in marketing | | |
| Using marketing knowledge in the future | | |
| Working on marketing assignments/projects | | |
| | | |
| *Choosing ch2, ch3, ch4* | | .8052 |
| Course provides a wider career base | | |
| Allows flexibility to specialize in my career | | |
| Fits in with other courses | | |

Table 8: *Construct and associated latent variables; mean scores and reliability scores*

PLS evaluates the individual item reliability and presupposes no distribution form (like multi-normality) of the data (Gopal, Bosrom  and Chin, 1992). PLS is recommended to evaluate the loadings of each item with its construct. These loadings should be higher than 0.5 (ideally higher than 0.70) which indicates that significant variance is shared between each item and the construct. In this study, to further increase the reliability levels, items were dropped when their removal meant that the level of reliability would increase.

Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was calculated as a measure of reliability of the construct (See Table 9), the acceptable level of AVE is 0.50 (Chin, 1998). This indicates that more than 50% of the variance of the indicators has to be accounted for by the latent variables. All the constructs exceed the minimum AVE level and therefore demonstrate sufficient reliability.

| Scale | Cronbach's Alpha | Composite Factor Reliability | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) | Number Of Items |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Confidence | 0.8593 | 0.906 | 0.706 | 4 |
| Evaluation | 0.7934 | 0.755 | 0.562 | 4 |
| Comparison | 0.7446 | 0.761 | 0.565 | 4 |
| Career | 0.8598 | 0.908 | 0.711 | 4 |
| Interest | 0.7299 | 0.832 | 0.558 | 4 |
| Choosing | 0.8052 | 0.874 | 0.699 | 3 |

Table 9: *Reliability of Study*

## Validity

Validity refers to the degree to which a study accurately reflects or assesses the specific concept that the researcher is attempting to measure. While reliability is concerned with the accuracy of the actual measuring instrument or procedure, validity is concerned with the study's success at measuring what the research sets out to measure. There are two types of validity used to analyze scale evaluation: content and construct validity.

Content validity refers to the representativeness and comprehensiveness of the items used to create a scale. It is a qualitative assessment of whether the items in a scale capture the real nature of the construct as it is in the real world. To establish content validity of the scale, an initial set of items was compiled from previous literature dealing with online trust in ability, integrity and benevolence. The entire set of items was examined and a suitable subset of the items that applied to online student behavior was then chosen for this study. This consists of definitions of user participation, user attitude and user beliefs.

Construct validity looks at the extent to which a scale measures a theoretical variable of interest. It seeks agreement between a theoretical concept and a specific measuring device or procedure, such as a questionnaire. To understand whether a research has construct validity, three steps should be followed. First, the theoretical relationships must be specified. Second, the empirical relationships between the measures of the concepts must be examined. Third, the empirical

evidence must be interpreted in terms of how it clarifies the construct validity of the particular measure being tested. Construct validity can be broken down into two sub-categories: convergent validity and discriminant validity.

Convergent validity refers to the extent to which multiple measures of a construct agree with one another or is the actual general agreement among ratings, gathered independently of one another, where measures should be theoretically related. In this study, convergent validity was assessed through the use of Partial Least Squares Method. Under this method, the item loadings of the indicators for each construct, called item reliability, were evaluated (See Table 9). These item loadings should be greater than 0.71 for each individual loading (Chin, 1998).

The traditional methodological complement to convergent validity is discriminant validity, which represents the extent to which measures of a given construct differ from measures of other constructs in the same model. One criterion for adequate discriminant validity is that a construct should have a higher variance with its own measures than it shares with other constructs in a given model. To assess discriminant validity, the use of Average Variance Extracted is employed (i.e., the average variance shared between a construct and its measures).

Discriminant validity was evaluated using Partial Least Squares method by examining the following: (1) item loadings and cross loadings of the indicators within its' own construct and other constructs and (2) comparing the correlation among the construct scores against the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE). The item loadings on its own construct should be higher than on other constructs and the correlation scores should be lower than the square root of the AVE for its own construct (See Table 10).

| Indicator | Confidence | Evaluation | Comparison | Career | Interest | Choosing |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Confidence | **0.840** | | | | | |
| Evaluation | 0.245 | **0.750** | | | | |
| Comparison | 0.549 | 0.240 | **0.752** | | | |
| Career | 0.582 | 0.004 | 0.438 | **0.843** | | |
| Interest | 0.655 | 0.150 | 0.429 | 0.652 | **0.747** | |
| Choosing | 0.535 | 0.289 | 0.612 | 0.561 | 0.416 | **0.836** |

Table 10: *Correlation among Variable Scores (Square Root of AVE in Diagonals)*

# The structural model: Testing for significance

In order to validate the theoretical model and make inferences with regards to the hypotheses, data analysis was performed using the Path Analysis method. Model fit was analyzed as a measure of the validity of the model and statistical significance of the path coefficients were used to make conclusions about the hypotheses. Table 11 shows the standardized regression coefficients ($\beta$) named "path coefficients" in SEM terminology as well as the T-statistics and $R^2$ values.

| Endogenous Variable | $R^2$ | Exogenous Variable | Standardized Coefficient | T-Statistic | P-Value less than |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Interest | 0.551 | Confidence | 0.409 | 12.115 | 0.021* |
| | | Evaluation | 0.045 | 1.164 | 0.165 |
| | | Comparison | 0.035 | 0.440 | 0.127 |
| | | Career | 0.406 | 15.290 | 0.023* |
| Provides a wider career base | 0.315 | Interest | 0.340 | 4.985 | 0.001*** |
| Allows flexibility to specialize in my career | 0.311 | Interest | 0.333 | 5.212 | 0.001*** |
| Fits in with other courses | 0.335 | Interest | 0.367 | 5.675 | 0.001*** |

*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001

Table 11: *Statistical Significance of Coefficients (Endogenous is equivalent to dependent variables Exogenous is equivalent to independent variables)*

Under PLS, $R^2$ values of endogenous variables are used to determine the fit of the model. Interpretation of the $R^2$ values is similar to ordinary least squares method regression. The results of the data analysis including the $R^2$ values are pictorially presented in Figure 4 ,5 and 6.

$R^2$ values measure the construct variance explained by the model. The $R^2$ for "choosing," the endogenous variable to be explained is 0.315 for H2, 0.311 for H3 and 0.335 for H4.

A standardized path coefficient analyzes the degree of accomplishments of the hypotheses. Chin (1998) suggests that they should be greater than 0.3 to be considered significant.
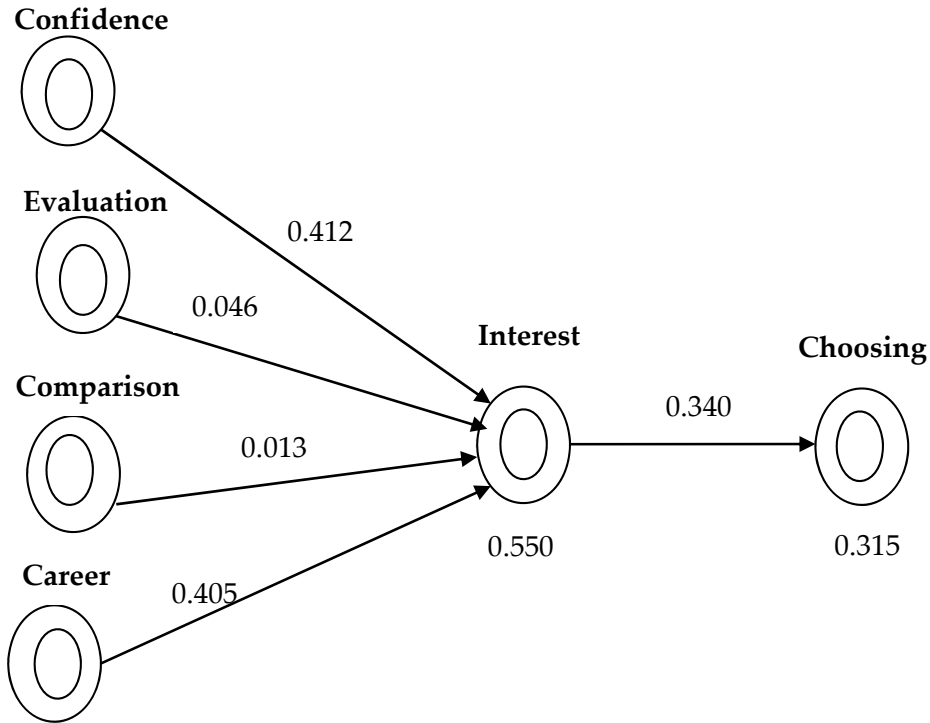
Confidence

Evaluation

0.412

Comparison

0.046

Interest

0.013

Choosing

0.340

Career

0.405

0.550

0.315

Figure 4: The structural model for the study based on TAM – for H2

Confidence

Evaluation

0.402

Comparison

0.042

Interest
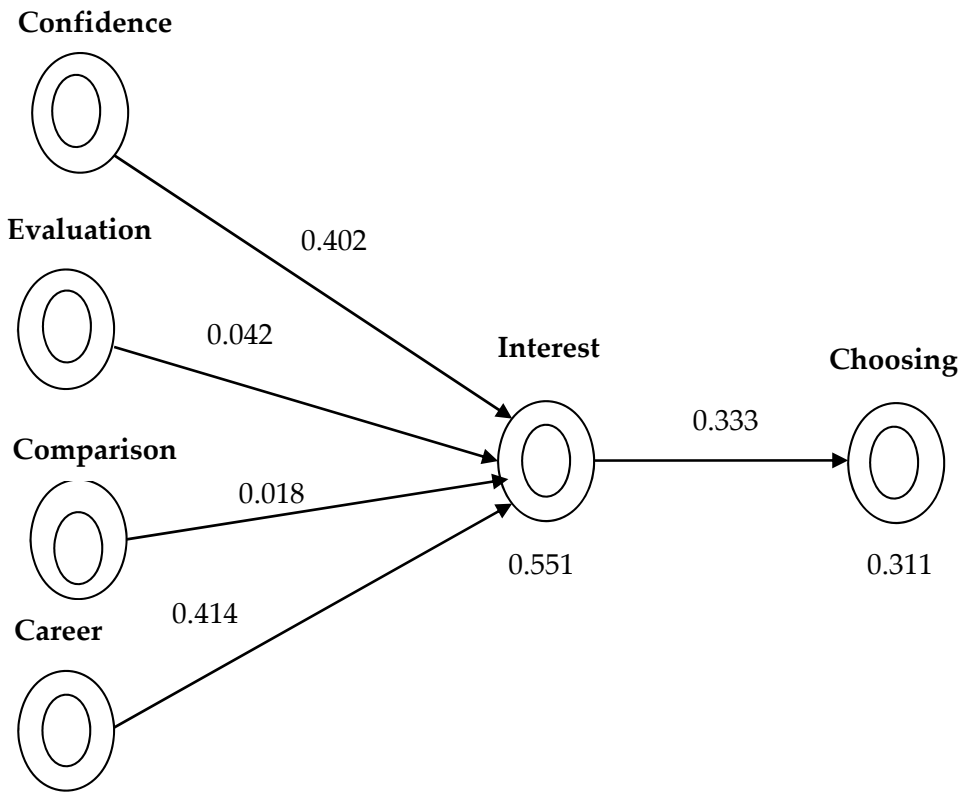
0.018

Choosing

0.333

Career

0.414

0.551

0.311

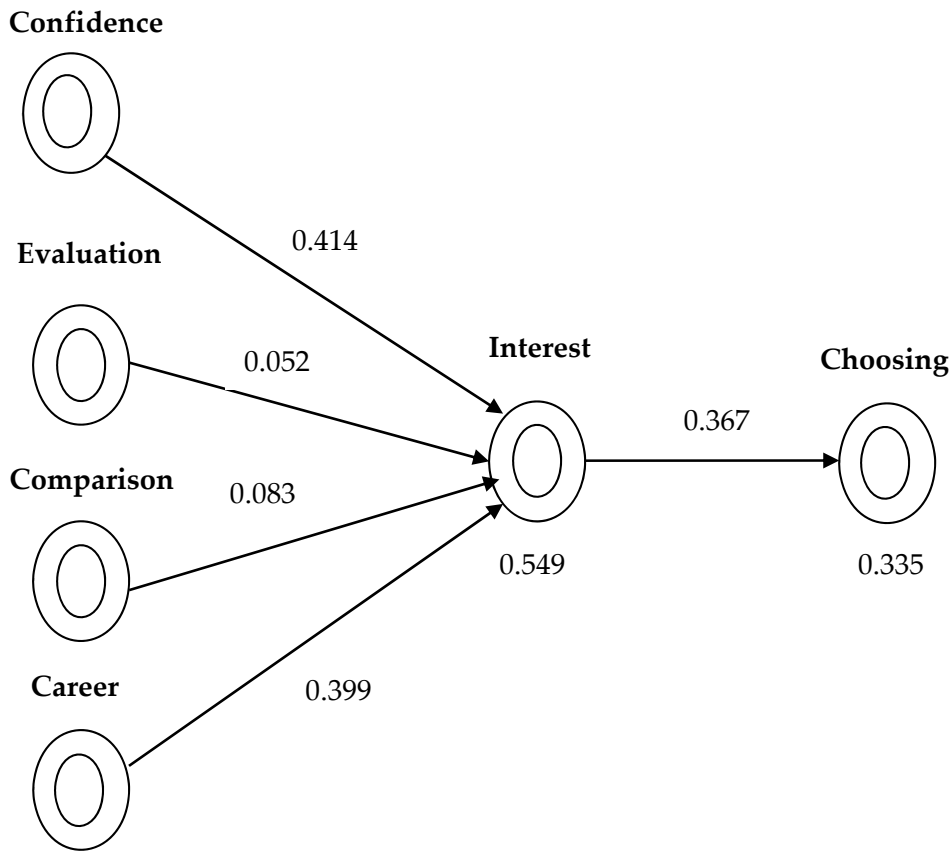Figure 5: The structural model for the study based on TAM – for H3

Figure 6: The structural model for the study based on TAM – for H4

## Data Analysis

The analysis of the study focused on the reliability and validity of the data and measurement model, and the path coefficients and goodness of fit of the structural model. The constructs displayed strong internal reliability on three measures: Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The constructs also demonstrated strong convergent and divergent validity. High indicator construct loadings showed strong convergent validity, whereas strong divergence was shown by the cross loadings results. Also shown is the square root of the AVE whose own construct value was higher than the variables of other constructs.

The research model has several mediators and tests multiple complex relationships. Because of this, structural equation modeling (SEM) is a suitable technique. Partial Least Squares (PLS) was chosen because it handles both formative and reflective indicators, whereas other SEM techniques do not. In addition, PLS is prediction oriented and it does not assume multivariate normality unlike SEM techniques such as LISREL. PLS Graph Version 3, Build 1130 (Courtesy of Dr. Chin, University of Houston) was the software tool used to conduct the analysis.

**H1a**: *Highly confident students are more likely to have a favorable interest towards choosing marketing course*

As shown in Table 11, the path coefficient from Confidence to Interest is 0.409 (p-value < 0.021), which is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This suggests that the hypothesis is supported and that confidence in the marketing course does have any effect on interest in the course. As a result, hypothesis H1a is supported.

**H1b.** *Student's evaluation of a marketing course is more likely to have a favorable interest towards choosing a marketing course*

As shown in Table 11, the path coefficient from Evaluation to Interest is 0.045 (p-value < 0.165), which is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This suggests that the hypothesis is not supported and that evaluating the marketing course does not have an effect on interest in the course. As a result, hypothesis H1b is not supported.

**H1c**: *Student's comparison of a marketing course is more likely to have a favorable interest towards choosing a marketing course*

As shown in Table 11, the path coefficient from Comparison to Interest is 0.035 (p-value < 0.127), which is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This suggests that the hypothesis is not supported and that comparing the marketing course to other business courses does not have an effect on interest in the course. As a result, hypothesis H1c is not supported.

**H1d**: *Students perception that the marketing course will have a future impact on their career is more likely to have a favorable interest towards choosing marketing course*
As shown in Table 11, the path coefficient from Career to Interest is 0.406 (p-value < 0.023), which is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This suggests that the hypothesis is supported and that future career impact does have any effect on interest in the marketing course. As a result, hypothesis H1d is supported.

**H2.** *Highly interested students are more likely to favor a marketing course if it provides a wider career base*

As shown in Table 11, the path coefficient from Interest to Choosing (based on career base) is 0.340 (p-value < 0.001), which is statistically significant at the 0.001 level. This suggests that the hypothesis is supported and that highly interested students will be affected when choosing the marketing course if it provides a wider career base for them, which does impact their choosing the marketing course. As a result, hypothesis H2 is supported.

H3. *Highly interested students are more likely to favor a marketing course if it allows flexibility to specialize in their career*

As shown in Table 11, the path coefficient from Interest to Choosing (based on career flexibility) is 0.333 (p-value < 0.001), which is statistically significant at the 0.001 level. This suggests that the hypothesis is supported and that highly interested students will be affected when choosing the marketing course if it provides the opportunity for flexibility in their career, which does impact their choosing the marketing course. As a result, hypothesis H3 is supported.


H4. *Highly interested students are more likely to favor a marketing course if it fits in with other courses*

As shown in Table 11, the path coefficient from Interest to Choosing (fits in with other courses) is 0.367 (p-value < 0.001), which is statistically significant at the 0.001 level. This suggests that the hypothesis is supported and that highly interested students will be affected when choosing the marketing course if it fits in with other courses, which does impact their choosing the marketing course. As a result, hypothesis H3 is supported.

| Hypotheses | | Supported |
|---|---|---|
| H1a | Highly confident students are more likely to have a favorable interest towards choosing a marketing course | Yes |
| H1b | Students evaluating a marketing course are more likely to have a favorable interest towards choosing a marketing course | No |
| H1c | Students comparison to other business courses are more likely to have a favorable interest towards choosing a marketing course | No |
| H1d | Students perception of a marketing course impact on their future career are more likely to have a favorable interest towards choosing a marketing course | Yes |
| H2 | Highly interested students are more likely to be more favorable towards choosing a marketing course if it provides a wider career base for them | Yes |
| H3 | Highly interested students are more likely to be more favorable towards choosing a marketing course if it allows flexibility to specialize in their career | Yes |
| H4 | Highly interested students are more likely to be more favorable towards choosing a marketing course if it fits in with other courses | Yes |

Table 12**:** *Summaries of Hypotheses Results*


**Results: structural model**

The PLS construct level statistics (AVE and CFR, previously explained) indicate a fit for the manifest variables to the latent variables; however, they do not give an indication of overall model fit or how the latent variables co-vary with one another. Since PLS is designed to maximize prediction, the emphasis is put on explanatory power to maximize variance in the dependent variables based on the independent variables in the model. Consequently, the degree

to which PLS models accomplish this objective is evaluated based on prediction oriented measures ( $R^2$ ; instead of covariance fit as is attempted in SEM)

The structural path coefficients show the results for the hypothesized model: variance explained for each dependent construct is shown, along with an indication of the significance of the hypotheses.

Consistent with *H1a,* interest in the course (intent) was significantly related to the confidence (attitude) that students had in taking the course (ß1=0.409, *p* >0.05). Also, interest in the course was significantly related as students perceived that it impacted their career (attitude) (ß4=0.406, p <0.005), supporting *H1d*. However, when interest (intent) was measured with the student's attitude of evaluating and comparing the marketing course it was not significant, (ß2=0.045; ß3=0.035; respectively), not supporting *H1b* and *H1c*.

Consistent with *H1,* choosing the marketing course because it provides a wider career base (behavior) was significantly related to the interest in the course (intent), confidence and career impact (attitude) that students had in taking the course (ß5=0.340, *p* >0.001), supporting H2. Also, students choosing the course that allows flexibility to specialize in their career (behavior) was significantly related to interest (intent) in the course and confidence and career impact (attitude), (ß6=0.333, *p* <0.001), supporting *H3*. And, students choosing the course that fits in with other courses (behavior) was significantly related to interest (intent) in the course, confidence and career impact (attitude), (ß7=0.367, p <0.001), supporting *H4*. Students' perception positively impacted their choosing the marketing course, which affected each of the hypotheses measuring behavior. Each of the 'intended' hypotheses was significant in revealing that each of the latent variables did influence choosing the marketing course.

## Conclusion discussion and implications

The aim of this study was to assess the perception of marketing classes by university students. The study investigated the concept of both the observable and abstract attributes from a students' perspective. The basic scale was comprised of six constructs: Interest, Confidence, Evaluation, Comparison, Choice (Observable) and Career (Abstract). The results indicate that while there is a relationship among the constructs in how the marketing course is chosen, some factors are more influential than others among the terms in choosing the course.

In evaluating the determinants for a successful marketing strategy, it is theoretically and managerially important to understand and test the boundary conditions for any variable. A primary goal of this research was to develop a conceptual framework and, given certain variables, to identify how students observe and process their information about the marketing course and how this influences them in choosing a specific course. This research attempts to analyze students' choices leaning towards a specific objective and behavior for a specific product - marketing course. This then can be extended to the bigger picture - Marketing Program. Understanding the relationship between the observable and abstract attributes and students

choices is essential to maximizing the effectiveness of that specific environment – Marketing Program.

We draw on the theory of planned behavior as a theoretical foundation in building our model of choosing of a specific product. Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) framework is adopted by arguing that, in the context of purchase, intention is not a significant mediator. In other words, purchases are unplanned, unexpected, and spontaneous; hence, the determinants of behavior influence buying directly rather than indirectly through intentions.

The model empirically analyzes students' from the perspective or with the aim of choosing. The determinants of students' choices include characteristics (such as: interest, confidence, evaluation, comparison and career usefulness) in the overall assessment of the Marketing program.

One may describe the overall picture that emerges as follows. First, student individualities with regards to the attributes do employ a significant impact on choices. This result shows that the drivers of these characteristics do directly influence such behavior.

Students' interest in the areas evaluated encourages both their overall assessment and intention to choose the marketing course. Clearly, their interest and impact on their careers are the driving forces for their intentions. Their interest in the course is useful in formulating their future intention and their willingness to choose the course affects their overall evaluation. As students need to choose the course to collect, compare and assess details about the course.

This research provides a number of suggestions for universities that have a marketing program. To choose the course, students must be able to attend; therefore, awareness of the course is critical to inform them of the objectives. They must also generate interest in the course based on the attributes that are measurable, that are important to their learning and future career development. As well, they must have the ability to evaluate and compare the course, to develop future behaviors or intentions. These conditions lead to a favorable evaluation of the course, which then leads to students choosing the course.

An effective promotional campaign should be designed for students. The campaign should emphasize the strongest observable and abstract attributes found for the students in this study. The strongest attributes were that the majority of students, regardless of their major field of study, indicated that enrolling in a marketing course is helpful to their study and knowledge. Whereas marketing students expect the courses to be useful in their career. The findings of studies, such as this one, can assist educators and program planners of vocational education to promote and perhaps modify vocational education programs successfully to attract and retain interested students.

Although university students are not definite about what career routes they will pursue and they may still be influenced to change their future career interests. All students, both those enrolled and those not enrolled in marketing, make up the target market for the marketing education program. They need to be informed and influenced by the benefits of the program or courses. If other students outline some benefits that are either course-related or career-related, then that

would be beneficial to the university, even if it's applicable to only one group of students: the marketing students. These students can also influence members of their peer groups to enroll in the program. Marketing students have already been influenced positively and are participating in the program; however, universities must continue to develop effective promotional strategies and program designs to keep them in the program. A positive influence on students to enroll in the marketing program will result in a positive influence toward their peer group, parents, counselors, teachers, and others.

Furthermore, research can be carried out to measure students' perceptions toward other university programs (e.g., Management program, Accounting program, Finance program), and then determine how those relate to students' perceptions of educational programs. As well, future research can measure non-business students and their influencers in choosing a marketing course.

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