

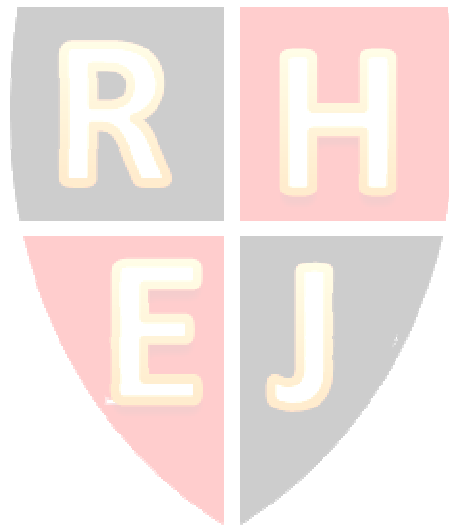
## Factors that influence students choosing a marketing course

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### ABSTRACT

This research incorporates two attitude-measuring models, observable and abstract, to compare the attributes of the marketing education program in terms of their relative importance in determining what factors influence students' and the impact of these attributes on students' choosing a marketing course. To analyze the data SEM techniques were used and the findings indicate that students' are influenced by factors associated closely to the program's observable and abstract attributes. These discoveries should assist in the development of a promotional campaign emphasizing the qualities of the marketing program which will incorporate the most significant attributes from this study. The effectiveness of the model in this study can also be demonstrated in measuring student attitudes in other vocational area.

Keywords: student factors choosing a marketing course, TRA, SEM, PLS



## INTRODUCTION

The goal of this research paper was to study the attitudes and evaluations of students and also to measure how these factors influence them to choose a marketing course. This student-based research about the attitudes, evaluations and outlook of students with regards to the marketing program can provide information to educators to inform and to attract students with the appropriate promotional packages. Through these findings; using models effectively to measure factors that influence a students' choice, educators can be better prepared for the future by modifying or fine-tuning their marketing programs. Specific details are made available to researchers that scholastic decision makers and educators can apply easily to continuously increase the perception of the marketing 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." (Hosein, 2014).

"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." (Hosein, 2014).

The impact of consumers' attitudes towards the attributes of a product or brand and the influence on their purchasing or choosing behavior is supported through marketing research and theory. Based on the consumers impression of the product from two perspectives: observable and abstract attributes; these attitudes are shaped.

"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." Individuals by understanding the specifics about the product or brand (marketing course) or by direct interaction with the product or brand (marketing course) over time learn or develop attitudes. With respect to the attitude of the object, these learned attitudes are used by consumers as a guide to their behavior, thereby constantly developing negative or positive behavioral forms. "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). The perception is that if someone is motivated favorably towards an object (product or brand) it would lead to a positive outlook with respect to that object, or within this context encourage positive behavior with regards to 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 research identifies how students view certain attributes of the marketing education program, then assesses each of these attributes associated with students' choosing a marketing course. The findings will also demonstrate how effective the programs are from a student's perspective.

Which will assist educators in developing promotional campaigns that are effective in order to attract and retain students to 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.

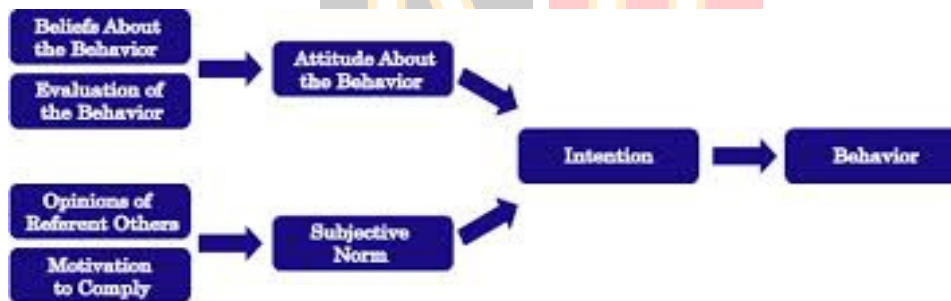
Based on these findings, the marketing programs can be modified or adjusted by educators for better results. "This, research-based data can provide educators with information about students'

attitudes and expectations of the marketing program so that they can develop the appropriate promotional packages to inform and attract students.” (Hosein, 2104). 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 their behavioral intention (BI) when performed; it 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 a 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). “Therefore, attitude toward behavior is a function of the product of one's salient belief (B) that performing the behavior will generate certain outcomes and will lead to an evaluation of those outcomes (E), i.e., rating of the desirability of the outcome.” (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980).

External variables to the model are thought to influence intentions but only to the extent of their effects on either attitudes or subjective norms (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). The theory of reasoned action has been successfully applied on a larger scale 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).



Fishbein-Ajzen 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, from a theoretical framework perspective, shows that a curriculum must first achieve in getting a students' attention to the program before they will think about 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 then there is a high probability that the behavior will be performed.

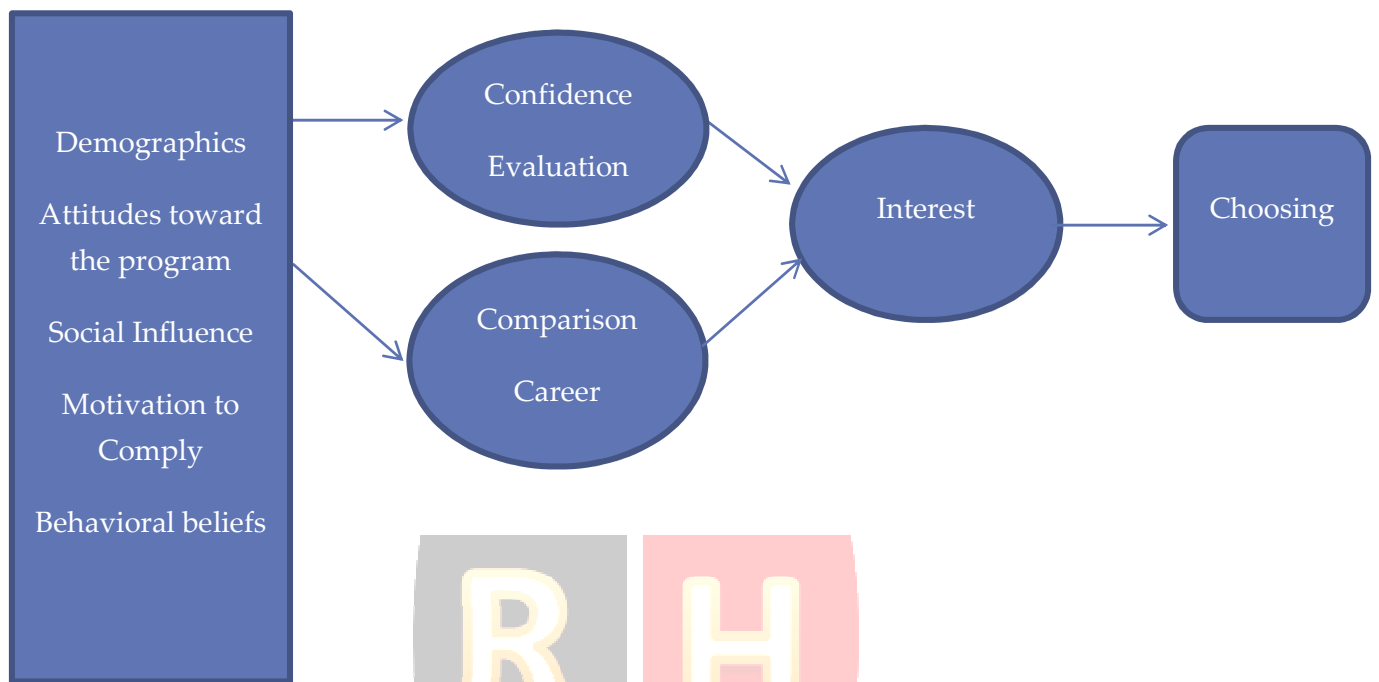


Figure 2: Key factors in measuring perception relationship to TRA, a generic theoretical framework

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**

This study's purpose was to determine how university students feel about certain particulars of the program and to identify their outlook with regards to the marketing course. Specifically, the study focuses on 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: attributes observable and abstract 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 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." (Hosein, 2014).

### **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 the past, conducting marketing research and survey research." (Hosein, 2014).

"The focus group interview was directed with 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." (Hosein, 2014).

### **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.” (Hosein, 2014).

### 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.” (Hosein, 2014).

### Student Research Analysis

The research for this study was conducted on six constructs, namely:

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

The number average signifies the students who responded positively for the questions, for all of the following data analysis. That is: either agree/strongly agree or likely/very likely.

#### Students’ confidence in their marketing ability

Investigations	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

Table 1: Confidence in Marketing Ability ...

The questions were about the student’s ability and understanding in discussing marketing concepts.

To explain and evaluate marketing concepts, some students have the knowledge and ability, while many were confident in their grasp of marketing concepts. The variety of responses

given suggests that students pursue knowledge through business examples and as well that students understand the concepts and have some confidence in the subject.

### Students' evaluation of marketing course

Investigations	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

Table 2: Evaluation of Marketing Course ...

The questions were regarding the impact the marketing course had on the students learning. Evaluating the course centered on students learning, some suggested that assigned homework wasn't very helpful to them while reading the text was of some help for most students in their learning. With the variety of responses given (some preferred reading while others preferred to surf the Internet) indicates that for the method of learning students have a preference.

### Students' comparison of other business courses to the marketing course

Investigations	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

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

The questions were regarding the student's comparison between other business courses previously taken to the recent marketing course.

Comparing to other business courses, students assessed the course centered on how stimulating, motivating and challenging it was. The course as most other courses was challenging as students indicated, while fewer specified that they had control over the pace of the course. The variety of responses given indicates that most will recommend the course to others and there wasn't much variance between the courses (marketing and other business).



### Students' perception towards a career in marketing

Investigations	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

Table 4: Viewpoint towards a Career in Marketing ...

The questions were regarding the student's perception of a career in the field of marketing. Even if students may not pursue a career in marketing when evaluating the course most indicated, focusing on their career objectives, that the marketing course will be helpful to them in the future and that the course is helpful to them in understanding marketing concepts. The variety of responses by students indicates that taking this marketing course would be helpful with their careers or in the future.

### Students' interest in marketing

Investigations	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

Table 5: Interest in Marketing ...

The questions were regarding the student's definite interest in this marketing course. Many of the students were involved in the marketing course because of their career selections or their use in the future of the knowledge and some were interested in knowing the fundamentals of marketing. As students have varying interests (some due to the subject 'marketing' and some for career choices), the variety of responses given suggested that students place some importance in understanding marketing concepts.

### Students' reasons for choosing a marketing course

Investigations	Mean
Course was more interesting	3.76
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

Table 6: Reasons for Choosing this Marketing Course...

The questions were regarding the students reasoning for choosing this marketing course. Most students responded that the course would offer a better career platform and would be more supportive to them in their careers. When evaluating based on reasons that they chose (how interesting and appropriate) to them this marketing course was. The responses given indicates that most students chose to take them because of career initiatives rather than recommendations or curriculum choice as they had a wide range of reasons in choosing the marketing course.

### Measuring Intent

Is the choice selection process affected, when an intent question is asked? "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." (Nedungadi, Mitchell and Berger, 1993). "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, it becomes increasingly likely that they will form these cognitions." (Nedungadi, Mitchell and Berger, 1993).

The factors that are a result from taking a marketing class are measured by the steps that the students are progressing through. Students' learning is enhanced as they move through the different cognitive stages and as well as their attitudes and ultimately 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, when measuring intentions that there will some concerns within a large group of students who seemingly will not all be at the same stage in their decision-making process. Two reasons for this suggestion were first, asking intent questions will in some circumstances lead to an existing attitude being made more defined, and second, measuring intentions will propel students' thoughts that will influence changes in attitude, behavior or choosing.

This research focuses on students that are currently taking a marketing course and involved in some cognitive development during the class. Measuring this intent to choose is central on two criteria: first, choosing essential course related attributes, such as attitudes, or behavior; second, assessing how choosing a course can prompt the students to develop thoughts that may influence

in changing or developing these judgments. In order to gauge their intentions; their intentions are assessed when these cognitive processes are measured.

**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 by oneself or being included in a group. It indicates the resolve for being in the class.

**Evaluation**

Evaluation pertains to the method used in the learning process while attending marketing classes this may 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 increases knowledge to our thought development about choosing the courses.

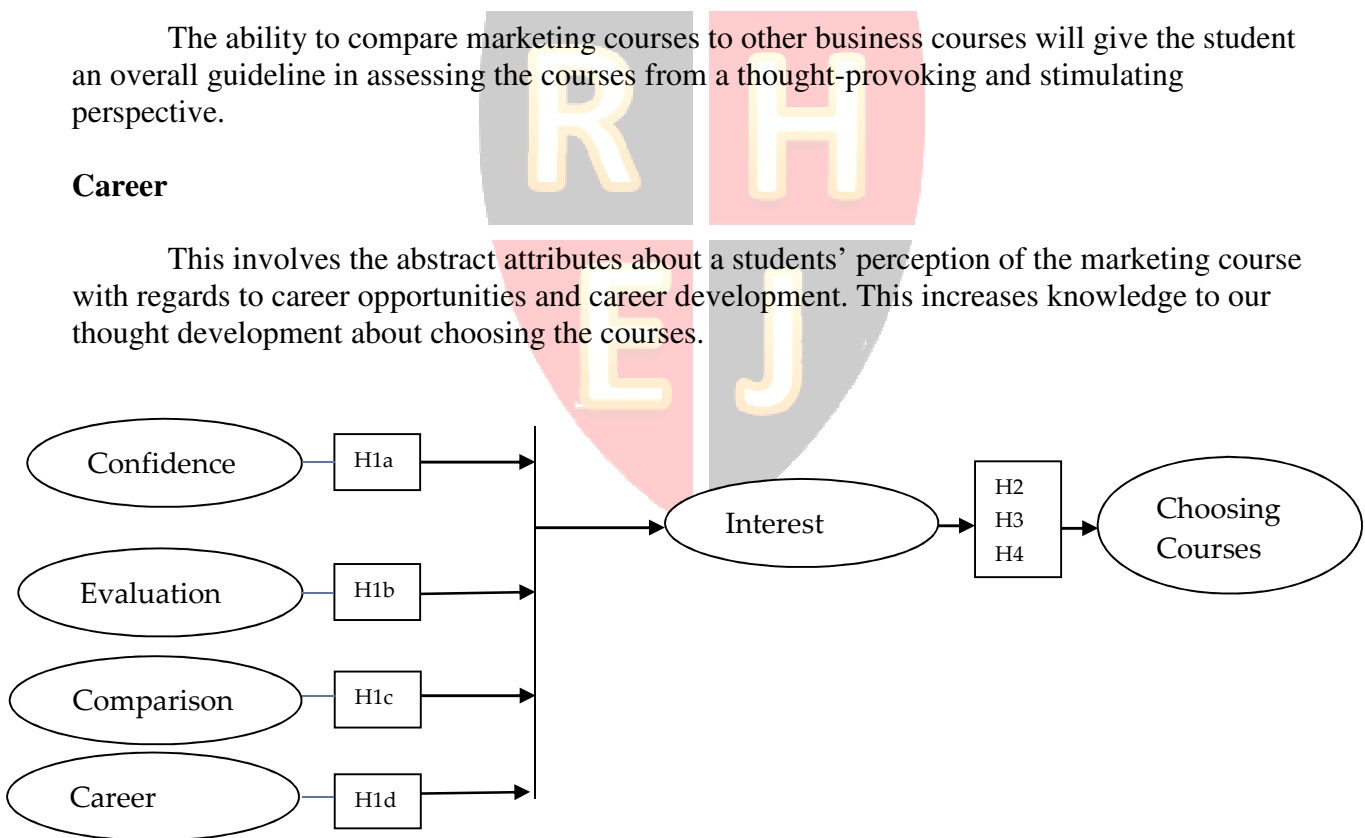


Figure 3: Conceptual measurement model. The model for the study based on TRA

## Interest

“Interest involves having some personal feelings about the marketing courses being offered.” Regardless if choosing or not choosing is the eventual conclusion, interest merely measures a students’ fondness for taking the courses.

## Choosing

How an individual assess the marketing course will have an impact on their future objectives, not only towards other marketing courses, but the marketing curriculum overall. The assessment of the marketing program overall is related directly to predicting future behavior.

## 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 relate directly to the various course assessments and choosing of marketing subjects by the student. Within the observable and abstract attributes this research undertakes to measure if there is an association between the selection of classes and course assessments of the student.

The following hypotheses were developed centered around 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 following hypothesis are to be tested based on structural paths for the model (Figure 1).

*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

An undisguised questionnaire was used to gather data for the study. The questionnaire was pre-tested several times among business associates (focus group members), students as well as various faculty members in the marketing department, in order that face validity of the items on the questionnaire were verified. The reason for pretesting was to pinpoint any misinterpretation in the phrasing of the questions on the questionnaire.

“This method for the questionnaire was selected for its low-cost outlay and ease of issue. 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 and general questions and the demographics. For part 1 all questions were measured on an interval scale (5 point). 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.” (Hosein, 2014).

The questionnaire was analyzed using SPSS software to calculate means, frequencies and reliability. By reviewing existing literature content validity was established. A test for ‘goodness of fit’ was performed using structural equation modeling (SEM), it was chosen as it is a multivariate technique and is able to:

- assess the validity of the causal structure
- investigate the associations among the unobservable and observable variables;

The two sections of this technique are: first, as a structural model, it highlights the relationships among the constructs. Second, as a measurement model, it indicates in relation to the observed variables how well the constructs are measured.

Our research model has several mediators and tests multiple complex relationships thereby making (SEM) a suitable technique. Partial Least Squares (PLS) was chosen as it handles both formative and reflective indicators, whereas other SEM techniques do not. In addition, PLS is prediction oriented and 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.

Displayed is a summary description of the sample data collected, before data analysis:

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

**TESTING FOR INTERNAL CONSISTENCY: THE MEASUREMENT MODEL**

**Reliability Analysis**

In order to assess reliability of the measures, PLS (Partial Least Squares) as well as Cronbach's alpha - SPSS were used (See Table 8). Cronbach's alpha assesses the amount of variance in accordance to the actual variable score that the research proposes to measure. It reveals the similarity of the items in the scale and the consistency of the measure.

Construct/Latent Variables	Mean	Reliability Cronbach's alpha
<b>Confidence <i>cn1, cn2, cn3, cn5</i></b>		.8953
Understanding marketing concepts		
Ability to write about marketing concepts		
Ability to explain [marketing concepts] through discussions		
Succeeding in a university [marketing/business] course		
<b>Evaluation <i>ev1, ev2, ev4, ev6</i></b>		.7934
Reading the textbook		
Doing assigned homework		
Participating in classroom discussion		
Writing reports/final project		
<b>Comparison <i>cm1, cm2, cm3, cm7</i></b>		.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		
<b>Career <i>ca2, ca3, ca4, ca5</i></b>		.8598
Helps in choosing a career path		
Find a job after graduating		
Advances chosen career field		

Useful in the future		
<b>Interest in1, in3, in4, in5</b>		.7299
Understanding principles of marketing		
Pursuing a career in marketing		
Using marketing knowledge in the future		
Working on marketing assignments/projects		
<b>Choosing ch2, ch3, ch4</b>		.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 and reliability scores

“PLS evaluates the reliability of an item (individual) and assumes no distribution form (like multi-normality) of the data” (Gopal, Bosrom and Chin, 1992). “To measure the loadings of each item with its construct PLS is recommended. An indication to when significant variance is mutual between each item and its construct, the value of the loadings should be higher than 0.5 (ideally higher than 0.70). For this research, items were not included when removing them further increases the levels of reliability” (Chin, 1998).

“The acceptable level of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is 0.50, this shows that more than 50% of the variance of the indicators has to be accounted for by the latent variables” (Chin, 1998). Measuring the reliability of the construct, AVE was calculated and included in the scale (See Table 9). Sufficient reliability is realized throughout all of the constructs as they exceed the minimum AVE level.

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 how a study correctly measures the specific concept that the researcher has set out to test. Whereas, validity is aligned with the research realization at reflecting the reality it claims to represent, reliability is aligned with the exactitude of the procedure or actual instrument used in measuring. Construct and content validity are the two types of validity implemented to evaluate scale evaluation.

There are three steps that are used to measure if a research has construct validity. “First, the theoretical associations must be stated. Second, the empirical associations between the measures of the concepts must be studied. Third, the empirical evidence must be construed in terms of how it explains the construct validity of the specific measure being tested.” (Chin, 1998) “Construct validity examines the magnitude on a scale, to which a theoretical variable of interest is measured. It seeks a correlation between a theoretical concept and a specific measuring device or procedure such as a questionnaire. Construct validity can be divided into two sub-categories: convergent validity and discriminant validity. Convergent validity denotes the degree to which several measures of a construct agree with one another or should theoretically be related.” (Cronbach & Meehl 1955). Partial Least Squares Method was used in this study to assess convergent validity, the item loadings (for item reliability) of the indicators for each of the constructs, were evaluated (See Table 9). “These item loadings should be greater than 0.71 for each individual loading” (Chin, 1998)

“Discriminant validity is the customary procedural counterpart to convergent validity. It signifies the extent to which, in the same model, measures of a specified construct are different from measures of another. In a model when a construct has a higher variance with its own measures than it shares with other constructs, discriminant validity exists.” (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). “To measure discriminant validity, Average Variance Extracted is used (i.e., the average variance shared between a construct and its measures).” (Chin, 1998)

Content validity denotes the representation and completeness of the objects used in creation of a scale. It assesses if the items in the scale reflects the true purpose of the construct as real world representation and is qualitative in nature. To institute content validity, a set of items initially were collected from previous articles and were examined to create an appropriate subset of items that apply to student behavior. This subset was then selected for this study. Partial Least Squares method was employed to evaluate discriminant validity by exploring the following: “(1) within its’ own construct and other constructs item loadings and cross loadings of the indicators, and (2) comparing the correlation among the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) against the construct scores.” (Chin, 1998). “The item loadings on its own construct should be greater than on other constructs and the scores (correlation) should be lower than the square root of the AVE for its own construct” (Chin, 1998) (See Table 10).



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

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

**TESTING FOR SIGNIFICANCE: THE STRUCTURAL MODEL**

The Path Analysis Method was used in data analysis to verify the theoretical model in order to make interpretations with regards to the hypotheses. The fit of the model was evaluated in order to determine validity and the statistical significance of the path coefficients evaluated with regards to conclusions on the hypotheses. Table 11 displays the standardized regression coefficients “path coefficients” ( $\beta$ ) generated from SEM as well as the R<sup>2</sup> values and T-statistics.

Endogenous Variable	R <sup>2</sup>	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)

With regards to PLS, R<sup>2</sup> values of dependent (endogenous) variables defines how best these variables fit the model. “Understanding of the R<sup>2</sup> values is comparable to the ordinary least

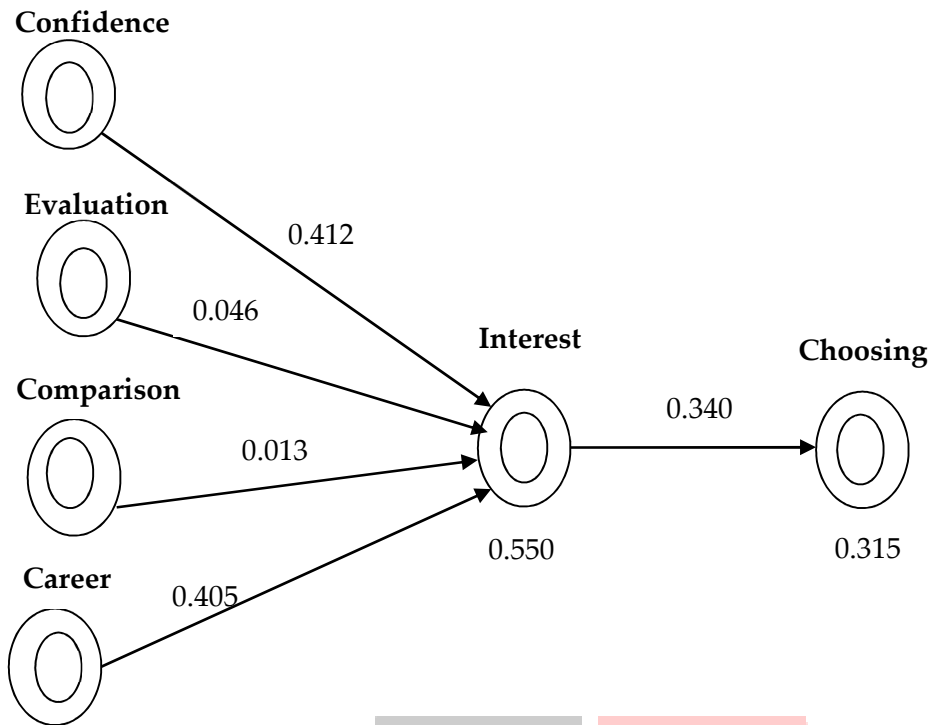


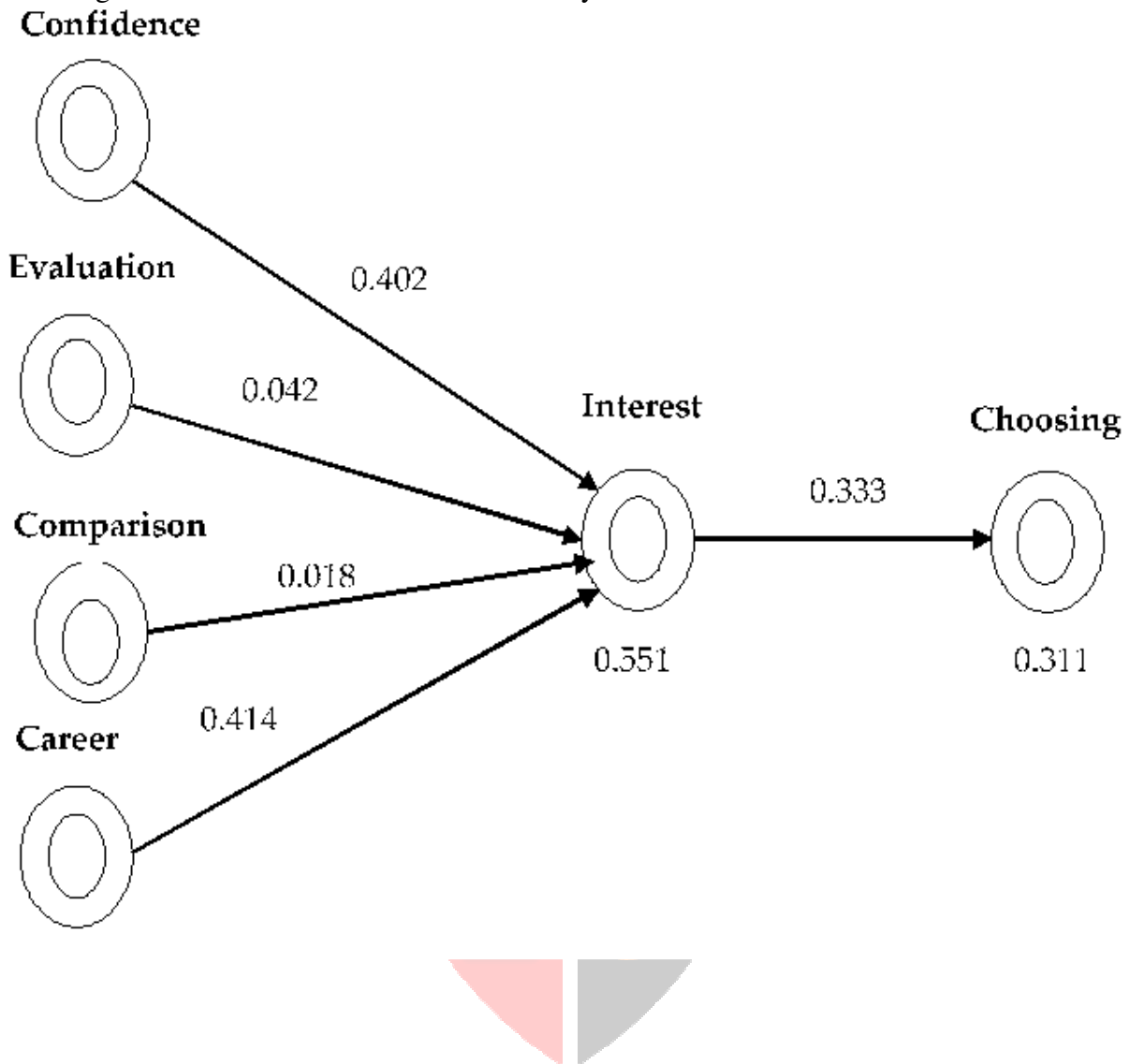
Figure 4: The structural model for the study based on TAM – for H2

squares method regression.” (Chin, 1998). The results for the data analysis, together with the values for R<sup>2</sup> are displayed in Figure 4, 5 and 6.

Illustrated by the model, R<sup>2</sup> values indicates the amount of variance for the construct. The R<sup>2</sup> for “choosing,” the dependent (endogenous) variable described is 0.315 for H2, 0.311 for H3 and 0.335 for H4.

The degree of events of the hypotheses is examined by the standardized path coefficient. Chin (1998) to be considered significant suggests that they should be greater than 0.3.

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



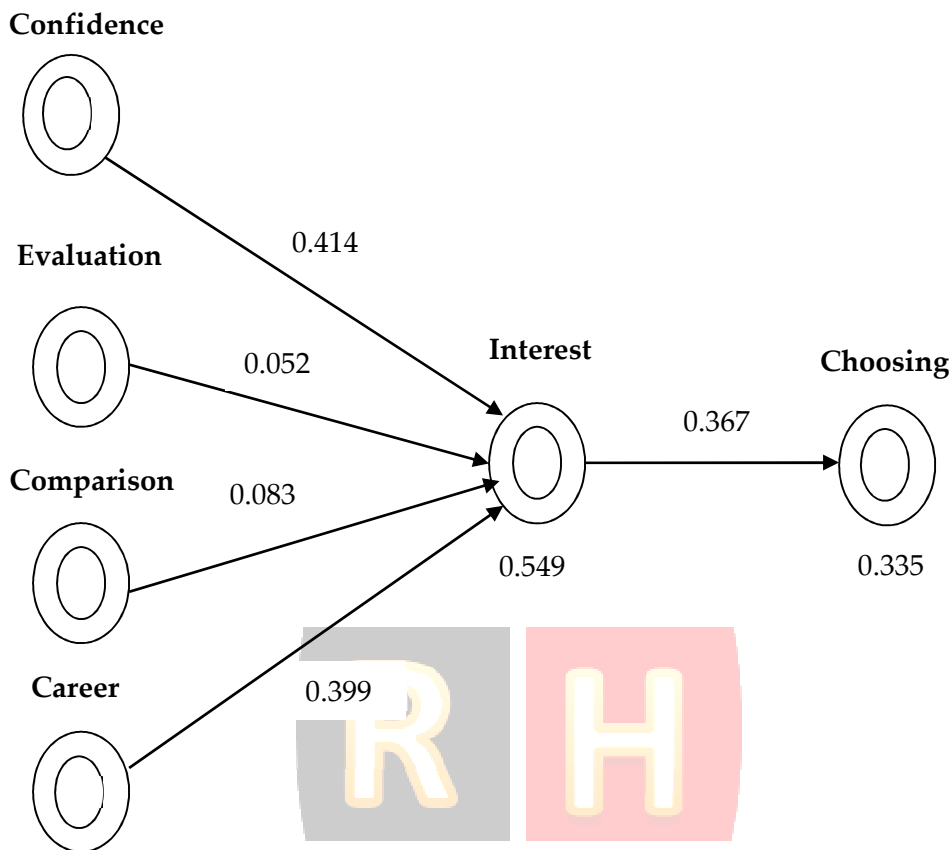


Figure 6: The structural model for the study based on TAM – for H4

**DATA ANALYSIS**

For this research the data analysis concentrated on the validity and reliability of the data, as well as the goodness of fit and the structural model path coefficients. On three measures the constructs displayed strong internal reliability: Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Composite Reliability and Cronbach’s Alpha. The constructs also showed strong divergent and convergent validity. The cross loadings results shows strong divergence, whereas the high indicator construct loadings displayed strong convergent validity. Also displayed is the  $\sqrt{AVE}$  whose construct value was greater than other constructs variables.

The research model has several mediators and multiple complex relationships and required a suitable testing technique, structural equation modeling (SEM) was chosen. Partial Least Squares (PLS) was chosen to fill the gaps left by the some SEM techniques, as it handles both formative and reflective indicators. In addition, PLS is prediction oriented and does not assume multivariate normality unlike LISREL, a SEM. 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*

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

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

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

Displayed in Table 11, which is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, the path coefficient from Career to Interest is 0.406 ( $p$ -value  $< 0.023$ ). This suggests that future career impact does have any effect on interest in the marketing course and that the hypothesis is supported. 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*

Displayed in Table 11, which is statistically significant at the 0.001 level, the path coefficient from Interest to Choosing (based on career base) is 0.340 ( $p$ -value  $< 0.001$ ). This suggests 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 and that the hypothesis is supported. 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*

Displayed in Table 11, which is statistically significant at the 0.001 level, the path coefficient from Interest to Choosing (based on career flexibility) is 0.333 ( $p$ -value  $< 0.001$ ). This suggests 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 and that the hypothesis is supported. 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*

Displayed in Table 11, which is statistically significant at the 0.001 level, the path coefficient from Interest to Choosing (fits in with other courses) is 0.367 (p-value < 0.001). This suggests 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 and that the hypothesis is supported. 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)” (Chin, 1998)

“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.” (Chin, 1998)

Consistent with *H1a*, interest in the course (intent) was significantly related to the confidence (attitude) that students had in taking the course ( $\beta_1=0.409, p >0.05$ ). Also, interest in the course

was significantly related as students perceived that it impacted their career (attitude) ( $\beta_4=0.406$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ), supporting *H1d*. However, when interest (intent) was measured with the student's attitude of evaluating and comparing the marketing course it was not significant, ( $\beta_2=0.045$ ;  $\beta_3=0.035$ ; 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 ( $\beta_5=0.340$ ,  $p > 0.001$ ), 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), ( $\beta_6=0.333$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), 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), ( $\beta_7=0.367$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting *H4*. Students' perception positively impacted their choosing the marketing course, which affected each of the hypotheses measuring behavior. The 'intended' hypotheses each of them was important in highlighting that the latent variables did influence choosing the marketing course.

## CONCLUSION DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study investigated from a students' perspective the concept or theory of two attributes: the observable and the abstract. The objective of this study was to measure the university students perception of the marketing program. The measurement model consisted of six constructs: Interest, Confidence, Evaluation, Comparison, Choice (Observable) and Career (Abstract). As indicated by the results there is a relationship amongst the constructs in how the marketing course is chosen and some factors are more influential than others among the terms in choosing the course.

For a successful marketing strategy, in assessing the factors it is crucial to test and to ascertain the limits for any variable; theoretically and managerially. A primary objective of this research was given certain variables, to outline a conceptual framework and to distinguish how students observe and process their information about the marketing course and how this impacts 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 crucial in order to capitalize on 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.” (Fishbein & Ajzen's, 1975) This 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.

The overall picture that emerges can be described as such: first, student individualities with regards to the attributes do employ a significant influence on choices. This result reveals that the drivers of these characteristics do impact directly such behavior.

Students' interest in the areas evaluated inspires overall their general 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 beneficial in framing their intention in the future and their inclination to choose the course influences their evaluation. As students need to choose the course to collect, compare and evaluate details about the course.

For universities that have a marketing program this research provides several suggestions. To choose the course, students must be in attendance; hence, in order to inform them of the objectives of the course awareness is critical. Interest in the course must also be generated based on attributes that are measurable, that are important to their learning and to their future career development. As well, they must be able to evaluate and compare the course and to formulate future behaviors or intentions. These circumstances leads to an evaluation of the course that is favorable, which then leads to students choosing the course.

An effective promotional campaign should be designed for students emphasizing the strongest observable and abstract attributes found in this study. Regardless of their major field of study the majority of students indicated that it is helpful to their study and knowledge to take a marketing course as evident by the attributes. Whereas marketing students believe the course to be beneficial in their career. The findings of studies, such as this, can facilitate educators and program planners of vocational education in promoting and perhaps modifying programs successfully in attracting and retaining interested students.

Although university students' career routes are not completely outlined, they may still be inclined to change their focus and future career direction. All students, those enrolled and those not enrolled in marketing, make up the target group for the marketing education program. They need to be informed of and influenced by the program or course benefits. It would be beneficial to the university, if the benefits of the course are outlined, either course-related or career-related, even only if it related to one student group: the marketing students. These students can also have an effect on 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 their interest. A positive influence on students to enroll in the marketing program will effect a positive influence with regards to their peer group, parents, counselors, teachers, and others.

Furthermore, research can be carried out to measure students' attitudes and perceptions of other university programs (e.g., Management program, Accounting program, Finance program), and 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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