Determinants of Students' Interest in Sales Job as Potential Profession: An Empirical Investigation in Malaysia

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Abstract

Sales career is a critical marketing activity that accounts for a major portion of the revenue generation for any company. The purpose of this study is to examine factors that influence Malaysian business student's interest in sales job as apotential profession. Male and female undergraduate students attending three universities were surveyed through a structural questionnaire to determine their interest in sales career. In this study, confirmatory factor analysis was employed using structural equation modeling (SEM) technique. A major findings of our study indicates that, overall, there is significant impact between key factors and students' interest in sales career at $p<0.05$. Additionally, personal development and extra benefit are highly significant at $p=0.00$ level while income and communication skill are significant at $p=0.01$ and $p=0.04$ respectively. The managerial implications towards a sales career are discussed, and areas for future study are suggested.

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Introduction

In current decades, sales recruiters are looking at diversifying their sales force by attracting university students; as a result professional selling has increasingly become an integral part of the global village that presents a variety of exciting and challenging carrer opportunities for university students (Castleberry, 1990; Caballero &Joonas, 2009; Bristow, Amyx, & Stephen, 2011). World market economy is driven by the consumption of goods and services (Spillan, Totten, & Ziemnowicz, 2007) whereas a group of skilled sales people are contributing continuously in promoting busienss environment and consumption process. In Malaysia,many business industries are attracting university graduates students in a sales career in job for expanding their potential business growth. Thus, recruiting university graduate students for sales career has become a major concern for corporate business organizations in Malaysia. Many university students initially enter the workforce through the sales field. Spillan & Totten (2007) stated that continued interest in assessing students' perceptions of the sales field as a career path. This interest is driven by the motivational factor that university students make up a large and attractive pool of job candidates (Stevens & Macintosh, 2002). An uderstanding of the perceptions of student's interest in sales career is an important area of study. Spillan, Totten, & Ziemnowicz, (2007) stated that those who sell the goods and services are the life blood of a firm. According to Cron (1984), the study of the career stages of the industrial sales person, people in the exploration stage of their career which typically includes college students are most concerned with finding an appropriate match between their skill, aspirations and the job requirements. Many business students initially involve with workforce through the sales field and consequently they have been continued interest in sales job as a career path (Spillan et al., 2007). Students had strong positive attitudes towards sales job as a potential carrer profession (Paul & Worthing (1970). On of the findings that college students' interest in sales career was generally negative (Swenson, Swinyard, Langrehr, & Smith, 1993; Spillan et al., 2007).

The purpose of this paper is to explore factors that influence sales job as a career ambition of students. To develop these perceptions, our study first asks the respondents to present their demographic information. Respondents alos ask to answer some basic questions about the nature of sales job and its activities. The study is organized into six sections. First we review the literature on the topic and proposes a conceptual framework for the research. Second, we develop the research design and data collection methodology.

Third, we present the findings and the analysis of the results. Fourth, we set forth our conclusion. Fifth, we progress our conclusion and managerial implications. Finally, we outline our study's limitations and future study.

Literature Review

The literature review begins with the empirical concepts, theories and models related to students' interest in sales job as potential career.

Personal Development

Splaver (1977) said "personality" plays an important role in the choosing of the right career. A student's personality must be a self-motivated type, as to investigate career possibilities from early on in their lives, and not the procrastinating type that waits until they are compelled to decide. Students must take seriously the role grades play in limiting opportunities in the future. Splaver went on to say, "it is important for students to have a good understanding of themselves, their personality, if they are to make intelligent career plans" (Splaver, 1977). Sales career job for college students gives an opportunity to express creativity through developing new ideas for products, packaging, branding and advertising. College students progress in their sales career, they will gain more independence. Therefore, college students have huge opportunity to gain knowledge by choosing sales career. The study by Rahman, Mohamed & Khan (2014) indicated that the educational level of sales candidates is an important factor for companies selecting members of their global sales forces. Sales people work to set up attainable and realistic goals. If the task seems too large, too complicated or too overwhelming, the sales people will most likely feel disappointed. Most sales people are tired of repetitious tasks. By offering training sessions either internally or externally, leaders can stimulate and motivate their sales people. At the same time, the sales people become more curious and creative, learn new techniques and procedures, and improve on the old ones.Other than selling as choosing sales as career it will provide personal development and ability to voice their own opinions on the job more than the recruiters. Therefore we propose that:

H1: Personal development has significant impact on students' interest in sales job as a potential profession.

Income

Students' preference for sales career is influenced more by associated characteristics of the financial benefits and decision making power than by the functional aspect of the job (Swenson, 1993; Amin, 1995). College students may have dramatic effects for earning money on the success of sales recruitment programs (Dubinsky & O'Conner, 1983; Dubinsky & Alan, 1980). The better performing sales person always thinks to earn extra income from their sales career program. Besides, most of the students want to provide his or her family members with financial help, for this reason they usually have a dream to earn more money from their sales job performance. Selling is a gainful profession. In sales, there is no ceiling on your income. If you are properly trained, skilled, and selling the right product in the right market, there is no limit in the amount of money you can make (Amin, 1995; Tracy, 2004). A career in sales job offer good income opportunities, pension scheme and high monetary reward. Sales job applicants also emphasize job location, compensation and encouragement for graduate study (Castleberry 1990). Accordingly, we propose that:

H2: Income has significant relationship with students' interest in sales job as a potential profession.

Communication Skills

An effective communication skill is considered one of the important factor for success in every profession that people are holding. A person who comunicates effectively there is less change that he/she will face misunderstading, friction among people and to make less mistake. An organisation whose employee communicate effectively it will experince less misunderstading among the employee and more successful they will be. In addition, a good communication skill of empolyee not only improve the efficiency of organisation but also it helps to make a better career in head. Besides, communication skills help to get good job and promotion with a better amount of salary. This is because, in the modern office today involves collaboration between coworkers and team members rather then solitary and repetitive task. Therefore communication skills are significant in this contempory working enviroment. Hence, Weilbaker and Merritt (1992) argue that college students possesclear communication skills, ethics and moral values as an sales employment. They further emphasis that colllege studuents create moral relation with the customer.

In addition to that Amin et al. (1995) argue that college students who are involved with the sales career they have achived outstanding sales communication skill and better sales strategy. Acording to Barat & Spillan (2009), recruiting future sales professionals from the existing pool of college graduates is vital to the continued success and sustainability of business entities. They also said that students communication skill increase the company reputation. Base on this we have proposed the following hypothesis:

H3: Communication skills has significant impact on student's interest in sales career.

Extra Benefit

There is some extra benefits in sales career that salesperson want to get offer for modern work environment, progressive sales and marketing techniques, flexible working hours and a generous compensation or benefits package. A substantial fringe benefit package may cover personal protection for salesperson in sales job career (Castleberry, 1990; Bristow, 2011). In sales career, students can get insurance facilities, travel opportunities, medical opportunities and sales job profession makes students to be self-dependent. The ten most common replies obtained were travel, money, personality, sales fast talker, commission, appearance, products, high-pressure, and aggressive (Sadiq, 2004; Rahman et al., 2014). According to Moncrief (1986), sales job involves travelling out of town and potentially spending the night out of town. In terms of age, older students were much more concerned with fringe benefits than their younger counterparts (Castleberry, 1990). Despite the persistent negative attitude towards the sales job, compensation of salespersons has improved substantially in the form of health benefits, vacation, and flexible work hour (Spillan, 2007). The study by Rahman, Mohamed and Khan (2014) found that extra benefit has significant relationship with students' motivation towards sales job as a potential profession. Based on these related empirical findings, we offer the following hypothesis:

H4: Extra benefit has significant impact on students' interest in sales job as a potential profession.

Grounded on extant literature review, the conceptual model (Fig. 1) is developed collecting data through survey questionnaires covering the most important motivational factors for university students' interest in sales career.

Fig. 1: Conceptualmodel
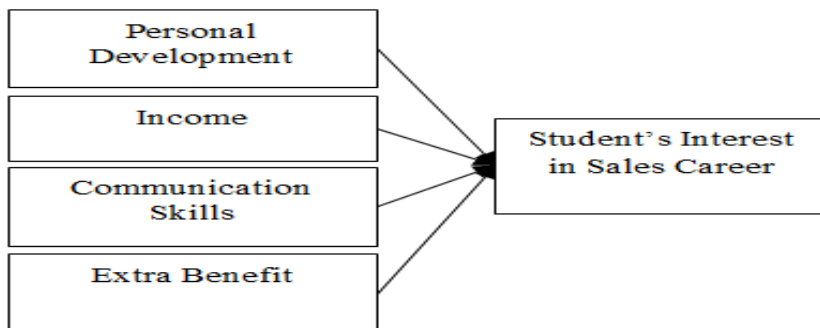
Methodology

The research method is based on the summary of the systematic investigation, procedure, sample selection and analysis which are used in the research (Martin & Guerin, 2006). Quantitative research approach is determined by the purpose of this research study. It expresses the positivist paradigm which is related to the objective facts (Firestone, 1987).

Research Design

To conduct this study, a self-administered questionnaire developed distributing among 460 students in selecting Multimedia University, University of Malaya and International Islamic University Malaysia through convenient sampling method. The questionnaires set on five-point likert scale range from 1 to 5 (i.e. 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree). The students were from different areas of business courses (Marketing, Economics, Finance, Management and also other departments) of three universities. The data collection was performedbetween September 2013 to December 2013.

Sampling

In this survey, we found some questions that were not completed answer by the respondents. However, after completing data screening process 280 valid questionnaires were selected for data analysis, whereas response rate was 60.8% that considered a good in view of time constraints, cost and geographical distance.

Research Instruments and Measures

Using structural equation modeling technique, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used for data analysis. In this research, CFA addressed for measuring 18 indicators from dependent and independent variables. Table 1 and Table 2 illustrates 18 indicators of student's interest towards sales job as a potentioal profession. Generally, factor analysis is used to present analytical process of transferring data into linear combinations of variables (Rahman & Jalil, 2014) as a result; this study conducted factor analysis measuring motivational factors that have impact on the university students' interest in sales career. In addition, CFA addressed a larger number of populations into a considerably smaller number of factors with a minimum loss of information (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 1: Instruments for measuring perceived behavior

Construct	Description
Income	A career in sales would offer me good income opportunities.
	Sales career can provide me good pension scheme.
	High monetary reward.
	For me, sales career would be rewarding.
Communication Skills	Good communication skill compulsory to be a good sales person.
	Sales career job give me skill tobetter communicate with others.
	Good communication skill compulsory to be a good Sales person.
Personal Development	I can utilize my knowledge in sales career.
	Understanding of business is easy in sales career.
	Sales career build up my leadership skill.
	Sales career enhance me managerial skill.
Extra Benefit	In sales career, I will get insurance facility.
	Sales career give me more travel opportunity.
	Getting medical benefit is more possible in sales career.
	Make me self-dependent.

Table 2: Instruments for measuring behavioral intention

Construct	Description
Interest in Sales Career	Provide high self-esteem within community.
	Sales career is the long term professional goals.
	Sales career job is helpful to create networking with friends.

Research Findings and Discussions

Demografic Information

A total of 280 respondents in which male respondents (57.4%) were greater than female (42.6%). In terms of marital status, 62% was single and 38% was married. The overall 60.4% respondents were age between 20 to 30 years old which followed by 34.6% was 31-40 years old, 2% was below 20 years old and 3% was above 40 years old. In terms of ethnic background, 48.8% respondents were Malay which folowed by Chinese (19.5%), Indian (16.7%) and others (15%). By looking at the academic majoring, the highest percentage (67%) was business courses and the lowest (33%) was general business. A total of 70% respondents states that their father's occupation is in professional/managerial field while majority of the respondent's mother occupation is a housewife and rest 30% was others occupation. In favor of the experience in sales, the majority (60.8%) of the respondents said that they have an experience in sales and rest of 39.2% was not experience in sales carrer.

Reliability and Validity Analysis

The findings showed that the Alpha value for all constructs is 0.905. Reliability is the extent to which a scale produces consistent result if repeated measurement is made on the characteristic (Sekaran, 1999). The reliability of the measurement scale is tested by cronbach's alpha which varies from 0.804 to 0.938 (Table 2) that indicates higher reliability factor and meet the internal reliability.Cronbach's alpha is commonly used to test the reliability of items under a set of two or more variables (Rahman et al., 2010). Cronbach's alpha should be equal to or greater than 0.70 if it is to be valid (Hair et. al., 1992; Rahman & Jalil, 2014). According to Hair et al. (1992) stated that Cronbach's alpha was a commonly used method where the alpha coefficient values range between 0 and 1 with higher values indicating higher reliability of variables and the relevant items under them (Sekaran, 2010).

Table 2: Reliability Analysis

Items	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of items
Income	0.938	4
Comminication Skill	0.879	3
Personal Development	0.804	4
Extrabenefit	0.877	4
Interest is Sales Career	0.892	3
All variables	0.905	18

Table 3 shows the constracts validity that examined applying Bartlet's test of Sphericity and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of of sampling adequacy. KMO value 0.879 indicates well to perform factor analysis. KMO computes to find out the suitability of using factor analysis. It is used to asses factors to drop from the structural model due to multicollinearity problem. The lower anti image value is necessary to drop until KMO achieved factor loading 0.60 (Hair et al., 1992).

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.879
Barlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi Square	1321.078
	df	153
	sig.	0.000

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

In this study, CFA was conducted for each of the five constructs to identify whether the 18 items measured the variables and whether they were adequately assigned. However, deciding upon a number of factors, a minimum factor loading weight was necessary to include an item in its respective variables. Factor loadings greater than 0.50 or higher were very significant (Hair et al., 1992; Rahman et al., 2010). In this study, the factor loadings are greater than 0.65 for each item of the constructs (Fig. 3), which performe an ultimate success. Factor loadinga are the natural affinity of an item for a variable. A higher factor weight indicated a stronger affiliation of an item to a specific factor. In this study, each of the four constructs (income, communication skill, personal development and extra benefit) is homogeneously loaded into different factors. To conduct the CFA that generally assess several criteria such as chi-square, p-value, root mean square error approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), goodness of fit index (GFI) and normed fit index (NFI).
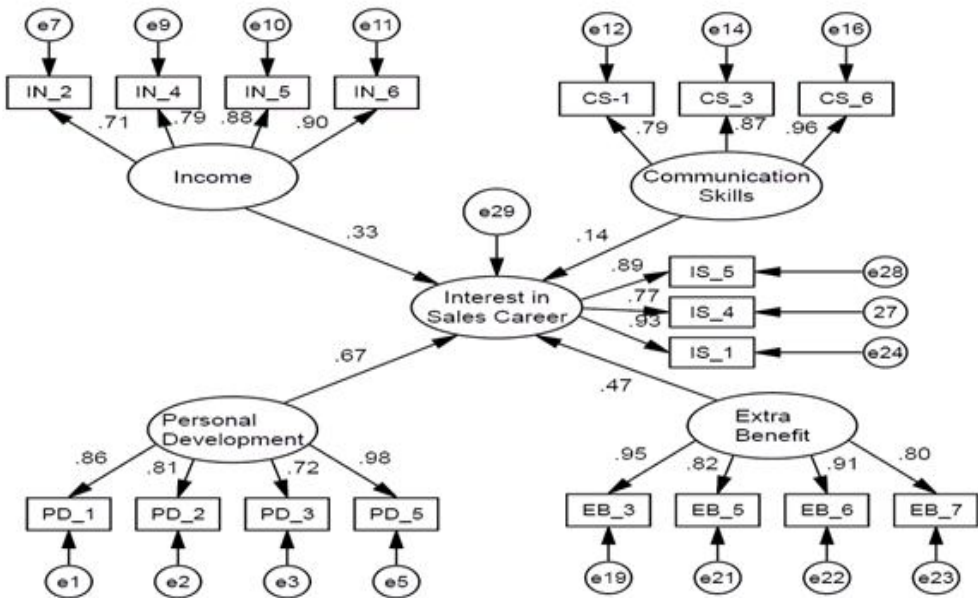
Fig. 3: Structural model

Table 4 shows the summarized result of the fit index of the structural model. The default model is assumed to be correct as chi-square/df is 2.768. Chi-square/df less than 5 indicates a good fit (Hair et al., 2010). For RMSEA, a value of 0.065 indicates a close fit. For instance, RMSEA value less than 0.80 deternines a very close fit for the model (Hair et al., 2010). The respective value for the CFI, GFI and AGFI are 0.959, 0.981 and 0.929 respectively wchis collectively indicated a very good fit for the model. A good CFI value should be 0.90 (Bentler, 1990; Kline, 2005), and 0.95 is a very good fit (Awang, 2012). GFI value should be greater than 0.90 (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1984). AGFI value greater than 0.90 is considered a good fit (Bollen, 1989). In this stduy all fitness indxes are achived the recommended level.

Table 4:Fit Index of the structural model

Name of Index	Fitness Indexes	Level of acceptance
Chi-Sq/df	2.768	Chi-Sq/df < 5 (Awang, 2012)
RMSEA	0.065	RMSEA < 0.08 (Hair et al., 2010)
CFI	0.959	CFI > 0.90 (Kline, 2005)
GFI	0.981	GFI >0.90 (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1984)
AGFI	0.929	AGFI >0.90 (Awang, 2012)

Hypothesis Testing

The structural model that is used to test the hypothesized relationship among the variables. Table 5 shows the summarized results of hypothesis testing. Income (beta=0.331) and communication skill (beta=0.141) has significant impact on student's interest in sales career. Therefore, H1 and H2 is accepted at p-value <0.05. Rahman, Mohamad & Khan (2014) found that income had significant relationship with interest in sales career at p-value 0.052, and communication skill has significant relationship with student's interest in sales career at p-value 0.00 level.Personal development (beta=0.673) and extra benefit (beta=0.473) has a significant relationship with student's interest in sales career whereas H3 and H4 is accepted at p-value 0.00 level. Rahman et al. (2014) tested that personal development had significant relationship with student's interest in sales career at p-value 0.00 level but extra benefit had not significant impact with student's interest in sales career. However, we found that extra benefit has significant impact on interest in sales career as majority of respondents want to get insurence facilities, medical benefit and travel opportunity.

Table 5: Hypothesis Test

Standardized path relationship				Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
H1	ISC	<---	PD	0.673	0.194	3.469	0.000	Significant
H2	ISC	<---	IN	0.331	0.121	2.735	0.015	Significant
H3	ISC	<---	CS	0.141	0.083	1.698	0.047	Significant
H4	ISC	<---	EB	0.473	0.131	3.610	0.000	Significant

Footnote: ISC= Interest in Sales Career, PD= Personal development, IN= Income, CS= Communication skills, EB= Extra benefit

Table 6: AVE and CR result for Income

Items	Std. loading	Std. loading squ.	Err.variance = 1- loading squ.
IN_2	0.71	0.5041	0.4959
IN_4	0.79	0.6241	0.3759
IN_5	0.88	0.7744	0.2256
IN_6	0.9	0.81	0.19
Total Loadings	3.28	2.7126	1.2874
Total load. Squ.	10.7584		
AVE=0.678	**CR=0.893**		12.0458

Table 6 computes the average variance extracted (AVE) 0.678 and composite reliability (CR) 0.893 whereas convergent validity and construct reliability meet successfully as stated by Wheaton et al. (1977) and Awang (2012) illustrated that AVE should be greater than or equal to 0.50 and CR must be greater than or equal to 0.60. In addition, the construct validity is achieve once all fitness indexes of the model meet the required level. In this study all fitness indxes are achieved the recommended level.

Table 7 illustrated the AVE and CR result of personal development of student's interest in sales career. Here we found AVE=0.718 and CR= 0.909.

Table 7: AVE and CR result for personal development

Items	Std. loading	Std. loading squ.	Error var. = 1- loading squ.
PD_1	0.86	0.7396	0.2604
PD_2	0.81	0.6561	0.3439
PD_3	0.72	0.5184	0.4816
PD_6	0.98	0.9604	0.0396
Total loadings	3.37	2.8745	1.1255
Total load squ.	11.3569		
AVE-0.718	**CR=0.909**		12.4824

Table 8 presents the AVE and CR calculation result for communication skills of student's interest in sales career whereas we found AVE=0.767 and CR= 0.907.

Table 8: AVE and CR result for communication skills

Items	Std. loading	Std. loading sq.	Error var. = 1- loading sq.
CS_1	0.79	0.6241	0.3759
CS_3	0.87	0.7569	0.2431
CS_6	0.96	0.9216	0.0784
Total loadings	2.62	2.3026	0.6974
Total load sq.	6.8644		
AVE=0.767	**CR=0.907**		7.5618

Table 9: AVE and CR result for Extra benefit

Items	Std. loading	Std. loading sq.	Error variance= 1- loading sq.
EB_3	0.95	0.9025	0.0975
EB_5	0.82	0.6724	0.3276
EB_6	0.91	0.8281	0.1719
EB_7	0.8	0.64	0.36
Total loadings	3.48	3.043	0.957
Total load sq.	12.1104		
AVE=0.760	**CR=0.926**		13.0674

Table9 computes the result of extra benefit of student's interest in sales career. In this study, we found that AVE=0.760 and CR=926.Table 10 shows the AVE andCR result for student's interest in sales career whereas we found found AVE=0.749 and CR= 0.899.

Table 10: AVE and CR result for Interest in sales career

Items	Std. loadings	Std. loading sq.	Error variance=1-loading sq.
IS_1	0.93	0.8649	0.1351
IS_4	0.77	0.5929	0.4071
IS_5	0.89	0.7921	0.2079
Total loading	2.59	2.2499	0.7501
Total load sq.	6.7081		
AVE=0.749	**CR=0.899**		7.4582

Table 12 illustrates the discriminant validity of constructs. The diagonal values in bold are the square root of AVE while other values are the correlation between the respective constructs. In this study the discriminant validity is achieved as a diagonal value in bold is higher than the values in its row and column.

Table 12: Discriminant Validity (Squared correlations between constructs)

Constructs	IN	CS	PD	EB	ISC
Income (IN)	**0.8234**				
Communication Skills (CS)	0.581	**0.8473**			
Personal Development (PD)	0.395	0.493	**0.875**		
Extra Benefit (EB)	0.455	0.284	0.465	**0.871**	
Interest in Sales Career (ISC)	0.109	0.347	0.221	0.377	**0.865**

Conclusion and Managerial Implications

The findings of this paper suggest that personal development, extra benefit, inocme and communication skills are very important element in determining the success of sales job as a potential profession. Actually, different students have different interest on sales job as a potential carrer. Specifically we have found in this paper that most of the motivational factors that drives student to choose sales job as a potential profession after graduation. Among the four motivational factors, personal development, extra benefit and income are the the major factor that influence student interest in pursuing sales career.In favor of personal development elements, students seeks to choose sales as career as they believe they will be given a chance to enhance their career development.

Recruiters would be well advised to target these segments of the student population when recruiting for sales job as a potential profession. Communication technology has made the virtual office a reality and many business-to-business sales representatives actually work at home. From the career fair, student is being exposed what are the benefits if they joint sales career after graduating.In addition, if the sales people can communicate well their prospect customer it will be easier for them to close the sales. Our point of veiw, communication skills should be added as an core subject at university level whereas all student are compulsory to take this subject. Before beginning a sales presentation, the sales representatives would have a sense of the audiences perception about them in their role as sales representative.

Limitations and Future Study

The primary data of this study collected from three universities in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia due to time constraints. Due to this small sample size and the convenient sample of data collection, there is a probability of biasness in the outcome of the study. Therefore, further study is necessary to be conducted with a large sample size to obtain excellent result. However, this paper offers support for the proposed conceptual model and exploratory investigation for comparison in future research. In addition, increasing our understanding of student perceptions of sales careers through future research helps us as organization to better prepare them for possible careers in sales. In turn, by helping students to have more realistic expectations of what a sales career entails, college recruiters can more accurately provide a good student-job fit, ultimately resulting in decreased job turnover costs for the company.

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