

## What motivational factors influence Students' Interest in Sales Career? An Empirical Investigation in Malaysia

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to explore various motivational factors to college students' interest in sales career. After assessing those factors we were able to determine the best predictor of motivational factors to college students' interest in sales career. A total of 130 respondents were obtained from students in International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and Multimedia University (MMU) in Malaysia. The data was examined by using demographic information, reliability analysis, independent paired t-test, Pearson correlation, paired samples correlations and hypothesis testing. The findings of the study revealed that personal development, communication skills and inner circle influence have most significant relationship with students' interest in sales career at  $p=0.00$  (2-tailed) level. The result also revealed that paired samples correlation of all constructs was significant at  $p<0.01$  level. The main contribution of the study is that, the results of this study would assist the business firm in Malaysia in their business plan. The findings of this research may also contribute to the improvement of business organizations for recruiting employees, managerial strategy and prudent marketing plan.

**Keywords:** Factors, College student, Students' interest, Sales career, Malaysia

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### I. Introduction

Professional selling is an integral part of the business world and represents a variety of exciting and challenging career opportunities for students (Bristow, Gulati and Amyx, 2006). Market economic worldwide are driven by the consumption of goods and services (Spillan and Totten, 2007). To continue the consumption process, we need sales people who are well trained with the skills to adapt to a continuous changing business environment. In such way, recruiting college graduates for sales jobs has become a major concern for corporate American in recent years (Amin et. al, 1995). Many business students initially enter the workforce through the sales field, and, consequently, there has been a continued interest in assessing said students' perceptions of the sales field as a career path (Spillan and Totten, 2007). As noted by Stevens and Macintosh (2002, 2003), this "interest is fueled by the fact that college students make up a large and attractive pool of job candidates," recruiting companies "would like to know the reasons why students are or are not attracted to sales" and professors want to "know what role education plays in students' attitudes and perceptions of sales as a career." However, some studies like Dubinsky 1981; Honeycutt *et al* 1999 conclude that, students possess a generally negative opinion of sales careers. The reason for this negative sentiment may be embedded in the widely held perception that selling involves manipulating others and is not considered a reputable activity (Spillan and Totten, 2007). However some studies have concluded that the perception appears to be changing and improving (Swenson *et al*, 1993). Many of the previous studies were attempt to measure on the student preferences, perception and attitudes, focusing on gender base studies and race comparative studies (Sadiq, 2004). Due to that factor the purpose of this paper is to explore various motivational factors to college students' interest in sales career. To identify entire factor, we based our research base on the previous research result conducted by the previous researcher, whether or not any significant difference from the previous generated result. In the process of investigating the motivational factors to the students, students were asked about their opinion about knowledge about selling environment.

### II. Literature Review

The important part of this project is to explore various motivational factors to college student's interest in sales career. General point of view, motivation is the key of success of sales people to success in sales career. There are various motivational factors which can lead college student to pursue their career in sales. Our research is based on the previous study conducted by; Castleberry (1990), Amin (1995), Charles (2002), Sohail (2004), Spillan (2007) and Bristow, Douglas and et. al (2011).

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## **2.1 Job Itself**

Today's sales job is more prestigious, responsible and rewarding than what it was in the past. In terms of job security students believe that today's salespeople is motivated more by the desire to succeed and excel in his/her profession than by the threat of being fired due to non-performance (Castleberry; 1990; Spillan, 2007). Weibaker et al. (1992) found that job satisfaction, job alignment with student's goals, recruiter morale at the time of interview, the company's financial health and reputation were some of the most important attributes of a sales job. Other characteristics identified in the literature include the job's reputation, growth prospects, and financial stability (Bergman et al., 1984; Wortruba et al., 1989) and the work environment of the company, compensation, job security and scope of advancement leading to job satisfaction location, responsibilities, and employee morale (Castleberry; 1990; Harris et al., 1987). Other than selling as choosing sales as career it will provide job independence and ability to voice their own opinions on the job (Lacy et al., 1983; Powel, 1984) more than the recruiters. Therefore we propose that:

H1: Job itself is the motivational factors for college student's interest in sales career.

People always relates career in sales provide high job security. Job security here refers to feeling good about your security within the company (Bristow et al., 2011). Job security normally valued highly by salespeople nearing retirement age (Ingram et al., 2008). In such way students also take job security as an important value for them if they want to choose sales as their career. The salesperson ability to sell can give salesperson high income and a lifelong job security (Brian Tracy, 2004). No matter how many changes take place in the economy, there is always a need for top sales people. On top of that, career in sales also provide high status. Status here means being accorded various position-based aspects such as one's own secretary, nicely appointed office, selected parking place, or other prestige elements (Bristow et al., 2011). Castleberry's study revealed that as student participants looked to the future, job security and status became increasingly.

## **2.2 Personal Development**

Personal development associated with the opportunity to develop and refine new skills and abilities (Castleberry, 1990; Bristow, 2011). Sales career job for college students gives an opportunity to express creativity through developing new ideas for products, packaging branding and advertising. There is a constant cycle of regular product improvements and updates as brands compete head to head on the shelf. There are also the new products that come out of nowhere to define a market. Sales people typically are not time clock puncher or clock watchers. They see time as an ingredient of opportunity. The exception may be retail sales where many salespeople begin and collect needed skill. Even so, retail sales give college students who are involved in sales career, hope for a better job that many other jobs in retailing do not have. As college students progress in their sales career, they will gain more independence. So therefore, personally college students have huge opportunity to gain knowledge by choosing sales career. Honeycutt and Ford (1995) indicated that the educational level of sales candidates is an important factor for companies selecting members of their global sales forces. Over the years many students have entered the work force through the sales field. Many of them have become sales managers and have moved into various levels of importance in many wealthy companies (Spillan, 2007). Based on this rationale, we hypothesize that:

H2: Personal development is the motivational factors for college student's interest in sales career.

Every sales person has ultimate achievement in their job career program. College students have also chance to achieve sales target. According to Castleberry (1990), and Bristow et al. (2011) has explained that "The feelings associated with successful competition of a job, finding solutions to different problems or seeing the results of one's work". Most management consultants would agree that feeling a sense of achievement is a very powerful motivator. Leaders can help motivate their employees, improve employee satisfaction and increase productivity by setting up programs that will allow happening. 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. Advancement is related to the opportunity for promotion based on one's ability. According to Wortruba and Simpson (1988), Castleberry (1990) "reported on a study 209 marketing seniors which asked them what hiring factors influenced their decision to accept or reject a job offer. The result indicated the highest ranking went to good opportunities for advancement". Salespeople are looking to advance or develop their careers; there is more than just a silver lining in all of this. There is a lining made of gold. As the confidence and wallets of the top salespeople in every company are shaken, the sales professional looking to make a move has the pole position.

To take advantage of such a great starting point, the sales professional of college students have to step up activity levels. Activity is never a substitute for productivity; but activity drives productivity (Walker, 1977).

### **2.3 Income**

The most of the important motivational factor is the income. This is because; 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). 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, are skilled, and are selling the right product in the right market, there is no limit in the amount of money you can make (Tracy, 2004). Sales job applicants also emphasize job location, compensation and encouragement for graduate study (Castleberry 1990; Posner 1981). Accordingly, we propose that:

H3: Income is the motivational factors for college student's interest in sales career.

### **2.4 Communication skills**

Oral communication is so critical to the business field and to the sales field especially. Those who can communicate well have the ability to excel in a sales position (Spillan and Totten, 2007). Generally, college students are very expert in communications through the product sales and services. This is because, sales person easily communicate to the customers for selling their goods and services. According to Weilbaker and Merritt (1992), have been examined that "Sales employment of college students have alternative clear communication skills, ethics and moral values. They make relation with their consumers by moral activities". Female's job experience in sales career is more important to company reputation. Women have clear comprehensive communication skills more than males (Castleberry, 1990; Wortruba et al., 1989). Students' perceptual communication skills increase the company's image and reputation (Barat, and Spillan, 2009). The average number of college students who are involved in sales career, has been achieved their target and goals for their excellent communication skills and sales force strategy (Amin, 1995; Lenartowicz, 2002). Hence, we propose that:

H4: A Communication skill is the motivational factors for college student's interest in sales career.

### **2.5 Extra Benefit**

Beside the fixed salary there is some fringe or extra benefits in sales career. A substantial fringe benefit package covering such aspects like personal protection (Castleberry, 1990; Bristow, 2011). The Ten most common replies obtained were travel, money, personality, sales fast talker, commission, appearance, products, high-pressure, and aggressive (Sadiq, 2004). 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 ( Lill et al., 2007 and Spillan, 2007). Based on these related empirical findings, we offer the following hypothesis:

H5: Extra benefit is the motivational factors for college student's interest in sales career.

### **2.6 Inner Circle Influence**

Inner circle is a person or a group of people who inspire, motivate, coach and encourage others. Inner circle is associated with family and friends. Every successful person has their own private inner circle. As, an inner circle in sales force career creates a social network friends to expand the business channels (Crant, 2000). The sales career tradition is strong in many families. Many children's careers follow in the footsteps of their parents or relatives. Numerous examples can be presented where sons and daughters have pursued the same professional sales careers as their mother, father, uncles, or other relatives. Selling is a preemptive career which has many dimensions. Gender, class standing, and family relationships are an important factor that affects the decisions to enter the profession of personal selling (Spillan, 2007). Gender, class standing, and family sales profession history affect the cognitive lens through which students, business, and non-business, perceive the sales profession as a career path. The students with some family members involved in the sales field tended to disagree that selling is a "dead-end job" while students who had a family member working in sales profession

had more positive opinions in general in selling as a career. Family member's involvement in sales field was shown to bear an influence on perceptions (Spillan, 2007). Consequently, we hypothesized that:

H6: Inner circle influence is the motivational factors for college student's interest in sales career.

### III. Methodology

Data for this research was collected from student through a self-administered survey. The sampling frame consisted of business students who were in their undergraduate degree program at International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and Multimedia University (MMU). The students were from different areas of business courses (Economics, Finance, Marketing, management and also other departments) of two university between 18 March to 22, 2011. The institution in the sampling frame enrolled students for both gender (male and gender) without any form of discrimination. The surveys were divided into two different sections. Section A consist of variable which to access student interest in pursuing sales after graduations and various motivational factor which leads student to choose sales as a career. Under Section A, respondent were asked to give their agreement to the related variable based on 6-point Likert scale. The possible answers for this question ranged from strongly disagree to disagree, somewhat disagree to somewhat agree, and agree to strongly agree as the intermediate answer possibilities. The second part of the questionnaire (Section B), consist of question related to socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. This includes; gender, marital status, age, academic majoring, years of study, father's and mother's occupation and whether or not the respondent have an experience in sales. A total of 130 respondents completed the survey.

#### 3.1 Sample

A total of 130 useable respondents were obtained from students in International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and Multimedia University (MMU). The sample had a majority of male respondents, 97 respondents compared to 33 female respondents. A total of 117 respondents which accounted for 90% of the respondent are single and 13 respondents are married. In favor of age, the highest percentage falls to below than 21 years old and 25 years old student which accounted for 37% from total respondents. Second is age of 21 years old which accounted for 17.7%, followed by 23 years old with 15.4%, 26 years old with 13.8%, 22 years old with 8.5% and lastly 24 years old with a percentage of 7.7%. By looking at the academic majoring, the highest percentage goes to others (other than business courses) which accounted for 52.3% and the lowest is general business which is 3.1%. Majority of the students are in their first year of study. This relates to the highest percentage of age rage where the highest is the below than 21 years old respondents. A total of 50 respondents states that their father's occupation is in Professional/Managerial field while majority of the respondent's mother occupation is a housewife. In favor of the experience in sales, the weighted is almost equal where 50.8% of the respondents said that they have an experience in sales. A profile of the respondents is provided by Table 1.

**Table 1: Respondent Demographic Profile**

Demographic Factors	Frequency	Percentage	Factors	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender:</b>			<b>Marital Status:</b>		
Male	97	74.6	Single	117	90
Female	33	25.4	Married	13	10
<b>Age:</b>			<b>Academic Majoring:</b>		
Below 21 years old	24	18.5	Marketing	6	4.6
21 years old	23	17.7	Finance	19	14.6
22 years old	11	8.5	Management	13	10.0
23 years old	20	15.4	Economic	19	14.6
24 years old	10	7.7	General Business	4	3.1
25 years old	24	18.5	Others	68	52.3
26 years old	18	13.8			
<b>Years of Study:</b>			<b>Mother's Occupation:</b>		
First Year	64	49.2	Professional/Managerial	27	20.8
Second Year	18	13.8	Sales Admin	6	4.6
Third Year	17	13.1	Farming	1	0.8
Fourth Year	30	23.1	Precision Production/Repair	1	0.8
<b>Have Selling Experience:</b>			Operator/Laborer	6	4.6
Yes			Currently Not Working/	4	3.1
No	66	50.8	Housewife	83	63.8
	64	49.2			

#### IV. Research Findings And Discussion

##### 4.1 Reliability Analysis

Reliability is the extent to which a scale produces consistent result if repeated measurement is made on the characteristic (Sekaran, 2010). The coefficient is used to access reliability. In this study, reliability is tested by the Cronbach's alpha where the total scale of reliability varies from 0.765 to 0.955 (Table 2) which indicates a higher reliability of items in the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha should be equal to or greater than 0.70 if it is to be valid (Hair et. al., 1992; Hair et al., 1995; Rahman et. al., 2010). According to Hair et. al. (1992); Rahman et. al. (2010); Haque et. al. (2012); Jalil et. al. (2013) 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. Hair et al. (2010) illustrated that the strength of alpha coefficient range less than 0.6 indicates poor, 0.6 to 0.7 is moderate, 0.7 to 0.8 indicates good, 0.8 to 0.9 defines very good and greater than 0.9 indicates excellent.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis

Variable	Cronbach Alpha
All variable	0.955
Interest in Sales Career	0.883
Job Itself	0.826
Personal Development	0.837
Income	0.773
Communication Skills	0.792
Extra Benefit	0.765
Inner Circle Influence	0.802

The findings showed that the Alpha value is 0.845. The result portray the strength of association is excellent. The reliability analysis tested the variables in the questionnaire given to the respondents. The test was carried out only for the ordinal data that is the based on likert scale which is range from 1 for strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 for somewhat disagree, 4 for somewhat agree, 5 for agree and 6 for strongly agree. The number of item tested is 45 variables.

##### 4.2 Independent Paired t-Test

In conducting the research, researcher had come up with one general objective. This gives major concern to explore various motivational factors to college student's interest in sales career. Due to the fact, researcher had used Independent Paired t-test to measure which motivational factor that attracts student's interest in pursuing sales as a career after graduating from their undergraduate studies.

Table 3: Significant Independent Paired t-Test

Relationship	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	t-value	Sig.(2-tailed)
Interest in Sales Career <--- Job Itself	-0.09442	0.81167595	0.07118869	-1.3263	0.187085176
Interest in Sales Career<---Personal Development	-0.28729	0.724897578	0.063577723	-4.51875	0.000000000
Interest in Sales Career <---Income	-0.12212	0.710744264	0.062336396	-1.95907	0.052261848
Interest in Sales Career <---Communication Skill	-0.93943	1.409468093	0.123618529	-7.59942	0.000000000
Interest in Sales Career <---Extra Benefit	-0.01763	0.765463285	0.067135571	-0.26266	0.793229334
Interest in Sales Career<---Inner Circle Influence	0.606725	0.909707762	0.079786649	7.604342	0.000000000

Referring to Table 3 above, there are three independent variables that indicate most significant values with the mean  $\pm$  S.E.M.  $P < 0.05$  which are Personal Development, Communication Skill, and Inner Circle Influence. Besides that, there are another three variables that signified less significant values which are Job (P=0.1871), Income (P=0.0523) and Extra Benefit (P=0.7932). Hence, in order to answer the research objectives; Personal Development, Communication Skill and Inner Circle Influence was the major factor that influence student interest in pursuing sales career.

##### 4.3 Pearson Correlation

Using an interval measurement of scale, (Sekaran, 2003) suggested that it would be appropriate to use Pearson Correlation. One of the first issues is to determine whether the correlation coefficient is statistically significant. The rules of thumb have been proposed to characterize the strength of the association between variables, based on their absolute size of the correlation coefficient.

In order to test the derived hypothesis, researcher had used Pearson Correlation to measure whether or not each of the variables had a significant relationship with the dependent variable. In the literature review part, researcher had drawn six hypotheses according to the independent variables. The Pearson Correlation was test by using 2-tailed test with a significant level at 0.01.

**Table 4: Paired Samples Correlation**

	Interest in Sales Career	Job Itself	Personal development	Income	Communication skill	Extra benefit	Inner circle influence
Pearson Correlation	1	0.6007**	0.6661**	0.6482**	0.2880**	0.6111**	0.5682**
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0009	0.0000	0.0000

\*\* Correlation is significant at the level 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to Table 4, the data showed that the correlation of all the variables was significant at  $p < 0.01$ . This showed that all the variable have significant relationship to the dependant variable. Therefore, the entire hypothesis accepted (Table 6).

**Table 5: Correlation Strength of Association**

Variable	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	Strength of Association
Job Itself	0.6007	Substantial to Very Strong
Personal Development	0.6661	Substantial to Very Strong
Income	0.6482	Substantial to Very Strong
Communication Skill	0.2880	Low to Moderate
Extra Benefit	0.6111	Substantial to Very Strong
Inner Circle Influence	0.5682	Substantial to Very Strong

According to Table 5 above, all the independent variable shows a substantial to very strong correlation with the dependant variables which are significant at 2-tailed except for Communication skill (0.2880) which is low to moderate strength of association.

**Table 6: Summaries of Hypothesis**

Characteristics	Result
H1: Job itself is the motivational factors for college students interest in sales career	Accepted
H2: Personal development is the motivational factors for college students interest in sales career	Accepted
H3: Income is the motivational factors for college student's interest in sales career.	Accepted
H4: A communication skill is the motivational factors for college student's interest in sales career.	Accepted
H5: Extra benefit is the motivational factors for college student's interest in sales career.	Accepted
H6: Inner circle influence is the motivational factors for college student's interest in sales career.	Accepted

## V. Conclusion And Implication

Findings from this study suggest that, there are various motivational factors to college student's interest in sales career. We know that different people have different motivational factors that drive their interest of taking sales as their professional career. We have demonstrated in this study that there are different interest among students, the potential sales people of the future, and who they are as individuals. Specifically we have found that, what are best motivational predictors or factor that drives student to choose sales after graduation. Among the entire six motivational factors, three of them which are; Personal Development, Communication Skill and Inner Circle Influence was the major factor that influence student interest in pursuing sales career.

As for the implication of the research, there are major implications for the educator and sales professional recruiter. From the training point of view, it is necessary for educators and trainers to set specific goals regarding an area of sales. 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. In such way, in favor of the educator, they must expose the student with what kind of benefit or area of personal development that student can achieve as they choose sales as a career. For example, they can expose the student by conducting a seminar where they can invite their previous student who had excelled in sales field. By doing this, the student will be more inspired to pursue in sales.

Second is in terms of communication skills. Communication skills are a very important element in determining the success and failure of sales people. If the sales people can communicate well their prospect customer it will be easier for them to close the sales. In such way, what educator and professional recruiter can do is they can provide communication skills class. Specifically, at the university level, communication skills should be added as an core subject where all student is compulsory to take the subject. Last but not least is in

terms of inner circle influence. Inner circle influence deals with the people around the students such as the family and friends. These are the people who can influence the students to come up with the decision to choose sales as a career. The educator and professional recruiter can make a joint venture to conduct a career fair to induce student's interest in sales. From the career fair, student is being exposed what are the benefits if they joint sales field after graduating.

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