

ENHANCING THE PLACEMENT VALUE OF PROFESSIONALLY QUALIFIED STUDENTS IN MARKETING: AN APPLICATION OF THE ANALYTIC HIERARCHY PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

A large number of institutions are imparting professional education to the students, but the problem is that the majority of students do not get absorbed in the corporate world. Here, a question arises, that on whose part the problem lies? Is it on the part of the students or on the part of those institutions which are imparting professional education? There may be any problem on the both sides; on one side, the student may not be receptive or on the other side, the education which is being imparted by the institutions may not be industry oriented. However, the probability of placement of students can be enhanced by developing the competencies in the students which are required by the business organisations. This study is focused upon the qualities which should be inculcated amongst the students particularly of marketing area which will further enhance the value of the students in order to get them placed in the industry. In this study, a set of 10 qualities had been identified on the basis of available literature and discussions held with the HR managers and marketing personnel from different business houses. An AHP (Analytical Hierarchical Process) questionnaire was developed as an investigation tool to be used with 22 marketing and HR managers from different business organisations situated in different areas of Punjab (India). Then, the AHP analysis was applied and the relative importance of every hierarchical item (competence) was obtained. The findings presented in this paper could be utilised as a self-evaluation tool by the aspirants seeking jobs in marketing area, as well as the basis for training in professional institutions providing education particularly to marketing students.

Keywords: Marketing Skills, AHP Analysis.

INTRODUCTION

In times of severe competition and rising customer expectations, firms are highly interested in keeping existing customers along with adding the new ones. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2008), “Marketing involves building profitable, value-laden exchange relationships with customers”. It means the effective management of marketing is the key to the economic growth and competitiveness of a business organisation. As the marketing has gained huge importance in today’s corporate world, career opportunities for marketing professionals continue to rise promptly under the influence of fast developments in technology, globalization,

increased workforce diversity and business complexities. A critical issue that arises here is about the specific contributions of the marketing people. Specifically, how and what role should the marketing people play particularly in a market-oriented firm? In fact, Meldrum (1996) suggested that the identification of key marketing competencies during the recruiting phase could result in better quality employment. Based on the literature reviewed and the opinions of the experts it can be established that only academic marketing knowledge is not enough for effectively working in the marketing area. Whereas academic institutions around the world imparting marketing education are also increasing their concern about how to provide their students, the required skills, knowledge and professional qualification that are needed to succeed in today's competitive workplace. The key question for marketing educators and prospective employees is, "*What do potential employers expect in marketing students?*" This is a reality that job seekers in marketing are not fully acquainted with the specific competencies required by business organizations. Acquisition of needed skills and knowledge is a necessary condition to get appropriate marketing jobs and to advance beyond the entry level. Reflecting this concern, this paper is an attempt to find out specifically those qualities which the marketing students should possess to get easily absorbed in the industry and could effectively contribute towards the achievement of the goals of the organisation. The purpose of this research study was to construct influential factors which enhance the placement value of students getting professional education of marketing, calculate the relative importance of each influential factor, and compare the importance given to these influential factors perceived by marketing and HR professionals. Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) was used as the main statistical method to measure the relative importance of the influential factors because it is often viewed as the best method in determining the relative importance of various factors/attributes (Saaty, 1980).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Organisations cannot take their customers' loyalty for granted; they need to adopt latest marketing strategies to remain in advance of their competitors (Strategic Direction, 2006). Kotler (2000) stated that marketing involves identifying and meeting human and social needs, and meeting these needs profitably. Miller and Lewis (1991) stated that management of marketing function has turned out to be an amazing task. Armstrong et al. (2015) defines that marketing has two goals one is to attract new customers by promising greater value, other is to keep and increase current customers by delivering satisfaction. Goyal and Shiva (2016) also indicated that to build profitable and value-laden exchange relationships with customers, the only option is to provide customers what they actually want. It means marketing on the whole is very important process for any business and marketing area needs to be focused cautiously. Segal and Hershberger (2009) stated that under the influence of macro trends like globalization, increased workforce complexity and diversity, changes in technology etc. career opportunities for professionals in marketing area continuously evolving rapidly. Whereas, Vukasovic (2014) indicated that to work successfully in marketing area only academic marketing knowledge is not enough. It is very essential to gain more skills to become successful transferor of knowledge into practice. He also stated that in addition to basic knowledge and skills in today's volatile environment, the broader understanding of the systems around us and understanding of the complexity of the relationships that are created within these systems is also very important. Kozubaska (1986) and Lidstone (1986) stated that the salesperson's skill to negotiate mutually

beneficial solutions significantly impacts sales performance. Johlke (2006) also indicated that negotiating skills can be reasonably important in building relational factors as well as the customer's perceptions of trust and credibility in that salesperson. According to Sharma (1999), Communication effectiveness is important for a continuing adviser-client relationship, or any personal relationship for that matter. The study further suggested that communication effectiveness directly impacts on relationship commitment. Park (2012) also indicated that effectiveness of communication has a significant, direct and positive impact on clients' relationship commitment. Customer satisfaction is thought of as an immediate originator of customer loyalty (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993). Homburg and Giering (2001) stated that managers must be careful for the different dimensions of customer satisfaction and their impact on loyalty. Stanton (2006) stated that ability to use modern technology or IT familiarity, particularly ability to use various computer tools is important to work easier and they can help in marketing business. A person, who knows how to use all the modern technology, has significant competitive advantage in the job market. Morrison (2008) Emotional Intelligence is the ability to monitor one's own feelings and emotions and make appropriate decisions to guide one's thinking and actions. Kidwell et al. (2014) indicated that sales professionals with higher Emotional Intelligence are not only superior revenue generators but also better at retaining customers. Boakye (2015) identified that teamwork and other measures of team performance have positive impact upon the organizational performance. Previous studies had indicated some important competencies affecting the marketing potential of prospective marketing professionals. On the basis of previous research and discussions held with marketing and HR professionals, ten competencies were selected based on the suitability of the study. The ten main competencies identified for the purpose of the study were communication skills, teamwork, emotional quotient, ability to work under pressure, IT familiarity, business insights, extroversion and confidence, negotiating skills, customer concern, and clarity of marketing concepts.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To make institutions imparting marketing education and training, understand various important competencies influencing placement of students in the marketing area.
2. To establish the priorities for competencies for enhancing the placement value of professionally qualified students of marketing.
3. To suggest the business organisations to set up the recruitment policies of marketing personnel as per the required competencies.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In today's world, decision making is much complex task and consists of numerous criteria that should be considered in taking final decision. Advancement in statistics and mathematics established a number of multi-criteria decision making methods and models. AHP is one of the multiple criteria decision-making methods that were originally developed by Prof. Thomas L. Saaty (1977). AHP mathematical model is a method that generates weighting value. This method is designed to reflect how people think. AHP is a technique often applied in analysing complex problems involving various criteria. This method is based on three basic principles, namely the arrangement of the criteria in a hierarchical structure, comparison of interest between criteria, as well as selection of the decision and the synthesis of interests. For

calculating consistency ratio Eigen Value method has been used because Eigen Vector Method is the only valid method for deriving the priority vector from a pairwise comparison matrix (Satty and Hu, 1998).

The AHP Procedure Followed to Find out The Relative Importance of Various Factors is given in The Following Steps:

Step 1: Identification of important competencies was done on the basis of review of literature and discussions held with experts.

Step 2: Data was collected from experts or decision-makers, in the pairwise comparison matrix of alternatives on a qualitative scale as described on the Saaty scale. (Saaty scale can be seen in Table 1).

Table 1 SAATY SCALE FOR PAIRWISE COMPARISON	
Numerical value	Definition
1	Equal importance
3	Moderate importance
5	Strong importance
7	Demonstrated importance
9	Absolute importance
2,4,6,8	Intermediate values

Step 3: The pair-wise comparison of various competencies generated at previous step were organised into a square matrix.

Step 4: The Normalised Principle Eigen Vectors (weights) of factors/competencies were computed.

Step 5: The Consistency Index (CI) was calculated in order to describe the consistency of respondent/decision-maker during evaluation process. CI can be calculated using the following equation.

$$CI = \frac{\lambda_{\max} - n}{n - 1}$$

Where λ_{\max} is the average of all the consistency measures of factors. And N is the number of items being compared. The consistency ratio, CR is calculated using the following equation.

$$CR = \frac{CI}{RI}$$

Where the value of RI was taken from the Table 2 of random consistency index, as shown below from n number of experts.

Table 2

RANDOM CONSISTENCY INDEX										
N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
RCI	0	0	0.58	0.90	1.12	1.24	1.32	1.41	1.45	1.49

Random inconsistency indices for n=10 (Saaty, 1980)

A pairwise comparison matrix is considered to be consistent if CR is less than 0.10. If the value of CR is greater than 0.10, the decision maker should reevaluate the pairwise comparisons due to inconsistencies (Singh et al., 2016).

DATA COLLECTION

In order to achieve the objective of the study, the primary data had been collected from the 22 respondents i.e. marketing and HR professionals from various industrial units located in different areas of Punjab (India). Particularly HR Managers and Marketing Managers had been chosen for the study because they are the main recruiters who recruit the qualified personnel for the particular jobs in this area and they know better the required attributes in the prospective marketing professionals. Survey method with the use of questionnaire was used for the data collection. Table 3 shows an example of questionnaire for the main criteria.

Table 3 AHP QUESTIONNAIRE											
	Team Work	Clarity of Marketing Concepts	Emotional Quotient	IT Familiarity	Communication Skills	Ability to Work under Pressure	Extrovert & Confident	Customer Concerned	Negotiation Skills	Business Insights	
Team Work	1										
Clarity of Marketing Concepts	X	1									
Emotional Quotient	X	X	1								
IT Familiarity	X	X	X	1							
Communication Skills	X	X	X	X	1						
Ability to Work under Pressure	X	X	X	X	X	1					
Extrovert & Confident	X	X	X	X	X	X	1				
Customer Concerned	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1			
Negotiation Skills	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1		
Business Insights	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1	

Table 4
PAIRWISE COMPARISON MATRIX OF ENHANCING THE PLACEMENT VALUE OF
PROFESSIONALLY QUALIFIED STUDENTS IN MARKETING

	Team Work	Clarity of Marketing Concepts	Emotional Quotient	IT Familiarity	Communication Skills	Ability to Work under Pressure	Extrovert & Confident	Customer Concerned	Negotiation Skills	Business Insights
Team Work	1.00	1.90	2.68	5.60	1.35	0.21	1.13	1.16	1.59	1.17
Clarity of Marketing Concepts	0.53	1.00	1.70	2.67	0.88	0.60	0.51	1.09	1.23	0.20
Emotional Quotient	0.37	0.59	1.00	2.27	0.52	0.78	1.23	0.76	0.76	2.07
IT Familiarity	0.18	0.37	0.44	1.00	0.17	0.19	0.23	0.52	0.17	0.14
Communication Skills	0.74	1.14	1.93	5.94	1.00	3.26	1.98	1.29	3.65	2.45
Ability to Work under Pressure	4.72	1.68	1.29	5.39	0.31	1.00	1.73	2.08	1.69	2.80
Extrovert & Confident	0.89	1.96	0.81	4.41	0.51	0.58	1.00	2.89	0.94	0.80
Customer Concerned	0.86	0.92	1.32	1.93	0.77	0.48	0.35	1.00	2.12	1.16
Negotiation Skills	0.63	0.81	1.32	5.81	0.27	0.59	1.06	0.47	1.00	1.50
Business Insights	0.85	5.06	0.48	7.39	0.41	0.36	1.26	0.86	0.67	1.00
Total	10.78	15.43	12.96	42.41	6.18	8.04	10.47	12.12	13.81	13.29

In the above Table 4 pairwise comparison matrix the average of all the responses were filled. After that each value in the each column of the above Pairwise Comparison Matrix was divided by the sum of the respective column to yield its normalized score. The normalised score so derived was then put in the Normalisation Matrix i.e. Table 5.

Table 5
NORMALIZATION MATRIX

	Team Work	Clarity of Marketing Concepts	Emotional Quotient	IT Familiarity	Communication Skills	Ability to Work under Pressure	Extrovert & Confident	Customer Concerned	Negotiation Skills	Business Insights	Total	Normalized Principal Eigenvector (Average)	Consistency Measure
Team Work	0.09	0.12	0.21	0.13	0.22	0.03	0.11	0.10	0.11	0.09	1.20	0.12	11.04
Clarity of Marketing Concepts	0.05	0.06	0.13	0.06	0.14	0.07	0.05	0.09	0.09	0.01	0.77	0.08	11.00
Emotional Quotient	0.03	0.04	0.08	0.05	0.08	0.10	0.12	0.06	0.06	0.16	0.78	0.08	11.59
IT Familiarity	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.04	0.01	0.01	0.24	0.02	11.05
Communication Skills	0.07	0.07	0.15	0.14	0.16	0.41	0.19	0.11	0.26	0.18	1.74	0.17	11.57
Ability to Work under Pressure	0.44	0.11	0.10	0.13	0.05	0.12	0.17	0.17	0.12	0.21	1.62	0.16	11.81
Extrovert & Confident	0.08	0.13	0.06	0.10	0.08	0.07	0.10	0.24	0.07	0.06	0.99	0.10	11.11
Customer Concerned	0.08	0.06	0.10	0.05	0.13	0.06	0.03	0.08	0.15	0.09	0.83	0.08	11.36
Negotiation Skills	0.06	0.05	0.10	0.14	0.04	0.07	0.10	0.04	0.07	0.11	0.79	0.08	11.36
Business Insights	0.08	0.33	0.04	0.17	0.07	0.04	0.12	0.07	0.05	0.08	1.04	0.10	11.35
												CI	0.15
												RI	1.49
												C.R.	0.099

Here, in the Table 4. Consistency Index (CI) was calculated as follows:

$$CI = \frac{\lambda_{\max} - n}{n-1} = \frac{11.324 - 10}{9} = 0.15$$

In the above formula, λ_{\max} is calculated by taking the average of all the factors' consistency measures i.e.

$$\lambda_{\max} = \frac{11.04 + 11 + 11.59 + 11.05 + 11.57 + 11.81 + 11.11 + 11.36 + 11.36 + 11.35}{10} = \frac{113.24}{10} = 11.324$$

From the Table 5 and Figure 1, it can be seen that Communication Skills with 17% relative importance is the most required competence which a marketing professional should possess followed by the ability to work under pressure with 16% weightage given by the

marketing experts. It can further be seen that IT Familiarity has got just 2% relative importance it means ability to work with Team (12%), Clarity of Marketing Concepts (8%), Emotional Quotient (8%), Extroversion & Confidence (10%), Customer Concern (8%), Negotiating Skills (8%), Business Insights (10%) are much more important than it.

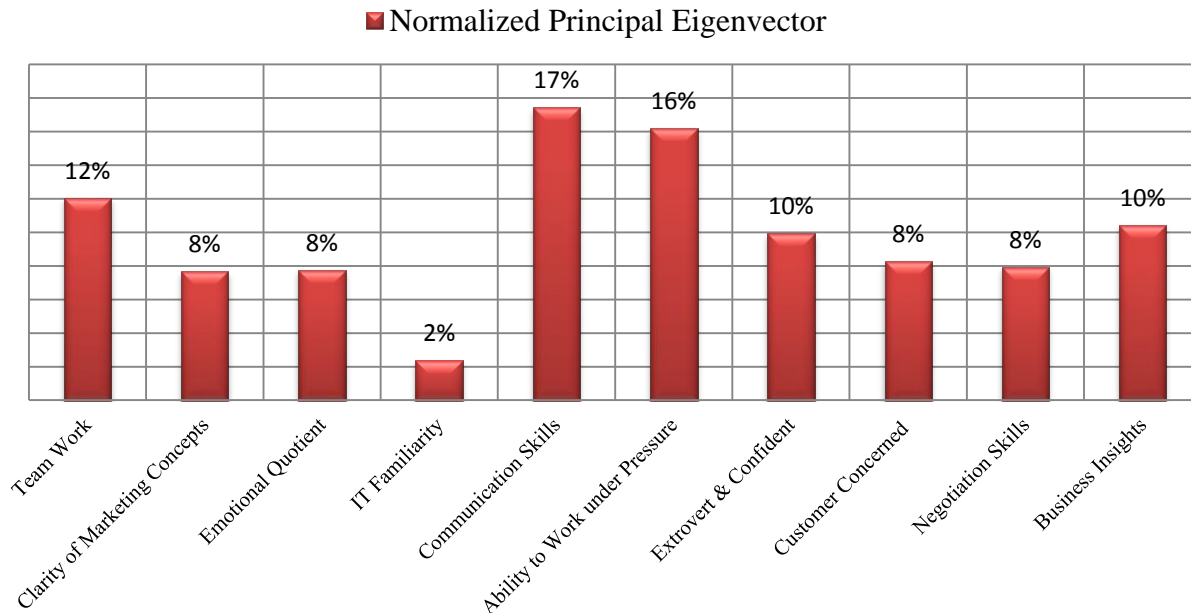


Figure 1
NORMALIZED PRINCIPAL EIGENVECTOR

After this, consistency ratio had been calculated. The purpose for doing this was to make sure that the original preference ratings were consistent. For this purpose consistency analysis was done. To arrive at the consistency ratio firstly consistency measure was calculated. To calculate the consistency measure, advantage of Excel's matrix multiplication function had been taken. After that calculation of the Consistency Index (CI) was done which is 0.15. And then consistency ratio was calculated. In practice, a CR of 0.1 or below is considered acceptable and C.R. (as calculated above) is 0.099 which is less than 0.1, hence this ratio is acceptable which indicates that the preference ratings were consistent.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated factors determining the placement potential of students getting professional education in marketing. In this regard, ten factors/competencies namely communication skills, teamwork, emotional quotient, ability to work under pressure, IT familiarity, business insights, extroversion and confidence, negotiating skills, customer concern and clarity of marketing concepts were identified and AHP Questionnaire was developed. This questionnaire was got filled from 22 marketing and HR professionals working in different corporate houses. The results of the analysis indicate that "*communication skills*", "*ability to work under pressure*" and "*ability to work with team*" are the most important competencies

which a prospective marketing professional must possess followed by other competencies like “clarity of marketing concepts”, “emotional quotient”, “extroversion & confidence”, “customer concern”, “negotiating skills”, “business insights” and “IT familiarity”.

This study could provide the major basis for the education and training of the marketing students in India. Educational institutions should design their training programmes based on the proposed findings. The findings of this study can also be used by the companies/marketing firms to set up the policies for recruitment of marketing personnel. Further such companies can encourage their existing marketing professionals to acquaint themselves with the above said professional competencies.

LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The study reported here is limited to an exploration among marketing and HR professionals from different business houses of a particular area i.e. Punjab (India). In order to overcome this limitation of present study, the research can be extended to other states of the country and can be extended to other countries as well. This kind of research can be further undertaken to understand the factors for enhancing the employment prospects of the students of various other fields as well. Moreover various other factors could be taken into consideration which may influence the employment potential of the students.

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