

MOTIVATING STUDENTS IN MARKETING CLASSES:  
SOME IMPLICATIONS BASED ON EXPECTANCY THEORY

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines learning motivation of marketing students based on expectancy-valence theory of motivation. Expectancy theory maintains that effort is related to the degree to which behavior is viewed as leading to various intrinsic and extrinsic outcomes weighted by the importance of these outcomes. A number of implications based on expectancy-valence models are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Enhancing the learning motivation of marketing students can be quite challenging for marketing instructors. In this regard, typical questions that often trouble instructors include:

- How can I, as an instructor, influence the performance of students who are in my classes?
- What makes some students work hard while others do as little as possible?
- Why do some students neglect work assignments, miss classes, and show up late to a class?

These important questions about students' performance can only be answered by instructors who have a grasp of what motivates students. A good understanding of motivation can serve as an important tool for:

- a. Understanding the causes of behavior in a marketing course;
- b. Predicting the effects of any strategy used by the instructor; and
- c. Directing students' behavior so that instructional objectives can be achieved.

The objective of this paper is to examine the learning motivation and performance of marketing students based on expectancy theory of motivation. Expectancy theory approach has been found to be very effective in predicting effort and performance of people in the organizational psychology context. A number of implications about enhancing the learning motivation of marketing students are discussed from a strategic perspective.

THE EXPECTANCY THEORY APPROACH

Expectancy theory which has its roots in the works of Dulany (1968) and Tolman (1938) has received widespread attention in organizational psychology in recent years. Over the past 15 years, research concerning expectancy theory has produced enough valid results for many behavioral scientists to conclude that it represents the most comprehensive, valid, and useful approach to understanding and diagnosing motivation (Hackman, Lawler and Porter 1977).

In general terms, expectancy theory (Galbraith and Cummings 1967; Lawler and Suttle 1973; Vroom 1964) maintains that an individual's behavior is a function of the degree to which the behavior is instrumental in attaining some outcomes and importance of these outcomes to the individual. While the theory may appear to be complex at first view, it is in fact made of a series of fairly straightforward observations about behavior. Specifically, the following three concepts serve as the key building blocks of the theory.

Effort-Performance Expectancy (E → P)

In the individual's mind, each behavior is associated with a certain expectancy or probability of success. This expectancy represents the individual's perception (i.e., a subjective probability) about the likelihood that he or she can perform at a given level, or that effort on his or her part will lead to successful performance. This term can be thought of as varying from 0 to 1.

In general, the less likely a student feels that he or she can perform at a given level, the less likely he or she will try to perform at that level. A student's E → P probabilities are strongly influenced by each situation and by previous experience in that and similar situations. For example, a student may have done poorly in multiple-choice type exams on a consistent basis. Thus, when he learns that his marketing research instructor has decided to administer multiple-choice tests he may develop a low expectancy that if he puts forth effort, it will result in good performance on the test.

Performance - Outcome Instrumentality (P → O)

This component of motivation refers to an individual's belief that if he/she performs at a certain level, he or she will obtain certain outcomes (or rewards). Such instrumentality beliefs can also be expressed in terms of a subjective probability varying from 0 to 1.

Examples of instrumentalities can easily be described. A student may strongly believe (say a .9 probability) that if he performs well on a given exam it will result in an overall grade A. While others may have a low instrumentality belief (say .4). Such beliefs may of course be influenced by a number of factors such as the student's view of the instructor's fairness behavior, or student's personal characteristics (e.g., some students are optimists while others are pessimists).

Valence (V): The term "valence" refers to the value (importance, attractiveness) of an outcome to the individual. Outcomes have different valences to different students. Differences in valence result because of individual needs and

perceptions, which differ because they in turn reflect other factors in the individual's life (Vroom 1964).

For example, in a particular marketing course, some students may value learning of a new concept very highly (high valence) because they think it will be useful in a real job situation, while others may value it low (low valence) as they may not be thinking so carefully about its application in job situations. The learning of a concept of "reliability/validity" in marketing research may have a great valence for an older student who is a full-time employee of a marketing research firm but little valence for a young student who hasn't made-up his mind whether to major in marketing or in history.

Putting these concepts together, it is possible to construct a general model of the student's behavior (Figure 1) and to make a basic statement about marketing students' motivation to learn and perform. In general, a student's motivation to attempt to learn and perform in a certain way is the greatest when:

- a. The student believes that he or she is able to perform at the desired level (effort  $\rightarrow$  performance expectancy);
- b. The student believes that his/her performance will lead to the attainment of important outcomes (performance  $\rightarrow$  outcome instrumentality); and
- c. The student believes that these outcomes have positive value for him or her (valence).

Given a number of alternative levels of performance (spending one, two, or three hours per week in a computer lab, for example), the student will choose that level of performance which has the greatest motivational force associated with it, as indicated by expectancies, instrumentalities, and valences. In other words, when faced with choices about behavior for a marketing course, the student would go through the process of considering questions such as:

- Can I perform at that level if I try?
- If I perform at that level, what will happen?
- How do I feel about those things that will happen?

The student then decides to behave in a way that seems to have the best chance of producing desired outcomes.

For operational purposes, the above components of motivation can be expressed in the following algebraic form:

$$\text{Motivation} \\ (M) = [E \rightarrow P_j] \times \sum_{j=1}^n [(P \rightarrow O_{jk})(V_k)] \quad (1)$$

where:

- $E \rightarrow P_j$  = the student's belief that his or her efforts would lead to a given level of performance  $j$ ;
- $P \rightarrow O_{jk}$  = the student's belief that a given level of performance level ( $j$ ) would lead to the outcome  $k$ ;
- $V_k$  = the importance of the outcome  $k$  to the individual student.

## Intrinsic and Extrinsic Outcomes

A further usefulness of the above model lies in the fact that using an intrinsic and extrinsic outcome dichotomy, it can be used to measure intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of students. Intrinsic outcomes are internally induced in that a student rewards him/herself. These include such outcomes as feelings of accomplishment, personal growth, and self-competence. Extrinsic outcomes are the rewards that are provided by others (e.g., by the instructor, fellow students, or the department) and include such outcomes as the grade, appreciation by group members, or a letter of recommendation from the instructor. Both intrinsic and extrinsic outcomes are important in understanding a student's motivation to learn and perform since they are available, and in general, actively sought by students. Therefore, the expectancy-valence model should be utilized to measure both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of students.

Using the intrinsic and extrinsic outcome dichotomy, the basic expectancy-valence model (equation 1) can be expressed as the following:

### Intrinsic Motivation

$$(M_i) = f[E \rightarrow P_j] \times \left[ \sum_{j=1}^{ni} (P \rightarrow O_{jki})(V_{ki}) \right] \quad (2)$$

### Extrinsic Motivation

$$(M_e) = f[E \rightarrow P_j] \times \left[ \sum_{j=1}^{ne} (P \rightarrow O_{jke})(V_{ke}) \right] \quad (3)$$

Notations in the above equations are the same as those in equation 1 except that subscripts  $i$  and  $e$  represent variables corresponding to intrinsic and extrinsic outcomes respectively.

## The Motivation-Performance Sequence

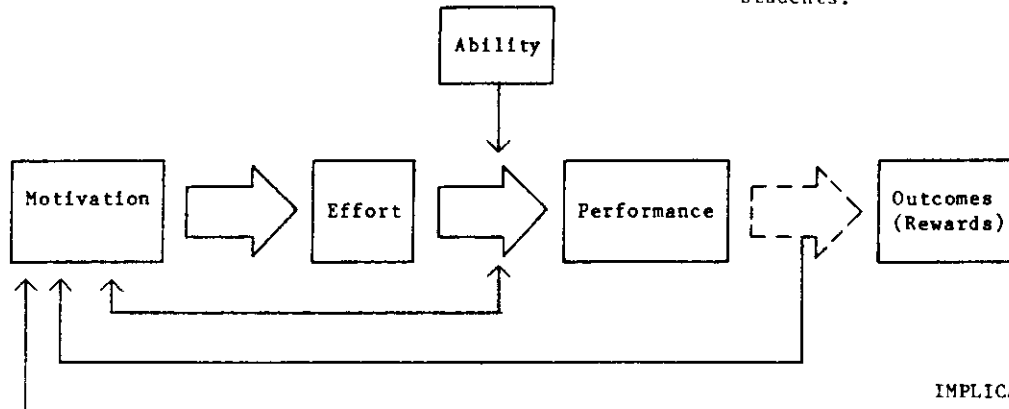
In the literature available on motivation-performance relationship (Hackman, Lawler and Porter 1977; Lawler and Suttle 1973; Nadler, Hackman and Lawler 1979; Walker, Churchill and Ford 1977), the motivation is seen as a force that influences an individual to expend effort. A typical example of effort may involve the average number of hours per week spent by the student on academic activities. However, effort alone may not be sufficient. Efforts along with the level of ability which a student has (reflecting skills, aptitude, etc.) produces a given level of performance (Vroom 1964; Porter and Lawler 1968). In most of the reported research, however, performance has been successfully predicted from the motivational component only and without the use of an ability measure (Graen 1969; Hackman, Lawler and Porter 1968; Lawler and Suttle 1973; Porter and Lawler 1968). As a result of performance, a student receives certain outcomes. However, the relationship between performance and outcome is regarded as conditional reflecting the fact that sometimes the student performs well but does not obtain desired outcomes (Figure 1). As this process of performance-rewards occurs, time after time, the actual events serve to provide information which influences the student's perceptions, particularly  $E \rightarrow P$  (expectancy) and

$P \rightarrow O$  (instrumentality) probabilities and thus motivation in the future.

- scores than directly from the motivation (M) scores.
5. Performance  $\rightarrow$  outcome contingency will positively influence the student's motivation to learn.
  6. The above relationships are stronger for high control students than for low control students.

FIGURE 1

The Basic Motivation-Behavior Sequence



A student's motivation is a function of:

- a. Effort-to-performance expectancies
- b. Performance-to-outcome expectancies
- c. Perceived valence of outcomes

High Versus Low Control Students. A number of studies (Dulany 1968; Fishbein 1967; Mitchell and Biglan 1971) suggest that the way expectancies and instrumentalities influence an individual's effort may be greatly influenced by his/her perception of control over the behavior in question. This is because the degree to which one can carry out his intentions is due partially to the degree of perceived control over the situation. For example, based on expectancy-valence model we may predict that a student will spend a great deal of effort this weekend doing a library project. However, a number of things might prevent him from carrying out his intentions such as a last minute assignment from another course which is perceived as more important or the fact that the books required for the library project were already checked out. Thus, the expectancy-valence model will better predict effort and performance of those students who indicate a higher control over the academic behavior than who perceive a lack of this control.

Based on the above discussion, the following propositions are suggested regarding the student's learning motivation-behavior process:

1. The student's tendency to expend effort (W) can be predicted from the motivation construct

$$[E \rightarrow P_j] \times \sum_{j=1}^n [(P \rightarrow O_{jk}) (V_k)].$$

2. The student's tendency to expend effort (W) can be predicted from both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.
3. The student's performance (P) can be predicted better from a multiplicative relationship between effort and ability (W x A) than from effort (W) itself.
4. The student's performance (P) can be better predicted from the motivation x ability (M x A)

IMPLICATIONS

Since academic performance is a result of forces both within the student and within the environment, the instructor should look and diagnose both the student and the environment. Specifically the following implications can be considered.

As a first step, it is important to identify what kinds of intrinsic and extrinsic outcomes/rewards have valence for your students. There are various ways of finding this out, including (a) finding out students' desires through some structured method of data collection, such as a survey instrument, (b) observing the students' reactions to different situations or rewards, or (c) simply using a focus group approach and asking them what kinds of rewards are important to them, what kind of career goals they have, or "what's in it for them." It should be emphasized here that it is very difficult to change what students want, but fairly easy to determine what they want.

Second, instructors often emphasize "good performance" without really defining what good performance is. An important step in motivating is to set specific performance standards and appropriate measures or indicators of performance (quantity, quality, etc.). These standards should be communicated to students in a fairly specific manner (not in general terms) so that they understand what is desired of them.

Third, as has been discussed before that learning motivation is induced not only by the instrumentality ( $P \rightarrow O$ ) beliefs, but also by the expectancy ( $E \rightarrow P$ ) beliefs. This implies that if performance standards are set at a higher than reasonably reachable level as perceived by students, then their motivation to perform will be relatively low. The instructors, therefore, should determine levels of performance that are perceived to be attainable by students.

Fourth, it is important to link outcomes valued by students to the specific performance standards set by the instructor. If extrinsic rewards are valued, it is important that students see a clear example of the reward process working in a fairly

short period of time if the motivating "expectancies" are to be created in the student's mind. If students value intrinsic rewards (e.g., feeling of accomplishment), then the instructor should focus on changing the nature of the student's work as he/she is likely to respond with such things as increased challenge, feedback, and autonomy, because these things will lead to a situation where good performance is intrinsically rewarding.

In order to examine the adequacy of intrinsic and extrinsic reward systems, the students' perceptions of the situation must be determined. Remember, it is the perceptions of rewards that determine their motivation, not the objective reality. It doesn't matter, for example, whether an instructor feels that a student's grade is related to his/her motivation. Motivation will be present only if the student sees the relationship.

Fifth, it is important to provide extrinsic rewards or create situations for intrinsic rewards so that changes in rewards are large enough to motivate significant behavior from students. Trivial rewards will induce trivial amounts of effort and thus trivial improvements in students' performance. Rewards must be significant enough to motivate students to expend the effort needed to cause significant changes in academic performance.

Sixth, attitude surveys (e.g., standard student questionnaires) should be conducted on regular intervals among marketing students to measure their expectancies and instrumentalities and thus the level of their intrinsic/ extrinsic motivation. Over a period of time, the indices for ideal levels of marketing students' motivation can be developed. The current level of motivation can then be compared against such indices. If the difference between the current level and indices is substantial, appropriate strategies should be used to enhance appropriate  $E \rightarrow P$  (expectancy) and  $P \rightarrow O$  (instrumentality) subjective beliefs.

Seventh, the marketing instructor should realize that even students with lower ability can perform better if their motivation is enhanced. The instructor should attempt to enhance motivation of weaker students by inducing beliefs that if they worked hard it will result in good performance and that performance will be rewarded.

Finally, specific steps should be taken to induce the student's feelings of control over the academic behavior in question. As we have seen, motivational strategies for students who think they can do little to complete a task (low control students) are relatively ineffective. For example, for a library assignment situation, students may feel that they can do little if books are not available or have been checked out (especially during the final weeks of a term). The marketing instructor can correct this situation by assuring that adequate material is available through the library reserve desk or his office. Similar other steps can be taken to induce feelings of greater control.

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