

Driven by the Norm: Investigating ‘Internmaxxing’ Intentions Through a Mixed Methods Approach Among Philippine Universities

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the behavior of ‘internmaxxing,’ a term coined as a result of the phenomenon of students taking more internships than what is required in their curriculum. This research examines the factors of perceived injunctive norms, perceived social support, self-efficacy, and outcome expectations of students through the lens of the Social Cognitive Career Theory and the Theory of Normative Social Behavior.

Design/methodology/approach—To understand the behavior of ‘internmaxxing,’ the study uses an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach. Online surveys were distributed to undergraduate business students from Metro Manila. The constructs analyzed from this study were (1) perceived injunctive norms, (2) perceived social support, (3) self-efficacy, (4) outcome expectations, and (5) internmaxxing intention. Reliability analysis, multiple regression analysis, and mediation analysis were used to provide insights on the strength and direction of the variables.

Key Words: Internmaxxing; multiple internships; social approval

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Internships were once primarily undertaken to fulfill academic requirements. In recent years, they have become strategic stepping stones in students’ career development. Increasingly, college students actively pursue multiple internships, viewing them as critical to standing out in a competitive job market. This shift in mindset has been fueled by the accessibility of hybrid and remote work setups, allowing students to balance internships with academic responsibilities.

The term ‘*internmaxxing*,’ coined by Lee (2024) in the context of Singapore, captures this emerging phenomenon, defined as the deliberate pursuit of multiple internships to boost job market competitiveness. It reflects a broader cultural shift where the number of internships completed is equated

with career readiness. As noted by Wolfgram and Ahrens (2022), students increasingly believe that accumulating internships enhances their credentials to potential employers, reinforcing a “more is better” mindset.

However, this behavior is not solely driven by career ambition. The pressure to keep up with peers, meet perceived social expectations, and avoid being left behind seemingly contributes to the normalization of internmaxxing. In the context of the Philippines, Martinez (2022) observes that what began as a practical way to “meet expectations” has evolved into a romanticized pursuit fueled by external validation.

Guided by Rimal and Real’s (2005) Theory of Normative Social Behavior (TNSB), this study investigates how perceived injunctive norms, or the desire for approval from others, can influence them to take more internships. The study also draws on Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), particularly the constructs of self-efficacy and outcome expectations.

Students with greater self-efficacy are confident in their ability to manage internships. Their outcome expectations can also reinforce their motivation (Lent et al., 2002; Bhattacharya et al., 2018). The study incorporates insights from Su, Tay, and Diener's (2014) Comprehensive Inventory of Thriving (CIT) and Brief Inventory of Thriving (BIT), which highlight how encouragement can shape career-related decisions.

Despite its growing relevance, internmaxxing remains largely underexplored in academic literature. Most existing studies focus on single internship experiences, which overlook the intentions and dynamics tied to taking on multiple roles. The study aims to formally define internmaxxing as a distinct behavior and answer the central research question: "What factors drive undergraduate business students to engage in internmaxxing?"

1.2 Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study includes exploring and explaining the factors that drive students to engage in internmaxxing. The study will focus on undergraduate business students, targeting those with internship experience from leading business schools in Metro Manila: (1) De La Salle University Manila, (2) Ateneo de Manila University, and (3) University of the Philippines Diliman. The study will employ quantitative methods through an online survey and qualitative methods through semi-structured interviews to gather insights into students' intentions and experiences regarding internships. The researchers acknowledge the potential homogeneity of the samples, resulting in a limited generalizability. Similarly, as the sampling is targeted to students who are pursuing business-related majors, the data and findings from this research may not be generalizable to students who are pursuing different majors and professional fields.

A significant limitation of this study is the lack of formal research conducted regarding the topic of internmaxxing. As internmaxxing remains undefined within the academic literature, the researchers had to establish a formal definition by drawing on informal online sources and aligning them with the closest approximations found from existing academic studies. The lack of prior research influenced the methodological approach of the study. With this, the researchers adapted scales and portions of the SCCT and the TNSB in order to measure and understand the drivers of internmaxxing as a behavior.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study will employ an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, beginning with quantitative data collection and analysis, followed by qualitative methods to further interpret the findings. The two-phase approach will combine the statistical measurement of psychosocial and career-related variables with an in-depth exploration of their underlying context. This provides both breadth and depth in understanding internmaxxing behavior among undergraduate business students in Metro Manila.

2.1 Quantitative Research

In the first phase, a structured online survey will be administered to undergraduate business students from De La Salle University (DLSU), Ateneo de Manila University (ADMU), and the University of the Philippines - Diliman (UP). Using purposive sampling, participants with at least one completed internship will be selected. A minimum sample size of 97 participants was determined through a priori sample size calculator for multiple regression (Soper, 2021), based on the following parameters: an expected effect size of 0.15, a statistical power of 0.8, six predictor variables, and a significance level of 0.05.

The survey will measure five key constructs: (1) perceived injunctive norms, (2) perceived social support, (3) self-efficacy, (4) outcome expectations, and (5) internmaxxing intention. They were grounded in the SCCT and TNSB. Each was assessed using validated and context-adapted scales, with responses captured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree."

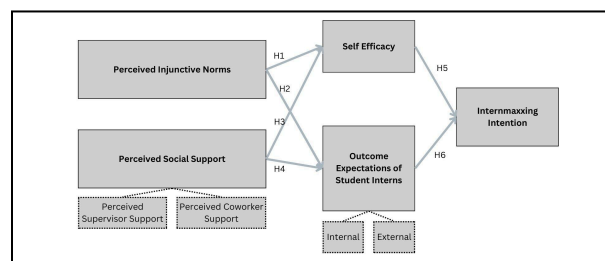


Fig. 1. Full Conceptual Framework of Research

The researchers will assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales using Cronbach's alpha. To analyze the survey data, a multiple regression



analysis will then be used. This method will allow the team to evaluate the strength, direction, and statistical significance of relationships between variables, providing insights into how they can collectively impact the dependent variable (Stolzenberg, 2004).

If the multiple regression analysis reveals that the mediators are statistically significant, the researchers will conduct a mediation analysis to investigate how various factors influence internmaxxing behavior through both direct and indirect pathways. This approach provides a deeper understanding of the roles mediators play in shaping the relationship between independent and dependent variables, revealing the underlying mechanisms behind these effects (MacKinnon et al., 2007).

2.2 Qualitative Research

The qualitative phase of this study aims to deepen the understanding of internmaxxing by exploring students' motivations, experiences, and perceptions through thematic analysis. Initially, qualitative data will be drawn from responses to open-ended questions in the online survey. Following this, the researchers will proceed with semi-structured interviews to complement the quantitative findings by uncovering the personal and social factors influencing students' decisions to pursue multiple internships. Participants will include students, employers, and professors (see Table 1).

Table 1. Qualitative Respondent Selection Criteria

Respondent	Criteria
	Undergraduate students enrolled in a business-related program from DLSU, ADMU, or UP Diliman.
	Enrolled in a business program.
Student	Completed at least one internship.
	Teaches business-related courses at DLSU, ADMU, or UP Diliman.
Professor	Preferably an internship coordinator or adviser.
	Experienced supervising at least one intern, with experience in screening and evaluation.
Employer	

A total of 6 to 10 interviews will be conducted via Zoom, with at least two representatives per group. Interview questions were developed using a structured, five-step process (Naz et al., 2022) and aligned with the study's key variables to ensure consistency and focus. The semi-structured format allows for flexible yet guided conversations, with emerging themes to be documented for future exploration.

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) will be used to analyze both open-ended responses and interview data, identifying patterns and extracting meaningful insights. This approach allows the researchers to interpret explicit and implicit themes, providing a nuanced, contextual understanding of internmaxxing in the context of business education.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Quantitative Analysis

A reliability analysis was conducted on the 5 constructs, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging between 0.7 to 0.9. According to reliability standards, a Cronbach's alpha score of at least 0.6 is generally considered the minimum acceptable threshold for exploratory research. As such, the group concluded that each construct demonstrates statistically reliable measurement properties suitable for further analysis (see Table 2).

Table 2. Reliability Analysis

Scale	Cronbach's α
Perceived Injunctive Norms	0.868
Perceived Social Support	0.897
Self-Efficacy	0.885
Outcome Expectations of Student Interns	0.739
Internmaxxing Intention	0.717

Due to the exploratory nature of the research, an R-squared value of 0.1 is deemed as acceptable (Ozili, 2023) to continue the research as it is able to identify existing relationships. The multiple regression analysis conducted by the researchers revealed that the model achieved an R-squared value of 0.208. Thus, the R-squared value indicates that the current framework



employed in the research explains 20.8% of the variance, while the remaining 79.2% remains unexplained.

Table 3. Multiple Regression Analysis

Construct	R ²	Adjusted R ²	95% C.I.		p
			Lower	Upper	
Perceived Injunctive Norms			0.0965	0.506	0.004
Perceived Social Support			-0.0198	0.524	0.069
Outcome Expectations of Student Interns			-0.2449	0.277	0.903
Self-Efficacy			-0.0727	0.512	0.139
Internmaxxing Intention	0.208	0.175			

The researchers found that perceived injunctive norms ($p = 0.004$) have the most statistically significant relationship with internmaxxing intention as the p-value is less than 0.05. Moreover, the 95% confidence interval [0.0965, 0.506] is entirely above 0 which indicates that the variable has a consistent and positive relationship with internmaxxing intention. As such, the group accepts perceived injunctive norms to be the variable which most strongly and directly influences internmaxxing intention.

In addition, perceived social support ($p = 0.069$) may also be recognized as moderately significant. As the 95% confidence interval reveals a range of [-0.0198, 0.524], the lower and upper bound displays the potential to be impactful to internmaxxing intention under certain conditions. In spite of the presence of noise within the construct, the group acknowledges the potential significance of perceived social support under certain conditions or as a bigger sample size is obtained.

On the other hand, the mediating variables, self-efficacy ($p > 0.05$, 95% CI [-0.0727, 0.512]) and outcome expectations of student interns ($p > 0.05$, 95% CI [-0.2449, 0.277]), were identified as variables that were least statistically significant. Aside from the p-value being above 0.05, the confidence interval

overlaps with 0 which indicates the presence of noise. Hence, they do not impact internmaxxing intention.

The group initially planned on using a mediating analysis to test for potential indirect effects among variables. However, the multiple regression analysis revealed that the mediators were not statistically significant. Hence, the researchers decided that conducting a mediating analysis would not be relevant to the study. Thus, the patterns revealed by the multiple linear regression analysis suggest that internmaxxing intention is strongly influenced by norms. It highlights the idea that partaking in multiple internships may be a personal choice, but it is largely enforced by internal and external pressure.

3.2 Qualitative Analysis

The first portion of the qualitative data was gathered from the open-ended questions included in the student survey questionnaire. This allowed respondents to elaborate on their personal experiences, motivations, and perceptions surrounding internmaxxing beyond the constraints of fixed-response options. These responses later guided the researchers in crafting probing points for the semi-structured interviews.

Table 4. Survey Open-ended Questions Analysis

Theme	Sample Representative Statements
	"Having multiple internships provides a great head start as you enter the corporate arena."
	"I take into consideration the reputation and name of the companies I apply for."
Perceived Norms	"Anxiety as an undergraduate student, pressure to perform well." "My supervisor is mentor-like yet friendly. This balance helped me develop both my professional skills as well as make a meaningful bond."
Perceived Social Support	"They were very hands-on with me but at the same time, often gave me chances to learn things by myself."
Holistic Professional	"It can help me expand my skill sets and give me first-hand experience on



Development	corporate culture." "Can this internship propel me towards my professional career in the future?"
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While the survey provided valuable initial insights into internmaxxing among students, the researchers conducted interviews with two students, two professors, and three employers to explore the themes in greater depth. The open-ended responses from the survey served as a foundation for structuring the interview questions and shaping the overall direction of the conversations. The data collected from these interviews were also subjected to thematic analysis.

Table 5. Peer Pressure and Social Comparison Analysis

Respondent	Sample Representative Statements
Student	"You see the people on LinkedIn and get shocked how so many people get these internships when we're only required [to do] one."
	"Being in a competitive environment such as my course, my peers positively influenced me to take on more internships as a way for me to keep up with other students."
	"It's good to find out where this voice is coming from — peer pressure. That in itself should already make us say, is it worth it? Is that a good intention just to keep up?"
Professor	
Employer	"[Students] see an internship is required in their curriculum, yet the people around them feel they need to compete with more internships. They then feel pressured to 'catch up' to the others."

Internmaxxing, as reflected in this theme, reveals how social expectations are deeply embedded in students' decision-making to pursue internships. It fosters a broader culture where internships are pursued for reassurance and recognition. What is defined as voluntary behavior often conceals a deeper response to perceived norms, leaving students caught between the desire to grow and the fear of falling behind. In this light,

internmaxxing appears less as a deliberate career strategy and more as a reactive behavior shaped by competitive academic environments and constant social comparison.

Table 6. Quality vs. Quantity of Internship Analysis

Respondent	Sample Representative Statements
Student	"Multiple internships can provide an edge over those who are unable to secure multiple internships."
	"You don't get to absorb your experiences if you have too many internships."
Professor	"I'm concerned that students forget that we are here also to give to society. When one is into working, studying, all the time, is there time to reflect?"
	"I think we should promote quality over quantity [for] internships. Quantity can look impressive but only if they can really quantify [their] experiences and overall contributions."
Employer	

Employers also stressed that internships are only one component of their overall evaluation. Given this, internships should not be viewed as a definitive indicator of readiness, as employers look at whether the student made the most of each opportunity, learned something substantial, and aligned the experience with their broader goals. Hence, value lies in intentional engagement rather than mere participation. Without the presence of intentionality, internships may become tedious tasks rather than experiences that shape professional identity. This theme exposes the tension between perceived expectations and actual employer standards. Students may internalize the idea that "more is better," but in actuality, those who can speak meaningfully about fewer but richer experiences are often viewed more favorably.

Table 7. Workplace Environment and Support Analysis

Respondent	Sample Representative Statements
Student	"My supervisor is very hands-on but still provides me the autonomy to work on my own project and to call my own



	decisions which also hones my project management skills.”
Professor	"She improved on a lot of skills because she had very good experiences with her internships."
Employer	"A good supervisor is a manager who guides the intern without micromanaging."

The workplace environment plays a significant role in shaping the quality and impact of internship experiences, as evidenced by the responses. Students shared that having approachable, respectful, and involved supervisors helped them feel more capable in their roles. This kind of atmosphere encouraged them to ask questions, make decisions, and take initiative in managing their responsibilities. For instance, one student shared how being given the opportunity to manage their own project helped them build confidence and a stronger sense of ownership over their work.

Table 8. Prioritizing Internships Over Academics Analysis

Respondent	Sample Representative Statements
Student	"Personally, I still prioritize getting good grades since I believe that good grades are a key metric that recruiters look for when securing internships."
Professor	"First off, your parents pay for the school so the priority should be your academics."
Employer	"Grades in itself is not the basis of how recruiters would discern whether or not you'll fit the role but it's still important."

Early-stage research revealed that some students may view internships as more important than academics. However, all interviewee groups converged on one insight: academic performance remains a critical priority within the Philippine context. With this, it is important to note that the idea that internship experience could outweigh academic performance was traced by the researchers to an article from Singapore encountered during the early stages of the study. With that, this perspective may reflect a different academic

and professional context, given the differing cultures. The interview data does support and suggests that such a viewpoint may not fully apply to the Philippine setting.

Table 9. Internmaxxing as a Career Strategy Analysis

Respondent	Sample Representative Statements
Student	"I believe that taking internships despite not being an academic requirement will greatly improve my resume and will increase my chances of securing my desired positions."
Professor	"We have to develop not just our technical skills, financial, but we also have the social, emotional, spiritual, and moral dimensions."
Employer	"It serves a purpose for sure, because it shows your ability to adapt to a corporate setting and do actual work for a company."

The value of internmaxxing is clearest when they contribute to a consistent professional direction and are chosen with specific goals in mind. This supports earlier findings that emphasize the importance of quality over quantity. At the end of it all, intentionality gives the internship experience its weight. When internships are chosen thoughtfully and build on previous experiences, they offer deeper development. This shows how intention can gradually influence internmaxxing behavior. Students may initially pursue multiple internships to meet external expectations, but their experiences in environments where they feel supported and trusted, can lead to more deliberate decision-making. Thus, over time, internships become less about keeping up with others and more about advancing toward specific career goals.

Table 10. Impact of Internmaxxing on Future Employment and Job Market Analysis

Respondent	Sample Representative Statements
Student	"I believe that internships are an avenue for students to build their network and connect with peers in the corporate world."



Professor	“The competition will be tighter and tighter.”
Employer	“The talent market will get more competitive because applicants already know what to expect such as the business or maybe they already have the skills before graduation.”

As internships grow more common, the real challenge is about pursuing experiences that create distinction. Professors and employers emphasized the importance of students being intentional in building their profiles. Leadership in student organizations, volunteer work, and research involvement were cited as examples of experiences that help students avoid falling into the pattern of sameness. This suggests that students are encouraged to seek out opportunities that offer distinction beyond the internship space. One employer even remarked that in a sea of internmaxxers, such experiences might be what sets a candidate apart (see Appendix E). Neither internships nor internmaxxing should be viewed as the ultimate measure of success. In a saturated environment, standing out means going beyond commonality and choosing paths that reflect clear direction and meaningful engagement.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Internmaxxing has become a recognizable pattern of behavior among undergraduate business students. This study demonstrates that internmaxxing is not merely a product of individual decision-making or internal motivation. It is a context-driven behavior shaped by peer influence, institutional gaps, and evolving standards in academic and professional environments. By applying the Theory of Normative Social Behavior (TNSB), Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), and the Comprehensive and Brief Inventories of Thriving (CIT and BIT), the researchers land on the following conclusions on internmaxxing.

Students' first engagements are rooted in the desire to learn, gain experience, and clarify professional interests. As they absorb unspoken expectations across both academic and digital networking platforms, internships become indicators of preparedness and symbols of ambition. This shift marks the influence of perceived injunctive norms, where internmaxxing evolves into a patterned response where students adjust

their goals to match what appears to be expected. It is a self-perpetuated cycle that reshapes how internship success is collectively defined.

Within this cycle, students continue to use opportunity, and skill development as justification for their decision to partake in the phenomenon. However, qualitative interviews reveal an unconscious gap between what students say and what actually drives them. Many quietly respond to internalized pressure and peer comparison. This disconnect adds an emotional burden to the internmaxxing experience. Students must perform confidence and intentionality in public while managing self-doubt and insecurity in private.

The study also shows that internmaxxing is not influenced by internal traits such as self-efficacy or outcome expectations. In the quantitative phase, these constructs had no significant relationship with internmaxxing intention. However, in the qualitative phase, students shared that their confidence grew when they felt supported. This reflects a movement toward authentic autonomy.

Amid the growing emphasis on internships, academic achievement continues to hold value, particularly in the local professional landscape where distinctions like Latin honors are still rewarded. However, since accumulating internships has become increasingly normalized, many feel that grades alone are no longer enough to stay competitive. Instead of approaching academics and internships as connected parts of the same developmental path, students often manage them separately. As students move quickly from one commitment to the next, they are unable to absorb what each experience is meant to offer. Eventually, this habit becomes a routine. Internmaxxing becomes an automatic response to the competitive environment students are trying to survive in.

From the standpoint of academic institutions, internmaxxing is not an encouraged practice. Professors acknowledge the benefits of internships when they are thoughtfully pursued. They also express concern that overcommitting to multiple roles may hinder learning and negatively impact student well-being. Institutional figures worry that too much movement between roles without enough time to process learning may prevent students from building a clear sense of professional direction. This view suggests that internmaxxing is not institutionally imposed, but a student-led behavior.

Employers share similar observations. While multiple internships were once seen as an advantage,



hiring professionals now emphasize the importance of depth over repetition. In conversations with HR practitioners, the ability to explain one's learning, articulate its relevance, and show consistency with career goals was seen as more valuable than a long list of positions. As internships become more common, students are encouraged to seek experiences, both inside and outside the workplace, that genuinely contribute to their growth.

This study positions internmaxxing as a contextual behavior rather than a purely psychological one. It is shaped less by fixed traits and more by the conditions students live in. It is a response to an environment that rewards visibility and speed. The research shows that this environment can be reshaped so students can transition from pressure-driven accumulation to purposeful engagement. The shift toward authentic autonomy is possible when systems are in place that prioritize process, alignment, and the ability to make informed choices over the pace and volume of experience.

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