

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT BETWEEN INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND MARKETING: ROLE OF EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT

Dr. Chetan Srivastava, M. Mahipal Reddy
Associate Professor, Research Scholar
School of Management Studies
University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, India

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to conceptualize employee involvement's influence on the Marketing –IT alignment in organisations. This paper proposes perceived communications on Marketing-IT strategies to employees, perceived employee commitment to Marketing – IT strategies and perceived knowledge on Marketing – IT strategies. This paper highlights the lack of empirical research by investigating whether employee involvement would improve an organisation's Marketing-IT alignment.

Index Terms: Information systems; Marketing, Employee involvement, Strategic alignment

1. INTRODUCTION

The evolution from *the industrial age characterized by the industrial revolution to the information age of today characterized by the digital revolution* has significantly altered the competitive landscape and affected the business practices of enterprises.

In order to achieve sustainable growth, organizations are building agile and lean organizational systems nowadays. Information technology (IT) has become an integral part of such organizational system and eventually organizations are depending on IT infrastructure to support their business processes. From the assets point of view, Information and knowledge have gained over fixed and financial assets. As result of this, organizations are more and more dependent on IT and the expenditure on IT and allied activities has increased significantly.

In the recent past, many empirical studies picked up from the business literature demonstrated how information technology and/or information systems (IT/IS) has been and can be used to achieve the strategic competitive advantage for an organization and how IT/IS can impact positively on business performance.

In the similar manner, the strategic significance of marketing and its positive impact on business performance has been highlighted. But in many organisations these two functions have a tendency to practise their strategic directions in a relatively separate fashion, linked only by the overall business strategy.

In the recent past, many organisations focussing more on strong customer relationship by keeping competitive environment in mind. This scenario translated to relationship marketing and customer relationship management (CRM). By looking at the role of IS and the Internet in these practices also suggests the need for the two functions to work together in synergy in order to improve the overall business performance.

In the contemporary business environment, Information Systems (IS) function alignment with the remaining functions of the business has become important. Many studies have found the strong positive relationship between IS strategic alignment and business performance. Alignment means using information technology suitably to achieve business goals, needs and objectives.

Although many studies support the business - IS alignment empirically, the studies on alignment between IS and marketing are in the initial stage.

Although many studies indicated the relationship between IS and marketing and its impact on the performance of the organization, most of the studies took place in western and developed countries. In India, most of the studies are conducted to understand the relationship between IS and business strategy. In few cases, the studies focused on relationship between IS and other functions of the organization but they are from an operational perspective. This paper applies strategic perspective and explains the role of employee involvement.

"Employee Involvement" defines, describes, and explains how businesses can improve their performance by cultivating employee interest and dedication. Even though employee involvement in information system development has long been considered to be a critical success factor in achieving alignment between marketing and Information Systems (IS), research has failed to clearly demonstrate it in Indian context.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature provides comprehensively consolidated literature of the recent past in the areas of information systems and marketing with an intention to understand issues related to strategic alignment between these two areas.

IS strategy:

The difference of opinion among the scholars about IS and IT strategies emerged over the last few decades. From the literature it is clear that IS is encompassing than IT. In addition to the IT, IS strategy includes other functions of the organizations, and people who are critical in managing IT. This differentiation brings out the nature of IS strategy as corporate level strategy and IT strategy as functional level strategy in tune with the overall business strategy of the organization.

Although IT was seen as a support function historically, but of late the corporate and academicians accepted that IT and business strategy need to be independent and interlinked. Many scholars worked on why organizations are keen to link their IT and business strategy. The outcome of these studies revealed that gaining competitive advantage is the primary reason for the linkage.

Porter and Millar (1985) suggested that IT should support business strategy or lead it, or whether they should work in tandem so that, depending on the situation, either the one or the other or both would take the lead.

From the above literature, it is evident that IT/IS has emerged as a function of strategic importance from that of support function as organizations have understood the importance of IT/IS in achieving and sustaining competitive advantage.

Marketing Strategy:

The central idea of marketing is to match the company's capabilities with the desires, needs and wants of the customers in order to achieve the objectives of both parties. As such, marketing performs a boundary role between the company and its markets. It is this role which is critical to strategy development.

Marketing strategy essentially deals with the interplay of three forces: the customer, the competition and the company. Marketing strategies focus on the ways in which the company can differentiate itself effectively from its competitors, capitalizing on its distinctive strengths to deliver better value to its customers. In free market economies, companies thus compete to outperform the competition and to do so in the most profitable way. The key to such profitability lies in achieving a sustainable competitive advantage based on superior performance.

Over the years, this focus on marketing competitiveness has become all the more absorbed into company strategies so that models such as Porter's (1985) Five Forces and Value Chain and Ansoff's matrix (McDonald, 1995) have come to be regarded as general strategic tools or models which are applied to other areas such as IS. This would seem to signify that the value of strategic marketing is well recognized.

Linkage between IS and Marketing Strategies:

With reference to existing literature, the relationship between IS and marketing strategies is less synergetic. Colgate (1998) found that the outcomes from the linkage between IS and marketing not encouraging. Winer (2001) and Cina (2002) illustrated how CRM system could not achieve the real objective of improving long term relations with the customers.

This suggests that even though both IS and marketing strive towards achieving corporate objectives but they do it by their own individual strategies within the frame of overall business strategy. Both the strategies contribute by giving sustainable advantage to the organization and lead the organization to achieve financial objectives.

Further, both the strategies in spite of having different approaches, the end result out of these strategies is to serve customer needs better than competitors and overcome the completion by financial results. The reason behind such situation could be some sort of alignment between IS and marketing.

Strategic alignment

In the management literature, alignment has been used to highlight the significance of aligning the organization to the needs of customer. It has also been used to refer to the connection between various functional departments, either between functions or of a function with the organization.

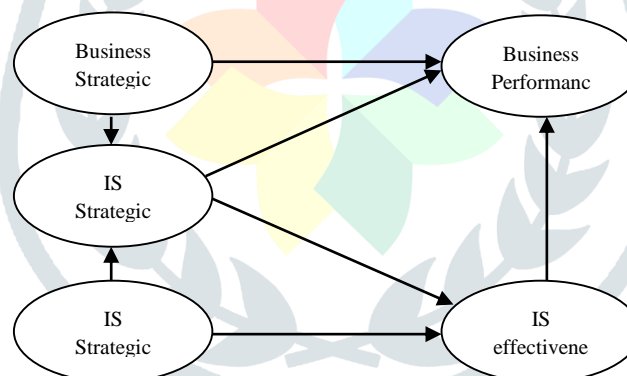
According to Luftman (1997), the issue of alignment of IS with business strategy has been among the top ten major concerns of IS executives and top management for more than two decades. The major reasons behind the concern could be enhancing organization's competitiveness or competitive advantage, to maximize the returns on IT investment or to create a positive impact on business performance. The reasons mentioned above, one can conclude that alignment is strategic concept regardless whether it qualifies or not (Reach & Benbasat, 2000).

As a result of the concerns of the executives, it is commonly accepted that IT and business strategies should be interdependent and linked. Traditionally, IT is considered as a support function, researchers like Henderson and Venkatraman (1993) stressed the need for more balanced and comprehensive approach for this linkage. This opinion was accepted as the organizations were unable to leverage IT spending and realize the value from the investments.

Taking the work of Venkatraman (1989b) ahead, researchers like Chan & Huff (1993) attempted to quantify the strategic alignment. Especially Chan conducted empirical research to assess the alignment between IS strategy and business strategy. Chan defined IS strategic fit as:

"The coherence or synergy between business strategic orientation and IS strategic orientation".

Chan used similar dimensions that of Venkatraman (1989) for assessing the strategic orientation of business and the strategic orientation of IS. The dimensions used in Chan's work are: aggressiveness, analysis, defensiveness (internal and external), futurity, innovativeness, pro-activeness and riskiness.



Strategic Fit: Conceptual Model (Chan, 1993)

Using this model, Chan and Huff (1993) divided strategic alignment into three phases i.e. awareness, integration, alignment.

Market Orientation

There are many definitions to market orientation in the contemporary literature but the definition given by Narver & Slater, (1990) explains the importance of market orientation by considering customer value and its impact on profitability.

"A market orientation is the aspect of business culture that motivates employees throughout the organization to place the highest priority on the profitable creation and maintenance of superior customer value".

Morgan and Strong (1998) observed that if market orientation can create superior value for the customers in the long term then market orientation can lead to superior performance with respect to competitors and there by lead to sustainable competitive advantage.

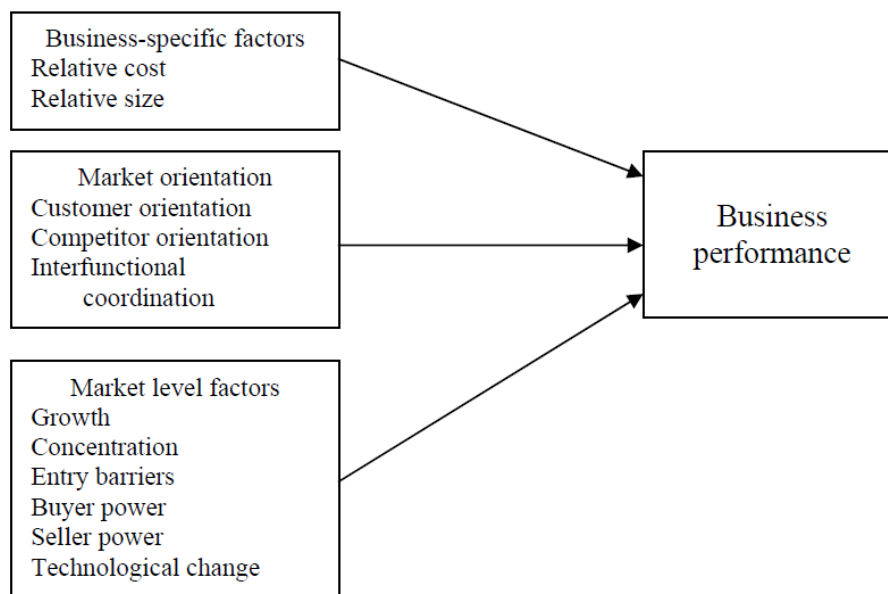
Market orientation originated from Marketing concept, which has replaced the preceding approaches such as production concept, product concept and the selling concept. Kohli and Jaworski, and Narver and Slater took the challenge of measuring the impact of

marketing, market orientation on business performance. They used the term “market orientation” against the “marketing orientation” as whole organization focus on markets rather than individual customer.

As a result of their empirical research, they proposed a framework consisting of antecedents, consequences and moderators. Antecedents consist of senior management factors, interdepartmental dynamics and organizational systems. The consequences include customer responses, business performance and employees’ responses. The linking moderators were supply side moderators and demand side moderators.

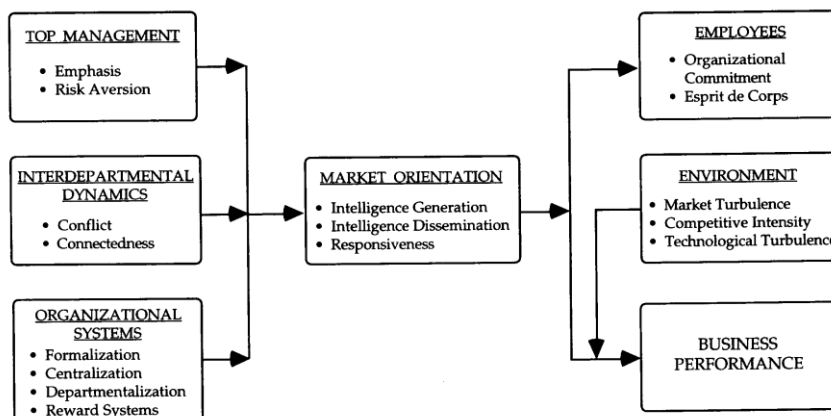
On the other side, Narver and Slater (1990) proposed a framework consists of three behavioral components i.e. customer orientation, competitor orientation and inter-functional orientation and two decision criteria – long term focus and profitability.

Extending this framework, Narver and Slater (1990) proposed MKTOR model describing the components influencing the business performance. The model is shown below:



Using the above model and receiving the responses from the practicing managers, they found a positive relationship between market orientation and business performance. Even though Kohli et al. (1993), described MKTOR model as the most comprehensive but he criticized that Narver and Slater (1990) model has neglected the process of market intelligence gathering and dissemination of the same in the organization.

To address the above gap, Jaworski and Kohli (1993) studied the impact of market orientation on employees as well as on business performance and came up with a refined model containing six factors – general market orientation, intelligence generation, intelligence dissemination, responsiveness, marketing informant and non-marketing informant (Kohli et al.,1993).



The above literature suggests that different components of market orientation may have varied impact on business performance.

The measures used for the business performance also evolved over the time along with evolution of the models. Narver and Slater (1990) used return on investment, return on assets and return on net assets in comparison with competitor as the measures of performance. Jaworski and Kohli (1990) inclined in favour of return on investment, profits, sales volume, market share and sales growth. Other measures used are new product success, marketing effectiveness, and profitability, growth in overall revenue, return on capital, ability to retain customers and ability to control expenses.

Role of employee involvement

From the above literature it is evident that Employee involvement is a key success factor for achieving strategic alignment. Employee involvement happens when the employee's behaviour matches with the organisation strategy. However, the question remains whether employees in the organisations really realize the directions and objectives of their organizations. In order to strategic alignment to occur, individuals within the organisations must behave in a contributory manner to support the strategic goals of the company. This article offers a structure which consists of the relationships between employee involvement and marketing –IT alignment. The proposed variables are explained below.

Perceived communications on Marketing - IT strategies to employees

In order for a strategy to be successfully implemented, a good communication is essential. A communication is successful if information is transferred from the sender to the receiver with the receiver fully understanding the information he or she received. (Al-Ghamdi, Roy, & Ahmed, 2007)

Luftman J.,(2000) stated that communication is one of the factors that can affect the alignment of business – IT strategies. Communications in organisations involved the exchange of ideas, sharing of information and knowledge between the IT and marketing managers, ensuring that those involved in both marketing and IT sides have an understanding on the firm's strategies, marketing and IT environment.

Al-Ghamdi, Roy, & Ahmed, (2007) studied how employees obtained information on corporate strategies and found that most employees surveyed were not happy with their present knowledge on corporate strategy and would like to know more. They found that employees who worked longer in an organisation were able to find more information on corporate strategies as they were able to communicate with the senior management, while junior employees often found that they were not able to have access to such information. Therefore it is important that strategies are communicated to all employees regardless of their positions and experience in the company.

Perceived employee commitment to Marketing –IT strategy

Commitment research shows that the challenges of aligning employees with organisation strategies (Gagnon, Jansen, & Michael, 2008). Commitment is defined as the individual's attachment and willingness to support his or her organisation. Gagnon & Michael, (2003) stated that in today's business environment whereby the bonds between employees and their organisations could be short term, it is important that they are committed to the strategies set by the companies.

Often, when forming a marketing –IT strategy, it involves implementing strategic IT tools in the organisation. Such tools could be new to the organisations. Chen, Gupta, & Chung, (1996) found that employee's lack of commitment is a barrier to the successful implementation of new technologies. They conclude that an important pre-requisite for technological change is employee commitment. Often, the major decline in employee commitment is also due to their resistance to technological change.

Perceived knowledge on Marketing -IT strategies

It is often being said that knowledge is a key foundation of competitive advantage for an organisation. In this article, perceived knowledge on marketing –IT strategies is defined as the employee's perception of their understanding of the organisation's marketing-IT strategies.

Gagnon, Jansen, & Michael, (2008)stated that in order for an organisation's strategic goals to be committed by the employees, the employees must have a clear knowledge of what the organisation is trying to achieve. That is to say that employee should have a complete understanding of their organisation's strategies and this understanding is consistent with those who created the strategies. Boswell, Bingham, & Colvin, (2006) highlighted that in order for organisations to gain complete advantages through their strategic goals, it is important that the employees achieved line of sight. They went on to define line of sight as the understanding

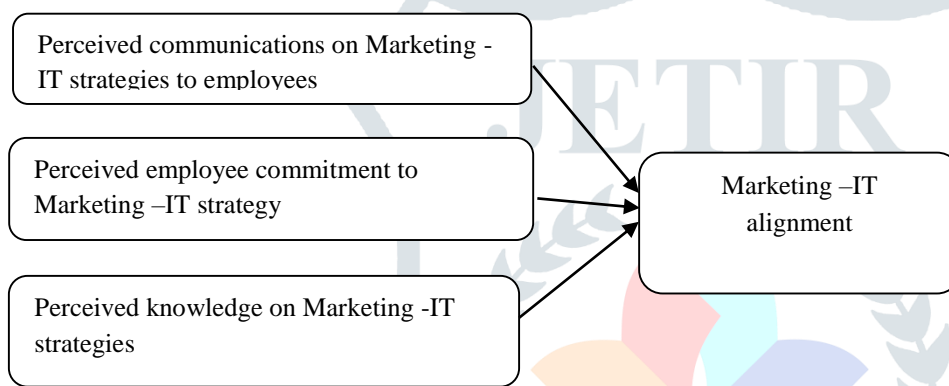
of organisational objectives and how to contribute to those objectives. In order to for employees to be aligned to the marketing –IT initiatives of organisations, it is important that they have requisite knowledge of the organisations’ overall marketing –IT strategies (Gagnon, Jansen, & Michael, 2008).

Although the relationships between employee knowledge and marketing strategies or strategic change have been studied in the past, there is little empirical analysis that investigates the relationships between employee knowledge and marketing –IT alignment.

The factors considered from the literature

Perceived communications on Marketing -IT strategies to employees	(O'Neil, 2008)
Perceived employee commitment to Marketing –IT strategy	(Boswell & Boudreau, 2001) (Noble & Mokwa, 1999)
Perceived knowledge on Marketing -IT strategies	(Boswell & Boudreau, 2001) (Darroch, 2003) (Wooldridge & Floyd, 1989)
Marketing –IT alignment	(Luftman J. , 2000) (Hooper, Huff, & Thirkell, 2010)

3. The proposed framework



4. HYPOTHESES

Existing literature suggests that employee involvement is critical in achieving alignment between marketing and information systems. Better resource management is important in achieving organisation goals. It is obvious that knowledge and commitment of employees are the key to achieve alignment in the organisation. At the same time, communication among the employees is also important in executing organisational level strategies.

H1. Employee Knowledge has significant influence on alignment between Marketing and Information systems.

H2. Employee commitment has significant impact on alignment between Marketing and Information systems.

H3. Communication among Employees has significant impact on alignment between Marketing and Information systems.

5. METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire

The research used a questionnaire to investigate the influence of employee involvement on alignment. The instrument included questions about the extent to which respondents’ organizations achieved alignment between marketing and Information systems. The questions also included items to measure employee knowledge, commitment and communication. The items were based on literature about those variables discussed previously in this paper. They measured each pointer using a 5-point Likert scale. In this measure, ‘1’ represent that the respondent ‘strongly agree’ that organization had implemented such exercise; ‘2’ represent ‘agree’; ‘3’ represent ‘neutral’; ‘4’ represent ‘disagree’ and ‘5’ represent ‘strongly disagree’ . The next section of the questionnaire estimated the alignment between marketing and information systems. Here Very Often, Often, Sometimes, Rarely and Never used to estimate responses respectively.

Table below identifies the items and the next section of the survey contained questions about respondent and organizational demographics.

Variables with items and acronymsCommunication

The directives that come from top-management are clear and consistent.

Our organization is committed to keeping the channels of communication "open."

Our organization encourages the sharing of information between departments.

Shared information received by us in a timely manner in our organization

Shared information received in our organization is reliable and consistent

Knowledge

We devote a great deal of attention to improving the efficiency of our business operations

All departments are involved in the preparation of the company's strategic plans

We optimize coordination among our departments (e.g. finance and marketing)

When one department finds out something important about our competitors / suppliers, it is slow to alert other departments

The IT people in our business unit share a lot of information about technology with other departments

Commitment

We have better work culture that constantly drive for change and push for new business opportunities

We maintain transparency while communicating with its stakeholders

We recognize and reward progress in implementing change.

We believe in empowerment of decision making

We do reengineering of process in order to sustain competitiveness

Alignment between IS and Marketing

IS related opportunities are identified to support the strategic direction of the marketing department (Align1)

The Goals and objectives of the IS are adapted to the changing goals and objectives of the marketing (Align2)

Major IS investments are prioritized by their expected impact on marketing performance (Align3)

The IT plan contains detailed action plans that support the marketing's strategies (Align4)

Organization has a plan to use existing technology to enter new market segments (Align5)

Organization has a plan to develop new technologies for new kinds of market offerings (Align6)

Decisions in IS Planning are tightly linked to marketing plan (Align7)

Marketing department utilizes the strategic capability of IS (Align8)

Marketing plan contains reasonable expectations of IS (Align9)

Nine senior level marketing managers volunteered for the pilot study of the questionnaire. These managers tasked to suggest any omissions, errors, or inconsistencies in it. Five managers submitted questionnaires along with suggestions directly to the author where as others submitted via an email.

These suggestions contributed many revisions to the questionnaire including rewording to make questionnaire more easily answerable.

6. DATA COLLECTION

After making changes to the questionnaire with the help of pilot test, the sample was designed by using information from multiple sources to make sure data is free from inconsistency.

The seed companies list is taken from NSAI, ASI & AICBA membership list. From this list, the sample is selected from Telangana, Andhra Pradesh only. Questionnaires were mailed to the 600 companies listed in this sample. Of the 600, 281 respondents completed the survey and sent questionnaires back. Around 47% of the respondents participated this study and thus provided usable data.

The response rate of 47% is good considering that the questionnaire was 4 pages long and reasonably complex.

7. DATA ANALYSIS

This study was performed in four major seed zones in India namely Hyderabad, Pune, Bangalore and NCR Delhi. From table 2 the Cronbach alpha for the study is .951. According to George, D., and Mallery, P. (2003) this value is well accepted and recommends that the questionnaire is reliable.

Reliability is an assessment of internal consistency of a variable (Hair et al., 2008). Questionnaire instrument internal consistency can be evaluated using Cronbach alpha. Cronbach alpha value 0.70 and above is accepted. Cronbach alpha value was measured for items using SPSS and presented below. Therefore, the questionnaire is reliable.

Table 1

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	281	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	281	100.0

a. List wise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Table 2

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.951	4

R is a measure which represents the correlation between the observed values and predicted values for the dependent variable. R² is the square value of R which represents the proportion of variance in criterion variables accounted by set of independent variables able to predict the value of dependent variable. The R-squared value is of secondary importance, unless key adjusted R- Square value makes accurate predictions.

In this study, the table 3 details the regression analysis model summary and gives the coefficient of multiple regression determination (R) value to assess the overall fit of the model. The adjusted R square value is 0.842. This denotes that the two independent variables of the model account for or able explain a variance of 84.2 (approx. 84%) in the given dependent variable – Alignment between IS and Marketing. And the remaining 21% of variance is not explained by the selected independent variables.

The prediction model for the study found to be statistically significant. $F(3,277) = 490.465, p < 0.01$. For a good regression model fit, the difference between R squared (R²) and adjusted R squared (adj. R²) should not exceed 0.05. In this case $R^2 - \text{adj } R^2 = 0.02$. Therefore, the regression model found to be significant.

Table 3 Regression Model fit Summary

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.917a	.842	.840	.578	.842	490.465	3	277	.000	2.223

a. Predictors: (Constant), Knowledge, Commitment, Communication

b. Dependent Variable: Alignment

Table 4 ANOVA results

ANOVAa

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	491.207	3	163.736	490.465	.000b
	Residual	92.473	277	.334		
	Total	583.680	280			

a. Dependent Variable: Alignment

b. Predictors: (Constant), Knowledge, Commitment, Communication

Table 5 Hypotheses testing results

Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.096	.091		1.064	.288	
	Knowledge	.339	.046	.336	7.399	.000	.277 3.615
	Commitment	.328	.045	.330	7.336	.000	.283 3.538
	Communication	.318	.045	.317	7.129	.000	.289 3.462

a. Dependent Variable: Alignment

8. CONCLUSION

Results of the multiple regression model show that alignment between IS and marketing can be predicted by perceived knowledge as the t value found significant ($t = 7.399$; $p = 0.000$) at 0.005 level. Moreover, this effect was positive ($\beta = 0.336$), which means that where employees' perceived knowledge leads to better alignment between IS and marketing. In other words, employees' perceived knowledge is directly proportional to alignment between IS and marketing. Therefore, H1 is accepted.

Alignment between IS and marketing can be predicted based on sources of information about employees' perceived commitment as the t value was significant ($t = 7.336$; $p = 0.000$) at 0.05 level of significance. And results also revealed that this effect is positive ($\beta = 0.330$) that means as the employees' perceived commitment affect Alignment between IS and marketing positively. In the other way, employees' perceived commitment has a direct proportional relationship with Alignment between IS and marketing. As the employees' perceived commitment has a positive effect, it enables the organisation to achieve alignment between IS and marketing. Hence, H2 is accepted.

Alignment between IS and marketing is predictable by utilising the sources of information about employees' perceived communication as the t value was significant ($t = 7.129$; $p = 0.000$) at 0.05 level of significance. And results also revealed that this effect is positive ($\beta = 0.317$) that means as the employees' perceived communication has a significant impact on Alignment between IS and marketing. In the other way, employees' perceived communication has a direct proportional relationship with Alignment between IS and marketing. As the employees' perceived communication has a positive effect, it enables the organisation to achieve alignment between IS and marketing. Hence, H3 is accepted.

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