

# REAL CUSTOMER. AN INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ROLE-PLAYING IN MARKETING AS NEW DIDACTIC CONTENT

## CLIENTE REAL. UNA EXPERIENCIA INTERNACIONAL DE JUEGO DE ROLES EN MARKETING COMO NUEVO CONTENIDO DIDÁCTICO

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### Abstract

Teaching Innovation Project Based on the Application of Role-playing as a Training Experience in English for University Students of the Marketing Degree, Enhancing University-Business Relations.

The challenge involves a role-playing with students, real international clients, and executives from a renowned company. The student must set sales objectives, present a product line, and negotiate a sales schedule. This study aims to determine how university students perceive participation in a role-playing activity as continuous formative content over six academic years, where 57.2 % of the students had high expectations and 42 % had low expectations. After the activity, 92.8 % of the students reported having met their expectations, and 100 % reported high satisfaction and contribution to their training. The NPS indicates that 92.9 % of the students would recommend participating in the activity.

**Keywords:** *role-playing*, real training experience, training cooperation, new actors, new training tools, applied learning.

**JEL Codes:** A22

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## Resumen

Proyecto de Innovación Docente basado en la aplicación del Juego de Roles como experiencia formativa en inglés para los estudiantes universitarios del Grado en Marketing, mejorando a su vez las relaciones Universidad-Empresa.

El desafío implica un juego de roles con estudiantes, clientes internacionales reales y ejecutivos de una empresa reconocida. El estudiante debe establecer objetivos de ventas, presentar una línea de productos y negociar un calendario de ventas. Este estudio tiene como objetivo determinar cómo perciben los estudiantes universitarios la participación en una actividad de juego de roles como contenido formativo continuo durante seis años académicos, donde el 57,2 % de los estudiantes tenía altas expectativas y el 42 % tenía bajas expectativas. Después de la actividad, el 92,8 % de los estudiantes informó haber cumplido sus expectativas, y el 100 % informó una alta satisfacción y contribución a su formación. El NPS indica que el 92,9 % de los estudiantes recomendaría participar en la actividad.

**Palabras clave:** juego de roles, experiencia formativa real, cooperación en la formación, nuevos actores, nuevas herramientas de formación, aprendizaje aplicado.

**Códigos JEL:** A22

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, there is a shift in training patterns towards new learning processes and away from the traditional acquisition of subject knowledge (Paul and Ponnamm, 2018). In this context, developing parallel learning actions based on activities and projects enhances academic performance (Chen and Yang, 2019). Role-playing games promote student participation and motivation in their learning process compared to traditional methods. However, for these role-playing games to be effective, they must be designed according to the specific characteristics of the students (Silva, 2020). The student should not be a passive subject (Hagvall Svensson, 2022).

Zhong (2022) further states that role-playing improves student performance if the activity is personalized, incorporating cognitive and motivational variables aimed at promoting active student participation. In this regard, Telloni (2022) applies a specific role-playing model to engineering mathematics students based on individualized learning and distributing tasks according to each student's profile. Schuring *et al.* (2024), Collins and Septiana (2023), Saddington and McConnell, F. (2024), or Chamorro-Cifuentes (2024) apply the specification to teaching, compare applications, and protocolize it. Additionally, research conducted by Chen *et al.* (2021) and Kusuma *et al.* (2021) demonstrates that role-playing games used specifically in digital environments are effective in improving student performance.

Furthermore, the continuous use of these role-playing-based learning methodologies over successive academic years increases student participation and motivation (Morales and Villa, 2019). Role-playing can also be used as an assessment tool to demonstrate the extent to which students have understood and can apply specific knowledge. Participants mobilize their competencies to carry out a shared practical activity (Kasper and Jung, 2018).

Therefore, there is a concern to improve students' academic performance through the design of an experiment tailored to the specific profile of the students, which can be evaluated, has continuity over time, and introduces a role-playing-based learning technique aimed at providing a new experience for students (Archarya *et al.*, 2018).

## **1.1. Objectives**

A series of interrelated objectives are established to determine the overall impact that participation in a specific training activity can have on a student. These objectives are stated as follows:

Obj.1. Determine how university students perceive the opportunity to participate in a role-playing activity as formative content.

Obj.2. Establish the level of interest that university students have in each specific component of the developed training activity.

Obj.3. Determine to what extent a university student's perception of their formative experience contributes to recommending it to other students.

Derived from the process of achieving these objectives, a research hypothesis can be formulated to determine the level of relationship between the outcomes of the learning experiences lived by the student in their formative process through the inclusion of parallel activities and the recommendation of these activities to other students.

## **2. METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES**

The development of this activity has been structured around two main axes: First axis (AXIS1), enhancing the university-business relationship as a cooperation element (between the footwear company Panama Jack from Elche and the CEU Cardenal Herrera University). Second axis (AXIS2), creating an international work scenario with real actors (clients) to motivate and enrich student training.

### **2.1. Experiment Design**

The role-playing process in which students participate consists of two phases, each taking place during the first and second semesters of the third year of the Marketing Degree and the double Degree in Business Administration and Marketing.

Therefore, the role-playing consists of two parts: the first part lasts half a working day and takes place during the first semester. The students, within the contents of the subject Product and Brand Policy and related to the contents of Strategic Marketing and Cost Control, spend half a working day at the company's manufacturing facilities analyzing and understanding the production process and the impact of raw materials on the product's cost breakdown and brand value. In the second semester, within the contents of the subjects Sales Management and Distribution Policy, the students experience a real negotiation and sales process at the company's physical facilities. The challenge involves a role-playing process with real distributor clients and the brand's executive team, where the students set a sales target, present a product line, and negotiate a distribution contract plus a sales schedule. Additionally, they must creatively solve various scenarios posed by real clients, executives, and professors during the process. The participating actors are real clients from the company's distribution structure for the German, Austrian, and Finnish markets.

The students, working in groups, take on the role of area managers belonging to the company's marketing department. Together with the company's Commercial Management, they define for each client the sales objectives, commercial conditions, and order schedule.

Each working group presents and executes a marketing action to a group of real company clients and executives from the commercial department who, in turn, take on the role of clients. These real clients must obtain the best possible commercial conditions. The activity facilitators can intervene in the negotiation processes by playing a “marketing environment” role.

The activity lasts half a working day, structured into sessions that include different scenarios: commercial planning, client presentations, negotiation and sales, result analysis, and sharing conclusions.

## 2.2. Data Collection

Since the 2017-2018 academic year, these activities have been carried out continuously, except for the 2019-2020 academic year when they were not conducted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The last activity was conducted in the 2023-2024 academic year.

The average number of participating students per academic year has been 17, with a total of 103 students participating over the six editions. After each session (two sessions per academic year, totaling 12 sessions), primary qualitative and quantitative data have been collected.

### 2.2.1. Qualitative Data

Obtained through focus groups conducted with participating students in two sessions. One session is held before the first role-playing activity, and another session is held after the second role-playing activity. The objective is to gather general ideas about expectations and the degree of fulfillment. The data are analyzed through content analysis.

### 2.2.2. Quantitative Data

After the second session, students are given a structured questionnaire with the following technical sheet.

The students, on average, for the different academic years, used a PC to complete the questionnaire 64.3 % of the time and a smartphone 35.7 % of the time, with tablets not being

**FIGURE 1. TECHNICAL DATA SHEET**

Population.	Marketing Degree students at UCHCEU Elche Campus enrolled in the subjects Product Policy, Distribution Policy, and Sales Management.
Sampling Frame.	An average of 17 students for the 6 academic years studied.
Sampling Size.	Census. 100 % of students enrolled in the subjects.
Number of Questionnaires.	An average of 17 questionnaires for each of the 6 academic years studied.
Number of Valid Questionnaires.	100 % for each of the 6 academic years analyzed.
Information Collection.	CAPI-assisted personal survey.
Degree of Specificity.	Structured.
Number of Questions.	16 closed questions with 76 variables.
Data Collection Date.	Month of May for each academic year from 2017-18 to 2023-24, except for 2019-20.

used as a device. There are no significant differences in responses based on gender, enrolled course, or age.

### 2.3. Type of Analysis

A descriptive analysis of the data was conducted, obtaining central tendency statistics, dispersion, and frequency tables. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to determine the existence of a correlation between certain variables.

## 3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

As described in the methodological section, the measurement of results over the periods during which the role-playing activity at Panama Jack took place presents the following outcomes.

Table 1 shows the students' opinions about the role-playing activity prior to its implementation. More specifically, it analyzes the perceived usefulness of participating in the role-playing for their training process.

The results indicate that the majority of students do not consider this activity to be highly useful for their training. However, it is noteworthy that there is a positive trend in the data. The average value shows a downward trend, while the high value exhibits an upward positive trend in the observations.

Table 2 presents the results obtained regarding the expectations that the role-playing activity has generated among students. Although they may show similar results to the level of usefulness described in Table 1, the level of expectations does not present the same outcomes. In the 2020-21 and 2021-22 academic years, student expectations were lower. However, it can be observed that for the following two academic years, expectations return to a high level.

In the following Table 3, descriptive statistics from Tables 1 and 2 have been obtained for both usefulness and expectations. It is observed that the mean is above 50 % at the high level, which constitutes a priori a challenge for the proper development of the activity. The standard deviation is higher both at the "high" level of usefulness and expectations, indicating greater dispersion compared to other levels. Additionally, the skewness coefficient is positive for both categories, except at the high level of usefulness, which is negative or less than 0, indicating that, in general terms, there is a greater difference in values above the mean. The coefficient

**TABLE 1. LEVEL OF USEFULNESS FOR THEIR TRAINING.  
 PREVIOUS ACTIVITY (2017-18 TO 2023-24)**

Academic year	No.of students	Low	Media	High
2017-18	14	7 %	57 %	36 %
2018-19	12	0 %	45 %	55 %
2020-21	19	0 %	43 %	57 %
2021-22	19	0 %	44 %	56 %
2022-23	20	0 %	43 %	57 %
2023-24	19	0 %	41 %	59 %

**TABLE 2. LEVEL OF EXPECTATIONS. PREVIOUS ACTIVITY  
(2017-18 TO 2023-24)**

Academic year	No.of students	Low	Media	High
2017-18	14	7 %	46 %	47 %
2018-19	12	0 %	48 %	52 %
2020-21	19	0 %	52 %	48 %
2021-22	19	0 %	54 %	46 %
2022-23	20	0 %	43 %	57 %
2023-24	19	0 %	41 %	59 %

**TABLE 3. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS RESULTS TABLE 1 AND 2**

	Utility level			Fulfillment of expectations		
	Low	Media	High	Low	Media	High
Average	0,012	0,455	0,533	0,012	0,473	0,515
Standard error	0,012	0,024	0,035	0,012	0,021	0,022
Median	0,000	0,435	0,565	0,000	0,470	0,500
Mode	0,000	0,430	0,570	0,000	0,000	0,000
Standard deviation	0,029	0,058	0,086	0,029	0,050	0,055
Sample variance	0,001	0,003	0,007	0,001	0,003	0,003
Coefficient of variation	2,449	0,127	0,161	2,449	0,107	0,106
Kurtosis	6,000	4,967	5,517	6,000	-1,485	-1,901
Skewness coefficient	2,449	2,158	-2,317	2,449	0,141	0,528
Range	0,070	0,160	0,230	0,070	0,130	0,130
Minimum	0,000	0,410	0,360	0,000	0,410	0,460
Maximum	0,070	0,570	0,590	0,070	0,540	0,590

of variation for the “high” category in both usefulness and expectations shows low relative variability, very similar to the mean level. Both the level of usefulness and the expectations placed on the role-playing have been increasing over the period during which the activity has been taking place.

Continuing with the descriptive analysis of the obtained data, Table 4 shows the level of usefulness that the role-playing activity has for the participating students’ training once it has been completed, that is, with the training experience already lived and therefore evaluating an experienced reality. It is observed that the “high” rating is the most responded category, presenting a positive trend since the beginning of the activity and an outstanding evaluation.

The difference in results regarding the evaluation that the same students make prior to the activity is significant. The perception of the usefulness of the activity for their training process is different and varies positively after its completion.

**TABLE 4. LEVEL OF USEFULNESS FOR THEIR TRAINING.  
POST ACTIVITY (2017-18 TO 2023-24)**

Academic year	No.of students	Low	Media	High
2017-18	14	0 %	15 %	85 %
2018-19	12	0 %	10 %	90 %
2020-21	19	0 %	10 %	90 %
2021-22	19	0 %	5 %	95 %
2022-23	20	0 %	5 %	95 %
2023-24	19	0 %	0 %	100 %

**TABLE 5. DEGREE TO WHICH EXPECTATIONS ARE MET  
(2017-18 TO 2023-24)**

Academic year	No.of students	Low	Media	High
2017-18	14	0 %	15 %	85 %
2018-19	12	0 %	10 %	90 %
2020-21	19	0 %	10 %	90 %
2021-22	19	0 %	5 %	95 %
2022-23	20	0 %	5 %	95 %
2023-24	19	0 %	0 %	100 %

Table 5 presents the data related to the degree of fulfillment of expectations, that is, to what extent the prior expectations that participating students might have had about the role-playing activity have been met. The results are very positive. In the first edition of the activity, the degree of fulfillment was already at highly differentiating values, but it is worth noting that in the last year of the activity, expectations have been highly met for all participating students.

In the same way as for Tables 1 and 2, Table 6 presents the results of the main descriptive statistics obtained from the data on the level of usefulness that the activity has had for their training after its completion (Table 4) and on the degree of fulfillment of expectations (Table 5). It is worth highlighting the mean value obtained for the series of editions, the symmetry of the data, and the platykurtic distribution.

More specifically, the Likert scale used to explore the different components of the role-playing activity allows for determining, in relative terms and descriptively, how each of its components has contributed to the construction of the students' experience. Table 7 describes the results of the Likert scale by aggregating the specific results for each academic year and item under analysis.

The Likert scale used for the question of interest is as follows: Question: Regarding the role-playing activity conducted at Panama Jack, indicate the level of interest you have in the following aspects. Scale: Not Interesting - Slightly Interesting - Moderately Interesting - Quite Interesting - Very Interesting.



**TABLE 6. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS RESULTS TABLE 4 AND 5**

	Utility level			Fulfillment of expectations		
	Low	Media	High	Low	Media	High
Average	0	0,075	0,925	0,000	0,075	0,925
Standard error	0	0,021	0,021	0,000	0,021	0,021
Median	0	0,075	0,925	0,000	0,075	0,925
Mode	0	0,100	0,900	0,000	0,100	0,900
Standard deviation	0	0,052	0,052	0,000	0,052	0,052
Sample variance	0	0,003	0,003	0,000	0,003	0,003
Coefficient of variation	0,000	0,699	0,057	0,000	0,699	0,057
Kurtosis	0,000	-0,248	-0,248	0,000	-0,248	-0,248
Skewness coefficient	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000
Range	0	0,15	0,15	0	0,15	0,15
Minimum	0	0	0,85	0	0	0,85
Maximum	0	0,15	1	0	0,15	1

**TABLE 7. PARTICULAR INTEREST IN THE COMPONENTS OF THE ACTION (\*)**

	Not interesting	Slightly interesting	Moderately interesting	Quite interesting	Very interesting
Knowledge of raw materials and production processes	0 %	0 %	20 %	40 %	40 %
Visit to manufacturing facilities	0 %	0 %	15 %	5 %	80 %
Understand how marketing processes work	0 %	0 %	0 %	15 %	85 %
Experiencing a culture of corporate values	0 %	0 %	0 %	10 %	90 %
Working with real data and customers	0 %	0 %	0 %	5 %	95 %
Experiencing real corporate responsibility	0 %	0 %	0 %	10 %	90 %
Opportunity to conduct the activity in English	0 %	20 %	20 %	20 %	40 %

(\*) aggregate data from 2017-18 to 2023-24

The components of the action that have generated the greatest interest among students throughout the different editions have been: “the possibility of working with real data and clients,” “being able to experience real corporate culture and values,” and “being able to experience real corporate responsibility,” rated as “very interesting” with a weight of 90 % - 95 %. Similarly, but with a rating between 10 and 15 points lower yet still high, the components of “being able to visit manufacturing facilities” and “understanding the functioning of marketing processes” have been rated at 80 % and 85 %, respectively.



On the contrary, there has been one component that did not generate interest among students: the “opportunity to carry out the activity in English.” This component indicates a lack of interest on the part of the students, but it does not determine the reason for this lack of interest.

Finally, both the overall satisfaction of the students with the role-playing activity and whether they would recommend the activity to other students as a verification of that satisfaction have been measured. Regarding overall satisfaction with the activity, Table 8 shows that, since its inception, participating students have experienced high satisfaction, highlighting that since the 2020-21 academic year, the level of satisfaction has been the highest analyzed on the scale.

Additionally, in order to contrast the level of satisfaction, the intention of students to recommend the activity is analyzed through the net promoter score (NPS). The results obtained are highly positive as the trend of the indicator is positive, almost reaching the maximum level of the indicator in the current year 2024. The scale used for the net promoter score (NPS) is as follows: Question: To what extent would you recommend other students to participate in the role-playing activity? Scale: 1 to 10. Table 9 presents these data.

In Table 10, the main descriptive statistics obtained from the data in Tables 8 and 9 are presented. The net promoter score (NPS) average for the analyzed period is 0.898, also showing minimal dispersion of the data around this average. Similarly, overall satisfaction also presents a high average of 0.967 with hardly any data dispersion. For both results, net promoter score (NPS) and overall satisfaction, the coefficients of variation indicate very low variability.

While the kurtosis for both, net promoter score (NPS) and overall satisfaction, indicates that both distributions are relatively flat, the same is not true for the skewness coefficients. Overall satisfaction has a negative skewness coefficient of -0.96825, whereas net promoter score (NPS) has a positive skewness coefficient of 0.12404

**TABLE 8. OVERALL SATISFACTION (2017-18 TO 2023-24)**

Academic year	No. of students	Low	Media	High
2017-18	14	0 %	10 %	90 %
2018-19	12	0 %	10 %	90 %
2020-21	19	0 %	0 %	100 %
2021-22	19	0 %	0 %	100 %
2022-23	20	0 %	0 %	100 %
2023-24	19	0 %	0 %	100 %

**TABLE 9. NET PROMOTER SCORE NPS (2017-18 TO 2023-24)**

Academic year	No. of students	Net Promoter Score
2017-18	14	82 %
2018-19	12	85 %
2020-21	19	90 %
2021-22	19	89 %
2022-23	20	95 %
2023-24	20	98 %

**TABLE 10. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS RESULTS TABLE 8 AND 9**

	NPS	Overall satisfaction
Average	0,898	0,967
Standar Error	0,024	0,021
Median	0,895	1,000
Mode	-	1,000
Standard deviation	0,060	0,052
Sample variance	0,004	0,003
Coefficient of variation	0,067	0,053
Kurtosis	-1,067	-1,875
Skewness coefficient	0,12404	-0,96825
Minimum	0,82	0,9
Maximum	0,98	1

It should be noted that while the average overall satisfaction throughout the academic years is not only high but has also increased, the recommendation presents a lower average value. Additionally, the skewness coefficient differs for the two distributions, being positive for the NPS and negative for overall satisfaction.

To determine in what way the willingness of students to engage and recommend the role-playing activity to other students is related to the level of satisfaction derived from their own experience, the Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated, yielding a result of 0.820292494. The calculation of the variance inflation factor (VIF) is 3.057, indicating moderate multicollinearity. Therefore, it can be stated that there is a strong positive linear correlation between expressing a high level of satisfaction and recommending the experience to other students. Although the association between these two variables is strong, it cannot be stated that they are completely dependent on each other and that their correlation is perfect.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results obtained from the descriptive analysis of the quantitative data analyzed, it can be affirmed that students perceive positively that their training activity is complemented with other parallel activities that allow them to put the subjects into practice. However, for students to affirm that they have a positive perception, they need to have experienced the training activity to understand its usefulness and contribution to their training process. With the training experience already lived, students positively evaluate the experienced reality. Students may remain skeptical of activities that are not usually part of their traditional content, but this same skepticism can become a lever in their own training process.

These parallel activities must be specifically adapted to the characteristics of the students and the type of training experience sought. Determining the importance of each component of the activity in the overall experience is key to obtaining a positive result. If these specific components are directly related to the real application of knowledge and provide them with the opportunity to play a different role, students will consider the activity of utmost importance for their training process. Similarly, the continuity in carrying out the activity in successive academic courses also has a positive impact on students.

Overall, students who report having had a satisfactory training experience are likely to recommend this activity to other students, becoming active subjects in the training experience of their peers. Generating a positive experience in students is key for them to feel part of their own training progress and to want to get involved by taking on the role of prescriber.

## 5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH LINES

This descriptive study of quantitative data could not reflect the results obtained through qualitative techniques, as their objective was to obtain guidance on the specific aspects that should be part of the activity and be tested later in the quantitative analysis. The focus groups developed in successive academic courses aimed to confirm that the specific aspects of the activity were relevant.

Another limitation found is that it is not possible to establish in advance and objectively the level of English that the students participating in the activity had. Their graduation requires a B2 level until the 22-23 academic year and B1 for 23-24, but at the time of the activity, there is no objective scale indicating the student's language level, which limits the understanding of the analyzed item and what type of relationship this circumstance establishes with the result extracted from the item "Particular interest in the opportunity to carry out the activity in English" through the Likert scale.

Future research lines should delve into the qualitative analysis, considering the different actors of the role-playing to contrast their opinions and experiences with the quantitative data obtained after the session. Similarly, it is pertinent to establish cause-and-effect relationships between the different variables used for the construction of the activity.

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