

Analysis of Factors Influencing the Choice Decisions of Graduate Students

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ABSTRACT

Higher education has become an increasingly competitive sector. This research paper investigates the factors that influence students' decision. In India presently the colleges are facing tough time due to cut-throat competition and in order to remain in the competitive market the colleges must provide superior value to the students. The management education institutions need to anticipate and react to student's needs. The basic purpose of education is to produce an able and competent cadre of individuals who can become, at later years, an effective human resource for nation's growth. Although education brings behavior changes in individuals but the benefits of education are multi- dimensional activity. Sample area for study was Madhya Pradesh and size was 306.

Keywords: Educational Institutes, Influences.

INTRODUCTION

Indian students' decision-making process is changing. Previously, traditional information sources such as print and broadcast media, friends, family and websites have been dominant sources of university course information. There was a time when foreign universities depended on their “local” agents in the target countries to disseminate information about themselves. Participation in sundry education fairs and expos was also considered de rigeur. Presentations and perusal of brochures used to be the main source of acquiring information of the dream University or college, with feedback of students already studying there being the clincher. Increasingly however, many studies of youth, teenagers and Gen Y overwhelmingly suggest that they are prolific users of the Internet and in particular social media applications.

Most Indian universities have seen the unlimited potentials of social media and now the social media in connecting with and recruiting students. In addition, 92 of the 100 top colleges and universities in India utilize social media to promote their programs to potential students. However, the average number of social media sites being utilized is 3.7. Facebook still remains the most used social media site.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Choudaha and Chang (2012) warn that the environment of intense competition globally amongst universities and budget cuts pressure universities to become more strategic and to focus on student recruitment. This situation makes student recruitment a highly valuable component to the financial viability of many universities in the India and other countries. But recruitment of students comes at a cost which relates to university budgets. Therefore, apart from using the traditional forms of recruitment methods, universities need to look beyond and experiment with other forms of recruitment including social media.

According to the National Association for College Admission Counselling, “the average acceptance rate for applicants is close to 70%, a number that has changed little since the mid-1980s” (**Hoover, 2008**). In previous decades, students applied to fewer institutions. In the 1970s, “50% of all college aspirants submitted just one

application and only 8% filled out 5 or more” (Kinzie et al., 2004). By 1990, the number of prospective students who only filled out one college application had decreased to 33%, while 37% filled out at least”.

One of the earliest models of the college selection process was developed by Chapman (1981). His model is limited to students of traditional age, since the circumstances surrounding older students may be more diverse. He cited the external influences of significant persons (friends, parents, guidance counsellors), institutional characteristics (cost/financial aid, location, availability of programs) and the institution's communication with prospective students (written information, campus visit, and recruiting/admissions) (Chapman, 1981).

Several researchers have investigated the college choice process for students of different ethnicities or specific characteristics. For example, Ceja (2006) found that Chicana/Latina students are most influenced by their parents and siblings. For those students whose parents have lower education levels, siblings been particularly important to the college choice process for Chicana/Latina students, primarily because parents lack the exposure to and understanding of higher education (Ceja, 2006). In spite of lack of understanding for some parents, they still exhibited a great deal of support for their daughter's educational aspirations, providing encouragement and motivation for their daughters (Ceja, 2006).

Student aid and family income have not kept up with rising postsecondary prices, college is becoming less affordable and accessible, especially for low- and middle-income families (Perna & Li, 2006). Low- and moderate-income students have been more sensitive to college costs than high-income students.

Financial aid has had a significant positive impact on the enrolment and success rates of students from low-income families (Chen & DesJardins, 2008). College enrolments have increased over the past two decades for 18 to 24 year old students, but there is still a significant gap for students in the lowest quartile for family income than for those students whose family income is in the highest quartile (Mortenson, 2001).

Merranko (2005) examined factors influencing the college choice process of first-generation college students. Through examining data collected by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), Merranko (2005) found the most important factor was academic reputation of a school. The second most important factor was the number of graduates of the school who found good jobs (Merranko, 2005). Other important factors included social reputation and low tuition (Merranko, 2005).

One such study investigated a number of factors, including student skills and aspirations, parental characteristics and encourage men and institutional information such as costs, availability of information and qualifications, and found that all interact with each other and impact the college choice process for students (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000).

Donovan and McKelfresh (2008) cited the importance of parents in helping their students choose a college. Parents expect to be involved in their student's experience. Their expectations result from a variety of factors, including “high cost of attendance, changing role of higher education in society, and their own regard for their students as children rather than adults” (Scott & Daniel, 2001, p. 84). A study of high-achieving high school students and their parents found financial factors were very important in their decision process, and found the parents were strongly involved in the process (Sztam, 2003).

Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, and Colyar's (2004) work showed the importance of the influence of school counsellors on the perception of a student's ability to attend college. Gonzalez, Stoner, and Jovel (2003) also described the importance of high school counsellors and the overall high school environment in expanding

both perceived and actual opportunities for college. Most college choice models have neglected to factor in transaction costs, which are defined as the time and money needed to access and evaluate college information (Arellano, 2002).

In a study analyzing regional or national college tour groups, students who participated in these groups had higher levels of applications to colleges, higher degree attainment than those students who did not participate in college tour groups, and participated in loan and work-study programs to aid in their successful degree completion (Arellano, 2002). Washburn and Petroshius (2004) advocated for the importance of marketing through an institution's campus tour program, finding that the campus tour had an extremely important role in influencing the college choice of students. Bowman (2005) explored student participation in a pre-enrolment event at a college campus as related to fit and patterns of college choice. The concept of students choosing a college based on how they perceive they fit in with the institution was explored by Nora (2004). Psychosocial factors played a more significant role in the final stages of the college choice process (Nora, 2004).

Researchers have found that prospective students utilize the internet to find out information about colleges with increasing frequency over the past several years (Poock, 2006). Other research has shown university web sites to be the primary source of information for students who are choosing a college (Martin, 2006). A university web site is often the first communication experience the majority of students have with a college or university (Martin, 2006). Some recent studies have focused more on other aspects that may influence college choice.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To identify the factors influence the choice decisions of graduate students.

HYPOTHESIS:

H₁: To identify the factor influencing the college choice decisions.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The study was descriptive in nature investigates prospective of education. The methodology was qualitative survey. Survey was developed by questionnaire by 5 point likert scale on 5 most important and 1 not important. Respondents were students who want to take admission in UG programs. The respondents were from Madhya Pradesh. Sample size was 400 initially and after screening data 306 was final sample for analysis. Questionnaire was based on refinement of the 15-item instrument which was gathered from students of 12th class pass and their parents. For reliability on 27 sample by Cronbach alpha was 0.939. Dillman (2000) proposed that there are three data variable types that exist when collecting data using questionnaires. They include attribute, behavior and opinion data. Each of these data variables was considered in the design of the survey questions. However, data constituting behavior variable types was considerably more.

DATAANALYSIS & RESULT

1. In what ways did you choose your college?

Most participants corresponded with current students (33.66%), although 11.11% became a fan/friend of the campus with current students. Additionally, 36.6% used follow-up updates from admissions offices, while 18.63% corresponded with faculty or staff (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1: Ways you chose your college:

Way:	Response	%
Corresponded with current students	103	33.66
Became a fan/friend of the campus	34	11.11
Followed updates from admissions office	112	36.6
Corresponded with faculty/staff	57	18.63
Other	0	0

2. How did the college website influence your choice?

The majority of the students (70%) in this study reported specific college and university websites were at least somewhat influential, with 8.4% stating the websites were not at all influential. The question was not answered by 5.5% of the students (see Table 1.2).

Table 1.2: The Influence of College Websites

Level of Influence	Response	%
Very Influential	52	17
Somewhat Influential	162	53
Slightly Influential	49	16
Not at all Influential	26	8.4
No Answer	17	5.5

H₁: To identify the factor influencing the college choice decisions.

Table 1.3: Descriptive Statistics

S.no	Items	Mean	S.D
1	Influence of Social Networking	3.2974	1.12489
2	The Influence of College Websites	3.6634	.92032
3	Counsellor visit(s)	3.9118	1.31899
4	Campus tour(s)	4.3464	.79193
5	School guidance	4.3987	.85192
6	Informal campus visit(s)	3.9183	1.21326
7	College Brochure	3.8562	.94725
8	Siblings' opinions	3.2418	.90916
9	Parents' opinions	3.4673	.96864
10	Distance from home	3.8725	1.01146
11	Academic reputation	4.2092	.89188
12	Cost of attendance	3.7745	1.09461
13	Financial aid award/loan(s)	3.8725	1.01469
14	Scholarship(s)/ Grant(s)	4.0000	1.05582
15	Friends' opinions	3.9837	1.05414

Mean of each item of college choice is varying at least from 3.2418 to highest 4.3987. Highest was on school guidance and least was on Siblings' opinions.

Table 1.4: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.880
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	7501.092
	df	105
	Sig.	.000

The Kaiser –Meyer-Olkin measures of Sampling Adequacy is calculated using correlation and partial correlation to test whether the variable in the sample are adequate to correlate. The general rule of thumb is that KMO value should be greater than 0.7 for a satisfactory factor analysis to proceed. By observing the above result KMO is 0.88. Barletts Test of Sphericity test whether there is relationship between the variables. A p value less than 0.05 indicates that it makes sense to continue with the factor analysis from the Table 1.4, it is found that p is 0.000 which is less than to 0.05. It shows the relationship between the variables.

Table 1.5: Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	9.957	66.378	66.378	9.957	66.378	66.378
2	2.298	15.318	81.697	2.298	15.318	81.697
3	1.879	5.861	87.558	1.879	5.861	87.558
4	1.351	3.676	91.233	1.351	3.676	91.233
5	1.016	2.109	93.343	1.016	2.109	93.343
6	.879	1.857	95.200			
7	.596	1.307	96.507			
8	.370	1.136	97.644			
9	.194	.628	98.271			
10	.068	.453	98.725			
11	.060	.400	99.125			
12	.043	.284	99.410			
13	.038	.251	99.661			
14	.028	.189	99.850			
15	.023	.150	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

The Initial Eigen values - First 5 factors were meaningful as they have Eigen values > 1. Factors 1, 2, 3,4 and 5 explain by cumulative 66.378%, 15.318%, 5.861, 3.676, and 2.109 % of the variance respectively – a cumulative total of 93.343 % (which was acceptable). The Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings provides 93.343 % similar information based only on the extracted factors.

Table 1.6: Factor Loading

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
Counsellor visit(s)	.914				
Campus tour(s)	.866				
School guidance	.795				
Informal campus visit(s)	.896				
Parents' opinions		.789			
Siblings' opinions		.883			
Friends' opinions		.643			
Distance from home			.861		
Academic reputation			.849		
College Brochure			.612		
Financial award/loan(s)				.896	
Scholarship(s)/ Grant(s)				.896	
Cost of attendance				.883	
Influence of Social Networking					.863
The Influence of College Websites					.840

Factor loading prepared by five factors namely factor 1 (Personal Visit & Tour), factor 2 (Opinions), factor 3 (Overall Institute Profile), factor 4 (Cost Advantage or Financial Aspect) and factor 5 (Social Networking). Detail was given below.

Factor 1: Personal Visit & Tour

This is one of the most important factor in choice of college selection which consisted total variance 66.378%, eigen value of factor was 9.957 and highest loading was .914 on Counsellor visit(s), followed by .896 on Informal campus visit(s), .866 on Campus tour(s) and lowest loading was .795 on The Influence of College Websites. Interaction with the counselor always gives sensible impact on students as well as their parents.

Factor 2: Opinions

Every student takes lots of opinions here and there and out of this most of the time they consider any of them given in next few statements. That's why this one is second most important factor in choice of college selection which consisted total variance 15.318 %, eigen value of factor was 2.298 and highest loading was .883 on Siblings' opinions, followed by .789 on Parents' opinions, and lowest loading was .643 on Friends' opinions.

Factor 3: Overall Institute Profile

Every institute carries lots of parameters and facilities for student's benefits like best faculty, infrastructure, placement, internship and many more that's why institute profile is most useful and important criteria for selection on an institute. This one has third most important factor in choice of college selection which consisted total variance 5.861%, eigen value of factor was 1.879 and highest loading was .849 on Academic reputation, followed by .861 on Distance from home, and lowest loading was .612 on College Brochure.

Factor 4: Cost Advantage or Financial Aspect

From last couple of year fees of any program in reputed institute is increasing at very fast pace but mean while education loan is easy method to join good institute. So in current time it plays crucial and important role. This one has fourth most important factor in choice of college selection which consisted total variance 3.676%, eigen value of factor was 1.016 and their highest loading was equal in two items one is .896 on Financial

award/loan(s), followed by same loading on Scholarship(s)/ Grant(s), and lowest loading was .883 on Cost of attendance.

Factor 5: Social Networking

This is one of the important factor in choice of college selection which consisted total variance 2.109, eigen value of factor was 1.016 and highest loading was .863 and lowest loading was .840 on Influence of Social Networking and The Influence of College Websites.

SUGGESTIONS:

One of the benefits students desire by studying far from house is to obtain better and higher quality education which helps them improve their analytical skills and makes them more employable in the market. This has led the researcher to suggest that institute should structure their programs in a way that match industry demands and help students sharpen their thinking skills and become more creative.

CONCLUSION:

Like any other business institution, a higher education institution needs to understand its customer needs and wants in order to remain competitive and survive among higher education providers. Extant literature has probed the importance of student choice criteria as the decision is crucial on an individual's future life. This paper focuses on understanding the impact of a number of selected factors, which in hence the decision making of students in selection of college at graduate level. The students are also concerned about facilities and financial aids, location and many more. Besides faculty, a good library is another resource for a premier institution. While selecting the location for the B-School the management should take care of the facilities that a particular location can provide like cost of living, transportation and safety in that area. The fee structure, loan facility and scholarship scheme are also the important factor for the students. The scholarship should be provided to the meritorious students

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