

Factors Affecting Choice of students in selecting an educational institute and University: A study focusing on private education sector in North India.

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ABSTRACT

The decision to choose a university for higher education by any prospective student has become increasingly complex in India. The main driver of this change is increased privatization of education sector with international level infrastructure and good placements. With changing marketing dynamics, private universities responded by doing branding and improving operations. The role of marketing and advertising gained importance and today, advertisements of universities in India highlight their attractive features and USP's like placements, courses, infrastructure, foreign trips, scholarships and other schemes to help students take a decision. This study attempts to explore the factors of decision making for admission in universities in Delhi NCR. The data is collected post admission and 30 variables were generated based on the available literature. PCA was used to obtain factors and references, Placements, good courses, good counselling and nearness to their homes was considered important for the choices by the students.

Key Words:

Higher Education, Choices, higher educational institutions, Students Choice, Promotion, marketing

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Introduction

The decision to choose an institutions or university by any prospective student has become increasingly complex as higher education has transformed itself and has grown from a collection of national institutions and universities to regional and localized universities and institutions. The main driver of this change is increased privatization of education sector (without government funding / self-financed) and non-attractive government institutions with poor infrastructure and other facilities. Many private as well as government universities constructed buildings like library, auditoriums, cafeterias and also process reforms to become efficient and effective in decision-making and day to day operations. They also strived to be more economic within the limits of available resources. The result is that the role of marketing and branding and advertising gained importance in the education sector for students considering enrolling into a college/university in India and abroad. Today, the newspapers are filled with lot of advertisements about various colleges and universities in India and international universities with attractive scholarships and other schemes to help students. So, there are many factors that probably affect the

final decision to enroll in any place of study. Since the passing out school and college students may have only a vague notion of future educational needs and benefits; it is an opportunity for the university and institutes to allow students to investigate various alternatives by vigorously promoting their brand name, infrastructural capabilities, facilities like Hostel, sports etc and about their programs strength and innovativeness and their esteemed faculty members.

The management of colleges/university needs to market their institution and establish a unique difference which highlights their strength and gives the students a reason to choose that university. Since higher education institutions operate in a service environment, they need to understand the unique aspects of service marketing in order to accomplish the above goal. Higher education is now viewed as having all the characteristics of a service industry and is "people based", stressing on the importance of relationships with their customers (Mazzarol, 1998). (Shank et al., 1996) also underlined that educational services are now seen as intangible and perishable and is experienced by a student who participates in this exchange process. Marketing and promotion of higher education is

therefore sufficiently different from the marketing of products (Nicholls et al., 1995).

With increasing and now inevitable expansion of higher education, emphasis on quality parameters becomes important because of competition and an institution activity and their budget should be such so that obsolete activities should be erased creating space for new activities.

Higher education has always been recognized as a major contributing factor to the social, cultural and intellectual aspect of society and improves the quality of human life. According to the latest statistics available, there are more than 736 universities in India today and around 18000 centers of higher learning (colleges & polytechnics). The Government of India has been recommended by the Knowledge Commission to double the educational outlay up to 6 per cent of the GDP in the current budget.

Review of Literature

There are various school of thoughts on factors that influence the choices of students. Several researchers have conducted research to explain student choice and also student behavior by using mathematical modelling and other statistical tools. The choice to take admission in for higher education can change a person's life and hence, it remains an important social issue for all thinkers and practioners.

There are several decision criteria for selecting a university occur from various reviews and studies undertaken by the researchers and various studies have established several factors that influence student's choice of an institution. These include:

- a. Course or programme students want to pursue (type/availability)
- b. Academic reputation/recognition of an institute or University
- c. Campus location
- d. Ranking of the institution
- e. Quality of faculty members
- f. Friends attending the same institution: reference
- g. Family influence
- h. Financial cost: Program Cost
- i. Employment / placements prospects
- j. Earning potential
- k. Safety/security concerns

There are two perspectives available for understanding the complex admission decision. In first approach, aspiring students decides on

criteria like where to apply, admission criteria, and then make their enrollment decisions (Hearn & Longanecker, 1985). Geographic location and how near an institute is from their respective residence can also be a constraints for many students. (Niu & Tienda, 2008). The second approach talks about institutional requirements such as annual Fee, boarding and lodging expenses, campus infrastructure, distance, the quality of programs, and availability of scholarship and financial aid. Other common factor most commonly associated with a comprehensive institution choice include background of the student (Jackson, 1982), student aspirations (Chapman, 1981) (Jackson, 1982), their educational achievement (Hanson, K. and Litten, 1982) social environment (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987), financial variables (Edward P St. John, 1990) (E P St. John, 1991), net cost (Edward P. St. John & Starkey, 1995), institutional climate (Chapman, 1984), and institutional characteristics (Hanson, K. and Litten, 1982).

Parents do have a huge impact on a student's choice of college (Moogan & Baron, 2003); (Domino et al., 2006). Many studies in Asian countries found that student reference groups such as siblings, friends, peers, relatives, their school teachers and other relatives influence a student's choice of a university (Ceja, 2004) (Ceja, 2006) (Telli Yamamoto, 2006) (Pimpa & Suwannapirom, 2008); (Wagner & Fard, 2009). Other research (Dawes & Brown, 2002); (Kim, 2004); (Nora, 2004); (Telli Yamamoto, 2006); (Raposo & Alves, 2007) also explained that student personal factors also have a great influences on student choice of a university.

Several studies have focused on the factors influencing specifically foreign students' choice of the educational institutions in a host country (Mazzaral & Soutar, 2001)(Pimpa, 2005); (Chen & Zimitat, 2006). In (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) study, a pull-push framework was postulated. Students' decision making can be explained as some combination of push and pull factors. Push factors are basically political or economic in nature and play a major role in the choice of destination/country and even the type of institutions such whether they are public/private funded. They may include financing availability or political uncertainties in student's home

countries which may encourage students to study overseas., Pull factors on the other hand could refer to reputation of the institution, recognition of the qualification obtained, teaching standards, starting salaries upon graduation and location of the institution. Based on their study, six factors were important to students' choice:

- 1) Knowledge and awareness of the reputation and quality of education;
- 2) Recommendation of relatives, parents, and friends;
- 3) Costs, relating to tuition fees, lodging and boarding expenses, travel cost, and some miscellaneous social cost;
- 4) Social environment associated with weather, lifestyle, racial discrimination, local crime and safety;
- 5) Geographic distance between the two countries , if international education is chosen; and
- 6) Social links in foreign country because of past family and friends who might have lived or studied there (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

While(Carpenter & Fleishman, 1987) (Ariffin, 2008) found college attendance as a choice related factor , self aptitude and ability of a student is also one of the important contributor in selection of colleges (Wiley et al., 1985) (Hearn & Hossler, 1986). Geographic location like proximity and distance from home to university is also found to be a significant predictor of College choice as investigated by (Kohn, M., Manski, C. & Mundel, 1976) (Servier, 1986) (Sevier, 1994) (Absher & Crawford, 1996). What an academic program offers, what are the contents, range and duration are also significant(Ford et al., 1999). Branding and reputation of the college are found to be a very strong predictor of College choice as examined by (Maguire & Lay, 1981) (Murphy, 1981) (Keling, 2006). Living Cost and fees are an important factor to be discussed by various researchers (WEBB, 1993) (Joseph, M. and Joseph, 1998) and if financial aid is available then it also has a persuasive power on student college attendance (LM, 1982) (Wiley et al., 1985); (Jackson, 1986) analyzed that if financial aid is available then it will likely to attract more enrollments in university than other factors.

(Paulsen, 1990) examined the impact of employment opportunity and found that employment opportunities are the stronger

predictor of enrollment decisions. In another study (Sevier, 1998) (Garma, R., & Moy, 2003) identified that employment rate of graduates and college attendance decisions are significant. (Hossler, 1990); (Sevier, 1992) noted that many universities invites school students to visit their campus and concluded that student's tour to college also known as school outreach program also motivate them to enroll in the college.

Universities are using all marketing techniques to attract new students. They advertise in newspaper and other print media, they run jingles on radio, and also runs promotional advertisements on TV. Many universities have started sponsoring national and international sporting events. These efforts and channels are found to be an important factor and a very significant contributor of enrollment decisions. Program and Price of the total education are found to be important marketing mix variables (Maringe, 2006). The influence of advertisement, radio and television ads provide a good vehicle for promoters and educational marketers to communicate a good image and build strong brand recognition among prospective students in an effective way(Hossler, 1990).

A study conducted in Australia looked at the patterns of how student gets access to tertiary education and make decisions about courses and universities. The study described complexities of the higher education market in Australia and focused on the "micro-level" patterns of student decision making. Some useful insights included 1) The field of study is preferred over the choice of university; and 2) Self interest in learning is important and it was concluded that marketing of higher education can shape students expectations of their university experience. This research was important it meant that effective marketing would help form realistic expectations of what universities offer and levels of commitment and involvement required by students (James, 2002)

As per (Beswick, 1989) the student is the final decision maker regarding choice of institution (Murphy, 1981) (MacDermott, Kristine G., Conn, Paula A., and Owen, 1987),however, the final decision involves dialogue between and among students, parents, advisors, teachers, friends, relatives, and even representatives from institutions (Change, 1986). If we determine the

proportion of the decision by others then important decision makers can be identified. This information will help institutions in developing more appropriate communication between the decision maker and the information sources.

An exploratory study conducted in Indonesia by Kusumawati (Kusumawati & Perera, 2010) in 2010 revealed emergent themes as important factors for selecting an Indonesian public university. The result indicates that total expenses or the cost, program reputation, proximity to the residence, future job prospect and parents opinion are five most importance choice criteria for Indonesian students. The next five frequent factors mentioned in order of decreasing frequency are academic quality, friends, psychological motive, campus facilities and campus environment. These are important factors and shall be used for our research.

Higher Education Scenario: Indian Perspective

As higher education system continues to grow in India, the decision to choose a university is becoming more complex and multiple variables will affect students simultaneously, as this study suggests. This type of study will be useful for college/university administrators to consider that how they shall manage and present their resources pan India for current and future students. Therefore, the research will be beneficial in developing appropriate promotions that differentiate colleges in a meaningful way to potential students worldwide. In the previous researches, several important factors were discovered and it is possible that these factors may be unique to some countries especially India. In addition to determining the important factors, a greater knowledge about the underlying motivations of students for furthering their higher education will also be known to the promoters of these universities. The universities need to be dynamic and adoptive to the changing needs and priorities of the society and should also provide a place where these young and innovative minds can be free to learn.

Education in India is witnessing a dynamic change that started after a regulatory body, All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE) giving approval to run private institutes in affiliation with

government universities. It has become more competitive in recent years due to overall bad performance of government institutions and universities which have failed to revamp their structure and pedagogy. The last decade also witnessed reductions in funding from the government and increase of student fees in higher education. As the market grows more competitive, the role of marketing, previously non-existent in most universities, has grown significantly. Last 10 years were especially worth mentioning when private and deemed universities started making inroads in India under UGC and state approval, thus paving way for new and innovate programs offered by these universities. Due to large number of institutes and universities operating in India, it becomes difficult for students to understand and chose a place to study that matches their capability and their choice of program offered. With aggressive marketing and promotion by the private universities and institutes, it will be rather interesting to understand the factors that are important for the student while they choose a particular institute or university.

A questionnaire has been prepared to understand student preferences, internal motivating factors and other aspects that may have propelled him or her to choose a university. Similarly, the marketing and promotional activities of private university is also considered and investigated.

Since there are private universities and institutes in the market, regional choice factor comes into play and students restrict their choice by taking admission in the nearest university. Secondly, affordability may also be one of the key factors that weigh heavily in affecting student choice. Marketing and promotional efforts may have an impact on the student but brand effect may not be the significant factor. There are several hypotheses which are framed based on experience and on review of literature.

It is also important to understand that available literature do not provide much help in the current private education scenario in India when there are large regional concentration of private institutes and universities offering variety of programs within a city, to students. Since all private institutes and universities are self-financed, getting requisite enrollments in a year is essential for all running institutions. On other hand though

there are lot of students unable to make it in top ranking and moderately ranked institutions, they are still hesitant to join private education as they may well perceive the institution to be not worthy because of reasons like placements, education , infrastructure or other issues.

Research Design

The review of literature leads us to various factors that are important for the student final choices. The factors considered are

1. Course or program they wish to pursue
2. Academic reputation and recognition
3. Campus Location / Geographic area
4. Friend or sibling reference
5. Quality of faculty members
6. Financial cost
7. Placements
8. Infrastructure
9. Branding of the institute

Approximately 26 variables were formed based on the above literature review. Many questions were asked from different stakeholders about the decision making while they choose any university and institution for their kids or for themselves or for others. The questionnaire was framed on a formative scale and factor analysis as a statistical tool seemed to be appropriate with the idea of creating and exploring factors that may be seen as an important factor for decision making. PCA method will be used to understand the factors that have higher loading or if they group together. The term institute and university meant the same thing and denotes an educational setup for higher learning. In many places in this article, they are used interchangeably. The geographic domain is Delhi National capital region universities and institutes in India. The data is collected from three important universities. A survey from students was conducted in the year 2019-20 and 180 student responded. More than 150 valid responses were accepted and analyzed.

Research Methodology

The review of literature indicated factors that were used by students and so a number of related statements were prepared on an ordinal scale (formative scale) to ascertain the factors that are important for a student in considering a university or an institute. Keeping in view Factor loading method was chosen because of the ordinal data and a questionnaire was designed to understand and test all the hypothesis. The result is shared below.

The Results indicate that there are five important determinants like proximity to the university, references , good placements and good program , advertisements on various channels of communication and help/counselling from the university were significant for the educational promoters and marketers in developing marketing strategies and programs.

The research is based on a survey of 250 students in two undergraduate and graduate disciplines, management and engineering, across the four universities in India. The findings indicate that the choice decision is complex and multi-factorial and also involves local factors. Since there are lot of variations in universities offering courses and also availability of many private universities in India in different states, the evidence illustrates consistency in respect of the top four factors like word of mouth and references, academic reputation, distance from home and location and branding. The university which advertises along with good academic reputation seems to attract more students. The difference between genders and their decision choices are yet to be studies and can be a prospect for future research.

Factor Analysis

The following factors were created based on literature and then analyzed using short names in factor analysis table. The full names are given below

Nearness	Friend Reference	Good Placement	Newspaper Awareness	Satisfaction Feeling
Good Infrastructure	Good Teaching	Affordable Fee	E Awareness	Advertisement Helpfulness
Good Course	Prime Location	Awareness/ Promotion	Good_Counsellor	Attending Function

Sibling Reference	Known Institute	Radio awareness	Query handling	Attending university-Function :How Helpful
Out calling	Overall Experience			

Table 1. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.627
Approx. Chi-Square	551.349
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity df	231
Sig.	.000

Table 2. Communalities

	Initial	Extraction
Nearness	1.000	.773
Good Infrastructure	1.000	.549
Good Course	1.000	.618
Sibling Reference	1.000	.613
Friend Reference	1.000	.556
Good Teaching	1.000	.692
Prime Location	1.000	.610
Known Institute	1.000	.578
Good Placement	1.000	.654
Affordable Fee	1.000	.735
Awareness/ Promotion	1.000	.628
Radio_awareness	1.000	.724
Newspaper_Awareness	1.000	.740
E_Awareness	1.000	.582
Good_Counslr	1.000	.648
Query_handling	1.000	.677
Out_calling	1.000	.604
Overall_Exper	1.000	.664
Satisf_Feeling	1.000	.761
Advertisement	1.000	.689
Helpfulness	1.000	.689
Attending_Func	1.000	.584
Attend_Func_Helpful	1.000	.706

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 3. Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.332	15.147	15.147	3.332	15.147	15.147	1.886	8.574	8.574
2	1.960	8.907	24.054	1.960	8.907	24.054	1.819	8.268	16.842
3	1.840	8.362	32.416	1.840	8.362	32.416	1.721	7.822	24.664
4	1.543	7.012	39.428	1.543	7.012	39.428	1.704	7.747	32.411

5	1.270	5.775	45.203	1.270	5.775	45.203	1.551	7.051	39.462
6	1.210	5.498	50.701	1.210	5.498	50.701	1.535	6.976	46.438
7	1.111	5.052	55.753	1.111	5.052	55.753	1.420	6.454	52.892
8	1.074	4.880	60.632	1.074	4.880	60.632	1.390	6.317	59.209
9	1.047	4.757	65.390	1.047	4.757	65.390	1.360	6.181	65.390
10	.930	4.229	69.619						
11	.828	3.763	73.382						
12	.775	3.522	76.904						
13	.723	3.287	80.191						
14	.647	2.941	83.132						
15	.624	2.838	85.970						
16	.582	2.643	88.613						
17	.544	2.471	91.084						
18	.482	2.191	93.275						
19	.459	2.087	95.362						
20	.392	1.783	97.146						
21	.326	1.481	98.626						
22	.302	1.374	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 4. Rotated Component Matrix

	Component								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nearness							.871		
Good_Infrastr							.456		
God_Course	.430			.538					
Sibling_Ref				.741					
Friend_Ref				.643					
Good_Teaching			.632						
Prime_Location		.635							
Known	.718								
Good_Placement	.645								
Affordable_Fee						.819			
Awareness_Promo	.424	.436							
Radio_aware		.782							
Newspaper_Awar		.567				.515			
E_Aware			.482						
good_Counslr			.769						
Query_handling								.774	
Out_calling								.710	
Overall_Exper			.455						.434
Satisf_Feeling									.842
Adv_Helpful					.453				.498
Attending_Func					.633				
Attend_Func_Helpful					.789				

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 12 iterations.

Table 5. Rotated Component Matrix^a

	Component								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nearness							.871		
Good_Infrastr							.456		
Good_Course				.538					
Sibling_Ref				.741					
Friend_Ref				.643					
Good_Teaching			.632						
Prime_Location		.635							
Known	.718								
Good_Placement	.645								
Affordable_Fee						.819			
Awareness_Promo									
Radio_aware		.782							
Newspaper_Awar		.567				.515			
E_Aware			.482						
good_Counslr			.769						
Querry_handling								.774	
Out_calling								.710	
Overall_Exper			.455						
Satisf_Feeling									.842
Adv_Helpful					.453				.498
Attending_Func					.633				
Attend_Func_Helpful					.789				

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 100 iterations.

Discussion and Suggestions

Table 6.

Component 1	Component 2	Component 3	Component 4	Component 5	Component 6	Component 7
Known Institute =.718	Radio awareness=.782	Good Teaching =.632	Good Course=.538	Attending Functions =.633	Affordable fees =.819	Nearness =.871
Good Placement =.645	Newspaper Awareness =.567	Awareness =.482	Sibling Reference =.741	Attending Functions helpful=.789		Good Infrastructure =.456
	Prime Location =.635	Good Counselling =.769	Friend Reference=.643			

The above table is obtained from the table 5(Rotated matrix) which indicates around 6 components that are found in our PCA analysis. The institute popularity and good placements are considered important. This also means that in higher education, final placements are considered so important that any institute having a good track

record of final placements is popular among students who are aspiring for higher education. This is also validated from the experience that private institutes do advertise their final placements data in admission posters.

Similarly, component 2 and 3 are about awareness of the institution that comes from regular

advertisement. Good teaching, good counselling through word of mouth also travelled and internet advertisement and presence is also an important factor.

Component 4 is about good course, friend and sibling reference which again is an indicator that prospective students do get influenced by a good course and then they refer that course or institute to their friends and siblings. In case of siblings, it is a reflection of parent choice because of their experience and satisfaction with the institute.

Component 5 includes advertisement and institute annual functions. Both the factors are important for private institutes and a good advertisement strategy always brings good admissions. Annual functions are also a part of admission strategy in majority of private universities and it is considered a major event to attract attention amongst business schools and also for the aspirants who will take admission and also spread a word of mouth about the scale and participation of the annual event. So, institutes take this annual event very seriously and a separate budget allocation is made to make the event successful. Celebrity singers and stars are called to dazzle the audience that mostly includes students.

Component 6 includes affordable fees which is also a very important factor when it comes to deciding a institution of higher studies. The band of annual fees is given below for most popular programme amongst students in North India and their annual fees. A difference of fees is weighted with the university infrastructure and other factors given above which then helps in making a final decision.

Component 7 includes nearness of the university and good infrastructure which is an indicator that a place of education near to a student place or area of living with good infrastructure is a good factor for making a choice. Many private institutes are preferred by locals and regional people as their choice for higher education.

On a closer look, factors which have a loading higher than .7 are

1. How well an institute is known
2. The advertisements on Radio about the institutes

3. A need for good counselling
4. Reference given by sibling
5. Attending annual functions which are popular in institutes
6. Affordable fees
7. Nearness of institute from their place of living.

All private universities are seen doing the above activities in order to be seen and heard by prospective students and their parents. So, in our context of study, the above factors come out as important by the respondents and a further scope for research to gain more insight is also available.

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