

A qualitative study on the factors affecting the pre purchase decision of the management students in Kolkata.

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Abstract:

Digital marketing is a relatively new arena that has successfully engaged the attention of the analyst and the education marketers. The universities and the institutes offering management courses are continuously evaluating and exploring the digital marketing sources. The number of studies on factors affecting the pre purchase decision are still scarce and very little is known on the selection criterion with respect to digital strategies that affect the management students in Kolkata. The objective of this paper is to help the education marketers understand the whole market structure and potential students' behaviour which forms the basis for developing the effective digital marketing strategies for the management courses. A study on the marketing strategies of a university or an institute is required to understand the needs of the target customers and also to compete and survive amongst the providers of the professional courses.

Keywords: digital marketing, pre purchase, factors.

Introduction:

The pre purchase search and the evaluation of information is an intrinsic part of the consumer buying behaviour. It is vital for the marketers of the universities and the institutes to have a deeper understanding of the consumer information acquisition behaviour so that they can reach to the target consumers in its most effective way and also plan the communication strategies accordingly. Studies reveal that the pre purchase information search of the universities and the institutes is generally done by the prospective students and also by their parents with a greater involvement (Moogan & Baron, 2003; Domino, Libraire, Lutwiller, Superczynski, & Tian, 2006; Yamamoto, 2006; Raposo & Alves, 2007; Al-Yousef, 2009). For example, in the Western countries it is evident that more number of parents attend the open days and the request for information is mostly from the prospective students. In a university or an institute, the services that are provided are intangible. Hence, the potential students cannot gain the service well in advance (Cowell, 1991; Soloman M. , Suprenant, Czepiel, & Gutman, 1985).

The present study focuses on the pre purchase behaviour of the students, so it considers the first three stages of the consumer decision making process such as ---- problem recognition or need recognition, information search and evaluation of alternatives. Moreover, the process of consumption of the service may take several years and there involves the risk of wrong selection amongst the prospects (Blythe & Buckley, 1997; Mitchell V. , 1995; Murray K. , 1991). Findings of various researches suggest that more than 90% consumers read the online reviews before availing any service or buying a product. The online reviews play a pivotal role in the entire decision making process (Godes & Silva, 2012; Kee, 2008).

Literature review:

A careful review of around 150 research papers and articles has been completed before conducting the qualitative study and analysis. The following represents the key findings relating to the factors affecting the pre purchase selection of the management students from the literature surveyed.

Researchers found that proximity to home has a strong impact on student's selection of a university or an institute (Paulsen, 1990; Raposo & Alves, 2007; Dawes & Brown, 2005)

(Soutar & Turner, 2002) had grouped the factors influencing student's choice of the university or the institute into two categories such as: (a) university related (b) personal factors. The university related factors include the type of courses offered, the campus, academic reputation of the institute or the university, the quality of the faculty and the type of the university. The personal factors, on the other hand, include proximity of the university or the institute to home town, family opinion and choices of friends or peers.

(Shanka, Quintal, & Taylor, 2005) highlighted proximity to home, variety of education offered, cost of living, tuition fees, safety and recommendation from family are significant factors influencing the student's selection process.

Certain factors are more alluring for the female students such as case studies, industry guests lecturers, live projects etc. Whereas male students consider wi-fi campus, communication development programmes particularly in English, furnished seminar halls etc as more important factors in the selection process (Bhola & Nalawade, 2013).

Factors such as the accommodation facility or the residency, academic environment, reputation of the institute, quality of the institute, size of the institute, financial aid available and course diversity are the significant elements impacting student's choice (Kallio, 1995).

Studies highlight that determinants of the selection process of a university or an institute can be grouped under three heads such as: the student's interest of study, the influence of others and the career prospects associated with the course (Strasser, Ozgur, & Schroeder, 2002).

Literature reveals that student's selection of the universities or the institutes depends on various factors such as academic quality, campus, facilities offered, personal traits etc. The level of family income significantly affects the student's choice (Sidin, Hussin, & Soon, 2003).

Studies highlight that e-customer adherence depends upon various factors such as – usage of the website and technology, value to be delivered, branding, customer service and trust and security. These broad factors embraces various other factors such as speed, customized features, easy payment methods, quick delivery, trust and authentication etc (Gommans, Krishnan, & Scheffold, 2001).

Studies found that the availability of the subject in which the student is interested, tuition fees and costs associated are the factors which influences the student's decision making process (Connor, Pearson, Court and Jagger, 1996).

Researches reveal certain factors influencing student's selection of Business school such as location, college reputation, academic programme, cost associated, employment opportunities etc (Ming, 2010).

Factors like academic reputation and accreditation, proximity of the university or institute to the home town, costs and the marketability or the market value of the degree are significant in the student's decision making process (Webb, 1993).

Previous researches show that facilities provided by a university or an institution affects the enrollment (Price, Matzdorf, Smith, & Agahi, 2003). Literature shows that factors like academic reputation, location and program was emphasized as factors affecting student's selection of a university or institute (Moogan, Baron, & Bambridge, 2001) (Moogan, Baron, & Harris, 1999) (Price, Matzdorf, Smith, & Agahi, 2003).

Studies show that the factor course or program was again highlighted as a selection criterion (Whitehead, Raffan, & Deaney, 2006).

Literature reveals that the student's choice of the university or the institute is affected by the set of characteristics in the student which may be either internal or external. The internal traits can be the various aspects of the student's performance and the aptitude and the expectation that they aspire for. External variables are the outside factors such as family, friends or teachers who influences the student's behaviour (Chapman, 1981). Chapman had further emphasized the quality of the lecturers or the faculties associated with the academic institution as well as the academic reputation which act as significant determinants in the decision making process of the students.

After evaluation of all the above factors, it was found that the mean score of the following factors are higher than a threshold value of 5. These factors are----- placement opportunity, cost, facilities, good ratings, display advertising, program, marketability or market value of the degree, trust and security. The study considers only these eight factors for further analysis.

The objective of the study is to identify the factors affecting the pre purchase behaviour of the management students in Kolkata.

Qualitative Data Analysis:

With the help of unstructured interview of the 35 student respondents, the qualitative data was collected. Purposive sampling method was used to collect the data. Purposive sampling is one of the sampling strategies where respondents are selected as they provide the relevant and best information in order to achieve the objectives of the study. The study is exploratory in nature. The initial plan was to let the student respondents 'express themselves' and their 'voice' could be heard in the process.

Prior to the analysis of the qualitative data, the interview transcripts were studied carefully. This made it easier to understand the key patterns and themes and the underlying issues in data. The extensive literature review had also helped to identify the themes and sub-themes. The following themes and sub-themes have been identified:

Theme 1-----Online marketing strategies

This theme represents the student's view on the online strategies formulated by the education marketer. The sub-themes that were identified are: (a) ease of browsing (twenty two respondents commented on this and considered that ease of browsing the website had an impact in selection of a university or an institute), (b) informative (nearly twenty eight students commented on this as positive and informative as they received all the information they required), (c) criteria (twenty six students commented on that the comparison amongst the universities and the institutes were based on certain criteria), (d) eye- catching contents (twenty nine respondents commented on this as they were asked about the particular advertisement that attracted most), (e) satisfaction (twenty one respondents had commented that the online experience and physical experience were same).

Theme 2-----Pre purchase search

Certain questions were asked to analyze the pre purchase search of the students. The sub-themes derived in the process were-----(a) Information search (nearly twenty eight respondents had collected the information from various sources) (b) source (twenty respondents had gone for online search, others had collected the information physically) (c) preference (thirty respondents had reacted positively to this question) (d) decision maker (nearly twenty eight respondents commented that parents had an active involvement in the decision making process).

Theme 3-----Factors influencing the selection criterion

Certain questions were asked to the respondents to understand the factors influencing the selection criterion. This theme refers to the respondent's view on the factors that influence the selection criterion. After a careful evaluation of the literature review, the factors influencing the pre purchase behaviour of the management students have been found out. The theme identifies the following sub- themes:

(a) placement opportunity (almost thirty three respondents emphasized placement opportunity as a pivotal factor) (b) cost (thirty two respondents pointed out that cost or education expenditure as a factor that influence selection criterion) (c) facilities (twenty seven respondents agreed that facilities play an important role in the selection criterion) (d) good ratings (twenty four respondents pointed out that good ratings is an important factor that promotes a university or an institute) (e) display advertising (thirty two respondents agreed that display advertisement is a

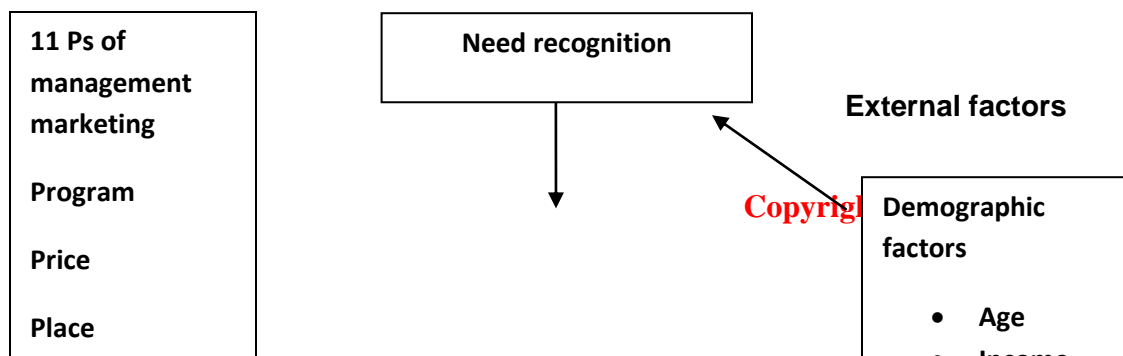
factor that attracts the students) (f) program (twenty nine respondents commented positively on the programs that they opted for) (g) marketability or market value of the degree (thirty three respondents regarded this factor as one of the most important) (h) trust & security (nearly seventeen had commented positively on this and the rest did not consider it as that important).

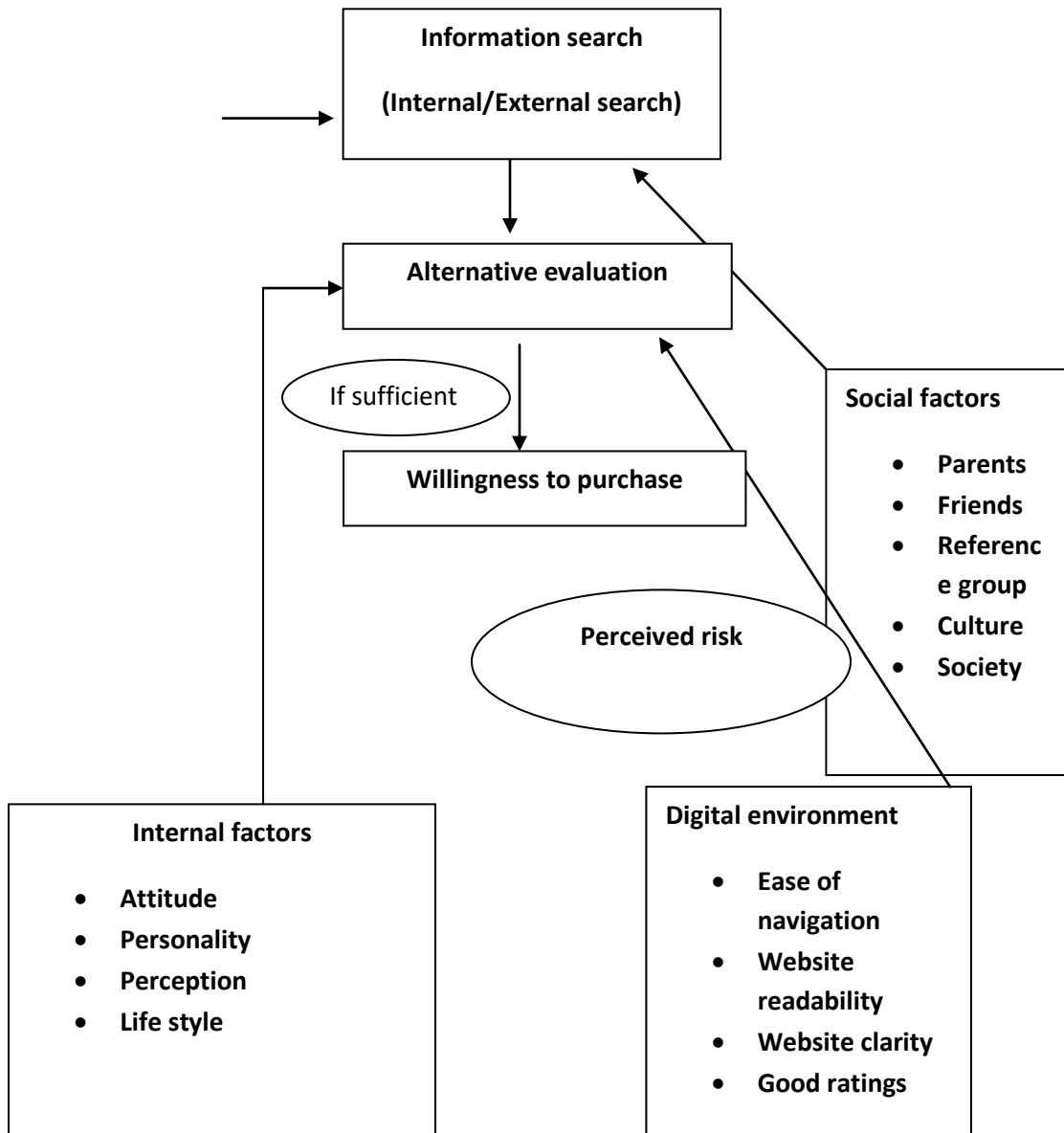
Discussion

The qualitative data analysis shows the student's views on online strategies, the pre purchase search and the factors that influences the selection criterion. A framework have been developed on the basis of the qualitative analysis and the literature surveyed. The qualitative analysis lays the foundation for further analysis. In the literature it was found that McCarthy created the 4 Ps of marketing mix in the earlier days when physical products and it's distribution and mass communication was dominant. In the present business environment, the search for a new paradigm with a dominant role in digital environment is in progress. The additional Ps of management marketing mix is an extension and an attempt to solve the operative decisions. The product has been replaced by program as management marketing mix. . The outcome of the services which is delivered through the 11P's is better in terms of enrollment of the technical education (Mahajan & Golahit, 2017) which includes the management and related courses. The successful institutes use the strategic marketing plans to carve out a niche and cater the needs of the prospective students.

The following is a framework developed on the basis of the qualitative data analysis:

Figure 1.1





Conclusion:

Thus the pre purchase search of the student's aspiring for the management courses can be influenced by the external as well as internal factors. The external factors can be the demographic, social and other digital environment factors whereas the internal factors can be the lifestyle, personality, perception or attitude of the students. The parents, friends, society and

culture exert some influence on the student's selection criterion. The pre purchase search generally involves—need recognition, information search (external/internal), alternative evaluation. If the information evaluation is sufficient then only the students select the university/institute which indicates the purchase behaviour. In digital environment, the element of risk plays a dominant role as the services offered and availed are intangible. The study shows that the 11 P's of management marketing mix has a direct as well as indirect impact in all the three stages of the decision making process.

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