Online Information Search Behavior of Business School Aspirants: An Empirical Study

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ABSTRACT

In last two decades there are several forces that have impacted business education system. It prompts the business schools across the globe to have market oriented approach either to survive or to excel. In this changing scenario the students’ roles in the system bear similarity to that of consumers in traditional business context. Accordingly, the researchers and practitioners have adapted the various marketing constructs – consumer behavior, service quality etc- to study the problems and prospects of this industry. The present study is an all round attempt to arrest the prospective business school students’ information search behavior which precedes actual decision making stage. Factor analysis reveals that seven factors- intellectual resource, state of Infrastructure, scope of placement, accreditation and collaboration, ranking status, cost of the program, and admission procedure- are usually searched online by the aspirants at pre-admission stage.

KEYWORDS

Business School Aspirants, Consumer Behavior, Factor Analysis, Information Search Behavior, Management Education, Service Quality, Social Media, Student Decision Making

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education market across the globe has been experiencing rapid change and competition (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2012). Marketing practices are being amply adopted by the higher education institutes to counter competitive pressures (Gibbs & Knap, 2001; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). As the students are considered as customers (Conway et al., 1994; Hill, 1995), understanding the process of student choice of higher educational institutes is one of the key concerns to researchers and practitioners (Kallio, 1995; Moogan et al., 2001, Soutar & Turner, 2002; Sojkin et al., 2011). The prospective students gather variety of information pertaining to various aspects of the institute at pre-admission stage. They explore varied information sources like web sites, career advisors, teachers etc (Veloutsou et al., 2004). The study of Moogan (2011) reported the use of online information sources like institute website, faculty website and independent websites for decision making by the potential students of higher educational institutes. Yang & Mutum (2015) cited that international students rely on EWOM (Electronic Word of Mouth) to choose university for studying in the host country.

Business education, which comes under higher education, has come out as one of the prominent service sectors in India. This sector has experienced tremendous growth in last two decades (Banerjee and Mondal, 2013). The researchers have explored several aspects of business school like service quality (Ravindran et al., 2013; Kamble & Sarangdhar, 2015), marketing mix decisions (Ivy, 2008), benchmarking (Mehta et al., 2015), branding (Opoku & Abratt, 2006; Shahaida et al., 2009;), reputation management (Baden-Fuller et al., 2000; Baden-Fuller & Ang, 2002) and media ranking of business schools (Corley & Gioia, 2000; Wedlin, 2007). Houston (1980) revealed information sources - institute catalogue, directories, alumni, current students, faculty, articles and direct contact with institutes - used by the business school aspirants before selecting the institute. Khanna et al, (2014) stated that information about infrastructure and placement of a business school disseminated by its alumni and current students in social media and media ranking of business school had impact on prospective student’s perception about the business school at pre-admission stage. Chauhan & Pillai (2013) advocated the role of content strategy of online brand community of the management institutes to attract the prospective students.

A variety of online information sources are available to gather information about business schools in India like educational websites (Shiksha.com, htcampus.com, Indianmba.com, mbauniverse.com), business school websites, online discussion forums (Pagalguy.com). Prominent business schools across the globe are also present in social media networks like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube etc (Chauhan & Pillai, 2013). This area has been neglected by the researchers. As a result, hardly any empirical evidence can be found with regard to online information search behavior of the potential business school students.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study is to explore the factors searched by the business school aspirants using online platform at pre-admission stage.
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