

What Factors Affect a Student's Choice of a University for Higher Education

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Abstract

The purpose of the research is to identify the reasons, why students choose a particular university? For identifying these reasons objectives of the research are formulated on which investigation are carried out in a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews. The research helps researchers understand that which objective is considered most important by respondents when selecting a university for higher education. As a result of the research it can be stated that all sources; word of mouth, role of marcoms and other factors of choice have impact on student's decision making process. But the most influential is word of mouth which has great significance for all interviewees. There are also other factors such as environment and social conditions that are the basis of positive word of mouth. The least important in accordance to the research seems to be the role of generic marketing communications such as advertisement when choosing a university.

Keywords: in-depth interviews, university, higher education, student choice, choice of university, qualitative approach, word of mouth, generic marketing communications

1. Introduction:

The purpose of the research is to identify the reasons, why students choose a particular university? For identifying these reasons objectives of the research are formulated on which investigation are carried out in a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews. These interviews combined would provide some understanding of what are the merits in selecting a university. The research would provide some understanding of how much importance each objective carries.

2. Research Objectives

The following research objectives were determined:

- To identify the factors of choice for students while choosing a university.
- Impact of word of mouth in choosing a university
- Importance of the role of marketing communications in choice making process of students.

3. Research Considerations:

A qualitative approach was adopted in carrying out the research. This approach has been chosen because it has a number of implications for the research objectives. First of all a qualitative research enables the researcher to have a better understanding of the relationship between factors of choice, word of mouth and role of marketing communications in choosing a university.

The qualitative approach would yield results that offer some insights into the most important factors that will determine underlying reasons for selecting a university.

4. Research Methodology:

In-depth interviews to explore the frameworks in which students determine their choice amongst universities based on the research objectives.

A qualitative approach was selected to enable a complex and exploratory conversation with students to start understanding the framework in which they made their decisions while choosing a university.

For the purpose of these In-depth interviews seven LUMS students were selected to identify the similarities between them while choosing their university and identifying the factors influencing while determining their selection, impact of word of mouth and role of marketing communications. Each interview was of 15 to 25 minutes.

5. Research Finding Under Each Objective:

5.1 Objective 1: Identify the factors of choice for students while choosing a university

Though it was not envisaged that the in-depth interviews would directly inform this objective, nonetheless a considerable amount of information was collected.

Regarding this objective, questions like "Why LUMS?" were asked, the interviewee responded in a similar way that choosing the best institute is a rational decision, an example is Mr. Salman Shahid who said: "I am lucky that I got admission in the best business school."

Every person's aim is to develop and extract a unique feature out of his personality; the type of professional network one gains from MBA at LUMS helps him to do so. Students have a versatile experience which leads to excel one's capability and creates a platform of learning.

The In-depth interview explains that in Pakistan the majority of students are career-oriented; they want to get a job once they are done with their degree. Such majority needs an institution which is top ranked, has good reputation and the job market response to that institution is above normal. The students' requirement is professional growth which can be fulfilled by a university of good ranking and market value.

It is interesting that the most important factors is peer pressure and environment. According to research LUMS is the primary choice of students because LUMS provide a dynamic environment and is a secular institution. Students have open option to choose from a wide variety of social groups which increases the social development and critical

thinking.

Based on the insights of In-depth interviews, faculty role in university fame was not emphasized by an interviewee. Although faculty was not good for Bsc in LUMS but still students consider LUMS the best option. Mr Faraz Akbar summarizes it saying, "Faculty might be important for some students but the majority is busy in analyzing other factors for choosing university rather than choosing on the basis of faculty." (Faraz)

5.2 Objective 2: Impact of Word Of Mouth in choosing a university

The in-depth interviews have been instrumental in providing ideas as how word of mouth has an impact of choosing a university. The insight shows that word of mouth is the most important factor when choosing a university this has been consistent with all interviewees.

It is interesting that universities spend a lot on advertising and marketing but the most influential power that affect the decision is peer pressure, an example is of Syed Zaeem Ahmed, he was indifferent whether to join LUMS or not but his father stood on a point that only LUMS is the place you're going to go to. The pressure was so strong that he was unable to see any other option.

Research stated that students are more inclined to believe word of mouth not only if it were family but also friends, relative, and also any other credible sources. 95% of the students choose universities on the basis of positive word of mouth.

Mr Shan Ellahi said, "I did not get help from other marketing tools, only positive word of mouth lead to my decision of joining LUMS."

All interviewees were asked about their opinion whether they will recommend LUMS to their brothers or relatives, they were seemed to be obsessed by their institution and their loyalty could be judged by their positive word of mouth. This loyalty will have impact on others as the word of mouth spreads.

The snowballing concept can be utilized here to show the effect and importance of marketing communications which is also called buzz marketing, LUMS has a geographically diverse student body, when a student of Gilgit is graduated and returns to his home town he will represent LUMS. His Word of Mouth will have a strong impact resulting in majority of students living in Gilgit.

5.3 Objective 3: Importance of role of marketing communication in choice making process of students

The in-depth interview has provided a number of insights brightening the role of marcom. It is an integral component for selling in markets where better communication leads to better supply chain management and connections, the profitability depends on marketing. But when it comes to academic institutions the role of marcom is minimal.

Analyzing the insights and thoughts of an interviewee; profession oriented students are impressed by striking facts such as Asia's top business school rather than colorful ads. Some think that there is no need of marketing by LUMS, it is a developed and is a recognized brand. Developing schools need to market themselves by names of faculty, magazines, newspaper etc. Mr. Shan Ellahi said, "Social media marketing does not have any role; if I was not in LUMS then I would definitely need it."

The thing in marketing communication that works for institutions such as of LUMS is pictorial marketing which shows a liberal social environment. It works great on A' level students who are interested in social interactions. This is not an attraction for a potential graduate student because he might be interested more in other thing than social interactions, when choosing a university.

An example was quoted by Syed Zaeem Ahmed about the role of Marketing Communications; he said that it is not so influential for people living in Lahore rather it does influence people living in rural areas and small towns. He further explained his point by giving reference of LUMS National Outreach Program which targets rural areas and small towns.

6. Conclusion

As a result of the research it can be stated that all sources; word of mouth, role of marcoms and other factors of choice have impact on student's decision making process. But the most influential is word of mouth which has great significance for all interviewees. There are also other factors such as environment and social conditions that are the basis of positive word of mouth. The least important in accordance to the research seems to be the role of generic marketing communications such as advertisement when choosing a university.

Appendices:

Interview guiding questions:

Q1: Why did you prefer LUMS over other institutions?

Q2: How well has LUMS fulfilled your expectation?

Q3: Did marketing communications play any role for you while you were applying for admission?

Q4: Will you recommend your brother to study in LUMS? Why?

Q5: If no! Which other institution you will recommend your brother to study in? Reason?

Q6: Did you prefer LUMS over foreign universities? Why?

Q7: what is the job market response to LUMS? How much influence it has in your decision making?

Q8: Have you ever seen LUMS advertisement? If yes, what influence did it have on you?

Q9: Are you impressed by marketing of LUMS?

Q10: Why you have chosen MBA?

Q11: When you realized that MBA is what you have to do rather than MSC, engineering, medical etc?

Q12: From where you got the idea of doing MBA?

Q13: Were you more inclined to management courses? Why?

Q14: How much influence "WOM" have on selection of LUMS?

Q15: How do you think any university can attract more students?