

Customerisation of Management Education

A Study of Impact of Quality and Support Services on Students' Decision Making of Self Financed Management Institutes

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Abstract

Management Education in India which started a little less than half a century ago has made rapid strides over the past decade. The process of liberalization which started in India in 1991 led to a major spurt in the demand for management graduates. This increase for management graduates, in turn, gave a major fillip to the demand for management education in the country which resulted in mushrooming of institutes/university departments offering management education. The task of selecting a management institute has become more difficult due to this as there are no standard or universally acceptable parameters or criteria in our country for ranking management institutes.

This study therefore was conducted to find out the parameters on which an institute is judged upon by any student. The study seeks to find out how does the students take the decision of selecting a particular institute for joining? What are the factors which contribute towards making an institute a strong brand? It also highlights the fact that faculty of an institute is a very important factor in guiding the decision making. The study has implications for providers of private education by helping in analyzing the student customer so as to sell there wares competitively in the open market. It also may be useful for educational

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PRIVATIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The system of higher education in India has been highly structured, intensely stratified and predominantly publicly controlled and funded. In spite of severe resource crunch, it has been undergoing major transformation since independence. Access, equity and parity issues have been the major concern all through. The world economy is experiencing unprecedented change. New development in science and technology, competition, media revolution, and internationalization are revolutionizing the education sector. They make new demands and pose fresh challenges to our established educational system.

Globalisation is having impact on education also and this is happening more immediately because of shrinking space, shrinking time and disappearing borders as a result of information and communication revolution. Hence even though educating the youths will continue to remain the responsibility of public universities, it may not necessarily be their sole concern. Alternatives like private institutions and spreading of teaching activities by foreign universities are emerging in India. These alternatives, albeit expensive, are equipped to offer better and useful results.

The growing Indian economy and the nation which is relocating itself to face the challenges of globalization, also need highly skilled human power to manage its own affairs. This demands that our education system must address the question of quality and of producing value added trained human power, in all disciplines and all subjects that would sustain and enhance our advantage as a nation contributing to the 'Gray Revolution'. In recent times, we have seen rapid expansion of private education institutions in skill oriented professional disciplines.

In India, private initiatives in education came from philanthropists who set up educational institutions and nurtured these institutions by endowments and liberal donation with the main aim of rendering service to the society. Over a period of time, with the increase in

demand and rise in the recurring and non-recurring cost, the private efforts, with the sole aim of service has declined significantly. Thus, the welfare state philosophy has paved the way for free market economy. In the current scenario, it is believed that, it is not the government but the market that can do everything for everybody. The education sector is also influenced by this philosophy. The resultant outcome has been the establishment of higher education institutions, which are founded, funded and run by private agencies. The primary motive of these private bodies in setting up educational institutions is to earn profit.

EMERGENCE OF THE STUDENT CUSTOMER

In a globalised environment when every thing has to compete to survive it should not surprise us if higher education has not only been reduced to the level of being a commodity but it must also sell its wares competitively on the open market. Since higher education is an intellectual affair, its quality should not merely be guaranteed but be market savvy as well. The fact that an institution would be judged by the quantum of distinctiveness it possesses over others but also how it deals in similar or identical products. Time was when higher education was meant to develop certain faculties only totally unrelated to the job market. Things stand radically changed now. The government is encouraging establishment of self-financing institutions, which are founded, funded and run by private agencies. These recover the entire cost of providing education from the students. Higher education will effectively be a market of 'Seller' and 'Buyer', institutions will be forced to market its transparent facilities and capabilities so that students as clients could choose based on their tastes, needs, and buying capacity. The institutions as 'seller' would make best efforts to satisfy their clients with quality and environment. In other words students are emerging as end customers of the self financed institutes who need to be satisfied.

MARKETING OF MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

A satisfied student serves as a satisfied customer who in turn indulges in positive word of mouth and emerges as an opinion leader for other reference groups. This

word of mouth works in two ways. Firstly, it strengthens the brand image of the institute in the competitive scenario and secondly influence intentions to purchase of other reference groups that get influenced by these opinion leaders. The need of the hour hence is to focus on this emerging customer and direct all marketing initiatives to satisfy the students. The questions of how these student customers take their decision of selecting an institute, what influences their psyche, what role does faculty as intellectual capital and other support services of an institute have in influencing their decision becomes pertinent and valid. A study in the Indian context, concerning management education, reveals that some of the criteria applied by students while choosing between institutions have been observed as under:

1. Reputation of the institution
2. Number of applicants keen to enroll in the course
3. Past placement record
4. Faculty expertise
5. Range of specializations offered
6. Infrastructure facilities
7. Fees

The Traditional 4Ps concept developed for marketing of products has been conceptually extended by Brooms and Bitner (1981), to include three more Ps, i.e. people, physical evidence and process, to explain the marketing elements used for services. Developing the right marketing mix for marketing of education would mean constantly fashioning and reshaping the components of the mix into the most effective combination at any point of time. The proposition here is that marketing of higher education programmes need also be seen similarly and that parameters of managing the service encounters need to be researched and evolved, such that customer satisfaction becomes attainable by design rather than as a chance happening. Numerous researchers have indicated that customer satisfaction depends directly and most immediately on the management and monitoring of individual service encounters (Bitner, 1990; Parasuraman et al., 1985; Shostack, 1984; Shostak 1987; Solomon et al., 1985).

The marketing of educational programmes has attracted attention of researchers who have identified research-based planning and programme development,

relationship marketing and non-traditional methods for education delivery as key areas for future focus (Hayes, 1996). It is said that quality like beauty is an elusive concept. 'Quality in higher education is a complex idea, but above all it is about what students learnt (what they know, what they can do and what their attitudes are) as a result of their interaction with their teachers, department and university' (Frazer). Although, the Quality management concepts in business and in education remain same, there are certain limitations in adopting the corporate methods of Quality management because educational institutes cannot be considered as industry and the products are not their students, but it is the education imparted to the students. Expectations from educational institutions (Dr. Asha Tewari, 2007).

To be competitive in the global context, organizations need to link appropriate corporate strategies and marketing strategies to address different consumer segments (White and Griffith, 1997). Consumers' values and associated product attributes (Alreck and Settle, 1999) could be addressed by various combinations of corporate and marketing strategies, depending on the customer segments targeted. You have got to value your customer's view. For alumni it's always a feel good factor if his alma mater achieves a good rank. It becomes easier for them to move up in corporate ladder and hop jobs for greener pasture even if the institute just participates in ranking.

Students, their parents, and their future employers are the customers of this product called education. In Quality management, the customer is defined as the next person in line. In an educational institute, students directly receive the teaching services and hence are the customers of the teacher, whereas the faculty and the Institute's administrators are the suppliers of the services.

Perception of quality depends on the perception of stakeholders. There are many stakeholders for higher education – the parents, the employers, the management of the institute, and, the most important the students. Each one's view of quality differs. Quality in higher education in fact refers to various qualities related to the process of education. That is, the quality of inputs – the teacher being the most important input. Teacher affects the process of learning both in content and delivery system. Faculty, therefore, is an intellectual capital and it surely affects students' perception about

the quality of the institutes. In marketing, the critical role of institutional image and institutional reputation in customer's buying intentions is well known (Barich and Kotler, 1991). For example, institutional image and reputation are important to develop and maintain a loyalty relationship with customers (Dick and Basu, 1994; Raj, 1985). In educational services management, these concepts are extensively used as positioning instruments to influence students' choice of a higher education institution (Milo et al., 1989; Weissman, 1990). More over, the institution's image and reputation may also have impact on students' decision to stay for advanced studies. In other respects, institutional image and institutional reputation are considered as two distinct but strongly related social entities. This relationship is intuitively appealing given the idea that image and reputation may share a certain number of components, while they constitute the global outcomes of the process of legitimation or the credentialing mechanism (Rao, 1994). How do the students actually decide on a particular management institute? What are the factors that guide their decision making? What is their perception of quality of the education service and what are the factors on which it is dependant? How important is the factor of faculty as intellectual capital for the students? What are the gaps if any in terms of importance and availability?

It was with these mind boggling questions in mind that the objectives of the study were formulated which are given as under:

To study the impact of quality of educational package, being offered by an institute on the student's perception.

What constitutes quality of education and whether it affects students' perception/decision to join a particular course or an institute?

To find out the reasons of joining the present institute.

To study the level of satisfaction for different variables relating to quality and support services.

To study the perception of students in terms of the Importance and availability of each variable of faculty as intellectual capital enhancing the quality of an institute.

To study the expectation of the students on completion of the course.

HYPOTHESES

- H₀₁ There will be a no difference between overall importance and overall availability of faculty as intellectual capital of an institute.
- H₁ There will be a significant relationship between Level of satisfaction of the students with respect to program they are pursuing and Assessment of the institute in comparison to other institutes.
- H₂ There will be a significant relationship between Importance of cost quality and support services parameters with reference to course and Assessment of the institute in comparison to other institutes.
- H₃ There will be a significant relationship between Importance of faculty as intellectual capital and Assessment of the institute in comparison to other institutes.
- H₄ There will be a significant relationship Availability of faculty as intellectual capital and Assessment of the institute in comparison to other institutes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in the Delhi NCR region. The sample chosen consisted of 273 respondents. The sampling technique used was multistage sampling. In the first stage the sampling was purposive wherein 10 management institutes were selected randomly (every second institute) from the list of AICTE approved management institutes published by AICTE in the Delhi NCR region. 30 students per institute were approached to fill in the questionnaire. Out of 300 questionnaires 273 completed questionnaires were considered for the study. The data was collected through a field survey conducted with the help of a non disguised pre structured questionnaire. Using a 5-point, Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 3 = neutral and 5 = strongly agree). The effort was to gauge respondents perception on different dimensions of quality and its impact on decision making for the institute. The questionnaire was pre-tested on a group representative of the target population and modified as needed.

The final survey instrument took between five to eight minutes to complete. The statistical tools used for descriptive analysis included mean, standard deviation, etc. For inferential analysis independent sample t test was applied. Besides this data was also analyzed using Pearson's moment correlation.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The student's definition of a Quality experience has to be found through discussions and observations of what gives them joy of learning, not just enjoyment without learning. If the teaching and learning process conforms to their ideas about what is Quality education, students enjoy learning. (Tewari, 2007)

Among the reasons considered important for judging the quality of the institute, the responses of the students on good faculty, good infrastructure/college campus, good brand image, good placement potential, and good extra curricular activities was considered important. It is clear from the Table 1 that students' perceived faculty and brand image as more important than extra curricular activities of the institute.

As given by the mean scores (in descending orders) it is very clear that the respondents are most satisfied with the student teacher relationship existing in these institutes and the coverage of syllabus. Further more, the students are satisfied with the academic qualifications of the faculty, aids and other facilities available for the purpose of teaching and the methodology adopted by the faculty. The next in line are the experience of the faculty and expert lectures conducted by the institute that lead to their satisfaction. The mean scores reveal that the course is updated according to the requirement and faculty possess industry exposure to a reasonable level of satisfaction.

The mean values of satisfaction for facilities offered vis-à-vis cost are relatively less than the other above given parameters. It may be seen that the mean values on a scale of 5 (for satisfaction) with 1 lowest and 5 highest are considerably and relatively low for innovativeness in teaching/learning practices, arrangement of industrial training, remedial training and counseling activities, and the research activities conducted in an institute than the other mentioned parameters. The combined mean of the variables chosen for finding out the students level of satisfaction is 2.72, which implies that the students do not perceive good quality of the institutes as per their expectations. Much, therefore, needs to be done on this count at the level of the institute.

When students were asked to give their response to the fact that faculty as intellectual capital plays an important role in enhancing the quality of the institute, all agreed to it. The variables included in this parameter

(faculty as intellectual capital) were short listed by the process of elimination as given above.

Students' response on each variable on two counts – importance of the variable and availability of the same in the institute – are given in the above table. In general, it was found that most of the variables were important so far as the faculty as intellectual capital was concerned. But the desired availability of these variables was lacking. Students valued command on the subject, sincerity and commitment of the faculty, and communication skills as most important characteristics, which should go with the faculty, but they perceived that such qualities among the faculty of their institute was lacking.

Advanced statistical analysis has also been attempted for the purpose of drawing an overall inference about the importance of various variables (which are indicative of faculty as intellectual capital and enhancing the quality of the institute) on which student's response was sought. This has been done with the help of combined mean, standard deviation (SD), and t value.

Combined mean is the mean of the means of individual variables. It helps us to draw a conclusion on the extent of overall importance of faculty as intellectual capital as perceived by the students. Similarly, the combined mean of the means of individual variables perceived as available, by the students in the institute can tell us about the students perception of overall availability in determining the quality of faculty.

The (paired t-Test) comparison of means between the variable of importance and availability shows that there is significant difference between the importance of faculty as intellectual capital and its availability as desired ($t = 17.29, p < .01$). The mean score further reveals that the students attach good importance to the faculty as intellectual capital, but thus do not have the desired availability of the same. Hence hypothesis H_{01} is refuted.

Besides faculty, quality of the institute also depends on infrastructure, support services, and other activities such as placement and industrial training. The various variables, responses on which have helped the investigator understand the impact of quality on students' perception, are as analysed in Table 4.

The mean score in descending order as shown in the table (Table 4) depicts that the main reason for

joining a particular institute is the availability of a desired course/specialization, followed by good faculty, and good infrastructure as important parameters guiding their decision to join a particular institute. Good brand name and convenient location are also important reasons for choice of an institute as perceived by the respondents. In terms of students' perception, extra curricular activities are a relatively less important factor is to guiding to their decision of joining an institute.

Perception of the entire population, with regard to different reasons that they have considered for pursuing the current program, was also studied. The parameters used for this purpose included good scope and job opportunity, self interest, good social status and success, parent's/guardian's advice, matching with previous qualifications, influence of peers and friends, and affordable fee and easy course.

The mean scores (in descending order) (Table 5) reveal the relative importance of different parameters guiding the decision to join a particular course. It is seen that good scope and job opportunity has been the main reason for pursuing the program. This in turn is followed by the interest in the course and good social status attached with pursuing it. Ease of the course, friends and affordable fees however are not perceived as the main reasons for opting for a particular course. Parents/guardian's advice however is a more important reason than friends' advice.

The Table 6 is self-explanatory. It is clear the students give very high importance to most of the variables enhancing the quality of the program. However, the highest importance is given to the placement facilities available in the institute where the mean score is 3.62. Equally important are industrial training, faculty interaction and other variables short-listed for the purpose of the response on this account. The combined mean of these variables has also been calculated which comes to 3.30. This means that most of the variables are perceived to be important for affecting the quality of the program being pursued. It may be noted that though placement is the most important indicator of quality yet it is not the most important reason for students to join an institute. The students consider availability of desired course, good faculty, good infrastructure and good brand name as relatively more important than the placement potential when it comes to taking the decision to join an

institute. The reason for this although not probed further can be explained by the relative importance students give to variables when they concern him in particular and when these are general perceptual statements of the students.

The mean values (in descending order) (Table 7) show the relative importance of different parameters depicting the expectations of the respondents on completion of the course. The scores show that the respondents are expecting a highly challenging and a professional career on completing the course. This is followed by the belief that the course will fetch them good money, future comforts, and self-employment potential. It is also perceived that further specialization may be undertaken after successful completion of the course. Relatively less importance is given to going abroad or joining family business on course completion. Self-financing institutions, therefore, have to be vigilant about matching the students' expectations with their programmes as much as possible.

It can be seen from the table (Table 8) that assessment of an institute by the students in comparison to others is positively related to the level of satisfaction of the respondents with respect to the program they are pursuing at .01 level of significance. That is, the increase in the level of satisfaction of the students with respect to the program is indicative of better assessment of their institute in comparison to other institutes. In other words, higher is the level of satisfaction of the students better is their assessment of the institute in comparison to other institutes. Hence hypothesis H_1 is accepted. It is also positively related to the importance of cost, quality, and support services parameters with reference to the course pursued by the students at .01 level of significance. Thus hypothesis H_2 also stands accepted.

Positive relationship also exists between the assessment of an institute by the students in comparison to others and the importance of faculty as intellectual capital ($p < .01$), institute Hence hypothesis H_3 stands accepted.

There exists no significant relationship between the importance of infrastructure facilities and the assessment of the However positive relationship ($p < .01$) exists between availability of Infrastructure facilities and the assessment of an institute in comparison to other institutes.

Positive relationship exists between the assessment

of an institute by the students in comparison to others and the availability of faculty as intellectual capital ($p < .01$), institute Hence hypothesis H_4 stands accepted.

CONCLUSION

Professional education system has to be privatized to achieve excellence in the higher education system to meet the increasing international and domestic demands. Thus, there is an obvious case for encouraging innovation and for the establishment of quality institutions through private initiative. The case for privatization of professional higher education stands not only on quality parameters but it also has equally sound support on other grounds too. Both in the private and public domain careful thought and planning is required as we move away from education as per supply to education as per demand. This would need, among other things, a proper research. The need to effectively manage the various points-of-marketing and especially those that led to the selection or rejection of a course of study by a candidate. In any case we have to move away from being programme-centric to student-centric. How students as consumer make decision to spend their available resource (time, money and efforts) on selecting the best product, i.e. the overall educational package offered by an institution, is therefore, a million dollar question for such institution. Finding an answer to it is both urgently needed and highly relevant. Students view it from the point of view of returns by studying a particular course and the input in terms of knowledge/skill/attitude and behavioral aspect of the course. In other words the value addition and contributions made for their good living attains importance in decision-making. Quality of faculty as intellectual capital has been found to have the maximum impact on students' perception. Therefore, the dedicated teacher must get his reward and delinquent one must receive the reprimand. Quite periodically the teachers intellectual attainment should be gauged and guarded. The increments should be sanctioned on the basis of the performance of the teachers. Increments even can be doubled in deserving cases. In nutshell, it is suggested that the central focus of our endeavors has to be the students and the teaching process and that we should certainly strive to make the system more and more student oriented.

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Table 1: Perception of the Entire Population about Level of Satisfaction for Different Variables Relating to Quality and Support Services

| Satisfaction Variables | Mean | SD |
|--|------|------|
| Student teacher relationship | 3.19 | 1.28 |
| Syllabus covered | 2.95 | 1.3 |
| Academic qualification of the faculty | 2.9 | 1.25 |
| Teaching aids and other facilities available | 2.87 | 1.2 |
| Teaching methodology adopted by faculty | 2.85 | 1.16 |
| Experience of the faculty | 2.83 | 1.15 |
| Special/expert lectures or seminars | 2.78 | 1.25 |
| Updating of the course vis-à-vis requirement | 2.7 | 1.18 |
| Industry exposure of the faculty | 2.62 | 1.12 |
| Facilities offered vis-à-vis cost | 2.6 | 1.13 |
| Industry interaction arranged by the institute | 2.51 | 1.17 |
| Innovative teaching and learning practices | 2.5 | 1.18 |
| Arrangement of Industrial Training | 2.5 | 1.22 |
| Remedial teaching or counseling | 2.46 | 1.14 |
| Research activity in the institute | 2.34 | 1.17 |

Table 2: Mean Values for Importance and Availability of Each Variable of Faculty as Intellectual Capital Enhancing the Quality of an Institute

| Indicators of Faculty as Intellectual Capital | Importance | Availability |
|--|------------|--------------|
| Communication skill | 3.73 | 2.69 |
| Command on the subject | 3.87 | 2.70 |
| Competent to enforce discipline in the class | 3.59 | 2.59 |
| Sincerity and commitment | 3.81 | 2.74 |
| Encourages class participation | 3.74 | 2.63 |
| Personal involvement with students | 3.56 | 2.42 |
| Timely feedback | 3.63 | 2.55 |
| Accessibility and openness for queries | 3.66 | 2.67 |
| Use of modern teaching methodologies | 3.65 | 2.56 |
| Academic Leadership quality | 3.51 | 2.43 |
| Ability to integrate the curriculum of the subject taught with the overall courses | 3.57 | 2.37 |
| Ability to design the project/ assignment to test understanding of the course | 3.59 | 2.47 |
| To be creative/open and adaptable to changes | 3.60 | 2.48 |

Table 3: Comparison of Importance of Faculty as Intellectual Capital Enhancing the Quality of an Institute and Its Availability to the Students (N = 273)

| Faculty as Intellectual Capital | Mean | Standard Deviation | T Value |
|---------------------------------|------|--------------------|---------|
| Overall Importance | 3.51 | 1.62 | 17.29** |
| Overall Availability | 2.42 | 1.29 | |

** Significant at .01 level.

Table 4: Perception of the Entire Population about Select Variables Depicting Reasons that Guided them to Join an Institute

| Reasons for Joining the Present Institute | Mean | SD |
|--|------|------|
| Availability of desired course or specialization | 3.06 | 1.37 |
| Good faculty | 2.92 | 1.29 |
| Good Infrastructure/college campus | 2.87 | 1.31 |
| Good brand name | 2.73 | 1.35 |
| Convenient location | 2.70 | 1.56 |
| Good placement potential of the institute | 2.67 | 1.27 |
| Good extra curricular activity | 2.53 | 1.29 |
| Affordable fee | 2.44 | 1.28 |
| No other alternative | 2.15 | 1.36 |

Table 5: Perception of the Entire Population about Different Reasons that They Considered for Pursuing the Current Programme

| Reasons of Pursuing the Programme | Mean | SD |
|---------------------------------------|------|------|
| Good scope and Job opportunity | 3.39 | 1.43 |
| Self Interest | 3.38 | 1.5 |
| Good social status and success | 3.27 | 1.33 |
| Parent's Guardian's advice | 3.03 | 1.47 |
| Matching with previous qualifications | 3.02 | 1.4 |
| Influence of peers and friends | 2.6 | 1.33 |
| Affordable fee | 2.46 | 1.33 |
| Easy Course | 2.41 | 1.32 |
| No other alternative | 2.03 | 1.37 |

Table 6: Perception of the Entire Population about the Importance of the Various Indicators of Quality in Relation to the Course being Pursued

| Indicators of Quality | Mean |
|---|------|
| Placement facility in the institute | 3.62 |
| Educational value of industrial training | 3.37 |
| Interaction with faculty | 3.35 |
| Field trips and industry training | 3.34 |
| Fairness of internal assessment | 3.31 |
| Sound and effective evaluation system | 3.27 |
| Exposure of student to corporate sector | 3.25 |
| Institute brand image in the society | 3.24 |
| Maintaining time-schedule of examination | 3.22 |
| Academic contents of the course | 3.21 |
| Efforts by institute/faculty for overall personality development of student | 3.17 |

Table 7: Perception of the Entire Population with Regard to Different Variables Depicting Expectation of the Student on Completion of the Course

| Respondent's Expectation on Completion of the Course | Mean | SD |
|--|------|------|
| High achieving and challenging field | 3.41 | 1.37 |
| Professional carrier | 3.3 | 1.46 |
| Good status | 3.28 | 1.35 |
| Good money and future comforts | 3.21 | 1.33 |
| Self employment potential | 3.17 | 1.36 |
| Further specialization and studies | 3.14 | 1.45 |
| Assured good job | 3.13 | 1.33 |
| Good chances of Going abroad | 2.7 | 1.47 |
| Helpful in family business | 2.4 | 1.39 |

Table 8: Relationship of Assessment of the Institute in Comparison to the Other Institutes and Other Indicators

| Indicators | Assessment of the Institute in Comparison to Other Institutes $r =$ Co-efficient of Co-relation |
|---|---|
| Level of satisfaction with respect to program they are pursuing | .34** |
| Importance of cost quality and support services parameters with reference to course | .13** |
| Importance of faculty as intellectual capital | .12** |
| Availability of faculty as intellectual capital | .29** |
| Importance of infrastructure facilities as support services | .04 |
| Availability of infrastructure facilities as support services | .14** |

* significant at .05 level
** significant at .01 level