

Revealing Factors Influencing College Selection: An Investigation of Management Students in Private B-Schools in India

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Abstract: *This study examines the factors influencing the choices of management students in India when selecting private business schools. A sample of 161 students from the top 100 privates as per the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF). B-Schools in India were surveyed to explore the key determinants. The findings reveal that placement opportunities, location, and social media posts play a significant role in influencing student's selection of private business schools. The research emphasizes the importance of considering these factors when designing marketing strategies for private business schools in India. Additionally, it raises concerns about the growing impact of social media on the decision-making process. The study provides valuable insights into the decision-making behaviours of management students and offers implications for educational institutions and policymakers. These findings can be utilized by educational institutions to develop effective marketing strategies to attract prospective students and by policymakers to improve the quality of higher education in India.*

Keywords: *Marketing strategies, Social media and placement opportunities*

Introduction

Once a student has completed 12 years of formal schooling, he or she must choose college or higher education in the Indian educational system. Due to the demand for bright employees and growing contributions from the service industry, India has experienced enormous growth in the field of advanced management education enterprises. In the past ten years, management training has evolved dramatically in higher education. However, due to shifting environmental conditions, administering these educational institutions, more notably management institutes, has grown more

challenging. Strategic planning has been impacted by and transformed by digital organizations' operations in India. In the sector of education, particularly, paradigm shifts will occur in management education in all facets of education, learning, and marketing. The location of the institute or university and parental influence is primary factors influences college choices in the earlier studies. Due to the rapid growth of digital technology in the last couple of decades, there has been a major change in communication methods, models, and mediums in various fields.

One major emergent communication model known as social media has grown more rapidly than others. Social media can be defined as a kind of electronic platform where people create and share ideas, interests, information, etc through virtual communities or with like-minded people. This emphasizes the effectiveness of social media tools for both students and academic institutions. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are also getting into the game, spending substantially on social media tools for promotions in the way to lure students. Individuals are lured to be using social media tools to connect, communicate, and collaborate. On social media networks, people actively consider reviews and recommendations. The process of decision-making becomes more reliable. The likelihood of placing an order is significantly more influenced by social conformity. Customers have recently become highly dependent on the opinions of others.

Students' decision to join college and university is influenced by a range of factors, including proximity to home, stipend amount, course fees, school environment, and parental influence. The factors such as admissions counsellors, college brochures, college websites, online advertisements, alumni, parents, and family members all impact a student's decision to attend a specific college. To persuade prospective students, the HEIs used a variety of tools and techniques.

The extant literature on the factors that influence students' selection of B-Schools found a dearth of Indian studies. The present study attempt to understand the pertinent factors that influence prospective management students while deciding to join a management institute in India. The 161 responses were collected on the purposive sampling method. The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) technique has been adopted to see the variations of their preferences as per the student's gender, class and Socio-Economic Class (SECs).

The study's outcomes will be particularly beneficial for educational institutions as they can develop informed and tailored marketing

strategies to attract prospective students. Additionally, policymakers can utilize the research findings to enhance the quality and relevance of higher education in India, aligning it with the expectations and aspirations of management students.

The paper is structured into the following sections. Section 2 presents a comprehensive review of the relevant literature. The methodology and data analysis are covered in the 3rd and 4th sections, respectively. Finally, the research findings and their managerial implications are discussed in the final section.

Literature Review

Choice of College in Higher Education

Chapman (1981) found that the socioeconomic status and cost of college are also significant factors that influence the college selection process. Another study conducted by Marvin J. Burns (2006) at the University of Missouri - Columbia focused on the significant persons, fixed college attributes, and college labour that communicate with the student.

Drewes and Michael (2006) noted that students prefer institutes closer to their homes, scholarships, and quality of teaching. Similarly, Mario (2007) found that proximity to home, course fees, and recommendations from parents and teachers play a significant role in university selection. Additionally, current student satisfaction is crucial in generating positive word-of-mouth. Private university students are more focused on individual performance, while public institution students are more price-sensitive due to income variations (Murat, 2012).

Ganis (2016) studied the impact of social media on higher education and recommended that faculties and business industries should be more active in connecting with students through social media to enhance institutional overall value. Messer (2016) described how parents, family members, teachers, and other adult figures assist students in college enrollment. Kaur (2018) found that most female students prefer educational institutes that are nearby and have reliable

transportation facilities. Semsia (2018) highlighted the importance of education quality, cultural values, and financial aid in the college choice process, which may vary based on gender, nationality, parental education, and occupation.

Finally, Sellami (2019) found that parents have a significant impact on college choice in Qatar, and social media platforms need to be incorporated into universities. Harisa (2019) recommended that the effect of social media in higher education needs to be incorporated into the curriculum for learning.

Social Media and Higher Education

As social media continues to be adopted by various stakeholders, businesses are increasing their budgets to reach their target customers. In the realm of education, social networking sites have been found to serve as educational tools (Lee & McLoughlin, 2008), leading educators and students to re-examine their teaching and learning practices (Mödritscher, 2010). Social media is also used as a promotional tool in higher education (Nour, 2011) and is transforming learning and teaching in significant ways (Li & Pitts, 2009; Tess, 2013). Universities are adopting social media policies and practices for marketing, relationship building, career management, and learning (Benson & Morgan, 2013). Social media has also been found to influence consumer buying behaviour (Forbes & Vespoli, 2013) and is used for professional development, personal networks, and branding (Alzouebi&Isakovic, 2014; RégisFaubet, 2017). In the academic realm, social media plays a critical role in enhancing students' academic performance (Raymond, 2016) and facilitates the exchange of knowledge through academic projects (Safari, 2019). Additionally, social media can be used by instructors for teaching and research (Yasemin, 2017), and students can share information about events, internships, and jobs in their field (Enilda Romero-Hall, 2017). This essay will explore how university students use social media to share information (Hamidh, 2020).

Social Media and College Choice

Studies have shown that social networking sites (SNS) have a significant impact on higher education marketing and the decision-making process of students in choosing a college or university, as noted by Kim & Gasman (2011), Rekhter (2012), Kimberli Burdett (2013), and Diana (2014) in western countries. In India, Samant et al. (2016) found that social networking and the Internet are major forces for education, work, communication, entertainment, banking, and online shopping. Bose (2016) discussed the use of social media for outbound marketing strategies in promoting educational institutes, while Norainna&Besar (2017) highlighted the use of Facebook to connect learners and support teachers. Arabinda et al. (2019) conducted a comprehensive study on the engagement of Indian IITs on LinkedIn for branding purposes. Although Arabinda's study is related to the Indian context, the literature review reveals a scarcity of research on the factors that influence college choice in India, unlike the studies conducted in Western countries by Yasemin (2017), Ming (2010), Kim & Gasman (2011), and Rekhter (2012).

The existing literature's lack of comprehensive research creates a significant challenge for educational institutions in effectively understanding and addressing the decision-making process of management students. To bridge this research gap, this study aims to develop the factors that significantly impact students' selection of B-Schools in India. There are following objectives are:

Research Objectives

1. To identify the factors that influence Indian management students in the B-School choice process.
2. To compare the preferred factors among Gender, Class, and Socio-Economic Class (SECs).
3. To understand the importance of each factor in B-School marketing & enrollment amongst prospective students.

Research Method

To gain an understanding of the distinct factors that impact the college selection process, we gathered research papers, academic theses, and reports from various sources such as EBSCOhost, Science Direct, and Google Scholar. Additionally, we reached out to admission counsellors and agents who were asked to provide us with a comprehensive list of factors that are considered important by prospective students while selecting a B-School. We combined this information with our findings from previous research and personal interactions with stakeholders to compile a complete list of factors was prepared. The various statement was refined with the help of 2 subject experts and a self-administration questionnaire was developed.

To obtain data for the study, admission agents from various private B-schools were consulted. The sample population for our study comprised students who are currently pursuing management degrees and the sample units were selected from the top 100 private B-Schools as per the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF). These students were sent the questionnaire via a URL link, which they were requested to fill out the same and share with their friends and peers through various platforms such as LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and Email. We employed the purposive sampling method, which although has its limitations, we believed that it would allow for initial respondents to share the questionnaire with

their peer groups, who would be true representatives of the initial sample. We received a total of 176 responses, of which 161 (91.4%) were deemed suitable for analysis.

Analysis

The study participants were master's degree students in management, including those pursuing MBA, PGDM, and IMBA degrees, located in various cities across India. Table 1 provides an overview of the respondents' profiles. The data collected for the study included 74 (46%) female students and approximately 87 (54%) male students, all of whom were pursuing master's degrees in management across various cities in India. The participants were categorized based on their class, with 51 (31.7%) being first-year MBA/PGDM students, 69 (42.9%) being second-year MBA/PGDM students, and 41 (25.5%) being IMBA students. The study also took into account the participants' social-economic classes (SECs), which were classified into SEC A1, SEC A2, and SEC A3 and below categories, based on the Market Research Society of India's (MRSI) 2018 Survey. The SECs were identified by measuring two variables - the chief earner's level of education and the consumer durables owned by a family. This helped to identify inequalities in terms of access to resources, as well as issues related to privilege, power, and control. From the study, it was found that 47 (29.2%) of students belonged to SEC A1, 50 (31.1%) fell under SEC A2, and 64 (39.8%) fell under the SEC A3 and below category

Table 1: Demographic Profile

| Category | Type | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Gender | Male | 87 | 54 |
| | Female | 74 | 46 |
| Student Category | MBA / PGDM 1 st Year | 51 | 31.7 |
| | MBA / PGDM 2 nd Year | 69 | 42.9 |
| | Integrated MBA / PGDM | 41 | 25.2 |
| Socio-Economic Class | SEC A1 | 47 | 29.2 |
| | SEC A2 | 50 | 31.1 |
| | SEC A3 & Below | 64 | 39.8 |

Source: Compiled by Author

Table 2: Statements by gender (Assuming equal variance)

| Code | Statements | Female | Male | P-value | Conclusion |
|------|--|--------|------|---------|--------------------|
| S1 | Campus Environment | 4.61 | 4.31 | .071 | Not Significant |
| S2 | Financial Aid Given by Institute | 3.14 | 3.20 | .764 | Not Significant |
| S3 | Placements of the Institute | 3.73 | 3.18 | .002 | Significant |
| S4 | Review on Online Platforms | 3.80 | 3.70 | .555 | Not Significant |
| S5 | Reputation of the Faculty | 4.47 | 4.24 | .100 | Not Significant |
| S6 | Aavailability of Programs | 3.97 | 3.87 | .500 | Not Significant |
| S7 | Ranking of Institute | 4.00 | 3.84 | .332 | Not Significant |
| S8 | Location of the Institute | 4.38 | 4.15 | .128 | Not Significant |
| S9 | Social Media Posts | 4.36 | 4.05 | .040 | Significant |
| S10 | Distance of Institute from Home | 4.39 | 4.30 | .506 | Not Significant |
| S11 | Number of Students in the Institute | 3.89 | 3.68 | .191 | Not Significant |
| S12 | Income Level of my Family | 4.34 | 3.97 | .014 | Significant |
| S13 | Advice of Parents | 4.35 | 4.01 | .019 | Significant |
| S14 | Aspiration for Higher Studies | 3.81 | 3.56 | .124 | Not Significant |
| S15 | Networking Opportunities Alumni | 4.04 | 3.97 | .670 | Not Significant |
| S16 | Performance in Entrance Tests | 4.01 | 3.67 | .024 | Significant |
| S17 | Aspiration for a good job | 4.34 | 4.15 | .205 | Not Significant |
| S18 | Networking Opportunities Professionals | 3.91 | 3.40 | .001 | Significant |
| S19 | College Advertisements / Promotions | 4.61 | 4.45 | .224 | Not Significant |
| S20 | Own connections on social media | 4.08 | 3.97 | .451 | Not Significant |
| S21 | Alumni on social media | 4.18 | 4.06 | .456 | Not Significant |

Source: Compiled by Author

In Table 2, it was observed that the mean score for campus environment was higher among female students (4.61) than male students. Additionally, placement at the institute was more important for female students (3.73) as compared to male students. The location of the institute was also found to be a crucial factor for female students (4.38) compared to male students. Moreover, social media posts were deemed to be more critical for female students (4.36) than for male students. The income level of the family was found to be an essential factor for female students (4.34) compared to male students. Female students also rely more on their parents' advice (4.35) in the

college selection process compared to male students. Performance in entrance tests was found to be more critical for female students (4.01) compared to male students. Lastly, networking with professionals (3.91) was also found to be a crucial factor for female students than for male students. Based on Table 2, it was observed that statements related to placements at the institute, social media posts, income level of the family, advice of parents, performance in entrance tests, and networking opportunities with professionals were significant at a 5% level.

Table 3: Statements by class (Assuming equal variance)

| Code | Statements | 1 st year | 2 nd year | IMBA | Sig. | Conclusion |
|------|--|----------------------|----------------------|------|------|--------------------|
| S1 | Campus Environment | 4.86 | 4.42 | 3.98 | .000 | Significant |
| S2 | Financial Aid Given by Institute | 2.78 | 3.23 | 3.54 | .015 | Significant |
| S3 | Placements of the Institute | 3.45 | 3.57 | 3.20 | .260 | Not Significant |
| S4 | Review on Online Platforms | 4.06 | 3.64 | 3.54 | .026 | Not Significant |
| S5 | Reputation of the Faculty | 4.65 | 4.23 | 4.17 | .013 | Significant |
| S6 | Availability of Programs | 4.04 | 3.88 | 3.83 | .516 | Not Significant |
| S7 | Ranking of Institute | 3.76 | 4.03 | 3.90 | .393 | Not Significant |
| S8 | Location of the Institute | 4.65 | 4.17 | 3.90 | .000 | Significant |
| S9 | Social Media Posts | 4.55 | 4.23 | 3.68 | .000 | Significant |
| S10 | Distance of Institute from Home | 4.63 | 4.28 | 4.10 | .011 | Significant |
| S11 | Number of Students in the Institute | 4.24 | 3.57 | 3.56 | .000 | Significant |
| S12 | Income Level of my Family | 4.43 | 4.07 | 3.88 | .017 | Significant |
| S13 | Advice of Parents | 4.24 | 4.20 | 4.02 | .504 | Not Significant |
| S14 | Aspiration for Higher Studies | 3.86 | 3.65 | 3.49 | .206 | Not Significant |
| S15 | Networking Opportunities Alumni | 4.37 | 3.91 | 3.68 | .008 | Significant |
| S16 | Performance in Entrance Tests | 4.04 | 3.78 | 3.63 | .126 | Not Significant |
| S17 | Aspiration for a good job | 4.65 | 4.17 | 3.83 | .000 | Significant |
| S18 | Networking Opportunities Professionals | 3.47 | 3.87 | 3.44 | .027 | Significant |
| S19 | College Advertisements / Promotions | 4.84 | 4.54 | 4.10 | .000 | Significant |
| S20 | Own connections on social media | 4.27 | 4.03 | 3.68 | .013 | Significant |
| S21 | Alumni on social media | 4.45 | 4.06 | 3.78 | .005 | Significant |

Source: Compiled by Author

Table 3 shows that significant differences were observed among the classes of MBA/PGDM 1st year, 2nd year, and IMBA for factors such as campus environment [S1], location of the institute [S8], social media posts [S9], number of students in the institute [S11], aspiration for a good job [S17], and college advertisements/promotions [S19] (p-value = .000), indicating that these factors have a highly significant impact on students' decision-making process.

Furthermore, the factors such as financial aid given by the institute (p-value = .015), reputation of the faculty (p-value = .013), distance of the institute from home (p-value = .011), income level of the family (p-value = .017), networking opportunities with alumni (p-value = .027), own connections on social media (p-value = .013), and alumni on social media (p-value = .005) also showed significant differences among the classes.

Table 4: Statements by SECs (Assuming equal variance)

| Code | Statements | SEC A1 | SEC A2 | SEC A3 or Below | P-value | Conclusion |
|------|--|--------|--------|-----------------|---------|-----------------|
| S1 | Campus Environment | 4.70 | 4.64 | 4.11 | .003 | Significant |
| S2 | Financial Aid Given by Institute | 3.11 | 3.34 | 3.08 | .510 | Not significant |
| S3 | Placements of the Institute | 3.62 | 3.46 | 3.28 | .308 | Not significant |
| S4 | Review on Online Platforms | 3.77 | 3.72 | 3.75 | .975 | Not significant |
| S5 | Reputation of the Faculty | 4.51 | 4.52 | 4.09 | .012 | Significant |
| S6 | Availability of Programs | 4.15 | 3.88 | 3.78 | .112 | Not significant |
| S7 | Ranking of Institute | 3.81 | 4.00 | 3.92 | .666 | Not significant |
| S8 | Location of the Institute | 4.38 | 4.28 | 4.14 | .406 | Not significant |
| S9 | Social Media Posts | 4.28 | 4.30 | 4.05 | .312 | Not significant |
| S10 | Distance of Institute from Home | 4.38 | 4.46 | 4.22 | .327 | Not significant |
| S11 | Number of Students in the Institute | 3.77 | 3.84 | 3.73 | .862 | Not significant |
| S12 | Income Level of my Family | 4.09 | 4.28 | 4.06 | .449 | Not significant |
| S13 | Advice of Parents | 4.32 | 4.12 | 4.09 | .402 | Not significant |
| S14 | Aspiration for Higher Studies | 3.66 | 3.78 | 3.61 | .669 | Not significant |
| S15 | Networking Opportunities Alumni | 4.06 | 4.24 | 3.77 | .067 | Not significant |
| S16 | Performance in Entrance Tests | 3.79 | 3.92 | 3.78 | .718 | Not significant |
| S17 | Aspiration for a good job | 4.30 | 4.26 | 4.17 | .767 | Not significant |
| S18 | Networking Opportunities Professionals | 3.72 | 3.66 | 3.55 | .626 | Not significant |
| S19 | College Advertisements / Promotions | 4.53 | 4.60 | 4.45 | .644 | Not significant |
| S20 | Own connections on social media | 3.85 | 4.08 | 4.09 | .369 | Not significant |
| S21 | Alumni on social media | 4.17 | 4.16 | 4.03 | .710 | Not significant |

Source: Compiled by Author

Table 4 indicates that factors such as campus environment [S1] (p-value = .003) and reputation of the faculty [S5] (p-value = .012) significantly influence all socio-economic classes (SECs) of students. This means that students belonging to SECs A1, A2, and A3 consider these factors as important when making their college and university choices.

Findings

Our analysis reveals that female students place a higher value on networking opportunities with professionals [S18] (p-value = .001*) and college placement [S3] (p-value = .002*) compared to male students. This suggests that female students prioritize career development opportunities more

than male students who may be more interested in self-employment or entrepreneurship. Overall, institute placement is a critical factor in determining the choice of B-school management students as they seek a return on their educational investment. Social media is also an important tool for college and university marketing as it is the preferred communication medium for today's generation. Other key factors in the choice process include parental income and advice, entrance performance, and networking opportunities.

When examining different student classes, campus environment [S1], location of the institute [S8], social media posts [S9], number of students

in the institute [S11], aspiration for a good job [S17], and college advertisements/promotions [S19] were found to be significant at the 5% level (P-value = .000) for MBA/PGDM 1st-year students. Additionally, the reputation of the faculty [S5] (p-value = .012) was found to be the most important factor for MBA/PGDM 1st-year students, whereas MBA/PGDM 2nd-year and IMBA students were more influenced by the academic image of the faculty [S5]. Code [S3], [S4], [S6], [S7], [S13], [S14], and [S16] were equally important among all three student classes. Regarding socio-economic class, campus environment [S1] (p-value = .003*) was found to be significant among SECs A1, A2, and A3. In general, the campus environment [S1] and the reputation of the faculty [S5] were considered the most important factors among students in these socio-economic classes.

Conclusion

In summary, this study offers insightful information on the variables affecting management students' enrolment in Indian B-schools. The study's conclusions imply that the main variables influencing students' decisions to enroll in business schools include the campus environment, social media posts and placement of the institute, location of the institute, and college commercials and promotions. Additionally, the faculty's reputation and the university's robust alumni network are crucial factors for potential students.

The study has significance for B-school administrators and other key stakeholders, who may incorporate these conclusions to develop robust promotional campaigns to draw in prospective students. Particularly, while counselling prospective students, admission counsellors and agents should concentrate on these important elements. Private B-schools in India could make use of social media and digital marketing tools to reach out to a younger demographic and successfully sell their institutional resources.

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of targeting, segmenting, and positioning promotional strategies according to individual needs based on gender, class, and SECs. Overall, this study makes a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge on B-School enrollment and marketing and can be used by stakeholders in the education sector to improve their marketing and enrollment strategies.

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