

**“AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENTS’
CHOICE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS”**

By

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20280

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Abstract

Purpose The aim of this study is to identify the factors that influence students' decision making for selecting higher education institutions and how do they prioritize them. Education sector in Pakistan is facing an immense competition from local as well foreign universities and in order to remain competitive, the higher education institutions need to become more customer focused and market oriented.

Methodology/sample- The research was conducted through structured questionnaire from a sample of 450 students of various universities in Karachi. The data was analyzed using statistical method i.e. Friedman test in order to check the priority of the variables.

Findings- The analysis and comparative results clearly suggested that there are various factors that affect student choice including Program, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, physical evidence, Reputation, Public relation and security. From these factors, the top three factors identified were Program, Reputation and Security that students look for while deciding which university to choose.

Practical Implications- The outcomes of the research might help the institutions' decision makers as it will provide useful insights to higher education institutions' management about the students' choice and ways through which they can attract more students and increase enrollment rate. It will also help institutions to develop marketing strategies to increase their market share and maintain competitive edge over others.

Keywords: Higher education institution, Market oriented, Program, Reputation, Security

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CHAPTER # 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Due to globalization and changes in policies, Higher education institutions in Pakistan are facing strong competition from each other as well as from foreign universities. As these institutions are one of the national assets in producing qualified human resources, so they should develop a very competitive marketing strategy for their survival and to maintain their competitive edge over other universities. The higher education institutions are an important source of producing qualified workforce, so they must focus on good marketing strategies, in order to attract maximum number of student towards them. Unfortunately, many of these institutions don't focus on being better than their competitors by working on their marketing strategies as a result they lose their customers to other national and international institutions. To manage this situation, they need to be market oriented, satisfy customer's need and must be better than their competitors.

Higher education institutions are involved in service industry where students are the customers; teachers are service provider and institutions serves as a medium through which the services are being offered. Student's being the customer seek variety of factors like price, reputation etc. however these factors vary from individual to individual and from institution to institution.

In today's dynamic and competitive world, Higher education institutions also face competition from international universities apart from local institutions. Many students tend to move to foreign universities for number of reasons like better opportunities, recognition etc. Universities in Pakistan must strive to provide these factors to the students which they look for, in order to increase the enrollment rate. Universities may also go for liaison with foreign universities in order to attract more students. The other factors which students look for may include security which is a major concern in Pakistan, Price, location, Environment, Infra structure, promotions, faculty and alumni etc.

1.2 Problem Background

As discussed earlier, Higher Education Institutions are facing intense competition from local as well as foreign Universities. All Universities are striving hard to maintain desired position in the mind of their consumers i.e. students by providing quality services to them. Universities can position them by developing a competitive marketing strategy for their survival and to maintain their competitive edge over their competitors. .

Students and their families look for many factors when they are choosing universities in fact it's a time consuming and confusing process. This study will help to understand the management about the consumer behavior of the students and in effective promotion of the universities to students and also in improving the education services.

Higher education institutions are involved in services industry where they provide their valuable services to the consumers' i.e. its students. Higher education possesses all the characteristics of a service industry, for example that education is "people based", and emphasizes the importance of relationships with customers (Mazzarol 1998). Shank, Walker and Hayes (1995, p. 74) also underlined that educational services are intangible, heterogeneous, inseparable from the person delivering it, perishable and the customer participates in the process. As a service, higher education marketing is sufficiently different from the marketing of products (Nicholls et al. 1995). University management need to market their institution and establish a unique difference which highlights their strength and gives the students a reason to choose that university, so they need to have a proper and comprehensive marketing plan in order to better position them as well as to get the competitive edge over other competitors.

Kotler & Fox (1995) developed a marketing mix solely for the higher education institutions which would help to attract more and more students by identifying the basic factors that have a tremendous impact on student's choice of universities. The marketing mix includes program, place, price, promotion, people, processes, physical facilities. The institutions however can modify this marketing mix according to their needs and on the basis of their target market characteristics in order to cater customer needs and motives.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The research aims to explore the factors that influence students' decision making process of selecting Higher Education Institutions.

Help Higher education institutions to understand what factors they need to focus in order to increase number of students.

1.4 Research Questions

The present study will try to answer the following research questions.

What are the main factors that affect students' choice of higher education institutions?

1.5 Significance of the study

This study is significant because this study involves the research over the buying behavior of consumers i.e. students and in Pakistan very little or no research has been done on this topic. In marketing, the most difficult thing to do is to understand the consumer behavior, and once you know it you can easily develop your marketing strategy. Since the study aims to identify the factors that affect student's choice of higher education, it will provide useful insights to higher education institutions' management about the students' choice and ways through which they can attract more students and increase enrollment rate. This study is also significant because it will help institutions to develop marketing strategies to increase their market share and maintain competitive edge over others.

CHAPTER # 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Literature Review

Student choice is similar as consumer behavior that deals with how an individual select, buy and use goods or services (Kotler and Fox 1995). The student choice process is similar to the consumer purchase decision making process i.e. the individual first recognizes his/ her needs and motives and search for the alternatives from different sources. Once all the alternatives have been identified the next step is to evaluate those alternatives based on number of factors that will be identified in this research. Based on this evaluation, the customer takes the final decision and gets enrolled in a particular university. The last step is the post purchase decision where the student evaluates his decision.

Numerous models and frameworks have been developed to understand the student's choice of higher education institutions. These models include: (a) economic models, (b) status-attainment models, and (c) combined models. The economic models focus on the assumptions that the student think rationally and consider financial factors while making choice between higher education institutions (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). The status-attainment models are based on an assumption that the student's decision of higher education institution is affected by number of social and individual factors like occupation, education etc. (Jackson, 1982). Third, the combined models include both economic considerations and some components of status attainment model. The combined models divide the student choice process into three stages which includes aspiration development and alternative evaluation, option consideration and final decision (Jackson, 1982).

According to James et al (1999) field of the study, courses offered and institutional reputation, geographical location etc. greatly affects student's choice of higher education institutions. Furthermore, he emphasized that good faculty reputation is also an important factor for students.

Foskett et al. (2006) explained economic factors are important for students' choice. The student analyzes number of economic factors like job opportunities after graduating from university, accommodation cost and geographical proximity.

There are two different approaches available to understand the complex decision making process of student. First approach focuses on how student develop their consideration set based on positive word of mouth, family influence, considering admission criteria, location etc. however, the second approach focuses on the institutional characteristics like cost, program, financial aids etc. The factors most commonly associated with a comprehensive college choice model include student background characteristics (Jackson, 1982), aspirations (Chapman, 1984; Jackson, 1982), educational achievement (Hanson & Litten, 1982; Jackson, 1982), social environment (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987), financial variables (St. John, 1990; 1991), net cost (St. John & starkey 1995) institutional climate (Chapman, 1984) and institutional characteristics (Hanson & Litten, 1982; Hossler et al., 1989).

The marketing strategy development includes the coordination and combination of marketing mix elements that are crucial for any organization trying to meet customer's needs and providing them superior values (Hawkins et al, 2001, Kotler and Fox, 1995, Ivey, 2008). The traditional marketing mix consists Product, Price, Promotion, Place (Kotler, 2008). In 1995 Kotler and Fox developed marketing mix designed specifically for education institutions and are an extract of all the above mentioned factors. It includes Price, program, place, promotion, people, process and physical evidence. These factors are explained below:

2.1.1 Program

Program is one of the basic factor that influence student's decision, because it is the first thing that a student looks for. Any institution usually starts with identifying the programs and services being offered to the customers, Anas al Fattal (2010).

The program of any university is the distinguishing factor (Frumkin, Milankovic and Sadler, 2007; Kotler et al., 1995), therefore they must be based on customer needs and expectations. According to Hoyer and McInnis (2001), developing a program that satisfy consumers' needs is a crucial activity for educational institutions.

Programs are intangible in nature and can only be evaluated after its consumption (Bloom and Hayes, 2002). Gibbs and Knapp (2002, 54) suggested that an institution must decrease the intangibility of the program by increasing the wrapping of its offering. This wrapping may include lectures, notes, CDs etc.

2.1.2 Price

In higher education institutions, price is the cost that a student will incur related to tuition fee or any other monetary issue, it also includes the financial aids provided by the institutions and according to Kotler (1999) and Eckel (2007), it is the major source of revenue and must be given attention. Pricing is very important yet difficult factor to decide because it can affect the overall image of university and also has impact on customers' perceptions about service quality (Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 2001).

Price has strong influence on the marketing strategies as many students and parents are concerned about it (Connor & Institute for Employment Studies, 1999, 47; Pugsley, 2004, 125).

2.1.3 Place

According to Kotler (2008), place refers to the availability of services to potential customers i.e. students conveniently.

It may not be only limited to a geographical location as many higher education institutions, nowadays, are using distant learning techniques and other technologies to better serve and satisfy their students. According to El-Khawas (1999) the intense competition among the educational institutions has forced them to use alternative delivery methods.

2.1.4 Promotion

The institutions must use promotional strategies to communicate its services and to enhance its name recognition.

Soedijati (2006) emphasized that the pull and push strategy can be an effective tool for higher education institutions, in promoting their services. The promotional mix of higher education institutions consists of direct marketing, advertising, internet and sponsorships (Rudd & Mills, 2008). According to Blumenstyk (2006) the institutions can use web advertising, search engine optimization etc to communicate its services to the target market. Word of mouth also plays a vital role.

2.1.5 People

Kotler and Fox (1995) explained that all the services are delivered and customer relation is built by people including not only faculty members but it also includes administrative staff. People also include institution's current and former students. People play an important role in delivering the services more efficiently and effectively. Clinton, 1990; Hoyt & Brown, 2003; Maringe, 2006; Richards & Holland, 1965) also emphasized that the good quality faculty is important an important factor for university success.

Wright (1999) emphasized on the adequate training to the staff so that they provide quality services and reflect positively on other marketing variables as well. According to Lovelock and wirtz (2004) customers evaluate quality of service on the basis of employees' appearance, social and technical skills. According to Wright (1999), success of any institution depends upon its staff, so they must be well trained.

2.1.6 Processes

The administrative system and the way an institution carry out a business is referred to as processes, Kotler (2008). According to Elisabeth Koes Soedijati & Sri Astuti Pratminingsih (2011)

Process in higher education includes the process of management, enrolment, teaching, learning, social and even sport activities. According to Palmer (2001), process are of great concern

especially for high contact services like education. As a result universities need to focus on how the services are offered. E.g. teaching methodologies and assessment system are some of the important issues for prospective students (Ivy & Naude, 2004).

2.1.7 Physical Evidence

According to Ivy & Fattal (2010) physical evidence refers to as the overall environment through which services are delivered. Physical evidence helps in communicating, performing and relay the customer satisfaction to potential customer.

Kotler et al (2008) suggested that physical evidence is the first impression about the university. It may include the buildings and other facilities. According to Gibbs and Knapp (2002) physical evidence contributes greatly for the image of the institution. For example: technologies used, cleanliness of rooms, library, etc.

2.1.8 Public Relations

Nguyen & LeBlanc, (2001) confirmed that the Public relations is an important source that can help University department to progress. Omboi Bernard Messah (2011), in his study found out that Public relations' influence student enrolment. By enhancing university's public image and its customer satisfaction.

Gatfield and Graham (1999), also emphasized that it is university's perceived excellence which increase the student enrolment rate. PR Offices plays an important role in increasing brand image by making collaborations with foreign education institutions and organization and by increased media presence.

2.1.9 Reputation

Hamrick and Stage (2004), and Steele (2008) found out in their research that reputation of the institution is an important factor in attracting students. Brown et al., 2009; Kim & Gasman, 2011; Kinzie et al., 2004; Pampaloni, 2010 emphasized that ranking of the university are important factor in decision making process as it further refines the student search. Bartl, 2009; Hachmeister et al., 2007; Willich et al., 2011, also confirmed the importance of reputation by submitting that it is the critical factor for choosing the right university.

2.1.10 Security

McBain, L. (2008).elaborated that there is no single best plan or security practice for campus security. Security plans must be based on institution's own needs and resources available. Creating a safe campus is a biggest challenge I today's world where everyone is concerned about security issues.

2.2 Hypothesis

H₁ Priority of all factors is not equally important in affecting students' choice of higher education institution.

H₀ Priority of all factors is equally important in affecting students' choice of higher education institution.

CHAPTER # 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Natures of Research

The study is quantitative research and this research will identify and explore factors affecting student choice of higher education institutions through primary and secondary data.

3.2 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The population for this study includes university students from Karachi i.e from Bahria University Karachi, Karachi University, CBM, Iqra University, NED, Muhammad Ali Jinnah University, PIMS and Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University. The sample size would be 50 students from each university. A structured questionnaire was constructed for collecting the responses and drawing conclusions. Non Probabilistic method of sample selection was used for this study i.e. judgmental sampling technique, keeping in view the limitation of time and resources.

3.3 Data Collection

A detailed study was required to conduct this research effectively; both primary and secondary data were utilized to collect relevant information. Questionnaire survey was included as primary research whereas for secondary data the already published resources were used. The Primary data was collected through structured questionnaire using online resource i.e. Facebook and by visiting above mentioned universities.

3.4 Data Integration

To integrate the quantitative study, close ended questionnaires base on likert scale was used and collected data was entered into SPSS 20 to test the relationship between the variables.

3.5 Resources Constraints

Due to limited resources and time constraints, it was not possible to do the study on a large scale however it was ensured that the sample size is representative of actual population and large to get reliable results.

3.6 Response Rate

Usually, the response rate is very low in such research as respondents do not have much time to participate in such surveys voluntarily.

3.7 Small Sample Size

Due to the scarce resources and limited time, the sample is limited to only some universities in Karachi, Pakistan which may not be a true representative of the whole population of Pakistan and rest of the world.

CHAPTER # 4

DATA INTEGRATION

&

ANALYSIS

4.1 DATA INTEGRATION & ANALYSIS

This research is quantitative in nature which is aimed at identifying the factors that affect students' choice of higher education institutions. This research is conducted by collecting primary data. The primary data was collected from various universities in Karachi, through structured questionnaire based on Likert scale. 450 questionnaires were distributed among respondents from different universities in Karachi, out of which 447 reliable responses were collected. The collected data was then entered into SPSS 20 for various testing.

Reliability test was done in order to determine the reliability of the collected data. Reliability was tested by comparing the Cronbach's alpha value with its standard value.

Then in order to identify the dominating factors that influence students' decision of higher education institution, Friedman Test was done.

4.1.1 Reliability and Validity Analysis

Structured questionnaire based on likert scale was designed to collect data. The collected data was entered in SPSS 20 in order to check the reliability of the data. In this test, value of Cronbach's alpha is used to measure the reliability and internal consistency of the variables.

Reliability Statistics

Table 4.1 Reliability Test

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.761	10

Table 4.1 show the value of Cronbach's alpha is 0.76 which is greater than that of the standard value which is 0.7. This result shows that the data collected is reliable and variables have internal consistency and further tests can also be applied on this data.

4.1.2 Friedman Test

The Friedman test is similar to parametric repeated measures ANOVA, which enables us to identify the difference in treatment in multiple test attempts. This test is a two way analysis of ranks to identify which factor dominates the other.

Statistical hypothesis to use Friedman test are:

H₁ Priority of all factors is not equally important in affecting students' choice of higher education institution.

H₀ Priority of all factors is equally important in affecting students' choice of higher education institution.

Table 4.2 Hypothesis Test

Hypothesis Test Summary				
	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distributions of Place, Program People, Physical evidence, Price, Process, Promotion, Reputation, Liaisons and Security are the same.	Related-Samples Friedman's Two-Way Analysis of Variance by Ranks	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Table 4.2 shows that since the p value is 0.000 which is less than 0.05, therefore we reject the null hypothesis i.e. priority of all factors is equally important in affecting students' choice of higher education institution

In order to identify the rankings, mean rank were identified to know the priority of all variables.

The below mentioned Table 4.3 shows the factors that affect the students' choice of higher education institution. The factors include Place, Program, People, Physical evidence, Price, Process, Promotion, Reputation, Liaison with organizations and foreign universities and security measures, which is a great in Pakistan. In Friedman test, the variables having highest mean rank values are the most important and dominating factors that influence students' choice of higher education institutions. Number of marketing strategies that a university may use to attract more students.

Table 4.3Ranks

	Mean Rank
Place	4.45
Program	6.37
People	5.17
Physical evidence	5.50
Price	5.44
Process	4.75
Promotion	5.49
Reputation	6.29
Liaisons	5.33
Security	6.21

In Table 4.3, numbers of variables are shown along with their mean rank values. As discussed earlier, the variable with highest value is the most desirable factor that influences decision making process. As in the above table, the top three most desirable factors include Program, HEC Ranking and Security.

The variable “Program” has a mean value of 6.37, which shows that it is a crucial factor that influences students’ choice of higher education institution. “Reputation” has a mean value of 6.29 which shows that it is the second most important factor that affect students’ choice and similarly “security” is third most important factor as it has a mean value of 6.21.

The table also shows the least desirable factors too that has little or no effect on students’ decision making process. For example, according to Table 4.3, the three least important factors include People, Administrative process and Place respectively. Location of the institution has a mean value of 4.45 which shows that students do not consider location as an important factor while deciding to take admission in higher education institutions. Administrative process and People have mean values of 4.75 and 5.17 respectively, which show that these are not important to consider or have a very minimal effect on decision making process.

Test Statistics

The actual results of Friedman test can be identified through these test statistics. These statistics also confirms the significant differences between the mean rank values of the related groups.

Test Statistics

Table 4.4 Friedman Test

N	446
Chi-Square	200.645
df	9
Asymp. Sig.	.000

a. Friedman Test

Table 4.4 shows the test statistics of the Friedman test. According to this test, the p value is .000 which is less than significant value of .05 so we reject the null hypothesis which says that all factors are equally important.

On the basis of these test statistics, we can conclude that all factors are not equally important and Program, Reputation and Security are the top three factors that impacts students' decision making process and Location, Administrative processes and People are the factors that have little or no effect on student choice of higher education institutions.

CHAPTER # 5

FINDINGS & CRITICAL DEBATE

5.1 FINDINGS & CRITICAL DEBATE

The data was collected from 447 respondents from the students of different departments of various universities in Karachi including Bahria University Karachi, Maju, Iqra University, KUBS, PIMS, CBM, BBSUL and NED. Data was also collected using online medium i.e Face book. The study aimed to identify what factors affect students' choice of higher education institution. A structured scale based questionnaire was designed to collect data from the respondents. After data collection, Reliability of questionnaire was checked and Friedman test was applied in order to identify the dominating factors. The questionnaire was found reliable as the value of Cronbach's Alpha was .761 which is greater than the standard value, so we can say that it was reliable.

On applying the Friedman test, we get the p value equal to 0.000 due to which we reject the null hypothesis that all factors are equally important. Every factor has its own worth and it vary from student to student e.g. some people may adopt universities due to less tuition fee and location but some chose because of the programs offered and not considering proximity or cost at all.

In 1999 James et al, in his study concluded that courses offered and institutional reputation, geographical location etc greatly affects student's choice of higher education institutions. However in our study it was found out that Program which includes Courses offered by the institution which has a very strong impact on students' decision making process. Kotler and Fox (1995) also confirmed that program has a strong impact on students' choice of higher education institution. In today's competitive world, where everyone is striving for its survival in the market the university must differentiate them. They can differentiate them from each other by offering various up to date programs.

The other factor which was identified as the 2nd most important in affecting students' choice was the Reputation. It can be associated with the brand image, ranking of the university. People look for the reputable institution having strong brand name while selecting them. Perna (2006), Cabrera and La Nasa (2000), Hamrick and Stage (2004), and Steele (2008) concluded that ranking, is also an important factor that influence student decision, along with curriculum, location etc. according to Brown et al., 2009; Kim & Gasman, 2011; Kinzie et al., 2004; Pampaloni, 2010), University rankings help students to decide which University to select and which not. Bartl, 2009; Hachmeister et al., 2007; Willich et al., 2011also emphasized that reputation of the university plays an important role in making right decision of university choice.

The third most important factor according to respondent was security measures. In Pakistan, students and their families are more concern about security issues. However this is important concern in Pakistan only as no relevant literature was found for security issues. There must be strong security measures by the institution management for students as well as their staff.

The 4th most important factor identified was the physical evidence that impacts students' decision of selecting higher education institution. According to Ivy & Fattal, Physical evidence helps in communicating, performing and relay the customer satisfaction to potential customer.

Kotler et al (2008) suggested that physical evidence is the first impression about the university. It may include the buildings and other facilities. According to Gibss and Knapp (2002) physical evidence contributes greatly for the image of the institution. But in our study, it was found out that respondent believed that the physical evidence or infrastructure doesn't have a strong impact on students' choice rather they decide on the basis of other factors like program etc. the physical evidence may include the infrastructure and overall environment of the university.

According to our research findings, Promotion has relatively good effect on students' decision making than Price, people etc, as it had a mean rank of 5.49 and is at the 5th rank. Rudd & Mills, (2008) explained that the promotional mix of higher education institutions consists of direct marketing, advertising, internet and sponsorships and universities and higher education institutions need to adopt promotional strategies in order to communicate our services. Our findings conform to the literature and it shows that it is moderately important and increases the student enrolment.

The next important factor is Price which has a mean rank of 5.44 and is at rank 6th position the price factor also include scholarships and financial aids provided to students. According to our findings, According to Klaauw (2002) financial aids are an important factor for competing with others in attracting students. . Lauer (2002) and Stenier and Wrohlich (2008) also found out that the students enrolment rate increases with monetary benefits. But according to our findings, respondents doesn't find it very influencing factors as they are more concerned about factors like Program, reputation and ranking and Security. According to our findings, price was not that much important factor in decision making process. But according to many studies found in literature it was emphasized that Price has strong influence on the marketing strategies as many students and parents are concerned about it (Connor & Institute for Employment Studies, 1999, 47; Pugsley, 2004, 125).

Similarly, Kotler and Fox (1995) emphasized that all the services are delivered and customer relation is built by people including not only faculty members but it also includes administrative staff. Wright (1999) emphasized on the adequate training to the staff so that they provide quality services and reflect positively on other marketing variables as well. According to Lovelock and wirtz (2004) customers evaluate quality of service on the basis of employees' appearance, social and technical skills. According to Wright (1999), success of any institution depends upon its staff, so they must be well trained. But in our study it was discovered that people don't consider it as a very influential factor that impacts students' decision making process.

In previous studies, People including Faculty, Staff and alumni were given great importance that they are involved in shaping potential students decision. Jackson 1985, Malanay 1985, and Moore 1984 emphasized the importance of faculty and alumni in creating positive impact on student's decision of a particular program. Clinton, 1990; Kim & Gasman, 2011; Moogan et al., 1999; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008 also believed that advice of others, Faculty, counselors friends and past students have strong impact on University selection. People seek advices and look for positive word of mouth before selecting any institution. Wright (1999) emphasized on the adequate training to the staff so that they provide quality services and reflect positively on other marketing variables as well. According to Lovelock and wirtz (2004) customers evaluate quality of service on the basis of employees' appearance, social and technical skills. According to Wright (1999), success of any institution depends upon its staff, so they must be well trained. But in our study, it was found out that the People don't have a very strong impact on increasing student likeness of a particular university or an institute.

According to our findings, the Process is the 2nd least favorable factor. Students don't consider it as an influential factor which impacts their decision. According to Elisabeth Koes Soedijati & Sri Astuti Pratminingsih (2011) Process in higher education includes the process of management, enrolment, teaching, learning, social and even sport activities. According to Palmer (2001), process are of great concern especially for high contact services like education. As a result universities need to focus on how the services are offered. E.g. teaching methodologies and assessment system are some of the important issues for prospective students (Ivy & Naude, 2004). But in our findings, it was clearly found that student give least preference to Process as their main concern is about the program reputation and security.

CHAPTER # 6

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

CONCLUSION

In today's dynamic and competitive world, Higher education institutions also face competition from international universities apart from local institutions. In such competitive environment, not only education institute but every organization needs to develop an effective marketing strategy. Many institutions don't focus on being better than their competitors by working on their marketing strategies as a result they lose their customers to other national and international institutions. Numerous studies have been done in order to identify the factors that affect students' choice of higher education institutions and it was found that Price, program, place, promotion, people, process and physical evidence, reputation are those factors that impact students' decision making process. But in our study new element was identified i.e. security, which is a major concern in Pakistan these days.

In this research, the top three factors includes program, Reputation and Security. The results of this study show that the University or institute management must focus on Program i.e. their main concern should be to provide better and up to date programs that are not offered by other universities. Program is the first thing that attracts students followed by university or institution's reputation. University reputation can be associated with strong brand image; HEC ranking etc. the universities need to build a very strong image in order to attract students. And a new dimension is that the universities can also increase the enrolment rate by adopting good security measures for the students. It may not be valid for other countries, but in Pakistan security has become a major hot issue and universities must cater to this issue and provide a good, secure and healthy environment to their students.

On the other hand, the least favorable factors according to students include people, process and place which mean that these factors have little or no impact on students' decision making process of higher education institutions. Like, student believes that the people including faculty, staff and alumni are not an important factor in increasing the student likelihood that a student will select a particular university. Similarly, process and location has minimal effect on students' decision because students don't consider them to be very important.

RECOMMENDATIONS

According to our research, it was found out that customer prefer Programs, Reputation and Security are the top three important factors that impact students' decision making process and People, process and place has a very minimal effect on students decision making of selecting higher education institution. Here are some of the recommendations that a University or higher education institution may adopt:

The university management needs to offer new courses that are not offered by other universities. E.g. Very few universities are offering MBA entrepreneurship or event management, though it's an emerging field and the management should start providing attention to it but no University management is doing that. Offering new courses will be beneficial for the university.

According to the research, the university can also increase the likeness among students by increasing its reputation. The university or the higher education institution needs to improve its brand image and focus on its repositioning. The university can do this by:

- Adopting new marketing and promotional strategies.
- Should increase media presence and start publicizing its achievements.
- Start building liaisons with organizations and foreign universities as it can be an added advantage for them.
- By increasing positive word of mouth among people by alumni, faculty etc.
- The university can also improve its reputation by hiring high caliber faculty.

Another way of attracting students towards the institution and university is to provide them with good security measures. Security, which is a major concern in Pakistan now, is a crucial factor that must be given attention. Not only students but their families as well are very concerned about security of their children. Proper boundary wall, well trained security guards, proper safety and security measures should be adopted. Universities must also train students how to take care of them in panic situation.

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

Topic: An Analytical study of factors affecting students’ choice of higher education institutions.		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree		
Please select your desired response: For example: If your response is 4 (Agree) than please draw a circle around that number like this 4						
1	The reason for selecting university was that the location of the institution was convenient for me.	1	2	3	4	5
2	A higher education institution must focus on offering up to date courses to attract more students.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Good and renowned faculty is important factor to consider while selecting a University.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Strong alumni network is an important source of positive word of mouth, which attracts students towards Higher Education Institution.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Administrative staff also plays an important role in attracting students toward university.	1	2	3	4	5
6	The infrastructure of the university or an institution is an important factor to consider while choosing it.	1	2	3	4	5
7	The most important factor that influence student’s decision making is the cost i.e tuition fee.	1	2	3	4	5
8	The administrative processes like minimal and easy admission process etc are important factor that affects university selection.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Overall environment of an Institution is an important factor to	1	2	3	4	5

	consider while selecting an institution.	
10	Advertising, internet marketing, sponsorships etc plays an important role in enhancing student's enrollment in universities.	1 2 3 4 5
11	Financial aids, scholarships attract students towards University.	1 2 3 4 5
12	HEC ranking of any University is an important factor that attracts students.	1 2 3 4 5
13	Liaison with good organizations is important factor to attract students.	1 2 3 4 5
14	Universities need to have collaborations with foreign universities in order to attract students.	1 2 3 4 5
15	Good security measures are vital for attracting students towards a higher education institutions.	1 2 3 4 5