

INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS IN THE SELECTION OF INDONESIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: EVIDENCE FROM EDUCATION EXPO VISITORS

Arif Hartono

Management Department, Faculty of Economics
Islamic University of Indonesia (UII)
arif.hartono@uii.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study examines the required information and its importance that used by visitors of an education expo to select Indonesian higher education (HE) institutions. The visitors were dominated by the final year students of high schools that are located in the city of Jakarta, Indonesia. The study also investigates preferred promotional tools considered effective by the visitors that influence their choice of Indonesian HE institutions. The results indicated that the top three (in order) of the required information that used by the visitors to select Indonesian HE institutions were scholarships offered, teaching quality and faculty accreditation. Teaching quality, faculty accreditation and scholarship were the top three factors (in order) to be perceived importance by the visitors in the choice of Indonesian HE institutions. Regarding, HE promotional tools considered the most effective that influenced the visitors in selecting Indonesian HE institutions were national television, university presentation and university website. The study results provide important insight for policy makers in Indonesian HE institutions to develop marketing strategy, particularly the strategy related to recruitment and advertising, due to the visitors are potential students of Indonesian HE institutions.

Keywords: *required information, selection, higher education, Indonesia*

1. INTRODUCTION

Globally higher education (HE) institutions face challenges such as intensifying global competition, declining funding and changing demand patterns (Gibbs, Habeshaw & Yorke 2008; Jarvis 2000; Veloutsou, Lewis & Paton 2004). For examples, Soutar & Turner (2002) described significant changes of tuition fees policy in Australia's tertiary education sector, government subsidies fees have been replaced by full cost fees at the postgraduate levels. In US, students' opportunities to go to colleges are increase; however the competition to recruit more students and to retain them has become more severe (Domino *et al.* 2006). In developing countries context, for example in Malaysia, many universities experience an increasing competition among them (Ming, 2010). In Indonesia, HE strategy has been reformed by implementing HE institutional autonomy and accountability (Kusumawati *et al.* 2010). The impact of the reform has granted full autonomy to well-established public universities.

From HE institutions' point of view, understanding required information used by students to select HE will provide important insight to develop marketing decisions. St. John, Paulsen & Carter (2005) argue that knowing students' and parents' expectation is one of the effective ways for higher education institutions to face the highly competitive new environment. Understanding institutional factors that affect students' decision to select colleges become an important part of marketing strategy planning that related to recruitment strategy (Ming, 2010). Therefore, the factors used by students to evaluate and select a university have changed as well as the used of marketing techniques to recruit potential students of higher education has become increasingly important.

From students' point of view, decision to attend a university can be classified as a high involvement decision and it needs the right and sufficient information to guide their decisions. Veloutsou, Lewis & Paton (2004) stated that decision to select a university is a difficult task for pupils due to such decision often affects their future life path. Domino *et al.* (2006) added that the decision is important for students due to education from universities will significantly influence students' whole life, therefore students and parents are very serious and careful when selecting a university to attend.

Taking the above into consideration, the present study focused on identification of the information requirements and its importance that used by visitors of an education expo in the city of Jakarta, Indonesia to select higher education institutions. In addition, the study also investigated what marketing communication tools that are considered effective and can be accessed and reached easily by potential students of HE institutions. Data of the study was obtained from the visitors of the annual education expo that was held in Jakarta, the capital city of

Indonesia from 16-19 February 2012. Visitors of the education expo were dominated by high school students from various high schools that are located in Jakarta. Most of them were in the final year of their study.

Research questions that were addressed in this study: (1) what is the required information used by the education expo visitors to select an Indonesian HE institution? (2) what is the degree of importance of the required information that influence the education expo visitors in selecting an Indonesian HE institution? (3) what are the preferred promotional tools for the education expo visitors that influenced their choice of HE institutions?

The present study seeks to achieve the following objectives: (1) determining the required information when the education expo visitors are selecting an Indonesian HE institution; (2) investigating the degree of importance of the required information that used by the education expo visitors to select an Indonesian HE institution; (3) determining preferred promotional tools for the education expo visitors that influenced their choice of Indonesian HE institutions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Required Information & Its Importance

Soutar & Turner (2002) surveyed determinants of university preferences for Western Australia school-leavers by using conjoint analysis. The analysis employed in order to investigate the relative importance of a number of attributes to school-leavers' choice of university. Soutar & Turner (2002) divided the attributes into two categories, namely university related factors and personal factors. The university related factors are the type of course, the academic reputation of the institution, the campus, the quality of the teaching staff and the type of university. The personal factors are distance from home, what family of high school leavers thinks about each university and what university of high school leavers' friends wishes to attend. They found that four most important determinants were course suitability, academic reputation, job prospects and teaching quality. The study's findings can be used by universities' marketing managers to determine target groups who can be attracted to higher education institutions, as well as to provide insights into marketing strategies in recruiting prospective students.

Veloutsou, Lewis & Paton (2004) conducted a study aims to identify required information that high school students expect and require when evaluating and selecting a higher education institution and to assess the relative importance of the various information items. In their study, they employed both qualitative and quantitative studies. They used factor analysis to identify groups of items describing the same dimension of required information. Based on the factor analysis, there were nine specific areas with students require information items, namely local infrastructure, local social life, career prospects, university's infrastructure, university's social life, business contracts, university's reputation, course studied, and campus. The study result showed that the most important information that the participants seek were the university reputation, courses and campus.

Briggs (2006) investigated factors that influence undergraduate students of higher education in six Scottish universities. He identified ten influencing factors, namely academic reputation, distance from home location, own perception, graduate employment, social life nearby, entry requirements, teaching reputation, quality of the faculty, information supplied by university and research reputation. The top three of the influencing factors were academic reputation, distance from home and location.

Yamamoto (2006) investigated important factors for evaluation and selection of a university in Turkey by using questionnaire method to determine the factors. He found several factors that influence students' decision to select and evaluate a university namely personal preference, parents, university entrance exam scores, university ranking, advisors and friends.

Ho & Hung (2008) studied the marketing mix formulation for higher education and they identified fourteen factors perceived by high students to select a university. They categorized the factors into five groups, namely living (location, convenience, and campus), learning (faculty, curriculum and research), reputation (academic reputation and alumni reputation), economy (tuition fee, subsidies and employability) and strategy (exam subjects, exam pass rate, and graduation requirements). Students perceived five factors as the most important factors, namely employability, curriculum, academic reputation, faculty, and research environment.

The recent study conducted by Kusumawati, Yanamandram & Perera (2010) explores the factors that influence student choice in the selection of Indonesian Public Universities. In their preliminary research, they conducted an exploratory study that consist of 48 semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion (FGD) with first-year undergraduate students in the five public universities in Java and Sumatera Island. The interview results showed that factors used by higher education students to evaluate and select higher education institution were similar to

previous studies in other countries. There were 25 emerging factors from their preliminary study. Of the 25 emerging factors, three were key drivers when selecting a higher education institution, namely cost, reputation and proximity. The other influencing factors were job prospect, parents, and quality.

Based on the literature review discussed above, it can be summarized that: (1) some influencing factors will be more important than others; (2) participants in previous studies from various countries exhibited many similar responses when choosing a university.

2.2. HE Promotional Tools

Bonnema & Van der Walddt (2008) argued that promotional tools in HE also have changed along with the changes in HE landscape and therefore marketers in HE institutions need to evaluate their marketing communication practices if they want to satisfy the need of information of their potential markets. They added that HE institutions need to consider marketing communication strategies that able to address the heterogeneous of HE's target markets. HE promotional tools such as campus visit programs, use of media mix magazine and newspaper advertising, radio/TV/cable advertising, web/internet, special events, direct mail, donor relations, alumni relations, view books, telemarketing, and high school relations affect students choices of particular HE (Al-Hawary & Batayneh, 2010).

Abrahamson (2000) noted that there was shifting in the use of printed advertisement to the web in order to reach students' way of communication. Furthermore, image, information and accuracy of web pages can be easily monitored and maintained. He added that traditional methods of communication are too slow for the generation; therefore HE needs to shift the methods. Brown & Hoyt (2003) revealed that web as a major of source of information affects university choice. Marketing media and communication technologies such as internet, www, email, and chat rooms are considered as reliable ways for colleges and universities to offer information to students in the various phases of the recruitment and selection process (Williams, 2000). The question remains as to which advertising tools that provides the greatest impact to students' choice of particular Indonesian HE institutions?

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Data Collection, Sampling and Instrument

This study was supported and funded by the oldest private university in Indonesia that joined in the 2012 annual education expo that was held in the city of Jakarta, Indonesia from 16-19 February 2012. Data were collected from the visitors of the education expo by employing questionnaires. This study employed purposive sampling to collect information from the visitors who visited the university's stand expo. Souvenirs were provided by the university in order to increase the response rate. In the last day of the education expo, a total of 100 completed and usable questionnaires successfully collected.

The questionnaire consists of four section; (1) participants' profile, (2) required information that used by participants to evaluate and to select HE, (3) the perceived importance of the required information, (4) HE promotional tools. Relevant required information that students searched for and expected when they evaluate and select HE was compiled based on the literature presented earlier in this paper. Participants were asked to assess a list of 22 items of the required information (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) and to reveal the perceived importance of the required information when they select HE (1=very unimportant, 5=very important). Subsequently, participants were asked to select one of ten HE promotional tools that influent students' selection of the HE.

3.2. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics was employed in order to facilitate the description and summarization of collected data. The participants profile section consist the following information: gender, age, types of high school, the students' grade, and destination city to study. In addition, cronbach's alpha was used in order to measure internal consistency reliability of the constructs measured. Factor analysis was used to identify groups of item describing the same dimension of required information. The factor analysis approach that was used in this study was the principal component. In such approach, the total variance in the data is considered (Malhotra, 2007). A general rule of thumb, all factors with eigenvalues greater than one is reported.

4. FINDINGS

Cronbach's alpha value was 0,964 which means that the required information internally consistent. Based on the descriptive statistics, the profile of the participants were: gender (24% men and 76% women), age (100% in the range 16-20 years old), types of high school (69% state high schools and 31% private high schools), the students' grade (99% in the 3rd grade/final year, 1% in the 2nd grade) and the top three of destination cities to study were Jakarta (55%), Yogyakarta (27%) and Bandung (9%).

The results indicated that the top three (in order) of the required information that used by the visitors to select an Indonesian HE were scholarships offered, teaching quality and faculty accreditation. Teaching quality, faculty accreditation and scholarship were the top three factors (in order) to be perceived importance by the visitors in the choice of an Indonesian HE. While, HE promotional tools considered the most effective that influenced the visitors to select an Indonesian HE were national television, university presentation and university website.

Factor analysis showed that three factors emerged out of 22 original factors with the following total eigenvalues 12,328; 1,277 and 1,198. The first factor consists of 16 factors associated with institution accreditation and offers. The second factor related to accommodation and living cost that consist of 3 factors. Lastly, two factors loaded to be a factor that related to institution reputation.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings above, lesson learned from the study can be discussed. As the competition in recruiting potential students from wide range of background is increased, it is important for policy makers of HE institutions to employ marketing practices to win the competition. The policy makers must understand what the information that required by the potential students in the selection of HE. In addition, understanding the knowledge related to the importance of the required information need to be taken into consideration. It is believed that such understanding can be used to develop marketing strategy related to profiling, targeting and recruiting potential students.

Marketing communication in the context of HE also has an important role. HE's policy makers need to understand what the promotional tools that effectively reaches the potential students as well as positively influence them in the selection of HE. Based on the study's result, national television, university presentation and university website considered as the effective promotional tools that can be used in the recruitment strategy. Regarding the use of internet as the HE promotional tool, the study result was in line with the previous studies presented in the literature review.

Lastly, limitations of the study need to be acknowledged. First, generalization of the study's result needs to be considered due to the use of convenience sampling. Therefore, in the future study, non-probability sampling methods is suggested to be employed. Second, the study was conducted in the capital city of Indonesia; therefore the result might be will be different if the study conducted in rural areas. In the future study, a comparison study can be conducted in order to portray different insight from students in urban and rural areas. Finally, updating of the insight related to required information and its importance cannot be gained from this study due to the use of one-shot or cross-sectional study. It is recommended for HE's policy makers to conduct the study regularly, therefore the update of what the required information and effective HE promotional tools that influence the choice of HE can be obtained.

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