Factors Influencing students in selecting Higher Education Institution (HEI) in UAE

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Abstract

Purpose: Helping the UAE' higher education institutions to understand the factors may influence their potential customers (Students), in order to have a better vision for evaluating their marketing strategies and techniques.

1. Introduction

Higher education industry in UAE is considered very important among other industries not only in UAE but also in the gulf region. UAE currently watches a growth in the higher education sector as the enrollees’ number of the high school students is getting 3-4% increase in the last three years (2013:2016). In addition, UAE has 79 private higher education institutions licensed by Ministry of higher education and scientific research (MOHESR). These universities and colleges offers 917 academic program (undergraduate and postgraduate programs). The industry size is encouraged the researchers of this paper to investigate the behavior of the consumers of this industry. Researchers tried to simplify the process of selecting higher education institution in UAE to look like a basic process of buying/selling by testing the Buyers side (Potential student's perspectives) and the Sellers (HE Institutions perspectives) side as well, and comparing them together to test if both perspectives are matched together or no. Furthermore, opinions of Professionals from higher education institutions that usually come from their best practice (day to day operations) is considered to be a useful add-on to the research context.

The paper is structures as follows. We fist provide the literature review which shows a summary of what other researcher find about the factors influencing students to select a higher education institution. Then we elaborate the methodology researchers followed going through the data sources and collection and the types of different analysis that researchers did to find some links between the Higher education institution and their customers (potential students). Finally to come up with some findings and recommendation and some implications for industry managers/ marketers.
2. Literature Review

The literature review section delves into the relevance and critique of secondary sources collected by our group regarding the research topic. The literature collected is critical when our group embarks on answering the research question at hand. The literature review is, therefore, a comprehensive critic of the relevant books and possible online sources that have so far attempted to establish the factors influencing students in selecting higher education institutions and universities in the United Arab Emirates. In this research, the literature review is essential as a means through which the old incumbent factors that have so far had an influence upon the education sector can be linked to the emerging or contemporary factors so as to establish the gap that our group will aim to fill or address. Concisely, in this study, our group will mostly pay greater attention to the already published books and offer views regarding the efficiency of those books in addressing the current research topic. A comprehensive literature review on the research topic, factors influencing students in selecting a higher educational institution and universities in the United Arab Emirates follows below.

Factors influencing students in selecting a higher educational institution and universities in United Arab Emirates

Students select higher education institutions or universities based on whether the institutions offer both part time and full time teachings. The concern for part time institutions is mostly with students who are already professionals in particular fields and who needed to only further their studies. The desire for part time studies was acknowledged in 2014 in a report which indicated that it has been growing more than the rate in previous years.

Providing education to working professionals that already have a degree is a growing and profitable business, but one that also requires offering course options that they can take on (Report: Dubai, 2014)

For instance, in the year 2014, the Manchester Business School in Dubai has around 1500 part time students enrolled for master’s in business studies (Report: Dubai, 2014). Consequently, only students who are beginning their higher education studies will be less concerned or not concerned at all about whether or not a university or higher institution of learning offers full time and part time academic course.

The place of accreditation of the university or higher institute of learning is also a factor in consideration for the students. Locally, The Commission for Academic Accreditation licenses schools and that means that students can choose any local universities and enroll under federal conditions. But in case a student desires to have a feel of how foreign studies are, he can still enroll into foreign accredited universities that are also licensed within the UAE. Most of these students are those who have a desire to one day move abroad for further studies. The foreign accredited universities seem to attract students because of the quality of education that is associated with them.

As more established universities settle in the Emirate, the quality of programs offered has also risen. S P Jain school of Global Management’s Global MBA program, which is offered in Dubai,
Sydney, and Singapore, was ranked the 11th best, one year international MBA program in the world by Forbes in 2013 (Report: Dubai, 2014).

Concisely, more international universities and colleges located within Dubai and Abu Dhabi have been in operation since the 1990s and are increasingly attracting more local students. Manchester Business School is an affiliate of the University of Manchester. Emirates Institute for Banking and Financial Studies has campuses in Sharjah, Abu Dhabi and Dubai which indicates the level of appreciation by the locals of such universities.

Further, a huge number of expatriates will prefer that their children enroll into private universities. As such an expatriate living in the UAE will not enroll a student into a government university even though the tuition fee could be much lower. New York Institute of Technology based in Abu Dhabi is an accredited US institution and is a better place for foreign students seeking to enroll. The advantage of the foreign academic accredited institutions is that they have a great command of the English language and they do not place a lot of emphasis on Islamic and Arabic studies as compared to the locally accredited institutions.

Another factor influencing student selection of a university or institution of higher learning is based on whether or not the institution accepts all genders or whether it is a single gender institution. Important to note here is that most single gender academic institutions are mostly those that fall within the bracket of the federally funded. But the UAE, in general, is moving out of the single gender based schools. Zayed University which was once a single gender institution now admits both males and females; a process it began in 2008 after existing for decades as a female only university. A great number of students actually prefer enrolment into mixed gender academic institutions as evident from the large number of enrolment into private institutions which are all mixed gender institutions.

By the end of the 2012 academic year, the overall capacity utilization of the private education system stood at 89.5%, leaving little room for expansion in current schools (Report: Dubai, 2014).

The American College of Dubai allows both sexes and University of Wollongong in Dubai is also mixed gender. Gulf Medical University based in Ajman is all gender based. The pointer here is that all foreign universities that are based in the UAE are private institutions and at the same time offer courses for both male and female students.

The level of infrastructure development within universities or higher learning institutions is another factor determining the university or academic institution that the students will choose to enroll into. One of the most important form of infrastructure that is linked to universities or institutions of higher learning is technology. The level of embedment of technology into a university determines enrolment especially in places such as the UAE. In this age, libraries are online and assignments and student- teacher interactions are mostly online. A lot has been written about the link between education and technology and how they are all taken into account by students searching for institutions of higher learning or universities that they seek to enroll into. The disruptive nature of technology in all the global traditional industries has not discouraged policy makers from finding a way to embed it into the education system in the
United Arab Emirates. The UAE announced its mobile learning initiative in 2012 and it was to achieve certain factors:

The initiative was to include, in a collaborative manner, all three of the UAE’s federal tertiary institutions and begin with approximately 13,000 students and faculty… The rationale behind this bold initiative was to help students better achieve 21st century learning outcomes through the ubiquitous use of mobile learning devices (Ally & Khan, 2015, 189)

Consequently, it is essential to establish whether students will choose a particular institution of higher learning depending on the institutions level of technological advancement or whether technology plays no role in attracting students. The research must establish whether every institution of higher learning in the UAE has embedded technology in its establishment including availability of computer laboratories and faster internet connection. This should be compared with the number of students in the institution and an assessment of whether they were attracted to the institution because of factors other than technology. Otherwise, the role of technology in influencing student enrolment to universities and institutions of higher learning may receive more credit than it deserves if the current author is followed blindly. Other factors could actually explain the choice of universities because in the modern age almost every student aiming for higher education already has a digital presence and probably owns a phone and a laptop.

The reputation of universities or academic institution is another factor taken into account by students seeking for enrolment. Reputation can be used as an indicator of the performance level of the institution so that the student is able to gauge whether the course he is enrolling for will be taught effectively by reputable lecturers. This factor can be tied to the prestige that comes about by studying in a particular university as compared to another. The level of prestige that comes with enrolling for a particular course may be a factor influencing students in selecting higher education institutions and universities in the United Arab Emirates. Shaw (1997, 121) stated the following in regard to what may be considered as a nexus between the course prestige and the institution chosen.

It has frequently been pointed out that Gulf students have tended to avoid the industrial arts and see handicraft artisan employment as having low status compared with clerical-administrative work. The higher colleges of technology, by their rapid success, show that this culture of antipathy to the practical and hands-on can be changed.

Concisely, the foregoing comparison between industrial arts and clerical-administrative work was conducted in 1997 and is therefore worn out by time and a changed world that it cannot be left unchallenged. This study must, therefore, establish whether or not circumstances still exist to warrant the conclusion that the presumed prestige that comes with enrolling for certain courses still influences the students in selecting higher education institutions and universities in the United Arab Emirates. The comparison can further be challenged or approved through the research by making an analysis of the number of students enrolled in universities or higher education institutions that teach industrial arts compared to the institutions that teach courses such as law and medicine. The comparison will clearly explain whether the prestige that comes from enrolling for a particular course is a factor influencing selection of universities or higher education institutions by students in the United Arab Emirates. This is important because some
students may actually opt for certain institutions or universities and enroll for certain courses in them because one of their relatives or friends actually studied in the same institution.

**Research gap**

Concisely, even though various secondary sources attempt to describe some factors that may influence students in selecting institutions of higher learning or universities, it is clear that most of the available information is scattered across different sources. Moreover, some of the secondary sources also seem outdated since the education sector in the United Arab Emirates has been evolving. Factors such as adoption of new technologies and creation of new campuses both within and outside the United Arab Emirates can attest to this. Therefore, there is need for a new type of research that can factor in all the shortcomings associated with the foregoing secondary sources. Concisely, this research study seeks to address the gap that currently exists as relates to the research topic, factors influencing students in selecting a higher educational institution and universities in United Arab Emirates.
3. Methodology

In this section, researchers showing how the data was collected through different sources, and the way we analyze the data collected. The figure (1), below shows the model that the researcher used for this paper.

Figure 1:
3.1 Data collection

Data has been used for this paper is collected from variety of resources, some data collected from statistics published by authorized data centers and governmental organizations. Other data collected from surveys posted to previous/current/potential customers. In addition, there is data collected from – one to one- interviews with practitioners and industry leaders. The following is the data collected sorted by the stage of search.

3.1.1 Data of the need assessment.

Researches tried to make sure from the industry size to test if we really need to study the consumer behavior in the higher education institution in UAE?! In other words, have we select a “Healthy enough” industry to work on? To answer this question, we collect data from the recent UAE fact book published by ministry of higher education and scientific research in UAE. (Figure1)
The number of licensed higher education institutions in the UAE has increased sharply during the last two decades and now stands at 71. Another seven institutions are currently in the establishment stage.

Higher education institutions from 1990 through 2013

 Licensed institutions are classified into the following three categories:

- University
- Institute
- College / Academy / University college

(Figure 2)
HIGHER EDUCATION ENROLMENT BY YEAR, 2008-2013

Student distribution by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of institution</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>33,164</td>
<td>35,323</td>
<td>38,069</td>
<td>39,932</td>
<td>41,651</td>
<td>45,385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-federal</td>
<td>52,926</td>
<td>59,873</td>
<td>65,566</td>
<td>69,880</td>
<td>76,734</td>
<td>82,894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>86,090</strong></td>
<td><strong>95,196</strong></td>
<td><strong>103,635</strong></td>
<td><strong>109,812</strong></td>
<td><strong>118,385</strong></td>
<td><strong>128,279</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total yearly increase</strong></td>
<td><strong>10.58%</strong></td>
<td><strong>8.86%</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.96%</strong></td>
<td><strong>7.81%</strong></td>
<td><strong>8.36%</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5-year enrolment increase (2009-2013):
- Total enrolment: 34.75%
- Federal institutions: 28.49%
- Non-federal institutions: 38.45%

Enrolment trends in 2008-2013

(Figure 3)
## Graduation Trends, 2008-2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of institution</th>
<th>2008-2009</th>
<th>2009-2010</th>
<th>2010-2011</th>
<th>2011-2012</th>
<th>2012-2013</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>6,389</td>
<td>6,943</td>
<td>5,942</td>
<td>6,570</td>
<td>8,134</td>
<td>34,378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-federal</td>
<td>9,621</td>
<td>9,798</td>
<td>10,588</td>
<td>12,600</td>
<td>13,792</td>
<td>56,869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16,010</td>
<td>16,741</td>
<td>16,530</td>
<td>19,170</td>
<td>21,926</td>
<td>91,247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total yearly increase</td>
<td>4.57%</td>
<td>-1.26%</td>
<td>18.39%</td>
<td>12.04%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5-year increase in graduates (2008-2013):
- Total graduates: 30.97%
- Federal institutions: 17.15%
- Non-federal institutions: 40.76%

### Graduation trends in 2008-2013

- **Total**
- **Non-federal**
- **Federal**

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**THE U.A.E. HIGHER EDUCATION FACTBOOK, 2013/2014**
3.1.2 Data of the industry

We collected the industry data via the official websites of seven private licensed institutions by the Ministry of higher education and scientific research. The universities has been selected based on many factor such as relatively good numbers of enrollees, academic accreditation, variety of programs offered and offer different levels of degrees, the selected universities are:

- Canadian University in Dubai (CUD)
- University of Dubai (UD)
- University of Wollongong in Dubai (UOWD)
- Abu Dhabi University (ADU)
- British University in Dubai (BUiD)
- University of United Arab Emirates (UAEU)

With the reference to “Model of buyer behavior” (Kotler et al. 2011), researcher has tried to study the marketing Stimuli (The four Ps) for the selected universities— focusing on the selling points that every university use to market for itself, such as tuition fees, location and university’ accreditation. These factor/selling point are which usually found under the title “Why to choose XYZ University?”

3.1.3 Data of Consumers

During the data collection process for the consumer part in this research, Researchers assume that the consumer of that industry as under three categories: Previous, Current, and potential students. We collected the consumer data via conducting two surveys. The first is initial paper survey conducted exclusively to high school students form different schools allover UAE. We selected one of the most famous education exhibition event (Najah Exhibition 2016) which held on October 2016, to conduct that survey to the attended students. This survey has direct five simple questions to inquire the factor my influence students to select their future higher education institution.

The survey was conducted to 50 students on the first day of the exhibition, however, 26% of them are excluded (13 survey) for invalid answers (like marking everything, or some of them are filled by grade nine students). Paper survey questions was as follows:

Q1: Are you planning to continue get your undergraduate degree from UAE?
Possible answers: ("yes", “No")

Q2: Which of the following is your targeted category?
Possible answers: (Public Universities, Private Universities, Branch Campuses, Other)

Q3: Who you usually consult about the University you select?
Possible answers: (Parents & Family, Friends, School mentor, Other)

Q4: How do you search about the universities you may select from?
Possible answers: (Internet, Newspapers, Exhibitions, School Counselor, Other)

Q5: What of the most attractive factor for you to choose your future university?
Possible answers: (Academic Accreditation, Offered Programs, Beautiful Campus, Other).
The **second survey** was web-based survey. This survey was targeting more current and previous students that the potential students. It has been conducted by using “Google forms” tool.

Survey consists of 5 questions has two different pathways. It has been forwarded to the more than 100 participants by email. We got 49 responses out of the 100. The survey questions was designed as follows.

**Q1:** Which of the following tools you use to select the university you study/might study in?

*Possible answers: Consulting family members and friends, Internet Search, Visit Educational Exhibitions, Radio and newspapers ads, other.***

**Q2:** What is the most attractive factor for you to choose your university? (Choose the most three)

*Possible answers: Reputation and recognition, Academic accreditation, Flexible Learning and schedules, Research Opportunity, Beautiful & comfortable Campus with luxury facilities, Reasonable tuition fees, Western Curriculums, Facilitate Visa Process, Have a good graduate employability rates, Community outreach and links with the society, Other)***

Then other questions runs automatically as follows:

- **Q3:** Are you currently/previously enrolled in a university?
  - Yes
    - Would you recommend this university to others?
      - Yes
      - No
  - No
    - Do you plan to enroll in a university inside UAE?
      - Yes
      - No

- **End**
  - What negative things you did face in your university? *(Essay Question)*
  - Why you are not planning to continue your study in a university inside UAE?
  - What makes you loyal to your university? *(Essay Question)*
3.2 Data analysis methods

In this part, researchers show the way they analyze the collected data to reach some initial conclusion for the industry side (industry analysis) and the consumer side (Consumer analysis), then we map the analysis outcomes together in the comparative analysis.

3.2.1 Industry analysis and need assessment.

As per the graphs shows in the data collection section (Figure 1), the number of licensed institutions by MOHESR are getting an increment as the below schedule shows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic year</th>
<th>Number of Licensed Institutions</th>
<th>Increase percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>18.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>10.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>4.20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, the number of enrollees in the higher education institution has also a noticeable increase during the last five years as shown in (figure 2) same as the number of graduates (Figure 3). With all these increments, we easily can conclude that the industry of the higher education is healthy and sable in UAE, the thing that encourage the research team to go forward towards researching how those institutions are market for themselves?

To answer the question above, research team has ran one to one interviews with three of industry leaders in three different universities, having industry direct experience between 10 to 22 years of experience. From the come outs of these interviews, we knew that universities usually using the following methods to market for itself: Educational exhibitions, Media campaigns in newspapers and radio channels, school visits, and the most powerful pathway is the official website of the university which is the research team interest in this paper.

Research team collected the most important selling factors universities present at their websites, added the selling factors for the selected seven universities into one Microsoft excel spread sheet.

We test every selling factor separately, by checking how many university using this factor and we give the factor one score point for every use. The below schedule (Schedule 1) shows the analysis of the mentioned data:
(Schedule 1):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selling Factor</th>
<th>CUD</th>
<th>UD</th>
<th>UOWD</th>
<th>ADU</th>
<th>AUD</th>
<th>BUID</th>
<th>UAEU</th>
<th>Factor Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alumni Networking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied study for real World</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful Campus</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive Prices</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship with Job Placement Opportunity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verity in Offered programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate Visa Process</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community outreach</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly Environment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Accreditation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International faculty</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option to Graduate/ Continuing education in Western Country</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership with the business/industry Community</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-centered approach</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Curriculum</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasonable tuition fees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible learning / Schedule</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research opportunities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate employability</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Recognition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural student community</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Accreditation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Then, we collect the weight of using each factor by counting the points in front of each factor (horizontally). As we see in the above schedule, not every factor is used for every university, some factors – such as “Facilitate Visa Process” is used only by one university (The American university of Dubai), while some other factor is used by all universities- Such as “National Accreditation”.
The below graph showing the results of this process (factors are sorted by weight).
Research team were affected by some theories of needs, in particular, **Maslow's hierarchy of needs**, when Maslow want to understand the needs and motivation of people. The team follows Maslow’s steps in understanding how universities in UAE market for themselves by ranking the selling factors they use on their websites as illustrated in (hierarchy 1).

The most used factors which are used by all / most of the selected universities are in the most top on the hierarchy pyramid, then the lower and the lower, until we end up with the least used factor in the end stage of the hierarchy pyramid of Universities ‘Selling Factors Usability. Research team assume that the mentioned pyramid might help universities’ marketers to have more clear vision in regards to the market and the competitors selling factors. They could test if they use the right factor to sell there universities and also could test if they forget to mention or misrepresent some other factors.
The initial conclusion of the industry analysis tells that most of the Universities Focused on Academic Accreditation as a selling point, Then Graduate employability, International
Recognition, Multicultural student community Then Flexible learning / Schedule, Research opportunities, Then other factors.

3.2.2 Consumer analysis

In the previous part, we studied the selling forces from the sellers (universities) points of view, this part is about studying the other side of the (sell-buy) process which is the buying motives by the consumers (students). The method of data collection has been mentioned in part 3.1.3 “Data of Consumers”, the following are the process and the analysis of this data.

101 meeting with the practitioners

To follow the right track, the team held some meetings with the practitioners of the field (Admission and recruitment officers working for the universities that we mentioned in the industry analysis part. The meeting was about choosing the right event to run a paper survey for the high school student, in addition, to provide us with some listings of (previous/current/potential) students so we can send them an online survey. Furthermore, the mentioned meetings included discussions with the practitioners about the surveys structures and the types of the questions shall we type in the surveys.

Initial Paper survey

The initial paper survey was analyzed by using Microsoft excel sheets, by spreading the possible answers of each question. We test the survey questions separately, we give the answer one score point for every per student choice. The below schedule (schedule: 2) shows the way researchers analyzed the collected data.
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</table>
Following to the excel spread sheet, the team has reached the below come outs.

Q1: Are you planning to continue get your undergraduate degree from UAE?

![Bar chart showing yes and no responses to Q1.](chart1.png)

This was to test if the willingness of students still positive towards studying at UAE, as the graph shows the majority say “yes” which is refers that the market still healthy and the consumers are there.

Q2: Which of the following is your targeted category?

![Bar chart showing targeted categories.](chart2.png)
As the above graph shows, the majority of students are focusing on the public and the private universities with almost no attention to the branch campuses. Which is refers to that researchers selected the right segments of the universities to study about.

Q3: Who you usually consult about the University you select?

Results of question three reflects the “Hofstede’s cultural dimensions” where the UAE society is a collectivistic society (the individualism dimension is relatively low). Family, parents and friends got the highest rates between the other factors.

Q4: How do you search about the universities you may select from?
Exhibitions and internet got the highest ranks of the students between the other choices, researchers choose the internet in their industry analysis after finding the results of question four in this survey, as the exhibition data is a bit hard to be collected in regards to the module study period.

Q5: What of the most attractive factor for you to choose your future university?

<table>
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<th>Factor</th>
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<td>Offered Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beautiful Campus</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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</table>

Academic accreditation was on the top of the attractive factors that grasp student’s attention, researchers used this point in the industry analysis by selecting only accredited universities in their research study. With the reference to Hofstede’s cultural dimensions, it seems that the Uncertainty avoidance is relatively high as students put their trust in universities which have academic accreditation. In other words, they belief in experts.
Online Survey

Online survey questions is was as follow:

---

The University of Choice

How do students select their future university

* Required

Q1: Which of the following tools you use to select the university you study/might study in? *

- [ ] Consulting family members and friends
- [ ] Internet Search
- [ ] Visit Educational Exhibitions
- [ ] Radio and newspapers ads
- [ ] Other: ____________________________________________
Q2: What is the most attractive factor for you to choose your university? (Choose the most three) *

- [ ] Reputation and recognition
- [ ] Academic accreditation
- [ ] Flexible Learning and schedules
- [ ] Research Opportunity
- [ ] Beautiful & comfortable Campus with luxury facilities
- [ ] Reasonable tuition fees
- [ ] Western Curriculums
- [ ] Facilitate Visa Process
- [ ] Have a good graduate employability rates
- [ ] Community outreach and links with the society

- [ ] Other: ________________________________________________________________

Q3: Are you currently/ previously enrolled in a university? *

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
If the answer of Question 3 was yes, the following is the consequences

**Satisfaction**

Q4: would you recommend this university to others? *

- Yes
- No

If question 4 answer is ‘yes” then the ‘Loyalty’ question will appear, and if the answer is ‘No’ the ‘Negative Experience’ question will appear.

**Loyalty**

Q5: What makes you loyal to your university *

Your answer

**Negative Experience**

What negative things you did face in your university? *

Your answer
If the answer of Question 3 was No, the following is the consequences

Interest

Do you plan to enroll in a university inside UAE? *

- Yes
- No

If the answer of was ‘yes’ then the survey will be submitted, if answer is ‘No’ the following question will appear

Barriers

Why you are not planning to continue your study in a university inside UAE *

Your answer
The following are the results of the online survey.

**Q1: Which of the following tools you use to select the university you study/might study in?**
(50 responses)

As the results shows the Majority of choices was to the 'internet' then 'family & friends" as a second ranked choice then other factors.

**Q2: What is the most attractive factor for you to choose your university?**
(Choose the most three)
(50 responses)

The results show that ‘Academic accreditation’ got the high ranked factor, then ‘Reasonable Tuition fees’ then ‘Reputation & recognition’ then other factors. This result reflects that the uncertainty avoidance is a bit high in the UAE, where consumers build their choice on something trusted and certified by authorities.
The majority of the answers was ‘Yes’.

This question reflects that the majority of the students are satisfied and recommending their universities to other. However, there is more than 16% are unsatisfied with their universities.
The analysis of the written questions about the reasons for student’s loyalty to their universities was focused on the well treatment, quality of education and the academic staff support.

The analysis of the written questions about the reasons for student’s negative experiences towards their universities was for strict policies and the non-flexibility of the academic system.

Do you plan to enroll in a university inside UAE?  (8 responses)

- Yes: 62.5%
- No: 37.5%
Following to researcher’s affection with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, we also ranked the factor liked by the consumer (students) in a hierarchy pyramid. Illustrated in (hierarchy 2).

The most used factors which are liked/selected by the most of students are in the most top on the hierarchy pyramid, then the lower and the lower, until we end up with the least liked factor in the end stage of the hierarchy pyramid of Students 'Liking Factors. Research team assume that the mentioned pyramid might help universities’ marketers to understand the consumer attraction factor so they pay attention to it when creating a marketing strategy.
(Hierarchy 2): Hierarchy pyramid of Students ‘Liking Factors to universities, up to November 2016

Most Liked

- National Accreditation
- Reasonable tuition fees
- International Recognition
- Employability Rates
- Flexible Schedules
- Research Opportunity and Beautiful Campus/
- Western Curriculums
- Community Outreach and links with Society
- Facilitate the visa Process
- Other Factors

Least Liked
3.2.3 Comparative analysis

Studying the Similarities and Dissimilarities between the sales forces and the buying forces, by mapping the results and the conclusions of the (Industry analysis) and (Consumer analysis).

Both sides, Universities –which are sellers and Students- which are the consumers have priorities for selling factors vs the consumer anticipations and interests represented in the two hierarchies below.

In this part, researchers is trying to find out if universities has the right ranking to the selling points which meet the same ranking of the consumer anticipations and interests which of course built on their values, belief, and attitudes.

The come outs of the mapping below shows the followings:

Some selling factors got almost the same ranking of consumer interests such as academic accreditation, international recognition, facilitating the visa process and flexible schedules.

Some other factors are found in a different layer / ranking in both hierarchies such as “reasonable tuition fees” got much more consumer interest that its position in the university hierarchy and the same for “employability rates”.

Researchers was recommending that each university should follow the presented model to detect the differences and gabs between what they think about their consumers and what consumers expect from them. Marketers of universities should take this model into consideration when they develop their marketing strategy for better results. This model is recommended to be updated on a yearly base because consumer behavior is changing and not always consistent with their cultures, i.e. as UAE is considered to be collectivistic society, we find through the presented consumer analysis that family and friends are playing an important role in influencing the consumer behavior of the student. On the other hands, Internet got the highest factor between the other factors could influencing the consumer decision – which regularly founded more in individualistic society.
(Hierarchy 1): Hierarchy pyramid of Universities
'Selling Factors Usability'

- National Accreditation
- Graduate employability
- International Recognition
- Multicultural student community
- Flexible learning / Schedule
- Research opportunities
- Community outreach
- Friendly Environment
- International Accreditation
- International faculty
- Location
- Option to Graduate/ Continuing education in Western Country
- Partnership with the business/industry Community
- Reasonable tuition fees
- Student-centered approach
- Western Curriculum
- Alumni Networking
- Applied study for real World
- Beautiful Campus
- Competitive Prices
- Facilitate Visa Process
- Internship with Job Placement Opportunity
- Variety in Offered programs

(Hierarchy 2): Hierarchy pyramid of Students
'Liking Factors to universities'

- National Accreditation
- Reasonable tuition fees
- International Recognition
- Employability Rates
- Flexible Schedules
- Research Opportunity and Beautiful Campus/
Western Curriculums
- Community Outreach and links with Society
- Facilitate the visa Process
- Other Factors
Experts’ opinion

It was very important to share the analysis with some people from the real world and deal with students on a daily basis. This is to make sure that our research was on the right track.

101 interviews has been held with three people working in top positions in well-known higher education institution in UAE, with long experience in that field (10–23 years of experience).

The concept of the research had the agreement of all, however, the results was likely known to some of them.

The common point of view that the practice of running surveys to know the students feedback is highly recommended even by the Ministry of Higher Education & Scientific Research (MOHESR).

Two of the interviewees like the idea to be applicable for their institutions as they see it is good point to know where you are from your potential customer and market needs.

On the other hand, one of the interviewees see that it is only good as a general knowledge about the field news; but she said that her organization is very selective for its new enrollee and their recruitment style is quite different as they targeting very niche category of students.

4. Findings, Conclusion, and Recommendations

- Universities in UAE are vary and different in the way they present themselves to the potential students
- Many factors could affect the university marketing strategy such as “Positioning” and for sure the type of Students
- A need for a potential student could be targeted and happily presented by X University, while some other universities might not agree with it or not aiming to have it.
- On that base, Consumer survey’s doesn't provide institutions with solutions for its problems, but it gives them access to more data about what they customers need and looking for.
- In marketing for a Service organization (like Universities and institutions), we have to take into consideration more wide marketing elements like the 7 Ps

![Image of the Marketing Mix]

**Figure 5.1** The elements of the marketing mix
- It is very important to keep conducting surveys and to be in-touch with the potential Customer either for strategies restructure or for getting updated knowledge about the recent changes in the behavior of you customers. The process is more likely to be operant conditioning.

**Figure 9.6 / Consumer learning by operant or instrumental conditioning**

- Students attitudes are often learned, universities should pay attention to the other influencers to the student attitude like family and friends.
- As the higher education is high important service to students, they are more likely to be influenced by the facts like academic accreditation and reputation of universities (=Central route).
- Universities should pay attention to attract their targeted students through reasoning, like showing some statistics and facts about their achievements. (Using logos approach in persuasion advertising). Also announcing their awards and international accreditation give them more credibility with their potential students.
- As the “websites & internet” got high rates in the student’s surveys as tools helping students to select their universities. Universities should pay attention to the students’ comments on their social media (i.e. testimonials), as other students & graduates comments are more trustworthy than the university advertising message.

The research limitations was that researchers didn’t focus on a specific segment of universities (private universities, Public Universities) as it was also influencing the consumer behavior somehow. In addition, the consumer segment could be divided to (National and non-national students), gender also play a role (especially in masculinity societies), in addition to the specialization that the students look for. Research team was hoping to have more resources (especially time) as this research has been developed in a nine weeks module including the induction, lecture and other class activities. Researchers are looking forward to complete phase 2 of this paper in the graduation project by going more deeply in the above mentioned limitations.
How Students Select Their Future Universities

Student Name: ______________________________  Gender: Male_    Female_
School Name: ______________________________  Grade: ____________
Email: ____________________________________

1. Are you planning to continue get your undergraduate degree from UAE?
   -- Yes  -- No
   If "No" Please Specify: __________________________

2. Which of the following is your targeted category?
   Public Universities_  Private Universities_  Branch Campuses_  Other_
   If other (Please Specify): __________________________

3. Who you usually consult about the University you select?
   Parents & Family_  Friends_  School Mentor_  Other_
   If other (Please Specify): __________________________

4. How do you search about the universities you may select from?
   Internet_  Newspapers_  Exhibitions_  School Counselor_  Other_
   If other (Please Specify): __________________________

5. What of the most attractive factor for you to choose your future university?
   Academic Accreditation_  Offered Program_  Beautiful Campus_  Other_
   If other (Please Specify): __________________________
   Any other comment: ________________________________

   Thank you for your time

Consumer Behavior Survey
REFERENCES


