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ATTRIBUTES OF CONSUMER PREFERENCE AND IMAGE WHEN CHOOSING A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

Abstract: This study's goal was to analyze the attributes of image and preference that are considered when high school alumine choose a College. We conducted a descriptive quantitative and qualitative (survey method) with students from public and private schools. Coordinators and the head of the Regional Education Center (REC). The attributes of preference are: the quality of courses/professors, the institution's rates, given (market and MEC); the institution's methodology, learning system and structure. The faculty is seen as a priority among the intrinsic attributes, and important determinants.

key words: Consumer behavior; attributes of choice; Higher Education Institution

INTRODUCTION

The 1990's were a milestone because it is from this moment that the market racing between teaching institutions becomes a business. The Law of Guidelines and Bases (LDB) promoted the access' expansion to Colleges by increasing competition to an idle market so far (Miranda; Domingues, 2006).

According to Bergamo (2007) it is possible to visualize this environment of competition from the census conducted by MEC since 1995, showing a considerable increase in the number of private institutions.

High offer and dropouts propose and environment of fierce competition (PORTO; RÉGINER, 2003). According to Cobra e Braga (2004), in Brazilian market, the majority of HEI is not oriented to marketing but to the product.

According to authors, globalization and competitiveness is not absorbed by Brazilian institutions that are still unprepared for this scenario. According to Miranda and Domingues (2006), generally educational institutions lack knowledge in marketing application.

It's necessary that educational institutions, turn to the market, through marketing, strengthen their brands, their image and increase their participation in the social context where they are inserted in order to remain competitive and establish good relationships so that there is a continuous demand service (MIRANDA; DOMINGUES, 2006).

As Bergamo's studies show (2012) it is clear that interest is being chosen by HEI prospect (potential student, who noted the establishment of some sort), but it is a reality closer when they better understand the buying behavior, and feasible and necessary to develop effective strategies.

Jongbloed (2003) lists actions to increase the attention given to students by HEI, innovation and variety of services offered and quality improvement, as responsible for strengthening the process of choosing the student.

In consumption field, several sides exert a significant influence on the identity of consumers (SOLOMON, 2011). Thus, it is possible that candidates for college have different preferences or appreciate the distinctive attributes present in several College centers.

Therefore the question that guided the study is: What are the key attributes of image and when high school alumine choose a College in Paranavaí - PR?

Thus the aim of this study is to analyze the attributes of preference when high school alumine choose a College in Paranavaí - PR, followed by specific objectives that aim to describe and discuss how students seek information about GI (Graduation Institutes) and their

courses; identify key attributes from the image attributes to the choice of an HEI, for students graduating high school; identify the preferences of attributes, comparing them to public and private schools; identify factors influencing their preference.

As academic justification, this work can be used as reference to previous studies reinforcing the theme. The consumer's behavior study of the student graduating from high school can help the direction, coordination of course, teachers and marketing team of GI to be better prepared to express their attributes in order to be perceived by the public focus and by society in general.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The applied science that studies the consumers' behavior or consumer behavior has its origin in the humanities and social sciences. To Karsaklian (2009) Science's goal is to understand the consumer behavior by adopting a multidisciplinary perspective as the sociological, economic and psychological.

To Solomon, (2011, p.33) studying the consumer's behavior with respect to how they "choose, buy, use or discard products and services, ideas or experiences to satisfy needs and desires." Added to this Blackwell, Miniard and Engel (2008, p. 73) claim that "nobody buys a product unless there is a problem, a need or a desire."

Consumer's behavior is a complex process, so that some authors divide factors they believe to be decisive, or at least in the process of influencing consumer's choice. Such factors permeate in the cultural, social, personal and psychological.

The external influences "involve group and families influence, social status, roles and the effects of culture and subcultures in buying behavior." (PINHEIRO; CASTRO; SILVA; NUNES, 2006, p. 33). Among the personal characteristics may be cited the age and stage in life cycle, occupation and economic circumstances. Psychological processes mentioned by Junior Vasquez (2008, p.19) refers to "information processes, capturing, decoding mechanism developed through sensation, perception, learning and memory."

To Urdan and Nagao (2004) in the process of purchasing, the consumer compares several options that are able to meet his needs also will select, integrate and evaluate information related to products and services so it may reach a judgment before the alternatives considered.

What is usually called decision refers to the entire process of choosing a course of action. Schiffman and Kanuk (2000) emphasize that not all cases of decision making of the

consumer receive (or require) the same degree of information and is a constructive process in which each consumer decides according to its subjectivity.

In this process, we capitalize the consume of services' specificity, which has characteristics like Intangibility, or lack of physical substances; Inseparability, linked to the physical connection of those who make the service with the service provided; Heterogeneity related to perceived quality, and perishability, which does not allow services to be saved, stored and that unused capacity is recovered (HOFFMAN; BATESON, 2008).

The perceived value of characteristics and attributes in a particular product or service guide the consumer preferences. The consumers' preference turns to the element with the highest combination of attributes and utility. In this sense, as Barwise and Robertson (1992), mentioned in the study Hemzo (2002), part of the brand's value derives from how they help consumers simplify their consumption decisions, offering, among other things, a sense of security.

Camargos, et al (2005) reiterate that GIs should be as attentive to students' preferences as to the conditions and quality of education offered. To the authors, consumer preference in education, based on cognitive aspects, referring to the reality the student would like to have.

There are some techniques that are based on the consumer's preference literature. Alfinito (2002) used in his study, the technique of Stated Preference (SP), which enables outline, the future of consumer behavior in relation to their current behavior. The author also mentions the Revealed Preference, which enables analysis preferably people including their behaviors, and cites Camargo et al., (2000) which states that the data are disclosed based on direct observation or questions about real situations, when occurred.

The consumer during the decision process observes attributes that positively and negatively possibly assist in his choices. "Attribute is something that is peculiar to something or aspects or properties that describe and distinguish an offer and its functions and attributes relate to its qualities or itself" (TAVARES, 2008, p. 74).

There are some developments to be mentioned in the attributes addressing internalization and externalization of them. As Tavares (2008) both regimes provide particularities in the selection process, such as product design (intrinsic) or the famous actor shown at the GI's publicity (extrinsic). Other attribute ratings can be found in Alpert (1971); Tibola, Sanzovo and Vieira (2004); Urdan and Nagao (2004), Joas (2002) and Peter and Olson (1999) and cited by Espinoza Hirano (2003) where has related attributes or intrinsic,

extrinsic attributes related or not; salient attributes; important attributes, attributes determinants; concrete attributes, abstract attributes.

According Bergamo et al., (2010), on relevant attributes that assist the decision, some aspects are emphasized on studies cited as tradition or the institution's reputation, location, finances, academic quality, employability, social, infrastructure, and courses' availability.

3. METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

Regarding the type of study, we adopted the descriptive research, which aims to "identify and obtain information on characteristics of a particular problem or issue" (Collis, Hussey, 2005, p. 24), meaning, knowing which attributes are considered when choosing a HEI.

Regard to the nature, it was used quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative research to Collis and Hussey (2005) is the collection and analysis of numerical data and applying statistical tests, the qualitative according to Souza et al., (2007) is based on the interpretation (and assigning meanings) phenomena not being translated into numbers. The method used in this study is the *survey*.

This analysis was developed in Paranavaí City, northwestern Paraná, Brazil. The research universe is composed by 12 schools (09 public and 03 private) that offer secondary education, specifically students enrolled in the third year of high school totaling 983 people, under a 95% confidence with a 5 percent margin of error more or less. To sample it, we collected 355 questionnaires in situ, in the mornings and evening. The questionnaires for public education coordinators, represented by the head of NRE, and private, were adapted from Antunes (2004).

For tabulation and data analysis, the research used software SPSS 13.0 and Microsoft Excel performing data mining observing the existence of missing data (missing data) and outliers (data fleeing the average of the other, or extreme). Statistical tests used in the sample data are Descriptive Analysis of Variables Characteristics of Respondents; Analysis Descriptive Statistics of Scales and Reliability Analysis of Scales through Cronbach Alpha method.

The factors were divided according to the constructs' attributes choice of HEI, "related attributes or intrinsic and extrinsic and not related or grouped by affinities.

4. RESULTS DISCUSSION

Responding to the first objective aimed to be described and discuss how students seek information about HEI and its courses, or the way they prefer to be contacted, there is predominance by digital means, the first option Social Media in second Social Networks and place third in the print medium, Flyers and / or posters. These data relate to the age factor of the public interviewed in that most have up to 17 years and empirically speaking, young people in this age group is more willing to use the internet.

Regarding to the goal, which was to identify the key attributes from the image attributes to the choice of an HEI, it was found that in the first place is the "support of the institution to carry out professional internships through the intermediation with companies and / or integration entities between company and school ", followed by" motivation of teachers to teach, "and finally," to know that the student has already formed good acceptance in the labor market."

Such approach results from other studies that examined similar attributes as Soutar and Turner (2002) analyzing the academic reputation, quality of education, and employability; Moogan et al., (2001) which addresses the "Career Opportunity and employability"; Veloutsou et al., (2004) and Veloutsou et al., (2005) on career prospects and employability and business contacts. Yamamoto (2006) cites the Quality of academic professionals and Pixie and Suwannapirom (2007) analyzed the Employability.

Karsaklian (2009) mentions Blackwell et al., (2009) and Zaichkowsky (1985), to say that the degree of personal involvement of the consumer is a key point in the decision process, because it is a singular perception and the importance the given situation.

The same involvement may be linked to the fact that students are willing to engage in remunerated activity, economic factors (an income) and also count on a rising social (status) because it is economically active, hence the importance given to the intermediation of HEI for internships. Zago (2006) points to elevated Brazilian socioeconomic inequality and the fact that preferences be reflected in the higher education market.

Miranda and Domingues (2006) also highlight the importance given to the quality of faculty by students where the item was reported by 78.67% of respondents. Using the factors adapted from Meyer (2002) and Antunes (2004) such responses would fall into (1) Factor 4 - Support Activity, (2) Factor 3 - faculty and (3) factor 1 - institutional conduct.

From the identified attributes, the first can be called intrinsic or related attributes, capable of providing functional and experiential benefits and establish the primary

associations related to the fact that students can have experiences of internships, practical knowledge of working within companies. Among the attributes unrelated or extrinsic, knowing the acceptance of a good graduate market is what exerts more influence.

Espinoza and Hirano (2003) cite authors, mentioned in a research framework to consider other classifications of attributes, so that institutional support, acceptance and teachers' motivation, all with common characteristic of not being palpable, may also be considered attributes abstract, they are only perceived by individuals.

As for the purpose of identifying the preferences of attributes, making a comparison between private and public schools, they were recorded differently for students according to their origin.

These factors are presented to students from public school as attributes influencing choice, just to know that the student has already formed good acceptance in the market, (1) Having the institution's support to carry out professional internships through intermediation with companies and / or entities integration company / school, (2) the level of teacher qualifications (Master and PhD) and a draw (3) The motivation of teachers to teach.

For students studying in private schools, three attributes that influence choice appear in tied in the first place: (1) the experience and motivation of teachers to teach as well as learn what the student already has formed good acceptance in the labor market, (2) The level of qualification of teachers (masters and PhD), and (3) the institution that offers the courses (course options) I want.

About students preferring an institution where teachers are qualified, experienced and motivated, Miranda and Domingues (2006) and Andrade (2008) show similar results, citing how important the teachers quality, the knowledge about the incomers' success and also to find the course they wish to do.

Using studies on the process of choosing the HEI prospects and aspects analyzed, with the source Bergamo et al., (2010), the students preferential results are closer to those found by Yamamoto (2006) found as relevant Quality attributes of academic professionals; Quantity and quality of courses and extracurricular opportunities, and also close to the results found by Maringe (2006) with "7Ps", specifically Program (factors of academic quality), People (quality of staff and teachers); Prospectus (variety of courses and curricula) and Prominence (reputation, tradition and image of the institution);

Overall, to verify the factors influencing the choice results in Factor 3, professors, as the most influential, both being important as a determinant of students' choice. As seen in

Camargo, Camargo and Machado (2005) HEIs should be attentive to students' preferences as to the conditions and quality of education offered. And this is exactly the key point perceived and preferred by surveyed students.

5. CONSIDERATIONS

The research conducted in this study came to the conclusion that, not distinguishing students from public and private schools, it is expected from the institution, support to perform professional internships, and guaranty that teachers are motivated to teach and also know the acceptance of egress into the market.

As described, the physical facilities of the service must accommodate the expectations and physical and psychological needs of clients. The excitement experienced by consumers when consuming the service can be a primary determinant of their satisfaction with the company and the pleasure derived from the experience held by the service. The physical structure of the HEI's indicated as a relevant factor may have significant share in the desire of students to be at a specific institution.

EMU as an institution most requested by respondents among the HEI's of Interest - generally binds to the imaginary, confronting the physical dimension with Factor 5 - infrastructure, where 55.4% fully agree with the importance of the physical environment and also with abstract aspect that is the image, the concept that has been extremely positive towards society - social acceptance, status.

This research analyzed important attributes for both the students and the coordinators in high school courses, some relevant to the two groups, naming, the conceptualization seen in institution, either it is considered by MEC or the market, the quality of courses and faculty as a whole, the methods of teaching and learning and the structure of the institution.

About the way that students learn about their courses and HEIs were seen at the media and social networks are the most efficient channels, or preferred by the surveyed, which can be exploited by institutions as a communication strategy in order to maintain a lasting relationship with their prospective students. However it should be considered that the respondents search information with people nearby.

Armed with this information, it is worth thinking about how to reach students, or as being noticed by prospects, what kind of media is more accessible and used to make an "infiltration" and seek attention. The author believes, based on all the theory used, a good or

bad image can be formed by the student checking for a new HEI. Present facts, news, events that are attractive can be a form of positive relationship with your target audience.

Knowing the image or concept perceived by the students, the value assigned to the brand and knowing what they represent and their position within the market data makes it commercially interesting because besides being able to know the image of your competitors even before the audience it can think of ways to adopt corrective measures to improve their concept before the consumer.

The formation of an image, the concept of HEI by the prospects and identifying the attributes that attract students is entirely possibly linked to his decision to choose and completion of stages of the decision-making stage, starting with the recognition of the need student when finished or are finishing high school and wants to go to college, followed by information search, evaluation of alternatives to pre-purchase; until finally occurs to Purchase, i.e., the attributes analyzed the choice is made by the Faculty that meets the expected features.

Relating the HEI Paranavaí causing more interest and the image that surveyed have of them, FAFIPA with 69.5%, ranks first, with an image of a great institution; it is public. UNIPAR, with 22.1% preference, even though private, has the quality of service as positive, i.e. you pay for something good. FATECIE, whose reputation is bad, poor education, the percentage of preference is extremely low.

With consumption the student will experience the services offered by HEI and verify that the features actually meets expectations, post-consumption evaluation. Finally, there is the disposal when the student withdraws from the course, or form going to the labor market, or when you start a specialization and at the finish, earning the title of specialist, graduated from the discards.

From the theoretical dissertations mentioned in it, it is confirmed that the image is formed by consumers according to their perception of the attributes considered important to you. Also according to the literature cited, not just have the tools to achieve customer satisfied, but it is also necessary that the consumer can understands and forms a positive image. Soon, working students shall already be enrolled in institutions and frequently can assist in the process of building the image of the customers who are not studying in HEI (prospects).

One of the factors that influenced the performance of this work was the setbacks faced in the questionnaire, as the non-application by a school that did not interfere with data collection. Another limitation, which also did not affect the results, including the data

obtained by mining, was the presence of questionnaires answered incorrectly (missing data and outliers).

It is suggested for further research, further analysis of the attributes that the scale can be more robust, and to construct and validate a model that has more scope and can be applied in HEI to measure the index of preference and to verify their image before the public for internal comparisons.

As discussed here, the expectations of students are to supply in the long run if I finish completing the graduation. Such a scenario requires institutions, interested in customer loyalty; attention (and actions) related to faculty, ensuring the motivation to teach, the conditions for performing professional internships, and mainly, the preparation for a good placement in the labor market.

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