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STUDENTS PREFERENCE IN SELECTING EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The selection of an educational institution is an important decision for students because it can influence their academic development, career opportunities and overall learning experience. This study examines the major factors that shape students preferences when choosing an educational institution and attempts to understand how personal, institutional and informationrelated factors contribute to their decision-making. The study adopted a descriptive research design and collected primary data from 121 respondents through a structured questionnaire. Percentage analysis was used to describe the responses, while the Chi-square test was applied to examine selected relationships among demographic and decision-related variables. The findings indicate that placement opportunities are a major consideration for students, followed by course availability and institutional reputation. Reputation, campus safety and accessibility also contribute to institutional preference. The study further shows that parents and family members have considerable influence on students choices, while recommendations from friends and seniors also contribute to institutional awareness. Digital information has become an important part of the selection process, with many respondents searching online and referring to institutional websites, social reviews and other digital sources before applying. The results also indicate that students compare institutions using alumni feedback, rankings, accreditation and industry connections. Overall, the study suggests that students evaluate educational institutions through a combination of academic quality, career prospects, institutional credibility, accessibility, social influence and digital information. The study highlights the need for institutions to improve academic and placement services, maintain transparent online information, strengthen industry and alumni networks, and adopt studentcentred communication strategies to meet changing student expectations.

Keywords: Students Preference; Educational Institution Selection; Academic Quality; Placement Opportunities; Institutional Reputation; Course Availability; Parental Influence; Digital Information Search; Social Reviews; Alumni Feedback; Higher Education.

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INTRODUCTION

Choosing the right educational institution is an important decision in a student's life as it can affect academic progress, career opportunities, and personal development. Students usually consider several factors before selecting a college or university. Academic quality is one of the main factors, including teaching standards, faculty experience, course content, and learning methods. Students prefer institutions that provide a good learning environment and help them develop the knowledge and skills needed for their future. The reputation of the institution also influences students and parents while making a decision.

Infrastructure and educational facilities also play an important role in students preferences. Classrooms, laboratories, libraries, computer facilities, internet access, and other modern resources can improve the learning experience. Students also look for opportunities to gain practical knowledge through internships, workshops, seminars, industry visits, and skill development programmes. Extracurricular activities such as sports, cultural events, clubs, and competitions are also considered because they help students develop communication, leadership, teamwork, and confidence.

Placement opportunities and career support are another important consideration. Students often prefer institutions that provide placement training, career guidance, internships, and industry interaction. Good industry connections can provide students with better exposure to employment opportunities. The availability of experienced faculty members and proper guidance can also support students in preparing for their future careers. At the same time, students and parents consider the fee structure, scholarships, and other financial support before making the final choice.

The opinions of parents, friends, seniors, teachers, relatives, and alumni can also influence students decisions. Students may consider the experiences and suggestions of others while comparing different institutions. Location, transportation, safety, discipline, and campus environment are also important, particularly for students who travel from home. In addition, students collect information through college websites, social media, advertisements, and other sources to understand the courses, facilities, and opportunities available before making their decision.

In today's competitive educational environment, institutions are making efforts to improve their academic standards, infrastructure, technology, placement facilities, and student services to attract students. At the same time, students are becoming more careful in comparing institutions according to their educational and career needs. Therefore, studying students preferences helps to understand the factors that influence their choice of an educational institution. It can also help institutions identify students expectations and improve their facilities and services. Choosing a suitable institution can ultimately provide students with better opportunities for learning, skill development, career growth, and personal development.

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RESEARCH GAP

Previous studies have examined different factors that influence students when selecting educational institutions, including academic quality, institutional reputation, infrastructure, fees, placement opportunities, course availability and faculty support. However, much of the existing research tends to focus on individual institutional factors rather than considering the complete decision-making process of students. There is also a need to understand how traditional influences such as parents, family members, friends and seniors interact with modern sources of information such as institutional websites, search engines, social media, online reviews and alumni feedback. In addition, students today compare institutions not only on academic aspects but also on placement opportunities, safety, transportation, industry exposure, rankings and accreditation. The growing use of digital platforms has further changed the way students collect and evaluate information before making their final choice. Therefore, a research gap exists in understanding students preferences through an integrated approach that combines institutional characteristics, social influence, marketing communication, information-search behaviour and comparison factors. The present study attempts to address this gap by examining these dimensions together and identifying the major factors that influence students in selecting educational institutions.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To understand the perception of students and parents towards marketing activities of educational institutions.
- To identify the key factors influencing students choice of educational institutions.
- To identify the influential marketing channels [search on social media, digital ads, campus events, reference etc.,] in student decision making to join the educational institutions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- The study is based on primary data collected from 121 students to understand their preferences in selecting educational institutions. The data were collected through a structured questionnaire prepared using Google Forms. The study was carried out over a period of six months, and the respondents were selected using the Convenience Sampling method.
- The study focuses on the major factors that may influence students while choosing an educational institution. These factors include academic quality, infrastructure, placement opportunities, institutional reputation, and course availability. The collected responses were arranged and examined to understand the opinions and preferences of the students.

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- Percentage Analysis and Chi-Square Analysis were used for analysing the collected data. Percentage Analysis was used to understand the distribution of students responses, while Chi-Square Analysis was applied to find out whether there was a

significant relationship between the selected demographic variables and students preferences in selecting educational institutions.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. **Patel and Mehta (2024):** examined the decision-making process of students while selecting higher education institutions. The study considered the various institutional and personal factors that contribute to students evaluation and final choice of an educational institution.
2. **Nair and Thomas (2024):** investigated college selection behaviour among higher education students. The study focused on the factors that influence students preferences and the manner in which students evaluate educational institutions before making their admission decisions.
3. **Petrea and Roxana-Adriana (2023):** Adriana examined the criteria used by prospective students when selecting universities. The study focused on the different considerations students use to compare institutions and understand their suitability before making an educational choice.
4. **Iyer and Kulkarni (2023):** studied the role of digital communication in educational institution choice. Their work highlighted the growing importance of digital sources in providing information about institutions and influencing prospective students during the selection process.
5. **Kumar and Tanwar (2022):** studied educational institution selection behaviour among students. The study explored the factors that influence students institutional choices and provided insights into how students evaluate different educational alternatives before making their final decision.
6. **Rao and Singh (2021):** investigated the factors affecting college selection among students. Their study emphasised infrastructure quality and faculty effectiveness. Smart classrooms, laboratory facilities, practical learning, mentoring, extracurricular activities and career guidance were found to contribute to students perceptions and institutional choices.
7. **Mehra and Joshi (2021):** examined the determinants influencing students choice of higher education institutions. Their work focused on the different institutional characteristics that shape students decision-making and highlighted the importance of academic and career-related considerations in selecting an institution.
8. **Bose and Chatterjee (2020):** examined the role of the learning environment in students institutional preferences. Their study emphasised the importance of the academic environment and related institutional conditions in shaping students perceptions and influencing their choice of educational institution.

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9. **Gupta and Kumar (2019):** studied students preferences towards higher education institutions. The study identified course availability, location and placement support as major factors. Internship opportunities, industry collaborations, modern facilities, scholarships and alumni achievements were also found to influence students institutional preferences.
10. **Sharma (2018):** examined the factors affecting students selection of educational institutions. The study highlighted academic quality, faculty competence, infrastructure and fee structure as important considerations. It also noted the influence of institutional reputation, parental opinions, safety, career guidance and transportation facilities on students choices.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study is limited to a small number of students.
- Responses are based on personal opinions, which may be biased.
- Time constraints restricted detailed data collection.
- The study covers only selected educational institutions.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A conceptual framework gives a clear idea about the main factors considered in a study. It helps to understand how different factors may influence students choices. In this study, the framework focuses on students preference in selecting educational institutions . Students usually consider their studies, future career, and personal needs before choosing a college. Factors such as academic quality, course availability, infrastructure, placements, and reputation may affect their decision. Students also get information from parents, friends, seniors, websites, and social media. They may compare different institutions based on the facilities and opportunities available. The opinions and experiences of other people can also influence their final choice. Therefore, students decisions are usually based on more than one factor. This framework helps to understand the major factors that shape students preference while selecting an educational institution.

1. Academic Quality

Academic quality is one of the important factors considered by students while selecting an institution. Students usually look at the standard of teaching provided by the institution. The knowledge and experience of faculty members can influence their choice. Students prefer teachers who can explain concepts clearly and provide proper guidance. The content

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and usefulness of the course are also considered before joining. A good academic environment can encourage students to take more interest in their studies. Students may also look for opportunities to gain practical knowledge. Workshops, seminars, projects, and other learning activities can support their education. Regular academic guidance can help students understand their strengths and improve their performance. Institutions with good academic records may create more confidence among students. Students may compare the academic standards of different institutions before deciding. The availability of proper learning resources can also support academic quality. Good interaction between students and faculty can make learning easier. Parents may also give importance to academic quality while advising their children. Therefore, academic quality can have a strong influence on students preference in selecting an institution.

2. Infrastructure

Infrastructure is an important factor students consider while selecting an educational institution. They may look at classrooms, laboratories, libraries, computer facilities, internet access, and other learning resources. Clean and comfortable classrooms can make students feel better about the learning environment. Well-equipped laboratories are useful for practical learning, while good library facilities help students access study materials. Modern technology and internet facilities have also become important for education. Students may also consider campus cleanliness, safety, and maintenance. Good infrastructure can support both academic and extracurricular activities. Therefore, the facilities provided by an institution can influence students preference and create a positive impression about the college.

3. Placement Opportunities

Placement opportunities are an important consideration because students are concerned about their future careers. Before joining an institution, students may look at its placement support and previous placement performance. Training for interviews, career guidance, internships, and interaction with companies can help students prepare for employment. Industry visits and connections with companies can also provide useful exposure. Students may prefer institutions that offer better career support and practical opportunities. Parents may also consider placement facilities when advising their children. Good placement support can increase students confidence about their future and make an institution more attractive. Hence, placement opportunities can have a strong influence on students' choice of an educational institution.

4. Institutional Reputation

Institutional reputation can influence the confidence students and parents have in an educational institution. Students may consider the academic performance, achievements,

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placement record, and overall image of a college before making their choice. The experiences of former students and recommendations from friends, seniors, teachers, and relatives may also affect their opinion. A good reputation can make an institution appear more reliable and attractive. Students may compare the reputation of different colleges before deciding where to study. Proper administration, student support, and positive academic results can further strengthen an institution's image. Therefore, institutional reputation is an important factor that may influence students preference.

5. Course Availability

Course availability is an important factor because students generally look for programmes that match their interests and future plans. They may compare the courses offered by different institutions before making a decision. The relevance, demand, career scope, and usefulness of a course can influence their preference. Some students may prefer institutions that provide a wider range of courses or specialised programmes. Career-oriented and skillbased courses may also attract students who are focused on employment opportunities. Students can collect course-related information through college websites, brochures, and other sources. Parents may also consider the future value of the selected course. Thus, availability of a suitable and relevant course can play an important role in students institutional choice.

6. Alumni Feedback

Alumni feedback can help students understand an educational institution from the experience of former students. Alumni may share their views about teaching quality, faculty support, infrastructure, placements, internships, and campus life. Such information can give prospective students a clearer idea about what they can expect from the institution. Positive experiences shared by alumni may increase students confidence in choosing a particular college. Students can also learn about the strengths and areas that may need improvement. Alumni achievements may contribute to the overall image of an institution. Students may consider alumni feedback along with information from websites, friends, and other sources. Therefore, alumni feedback can be useful in helping students compare institutions and make their final choice.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

PERCENTAGE ANALYSIS

Table: frequency distribution of marketing channels influencing the decisions

Marketing channels influencing the decisions	frequency	Percentage

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YouTube/Google	41	33.9
Word of mouth	36	29.8
Counselling	28	23.1
Institution brochures/bill boards	21	17.4
Educational fairs	19	15.7
Instagram	24	19.8
Shiksha reviews	7	5.8
total	121	100.0

Source: primary data

INFERENCE:

The above table, Shiksha reviews are the least influential marketing channel with 7 respondents (5.8 percent), while YouTube/Google is the most influential with 41 respondents (33.9 percent). As a result, Shiksha reviews have the least impact on students decisionmaking, while YouTube and Google have the biggest.

Table: frequency distribution of factors consider in choosing the institution

Factors consider in choosing the institution	**frequency**	**Percentage**
Fees	45	37.2
Placement records	61	50.4

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Course curriculum/extra curricular activities	49	40.5
Reviews from alumni	24	19.8
Cultural activities/sports	36	29.8
Infrastructure	27	22.3
Safety and secure	34	28.1
total	121	100.0

Source: primary data

INFERENCE:
The above table, 61 respondents (50.4%) ranked placement records as the most important of the individual factors, followed by course curriculum and extracurricular activities with 49 respondents (40.5%). Fewer responses were given to other factors like fees, cultural events, alumni reviews, infrastructure, and safety. Thus, it can be concluded that students prioritize academic quality and placement opportunities when choosing an institution.

INFERENTIAL ANALYSIS

CHI-SQUARE TEST

Table: Relationship between gender and awareness of the college

GENDER VS AWARENESS OF THE COLLEGE							
Gender	**Social media platforms**	**Friends & senior recommendation**	**College website**	**Family suggestion**	**total**	**Pearson Chi-square (x^2)**	**pvalue**
Male	2	22	8	17	49	2.842	0.417
Female	7	25	9	31	72		
total	9	47	17	48	121		

Source: Computed data

INFERENCE:

The results of the Chi-square test used to look at the connection between respondents gender and college awareness are displayed in the above table. With three degrees of freedom, the pvalue is 0.417 and the Pearson Chi-square value is 2.842. The alternative hypothesis is rejected

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and the null hypothesis is accepted since the p value (0.417) is higher than the 0.05 level of significance. Consequently, there is no observable correlation between the respondents awareness of the college and their gender.

Table: Relationship between age and searching for information about colleges online before applying

AGE VS SEARCHING FOR INFORMATION ABOUT COLLEGES ONLINE BEFORE APPLYING					
Age	**Yes**	**No**	**Total**	**Pearson chi- square (x^2)**	**p-value**
16-18 years	18	4	22	0.615	0.735
18 -21 years	54	17	71		
21-25 years	23	5	28		
Total	95	26	121		

Source: Computed Data

INFERENCE

The result shows that age does not have a significant relationship with searching for college information online before applying. Since the p-value (0.735) is higher than 0.05, the null hypothesis is accepted. However, students in the 18–21 age group formed the largest share of those who searched for information online. Overall, online information searching was not significantly associated with the age of the respondents.

FINDINGS

- 50.4 percent of respondents ranked placement records as the most significant factor influencing students choice of educational institution, followed by course curriculum and extracurricular activities (40.5 percent).
- Shiksha reviews have the least impact on students decision-making (5.8 percent), while YouTube/Google is the most influential marketing channel (33.9 percent).

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- The Chi-square test revealed a p-value of 0.417, which is higher than the 0.05 significance level, indicating that there is no significant correlation between gender and college awareness.
- The p-value of 0.735 is greater than 0.05, indicating that there is no significant correlation between respondents age and looking up college information online prior to applying. Nonetheless, the most likely respondents to conduct an online search were those between the ages of 18 and 21.

SUGGESTIONS

- Educational institutions should give greater attention to the factors that students consider important while making their choice. Improving academic quality, placement assistance, career guidance, relevant courses and practical learning opportunities can help institutions meet students expectations. Colleges should also provide a safe campus, convenient transportation and a simple, transparent admission process. Clear and updated information about courses, fees, facilities, placements and admission procedures should be made available through official websites so that students and parents can make informed decisions.
- Institutions should also strengthen their communication and engagement with prospective students. Effective use of websites, social media, search platforms, counselling, educational events, alumni networks and word-of-mouth communication can improve institutional awareness and credibility. Online reviews and student feedback should be monitored and addressed constructively. Regular interaction with students and parents can help institutions understand changing expectations and improve their services. Overall, adopting a student-centred approach and continuously improving academic, career, infrastructural and communication facilities can help institutions attract students and build a stronger reputation.

CONCLUSION

The study was carried out to understand the different things students consider when choosing an educational institution. From the study, it is understood that placement opportunities, course availability, institutional reputation, safety, and transportation facilities have an important place in their decision. Academic quality and infrastructure also matter when students compare different institutions. Students may receive suggestions from their parents, family members, friends, and seniors before making a choice. They also spend time collecting information about colleges through websites, social media, online reviews, and alumni feedback. This information helps them get a better idea about the facilities and opportunities available in different institutions. Students usually compare these options with their own interests, needs, and future plans. Overall, the study shows that students try to gather enough information before deciding where to continue their higher education.

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The study also makes it clear that educational institutions need to pay attention to what students expect from them. Good teaching, suitable courses, placement support, and a safe campus can make an institution more appealing to students. Career guidance, internships, and connections with industries can also be helpful for students who are planning their future careers. A good reputation can build trust among both students and parents. Institutions can make the selection process easier by providing clear and updated details through their websites and other digital platforms. Improving infrastructure and student support facilities can also create a better college experience. By understanding students changing needs, institutions can make suitable improvements in their academic and career services. This can help them maintain good relationships with students and parents. In the end, giving proper attention to students needs and expectations can improve their satisfaction and help institutions remain strong in the competitive higher education sector.

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