

Influencing Factors on University Choice Decision Making among Students in Private Universities: A Empirical Review

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Abstract: As the process of popularisation of higher education continues to advance in China and the age-appropriate population of higher education gradually declines, the well-developed private universities will confront even more fierce competition for student sources. The study of the factors influencing students' university choice decision-making is not only conducive to private universities' comprehension of students' demands, which can provide information for the enrollment and development of private universities, but also has a superior reference for the optimisation of individual students' decision-making on private university choice.

Keywords: Private Universities; University Choice; Influencing Factors.

1. Introduction

The largest higher education system in the world has been built in China (Liu, 2023). In 2019, higher education in China entered the popularisation stage with a gross enrolment rate of 51.6% (Bai, 2022). As an essential force in education, private universities have made significant contributions in satisfying the demand for higher education of the general public and promoting the process of popularisation of higher education in China (Que, 2022). There have been 764 private universities with 9,235,500 students enrolled in private universities in China as of 15 June 2023.

According to the demand of constructing a powerful education country and the expected goal of high-quality development of higher education, private universities have to confront with a lot of challenges in order to achieve high-quality development. The imbalance and instability of the student population is the primary problem that private universities have to confront. In addition, there will be a significant decline in the birth rate, which will lead to a gradual decline in the population of higher education age in China. That means the competition for students among private universities will be more fierce in the future, and the problem of shortage of students might emerge on a large scale (Wu, 2023).

In summary, as the process of popularisation of higher education continues to advance in China and the population of higher education age gradually declines, the well-developed private higher education will confront more fierce competition for student sources, and the complexity of private university choice is increasingly highlighted (Huang, 2020). To clarify the primary influencing factors affecting students' choices among private universities, which helps students to choose private universities suitable for themselves and make correct decisions on university choice. At the same time, it also helps private universities to improve their competitiveness and achieve high-quality development by optimising their enrolment promotion strategies.

2. Empirical Review

The issue of university choice has always been a topical issue of social concern. Since the establishment of the public education system in modern times, the debate on university choice has never ceased. Scholars in the United States and other Western countries have also been concerned about the issue of students' university choice, one of the reasons for which has been the annual decrease in the enrolment rate of private universities in the United States in recent decades (Huang, 2020). The problem of individual university choice in China has been gradually highlighted and paid attention by scholars since the massification of higher education.

2.1. The Effect of Students' Personal Factors on University Choice

A review of existing empirical studies shows that the influence of personal factors on university choice of students is mainly classified into interests, programme preferences, family background.

Xu (2019) processed the information data to rank the basis of students' university choices in descending order of interest, parental advice, and popular programme. Students who were satisfied with their university choice tended to be those who made their choices in accordance with their interests. Adeyanju, S (2022) conducted a structured questionnaire survey of students in a federal university in Nigeria. The study found that personal interests largely influenced students' university choice decisions. The conclusion of Gao (2021) is that the correlation between students' university choices and students' interest in programme is significant at the 0.05 level. Based on a large-scale questionnaire survey of university students in a certain province in China, Xu and Zhong (2022) found that the probability of students' university choices in favour of "prioritising their programme preferences" was significantly greater after the reform of the New College Entrance Examination. Nurnberg's (2016) research on Williams College found that students' ethnicity, family location, and interest in their programme emerged as powerful factors in students' success in applying to

universities. Zhang(2022) adopted stratified whole cluster random sampling to select 702 freshmen students majoring in pre-school education from C higher vocational colleges in Chongqing to conduct a questionnaire survey. The results found that family capital factors such as parents' education level, occupation, and family income had an impact on their university choice.

2.2. The Effect of University's Factors on University Choice

A review of empirical studies by national and international scholars revealed that the reputation/ranking of the university, teaching quality, programme offerings, and career prospects are the consensus of scholars' research.

The results of Abdelghani (2019) who used factor analysis to summarise the influencing factors of 384 randomly selected students from various regions and universities in Oman showed that the primary factors of university choice are the quality and reputation of the university. The results of a questionnaire survey of students in private universities in Ghana conducted by Ophelia A. (2020) revealed that in students' choice of private universities Both Anglophone and Francophone countries listed high teaching quality as a significant influencing factor in their choice between private universities. With a sample of 518 first year university students from Iraqi private universities in Kurdistan, Qasim (2021) adopted a self-designed questionnaire as well as a validated factor analysis (CFA) which found that the main university characteristics that influence the choice of university students are reputation/recognition, teaching quality, employment capacity, and the facilities quality. The primary data were collected by Nuseir, M. T.(2022) through a survey of students from two public universities (UAE University and Zayed University) and three private universities (New York University, Abu Dhabi University, and Al-Ahram University). The data were analysed by ANOVA, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) with SPSS and Smart PLS software. The results of the survey found that several factors such as reputation of the university, bursaries and funding, location and proximity, facilities and services, and publicity and marketing avenues drove university choice among the students.

2.3. The Effect of Admission Promotion Strategies on University Choice

A survey study by Moakofhi (2019) on students of a university in Botswana proved that how the university is marketed and advertised is one of a several major factors in students' university choice. Rexford (2020) surveyed 327 students of a private university in Ghana and adopted convenient sampling techniques to elicit the views of the respondents. The result of the survey revealed that the students learnt about the university through admission adverts. An empirical research was conducted by Calitz, A. P (2020) on national and international students in a South African university. National students indicated that the university website and visits from university representatives were important factors they considered when choosing their university. In terms of university promotion and recruitment methods, the main factors to which students were exposed were media advertisements, university websites, university fairs and word of mouth. Nuseir's (2022) findings with students at two private universities similarly indicated that

university promotion and marketing channels, drove students' university choice.

2.4. The Effect of Social Factors on University Choice

A review of empirical studies by domestic and international scholars shows that social factors affecting university choice include the acceptance of private higher education by society at large and the influence of significant others.

Dronkers J's (2008) empirical research on students and their parents at 19 universities of different natures found that society at large is more accepting and recognising of public higher education institutions, while having greater concerns about private universities. The status of universities of different natures in the minds of potential students varies greatly. The perception bias leads to the public's wrong perception of private universities, which also affects students' decision-making on the choice of private universities (Shi, 2020). Taking a cue from Baddeley's scale adjustment methodology, Levailant (2020) surveyed and analysed data from 502 students from seven universities in Hanoi, Vietnam. After regression analyses the results of the survey showed that there is an impact between social influence and university choice. The result of the survey conducted by Zhang (2022) on the students of the classes of 2020 and 2021 at the University of W showed that 70.2% of the students consolidated the opinions of the elders such as themselves, their parents and their teachers in their university choice. The influence level was in the order of parents and relatives, classmates and close friends, the class teacher, college teachers, counselling agency staff, and secondary school leaders. Chen (2023) surveyed students majoring in elementary education in University H by questionnaire star, and a total of 559 valid e-responses were recovered. Through the questionnaire survey, it was revealed that students tend to consider parents' and teachers' advice and geographical factors when choosing a university, and that parents and teachers are the two groups that have a greater influence on students' university choice, with more than half of the students tending to listen to their parents' arrangements and teachers' advice.

2.5. The Moderating Effect of New Media on University Choice

Through empirical review we can see that new media, with its convenient, timely and fast Internet access, has a great impact on all aspects of the audience. New media affects the ways in which students, their families, teachers and friends learn about university choice information; it affects the ways in which the university's own image and characteristics are disseminated, and it also puts forward new requirements for the university's admissions promotion strategy. The results of personal and focus group interviews conducted by Post (2018) with 44 students at Cumberland County College showed that Instagram, Facebook, and SnapChat were the top three most popular social media apps. The students suggested that universities use SnapChat, YouTube, Facebook, and international social networking sites to connect with students. Simiyu (2020) used cross-sectional data from 504 students from four Kenyan universities to validate the indirect effect of the relationship between new media and students' university choice decisions. Similar empirical findings include Bao's (2020) research on the "Post 00s", which shows that short videos have been the most popular new

communication method among candidates. At present, short video platforms such as Shake, Shutter, Baidu Baike, and Second Knowledge Video are very popular with the "00s", and universities should keep pace with the times by adopting short video forms for admissions promotion.

3. Summary

Empirical researches have consistently demonstrated that the university choice are influenced by various factors which can be summarised in terms of personal factors, private university's factors, enrollment promotion strategies and social factors. Regression analysis, multivariate analysis of variance (ANOVA), factor analysis, principal component analysis (PCA) and structural equation modelling (SEM) are the main statistical techniques used. On the whole, empirical researches on influencing factors of university choice among students are abundant both at home and abroad, but there are some deficiencies as well.

There has been more attention paid by scholars to public universities, and there have been detailed studies of public university choice by students. Only a small number of researches have focused on private universities, and there are limited researches that directly involved the students enrolled in private universities as the research object. Although both belong to the higher education field, the difference between private universities and public universities is still quite significant. Therefore, it is worthwhile to explore the influencing factors on university choice decision-making for the large student population of private university students.

Among the various influences, there has been little systematic research on social factors on students' university choice decision making, the sample data coverage of the survey is narrow, and the data argumentation has not been sufficiently developed. Although admissions promotion strategies have been found to be related to university choice decision making, the specific mechanisms of how admissions promotion strategies influence students' university choice decision making are not yet fully understood to inform further research and policy. In addition, there is an absence of research on the relationship between new media influences on personal factors, university factors, social factors, and university choice. The answer to the question of whether new media influences have a moderating effect on private university choice decision making is not clear enough in current research.

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