

SOCIAL INFLUENCE AND STUDENT CHOICE OF A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper discusses changes in the higher education sector, growing competition as a result of new private education providers and the adoption of the student-as-customer perspective in recruitment and marketing of higher education institutions. The paper reviews numerous models of student choice and identifies inconsistencies in the role of social factors in the student choice. These inconsistencies are of special importance in the current higher education landscape and growing prominence of peer-to-peer communication via social media. Consequently a thorough understanding of influences that effect student choice of higher education institutions is imperative. This conceptual paper puts forward a conceptual framework that integrates Herbert Kelman's processes of social influence and Robert B. Cialdini's and Noah J. Goldstein's goals that underpin the acceptance of that influence to examine the effects social context has on student choice of higher education institution.

Key words: student choice, social influence, student, recruitment, higher education marketing, student-as-customer

INTRODUCTION

The last couple of decades has brought significant and global changes in higher education (HE) sector. Increasing numbers of private higher education providers and decreasing government support have led to the intensification of competition amongst higher education institutions and has resulted in an adoption of a student-as-customer perspective in HE recruitment (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). The perspective is continuously debated, predominantly due to the possibility of negative impact on academic standards (Guilbault, 2016). In the context of this paper; however, the student-as-customer ori-

entation is discussed purely in regard to student recruitment and subsequent marketing efforts, and sits outside of issues associated with provision of educational services and student retention.

Marketing of higher education is well recognised as having an important role in student recruitment (e.g. Ivy, 2001, 2008; Maringe, & Mourad, 2012). In this context, it is of special significance to understand student choice processes and motivations, as well as determinants of motivations that underpin the choice processes. The current literature on the topic of student choice of higher education institution (HEI) addresses the processes of choice and implies the relationship between social influence and student choice (Chalcraft, Hilton, & Hughes, 2015). The social influence determinants that effect students during these processes are identified although neither their characteristics nor the reasons for these influences to be accepted are comprehensively examined.

The impact of social influence on consumer behaviour is well documented (e.g. Kropp, Lavack, & Silvera, 2005; Mangleburg, Doney, & Bristol, 2004; Mourali, Laroche, & Pons, 2005). The proposition that individuals seek approval of their opinions, likes and dislikes from outside reference groups to which they belong to or aspire to belong to, is frequently applied to investigate a range of phenomena in studies of consumer behaviour and marketing (e.g. Bertrandias, & Goldsmith, 2006; v. Wangenheim, & Bayón, 2004). This paper argues that the HE sector is no different from other industrial sectors and, consequently, similar social influences are likely to impact on students as they do on customers. Subsequently, these influences need to be taken into the account when discussing student choice of HEI.

Choice of higher education institution is a major and significant decision for future students. Indeed, it is likely to be one of the first, if not the first decision, to be made without dominant parental involvement. Therefore, it is not surprising that higher education institutions are eager to gain a thorough understanding of external influences that impact on prospective students during HEI selection process. However, two fundamental questions remain unanswered: What constitutes social influence factors that influence HEI choice? Why students accept social influence in that context?

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION STUDENT CHOICE MODELS

HEI choice models predominantly focus on two key areas: the predisposition to pursue HE and the selection of a specific institution, and it is the later that is of special interest in the context of this paper. The choice models are often grounded in different theoretical perspectives, which result in the emergence of three distinct types of models: economic, sociological and those that amalgamate both perspectives (Fernandez, 2010; Maringe, 2006).

HEI choice models that adopt an economic perspective are underpinned by rational choice and focus on the cost-benefit comparison between values offered

by each of the HE institutions under consideration, and the relevant tangible and intangible costs and benefits. The selected institution is likely to offer benefits that are greater, or perceived to be of greater value, than those offered by other institutions. Whereas the economic models emphasise rational decision-making, sociological models focus their attention on varied socio-economic characteristics and influences that impact on student choice throughout the entire HEI selection process. Models that to varying degree descend from both the economic and sociological perspectives are the combined models (Bateman, & Spruill, 1996; Joseph, & Joseph, 1998). Although, the combined models somewhat vary in their approach, they uniformly, and in agreement with economic and sociological perspectives, utilise a multi-stage funnel framework through which students pass, and which commences with the decision to pursue HE and concludes with enrolment at the specific college or university (Somers, et al., 2006). The key combined models include David V. Chapman's (1981) model, Gregory A. Jackson's (1982) model, Katharine H. Hanson and Larry H. Litten's (1982) model, Don Hossler and Karen S. Gallagher's (1987) model.

One of the most broadly adopted models is the D. Hossler and K. S. Gallagher's (1987) model that proposes three-phases of student selection of HEI: (1) predisposition, (2) search, and (3) choice. The three phases at the core of D. Hossler and K. S. Gallagher's (1987) model are representative of the framework that underlies the majority of the combined models. The first phase concentrates on the development of educational aspirations and acknowledges the role that socioeconomic status, student background characteristics, parents, peers and organisational factors (e.g., student's involvement during high school) have in that context. The second phase is concerned with gathering information about colleges and universities and, subsequently, forming a chosen set of alternative HEIs. The phase that is of special importance to investigation of effects of social influence on student selection of HE institution is the choice phase, which involves the evaluation of HEI alternatives and acknowledges a comprehensive range of social factors as having a strong impact on the outcomes.

SOCIAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE PHASE

The review of the combined models of student choice identify an extensive array of social factors that affect the student selection of the HEI during the choice phase. The social factors are separated into three broad groups: institutional communication, student related factors, and influences of the greater social environment that comprise of family, peers and other reference groups.

Institutional communication

Institutional communication (printed brochures, advertising, web content) is broadly acknowledged as having the greatest potential to influence student choice of HE institution (Veloutsou, Lewis, & Paton, 2004). To be effective; however, the messages must be communicated clearly and the material writ-

ten in a way that does not lead to misinterpretations (Hartley, & Morphey, 2008). These issues are vital as student choices are influenced by perceptions of HEI quality, and these perceptions are formed through institutional communication and interactions with staff. Although the increase of the online sources of information and the application of electronic media in regard to HEI recruitment are found to be responsible for increased efficiency of institutional communication, the printed material remains an important source of information (Gifford, Briceño-Perriott, & Mianzo, 2005; Hossler, 1999). One of the clear advantages of the electronic versus printed media is the ability to personalise the content, and at the same time facilitate the connection between student and the HE institution, and the immediacy of response (Donehower, 2003; Page, & Castleman, 2013). The recent emergence of handheld, mobile technology, combined with the increasing affordability and subsequent accessibility of these devices, provides current and future students with broad access to a range of electronic communication platforms that include web content, email and social media communication, and texting.

Student related factors

Student related factors refer to the student, and the student's family, demographics, socioeconomic characteristics, academic abilities and practical determinants that stem from the student's background (Avery, & Hoxby, 2004; DesJardins, Ahlburg, & McCall, 2006; Perna, & Titus, 2004), and cost related factors (Ivy, 2008; Maringe, 2006; Sojkin, Bartkowiak, & Skuza, 2014). Recently, Jane Hemsley-Brown and Izhar Oplatka (2015) conducted a systematic review of literature on the topic of student choice published between 1992 and 2013, and identified five distinct groups of student related factors: family income, parental education, gender, age and racial group, socioeconomic status, geographical considerations, and price sensitivity that covers costs, availability of financial aid and affordability. While these groups are consistent with previous research on the topic that spans almost four decades, there are, not surprisingly, some variations in regard to the importance of some of the factors, or groups of factors. These variations are most likely the result of the context and timing of these studies and, consequently, geopolitical, demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the environment in which the research was conducted.

The greater social environment

Although there is a consistency in the literature regarding the importance of institutional communication and socioeconomic factors on student choice, the findings are somewhat less clear in regard to social influence determinants, with significant differences in the ranking of at least some of the social influence factors between different researchers (e.g., Bonnema, & Van der Walddt, 2008; Gatfield, & Chen, 2006; Price, Matzdorf, Smith, & Agahi, 2003). Peer and family influences and the role of family opinion and expectations have shown a decline in their importance in studies conducted by Mathew Joseph and

Beatriz Joseph (1998) and Bogdan Sojkin, Paweł Bartkowiak and Agnieszka Skuza (2014). This contradicts earlier findings of D. V. Chapman (1981) who highlights student's primary reference groups as having a superior impact on student choice. These findings are also supported by more recent research of Heather T. Rowan-Kenyon, Angela D. Bell and Laura W. Perna (2008), Timothy C. Johnston (2010) and J. Hemsley-Brown and I. Oplatka (2015).

Family and parental influence

The importance of influence exerted by family and parents may vary between different authors, there is, however, a consistent acknowledgement that family, and especially parents, influence student decision (Avery, & Hoxby, 2004; Brooks, 2002; Cabrera, & La Nasa, 2000; Kinzie, Palmer, Hayek, Hossler, Jacob, & Cummings, 2004). Some studies estimate that 90% of students consult their parents in regard to their HEI choices (Brooks, 2002). While there is almost universal support for the importance of this group on student choice, the literature identifies some variations between different parental characteristics. Early research conducted by L. H. Litten (1982) and D. Hossler, Jack Schmit and Nick Vesper (1999) find significant variances between the importance of family sources for different parental educational levels and among racial and ethnic groups. Garry Bouse and D. Hossler (1991) recognise the importance of parental involvement in the choice process; however, find that, in order to effect final choice, that involvement must take place early in the process. Thomas A. Flint (1992) identifies three core areas that are of special importance in context of parental involvement: course offering, reputation and selectivity. Kathleen M. Galloti and Melissa C. Mark (1994) find that students whose parents are highly educated have greater reliance on them as sources of information as they have reasons to expect their parents to be more knowledgeable about higher education environment. This phenomenon is likely to result from shared family values that exist both within the student's family and broader reference group, and the level and the depth of parental involvement may be associated with student's ability level (Avery, & Hoxby, 2004; Cabrera, & La Nasa, 2000).

Peer influence and social media

While there is compelling evidence that parents play varied, but nevertheless important roles in student choice processes, the influence of peers is less understood and the research in the area indicates some considerable inconsistencies. Mary Jo Kealy and Mark L. Rockel (1987), T. C. Johnston (2010), Efthymios Constantinides and Marc C. Zinck Stagno (2011) and Farhan Mehboob, Syed Mir Muhammad Shah and Niaz A. Bhutto (2012) all find that peer groups are a source of significant influence across various processes of student choice. However, their findings are in direct contradiction with the results of M. Joseph and B. Joseph (1998), Carolyn W. Kelpe Kern (2000), B. Sojkin, P. Bartkowiak and A. Skuza (2014) studies who all state that peers have no significant effects on influencing institutional choice. It may be that the substantial

variance between these findings lies in the study design and the depth of the interpretation of results. The study conducted by M. J. Kealy and M. L. Rockel (1987) investigated influences affecting specifically perceptions of college quality, while findings of research conducted by T. C. Johnston (2010) explore significant changes in peer-to-peer communication, especially as a result of development in social media. These changes are likely to impact on the increasing role of influences yielded by peers, which is consistent with general changes in the marketing communication models. B. Sojkin, P. Bartkowiak and A. Skuza (2014) indicate a decline in the role of peers as an important source of information (as compared to findings of their 2008 study); however, they also report the increase in the role of the internet. Conceivably the terminology used (i.e., "internet") may include social media as well as peer-to-peer communication.

The important role of internet is also acknowledged in other literature on the topic (e.g., Obermeit, 2012; Pampaloni, 2010). Fast growing peer-to-peer communication via social media is likely to increase further the influence of peers on decision making. Social networks play an increasingly important role in the lives of young people. Social spaces provide effective platforms for prospective students to source and share information, and influence each other's opinions and behaviour (Jeong, Morris, Teevan, & Liebling, 2013; Kim, & Sin, 2016; McCorkindale, DiStaso, & Fussell Sisco, 2013). Furthermore, social media spaces facilitate communities that are based on shared interest and which communicate emotions, perceptions and uncertainties. Subsequently, even incidental connections that are formed through social communities have a potential for influencing students (Ellison, & Vitak, 2015).

Higher education institutions frequently utilise social media in a range of activities supporting their recruitment and branding communication efforts, as well as to gather other strategic information about the perceptions of their institutions that exist in the target market (Barnes, & Mattson, 2009; Owyang, Bernoff, Cummings, & Bowen, 2009). There is however, some proposition that, while important, social media scores fairly low as a valuable source of information for prospective students. A study conducted in the Netherlands by E. Constantinides and M. C. Zinck Stagno (2011) examined, among other factors, the impact of social media on the choice of HEI and found that social media ranked last on the list of information channels influencing choice of the HE institution. Campus visits, HE websites and the printed recruitment publications took the top three rankings (Constantinides, & Zinck Stagno, 2011).

Although there is some variance between suitability of different types of social media in regard to information seeking and information sharing, the importance of communication via social media for young people remains undisputed (Hamid, Bukhari, Ravana, Norman, & Ijab, 2016; Osatuyi, 2013). Social media contributes greatly to HEI recruitment and retention communication and branding strategies. Furthermore, there are some indications that social media may not only drastically impact on the brand but, in some instances, contribute to the brand survival (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011).

The literature on the topic strongly indicates a range of social pressures that influence the student throughout the HE institution selection process. However, it is not clear how these pressures effect student choice, nor why students accept these influences. In order to inquire into the effects of these social influences on student it is important to introduce the relevant social influence perspectives and theory underpinning the acceptance of influence.

SOCIAL INFLUENCE AND MOTIVATIONS UNDERPINNING THE ACCEPTANCE OF INFLUENCE

“One of the most pervasive determinants of an individual’s behaviour is the influence of those around him” (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975, p. 206).

Social influence is a broad term that refers to changes in behaviour, emotions or opinions caused by others in the external environment in which one operates. One of the leading researchers on the topic of social influence, H. Kelman (1961, 2006) describes social influence as a connection between an individual and the greater social environment (e.g., primary and secondary reference groups, media). The impact of social influence on customer behaviour is well documented (e.g., Mangleburg, Doney, & Bristol, 2004). The adoption of the student-as-customer perspective in higher education recruitment, and subsequent application of customer behaviour approaches to higher education marketing, further extends the need to understand social influences in this context.

Social Influence Theory

The drive for association with social groups is at the core of the theory of social comparison, and its premise that individuals seek approval, or evaluation, of their own opinions, and their likes and dislikes, from outside reference groups (Festinger, 1954). Reference groups may vary from those to whom the individual actually belongs to, those to which they desire or aspire to belong to, and finally, abstract groups that yield influence regardless of the individual’s lack of desire for membership (Stafford, 1966). Reference groups may influence behaviour in two ways: influencing a specific aspiration or defining approval by the reference group standard of behaviour and at the same time establishing a frame of reference (Schiffman, & Kanuk, 2007). Jiaqin Yang, Xihao He and Huei Lee (2007) identify three forms of reference group influence: utilitarian influence, value-expressive influence, and informational influence. These forms of influence correspond with three processes by which individuals respond to social influence: compliance; identification; and internalisation (Kelman, 2006). These response processes are at the core of the Social Influence Theory that has its origins in the seminal work of H. Kelman (1958, 1961), which proposes that if special conditions are met, individual’s attitudes and behaviour may change as a result of social influences.

Compliance

Compliance is described as an acceptance of influence to gain a positive reaction, or avoid a negative response, from a specific person or a group. Compliance may exist either in the cognitive consistency form where the influenced behaviour changes are perceived as consistent with enhancing the individual's value system, or in the affective appropriateness form where the influenced behaviour changes are perceived as extending the individual's self-concept. One form of influence that operates through the process of compliance is utilitarian influence, which deals with the change in behaviour that aims at satisfying a specific reference group's expectation to either gain the approval or to avoid the negative outcomes (Yang, He, & Lee, 2007). From a consumer behaviour perspective this type of influence is frequently represented through preferences for a specific product, service or brand in order to adhere to reference groups wishes (Childers & Rao, 1992). Compliance as a form of utilitarian influence is operationalised through subjective norms (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). Subjective norms deal with processes during which the behaviour is modified as a result of social pressures regarding that behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). In order to alter behaviour, these pressures do not have to be explicit but merely perceived or anticipated. However, Mehdi Mourali, Michel Laroche and Frank Pons (2005) propose that one of the conditions that needs to be met for the utilitarian influence to take place is the visibility of the influenced behaviour to the individual or a group that influences that behaviour.

Identification

Identification is defined as an acceptance of influence to create or enhance a positive relationship with a specific individual or a group. The key differences between processes of compliance and identification lay in the core premise that, in the case of the identification, the individual influenced to adopt specific behaviour is convinced by this behaviour. The type of influence that operates through the process of identification is value-expressive influence, which takes place when the individual matches his or her own behaviour to that of the reference group to which they want to belong to (Bearden, & Etzel, 1982; Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1989; Kelman, 1961). Value expressive influence is subsequently underpinned by the desire to improve one's self-esteem, or self-concept, and highlights the psychological need for the association with the specific reference group (Childers, & Rao, 1992). From the consumer behaviour point of view, William O. Bearden, Richard G. Netemeyer and Jesse E. Teel (1989) propose that value expressive influence was found, to varying degrees, across a range of products and services that are conspicuous in nature. Value expressive influence, functioning through the process of identification, is operationalised via social identity (Bagozzi, & Dholakia, 2002). The core premise of social identity is concerned with the impact that social groups have on the way that individuals see themselves. Subsequently, individuals define themselves through membership of social groups.

Internalisation

The process of internalisation is characterised as taking place when influence is accepted to maintain the agreement of actions and beliefs with one's own value system. The process of internalisation is manifested through informational influence. H. Kelman (1961) defines informational influence as having origins in the desire to make informed decisions and suggests that this form of influence is accepted to advance knowledge and increase one's capacity to deal with the surroundings that one operates in. Similar perspectives on informational influence is offered by Morton Deutsch and H. B. Gerard (1955) and, more recently, W. O. Bearden, R. G. Netemeyer and J. E. Teel (1989) who suggest that this type of influence responds to the tendency to accept information provided by others as an evidence about reality. However, J. Yang (Yang, He & Lee, 2007) proposes that the informational influence is only operational when the behaviour and values expressed by the reference group are perceived as beneficial. Informational influence has been previously tested in the context of student choices (Liew, Tan, & Jayothisa, 2013; Pimpa, 2005) especially in regard to family and peer influences and other referents that exert high credibility (Childers, & Rao, 1992). Informational influence may either occur through the process of searching for information from those who are perceived knowledgeable, or through observing the behaviour of others (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1989; Murali, Laroche, & Pons, 2005). Richard P. Bagozzi and Utpal M. Dholakia (2002) posit that internalisation, represented through informational influence, is operationalised by way of group norms that take place when individuals adopt a specific group behaviour in order to support their own value system (Kelman, 1958). However, it is suggested that the conformity with the group's norms is highly dependant on the commitment between the individual and the group. Subsequently, the greater the level of commitment the more likely it is for the group norms to be adopted and informing the behaviour (Jetten, Postmes, & McAuliffe, 2002).

The three forms of influence: utilitarian, value expressive, and informational, operating through processes of compliance, identification and internalisation, are frequently considered to be representations of interpersonal influence (Murali, Laroche, & Pons, 2005). W. O. Bearden, R. G. Netemeyer and J. E. Teel (1989) group utilitarian and value expressive influence under a broader umbrella of normative influence. This grouping is in line with early work by M. Deutsch and H. B. Gerard (1955) who describe two types of social influence, informational that is defined as influence to acknowledge obtained information as a reality and normative that requires conformation with expectations of others. Drawing on the work of M. Deutsch and H. B. Gerard (1955) R. B. Cialdini, Raymond R. Reno and Carl A. Kallgren (1990) describes two types of social norms: injunctive norms that are concerned with "ought" and "should" (Burchell, Rettie, & Patel, 2013) and define what is acceptable and right as based on beliefs and morals, and descriptive norms that refer to the behaviour of the majority. While these two types of norms are separate,

the distinction between them is frequently blurred as describing what others may do and do lead to the acceptance of that behaviour as what “should” be done (Burchell, Rettie, & Patel, 2013).

GOALS UNDERLYING THE ACCEPTANCE OF INFLUENCE

Social influence perspective developed by H. Kelman (1958, 1961, 2006) recognises two areas that may be fundamental to acceptance of influence: the first being a concern about positive reaction or creating a positive relationship in the case of compliance and identification, and the second a concern about appropriateness of individual behaviour in the case of internalisation.

The types and processes of social influence discussed above are activated by three goals described by R. B. Cialdini and N. J. Goldstein (2004): the goal of accuracy that deals with formation and acting upon accurate perceptions of reality; the goal of affiliation that is concerned with development and maintenance of social relationships or affiliations, and the goal of maintaining a positive self-concept. R. B. Cialdini and N. J. Goldstein (2004) investigate these three goals, or motivation, in regard to how they drive an individual’s cognition and behaviour especially in areas of compliance (specific response to specific request), and conformity (changes in behaviour in order to match responses of others).

Conformity has been found previously to drive consumption and influence choices as individuals modify behaviour to gain social rewards and avoid disapproval (Bellezza, Gino, & Keinan, 2014). Furthermore, customers frequently behave in similar way to those around them if they believe that the behaviour is beneficial to either strengthen the affiliation with the group or to convey the specific desired identity. Conformity behaviour is also found to impact on purchasing decisions through increased socialisation and connecting with peers that are facilitated by online communities (Wang, Yu, & Wei, 2012).

The three goals proposed by R. B. Cialdini and N. J. Goldstein’s (2004) suggest that, while the three core motivations that underpin the individual’s response to social influence (accuracy, affiliation and the maintenance of the positive self-concept) are associated with a specific social influence phenomenon, frequently the influenced behaviour serves multiple goals. Subsequently, in order to impact on student choice of HE institution, the influence is likely to be an ongoing process responding to few, if not all of these goals.

CONCLUSIONS

Significant changes in higher education sector and the intensification of competition amongst higher education institutions necessitate novel approaches and require HE marketers to gain further insights into processes that lead to student selection of the HE institution. Subsequently, it is of special significance to understand choice determinants that effect students during these processes.

The literature identifies and analyses a broad range of factors that impact on students throughout the HEI selection processes; however, limited attention is given to social influence factors. The impact of social influence on consumer behaviour is well documented and should be taken into the account when discussing student choice of HEI. It is of special importance to gain a greater understanding of social influence factors that influence HEI selection and reasons that underpin the acceptance of social influence in that context. This paper proposes a perspective that goes towards developing a greater understanding of the relationship between influences yield by the greater social context and the student selection of the HEI.

There is an extensive body of research that deals with social influence and its bridging effect that exists between an individual and the social context in which the individual operates. The theoretical discussion of student choice of HEI found in the scholarly literature on the topic appears to be insufficient to explain the impact of social influence on choice decisions. There are numerous studies that identify social factors that impact on a student during all three stages of the HEI selection process; however, with the possible exception of the predisposition stage, they largely fail to examine how these forces exert their influence. Thus, this conceptual paper proposes an integrative theoretical framework composed of three perspectives: D. Hossler and K. S. Gallagher's tripartite model of higher education student choice, R. B. Cialdini and N. J. Goldstein's goals underpinning the acceptance of influence, and H. Kelman's processes of compliance, internalisation and identification through which the influence is accepted.

The D. Hossler and K. S. Gallagher's (1987) model is comprehensive, based on the most important aspects of previous combined models, and provides an excellent overview of processes that students pass through prior to enrolment in a HEI. Since its development the model provided the theoretical background for numerous studies that investigated HEI choice. While the model consists of three processes, predisposition, search and choice, the proposed framework focuses on the last two phases as the predisposition stage is concerned predominantly with the decision to pursue higher education rather than the choice of a specific institution. However, it must be noted that it is a stage of predisposition that emphasises sociological factors, while the phases of search and choice are more centred on economic determinants. Subsequently, it is important to examine the factors that guide the student during these stages through adoption of the broader perspective that focuses on the social factors that influence student choice.

The three goals that underpin the acceptance of social influence identified by R. B. Cialdini and N. J. Goldstein (2004) provide a valuable framework for investigation of motivations that drive behaviour through processes of compliance and conformity. Behaviour and opinions of peers have been previously identified as having a strong influence on students (Castleman, & Page, 2013; Page, & Castleman, 2013), especially in the context of shifting perceptions of social norms. H. Kelman's processes that allow for the identification of effects

of social influence offer an important perspective as it allows for distinguishing between the effects of social influence that are oriented towards external rewards and intrinsic rewards.

The proposed framework allows for the investigation and identification of social influence related determinants of student choice and for the investigation of the impact that these factors have on choice of a higher education institution.

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