

The Possibility of Promoting Market Research in Education: An Indian Perspective

Vinit Ketan*

This paper examines the increasing importance of market research in India's rapidly evolving education sector, influenced by a growing youth population, technological advancements, and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. It highlights how market research can guide decision-making, optimize resource allocation, and foster sustainable growth for educational institutions in a competitive landscape. The paper discusses the benefits, current adoption challenges, and potential pathways for promoting comprehensive market research practices in Indian education.

Keywords

Market Research, Indian Education, National Education Policy 2020, Educational Institutions, Strategic Planning

Introduction

The Indian education sector is undergoing a rapid transformation, driven by a burgeoning youth population, increasing disposable incomes, technological advancements, and the ambitious goals outlined in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. This dynamic environment presents both immense opportunities and significant challenges for educational institutions. In such a competitive and evolving landscape, market research, traditionally a cornerstone of business strategy, holds immense potential to guide decision-making, optimize resource allocation, and foster sustainable growth within the education sector. This report explores the possibility of promoting market research in Indian education, highlighting its benefits, current scenario, and potential pathways for greater adoption.

The Current Landscape of Indian Education

India boasts one of the largest education systems globally, encompassing a vast network of schools, colleges, and universities across various disciplines. Key trends include the rise of virtual learning, the integration of technology, a focus on critical thinking and problem-solving and a growing demand for non-conventional courses (Wright Research, n.d.). The

government's emphasis on skill development and initiatives like the "New India Literacy Programme" further underscore the need for data-driven strategies (Wright Research, n.d.).

However, the sector also faces significant challenges. These include unequal access to quality education, particularly in rural areas, high costs of higher education leading to brain drain, outdated curricula that often lack practical relevance, and insufficient infrastructure and resources (Vygr News, 2023). A critical gap exists between industry requirements and the skills imparted by the education system (ISPP, n.d.).

The Case for Market Research in Indian Education

Market research can be a powerful tool to address these challenges and capitalize on opportunities. It enables educational institutions to make informed decisions by understanding the needs and preferences of various stakeholders, including prospective students, parents, employers, and the wider community.

Key Benefits of Market Research

- **Understanding the Audience:** Market research helps institutions identify their primary target audiences, including their age, geographical region, areas of interest, and financial resources. This allows for tailored messaging and program offerings (Emergen Research, n.d.). Segmenting the audience, for instance, distinguishing between undergraduate and graduate students, enables more focused resource allocation.
- **Competitor Analysis:** In an increasingly competitive landscape, understanding how an institution stacks up against rivals is crucial. Market research facilitates benchmarking programs, facilities, services, tuition fees, graduation rates, employment rates, and student satisfaction of competitors, revealing gaps and areas for improvement (Emergen Research, n.d.).
- **Program Development and Optimization:** By analyzing student preferences and labor market trends, institutions can adjust existing programs and develop new ones that are relevant and in demand. For example, if data science courses are gaining popularity, an institution can expand its offerings in that area (Emergen Research, n.d.). This directly addresses the issue of outdated curricula and lack of practical knowledge.
- **Strategic Marketing and Admissions:** Market research provides insights into which students are most likely to apply and enroll. By understanding their interests and pain points, institutions can modify their recruitment pitches, highlighting financial aid, special offerings, or campus life aspects that resonate with the target audience. This can significantly improve student conversion rates (Emergen Research, n.d.).
- **Enhancing Student Experience and Retention:** Beyond acquisition, market research can uncover areas where students need support, from academic guidance to mental health services. Addressing these concerns can lead to increased student satisfaction and improved retention rates (Emergen Research, n.d.).
- **Informed Policy and Strategic Decisions:** For policymakers and educational leaders, market research can provide valuable data on demographic changes, evolving student interests, and labor market demands. This data can inform long-term planning, policy formulation, and strategic investments in the education sector (ISPP, n.d.; RNL, 2023). For instance, understanding the perception of an institution among students, families, and industries can help in shaping its brand and mission (RNL, 2023).

- **Financial Viability and Pricing Strategies:** Market research can assist institutions in making strategic pricing decisions by understanding students' and parents' willingness to pay for education, balancing it with the revenue needed for quality education. Price sensitivity analysis can inform changes in tuition fees and aid programs (RNL, 2023).

Current Adoption and Future Pathways in India

While the concept of marketing and, by extension, market research, has seen some adoption in the Indian education sector, particularly with the rise of private institutions and EdTech companies, its systematic and comprehensive application remains nascent in many traditional institutions.

Evidence of Adoption

- **EdTech Companies:** Companies like Unacademy have successfully leveraged hyperlocal SEO and influencer partnerships, demonstrating the power of data-driven marketing strategies in the Indian test preparation market (Firdoshkhan, n.d.). GUVI Geek Pvt Ltd, supported by IIT-M and IIM-A, focused on vernacular language courses and affordable pricing, addressing key market needs (GUVI, n.d.).
- **Digital Marketing:** Many educational institutions are increasingly adopting digital marketing channels, such as attractive websites, search engine optimization, and social media platforms, to engage with prospective students and disseminate information (AfzalBasha, n.d., as cited in BiblioMed, 2021). This indicates a growing recognition of the need to understand and reach the target audience effectively.
- **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020:** The NEP 2020 emphasizes a holistic and multidisciplinary education, skill development, and entrepreneurship (GLBIMR, 2023). This policy shift inherently requires institutions to be more responsive to market demands and student aspirations, thereby implicitly encouraging market research.

Challenges to Greater Adoption

- **Lack of Awareness and Understanding:** Many traditional educational institutions may not fully grasp the scope and benefits of comprehensive market research, often equating it solely with advertising or admissions campaigns.
- **Resource Constraints:** Conducting thorough market research requires dedicated resources, including financial investment and skilled personnel. Smaller institutions, especially those in the public sector, may face budget limitations.
- **Resistance to Change:** There can be resistance to adopting new methodologies and a reliance on traditional approaches to planning and recruitment.
- **Data Availability and Quality:** While some data exists, comprehensive and granular data on student preferences, labor market needs, and competitor strategies might be fragmented or difficult to access.
- **Focus on Academic Outcomes Over Market Needs:** Historically, the emphasis in Indian education has been more on academic excellence and regulatory compliance rather than market responsiveness.

Pathways for Promotion

- **Capacity Building and Training:** Workshops and training programs can be organized for educational leaders, administrators, and faculty to educate them on the principles and applications of market research in the education context.
- **Government Initiatives and Policy Push:** Government bodies and regulatory authorities can actively promote and incentivize market research, perhaps by incorporating it into accreditation frameworks or funding criteria. The NEP 2020 provides a strong foundation for this.
- **Collaboration with Research Agencies and Consultants:** Educational institutions can collaborate with professional market research firms to conduct studies and gain expert insights. This can be particularly beneficial for institutions lacking in-house expertise.
- **Developing Open-Source Tools and Resources:** Creating accessible and affordable market research tools and resources tailored for the Indian education sector can lower the barrier to entry for smaller institutions.
- **Showcasing Success Stories:** Documenting and disseminating case studies of Indian educational institutions that have successfully leveraged market research can inspire others and demonstrate tangible benefits.
- **Integrating Market Research into Educational Leadership Programs:** Incorporating market research as a core component in educational leadership and management programs can prepare future leaders to make data-driven decisions.
- **Industry-Academia Partnerships:** Fostering stronger ties between educational institutions and industries can provide valuable insights into skill gaps and employer expectations, which can then inform program design.

Conclusion

The promotion of market research in Indian education is not merely a possibility but a growing imperative. As the sector becomes more dynamic and competitive, data-driven decision-making will be critical for institutions to thrive, remain relevant, and effectively serve the needs of students and the nation. By understanding the evolving demands of the market, educational institutions can develop responsive programs, optimize their outreach strategies, and ultimately contribute more effectively to India's human capital development and economic growth. While challenges exist, a concerted effort from policymakers, institutions, and industry players can unlock the immense potential of market research to transform the Indian education landscape.

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***Vinit Ketan is Founder & CEO of WiseGuy Research Consultants Pvt. Ltd.**