



Consumer Behavior in Higher Education:
Professional Ambitions of Students in South
Brazil (an Abstract)

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CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN HIGHER EDUCATION: PROFESSIONAL AMBITIONS OF STUDENTS IN SOUTH BRAZIL (AN ABSTRACT)

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INTRODUCTION

In 2016, there was little news about the crisis in the Brazilian economy. Along with the political crisis, the economic turmoil has not failed to cause recession and unemployment. Despite expectations of the country's economic recovery, the beginning of 2017 did not signal an end to the crisis. Analysts had expected 2017 to be more of a stabilization than a recovery of the labor market, with the generation of jobs still insufficient to bring down the unemployment rate, which, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), stood at 11.9 % at the end of 2016, with approximately 12.1 million unemployed (IBGE, 2017).

In this scenario of economic uncertainty, Higher Education Institutions face major challenges. Thus, in order to be able to attract students, it is necessary to study them in an attempt to understand their behavior, their desires and needs in view of the possibility of choosing professional training. Thus, in view of the recession that Brazil is going through and the uncertainties faced by Higher Education Institutions, the study aimed to analyze the needs and desires of high school graduates, regarding the choice of professional training.

BACKGROUND

The consumer behavior literature shows that needs and wants are essential to start the purchase decision process (SOLOMON, 2008). For Brei (2007), throughout history, human needs have been studied mainly by the area of Psychology. Among the various definitions for the term, one of the main is that a need is a construct, that is, a convenient fiction or a hypothetical effort.

All human beings have needs, whether basic, such as eating, drinking and breathing, or for recreation, instruction and fun. Needs become desires, as objects that can satisfy them are identified, thus generating demand (KOTLER; KELLER, 2012). To satisfy their needs or achieve their goals, every individual is guided by an internal energetic force: human motivation. According to Samara and Morsch

(2005), motivation is a variable and dynamic force that results from its interaction with the situation. The authors also add that needs arise from states of tension, and when they reach a certain level of anxiety, they become a predisposition (motive) that directs behavior towards goals. This motive (stimulus or impulse) expresses motivation, that is, the causal force that guides human behavior.

When it comes to the needs and desires of high school graduates, Aléssio, Domingues and Scarpin (2010) point out that, after finishing high school, many young people rely on family experiences or their interest or mastery of specific content to continue to studies. Most seek HEIs and courses that provide greater visibility and professional growth, regardless of the social class to which they belong. Many choose the institution and course, considering the curriculum, the financial factor and the brand of the institution, which will provide better job opportunities, among others.

For Mainardes (2007, p. 19), “constant education has been shown to be the only way to achieve success and, at a time when knowledge is so important, studying is always a necessity”. In this context, Prestes, Sousa and Santana (2009) highlight that the awareness of a need by an individual leads to the setting of goals or targets to be achieved. Thus, getting a good job and being competent in exercising it is an objective that many young people and adults have, and it is exactly in the youth and adult rooms that many of them satisfy this need.

For most students, there is usually no choice process, but a time to adapt to a new reality. Academic life constitutes a complex and unique social experience, placing young people in a set of expectations, responsibilities and new challenges. This period allows the development not only of the intellectual aspect, but also the elaboration of other values, attitudes, beliefs and dreams. The moment of choosing the profession, the HEI and the course is decisive for the young person's future, being seen by the family, society and himself as a necessity (ALÉSSIO; DOMINGUES; SCARPIN, 2010). It is observed that, whether human needs are considered at levels to be fulfilled, or whether variables are thought to be separated into motivational and non-motivational, the choices and decisions of young people and their parents about their professional career, according to these theories, necessarily pass through social condition in which they find themselves (PACHECO, et al., 2017).

Regarding the search for higher education, Fonseca (2009) explains that many families, due to their own culture, their own perception of needs and desires, prioritize housing, clothing, even a level of comfort (according to their possibilities), leaving the preoccupation with education secondary or even non-existent. The author stresses that, as the product offered by HEIs is intangible, that is, its quality can only be perceived after the acquisition of the service, in this case, higher education, previous experiences lived by family and friends are a strong element to be considered at the time of choosing the institution where the high school graduate will hold his / her higher education. With this, a service / education / training offered with quality will have a positive and amplified result, since each satisfied person will be linked to a chain of other people, facilitating the work of communication and finding new customers.

Sobrosa et al. (2014), in the study on the prospects for a professional future for young people from disadvantaged socioeconomic classes, sought to investigate the expectations regarding the professional future of young high school students from disadvantaged socioeconomic classes. It was found that students, in general, are optimistic about their professional future and hope to achieve personal and professional success. However, they point to the need to strive to achieve their goals and enjoy the

satisfaction that the chosen job can provide, once they realize the negative aspects associated with the instability of the labor market.

METHODOLOGY

In order to make an initial investigation of the needs and desires of high school graduating students, a qualitative-exploratory study was carried out, through structured interviews with 10 high school students. This stage provided support for the preparation of the research instrument for the next stage.

Then, a survey was carried out, supported by a structured questionnaire, following the recommendations of Malhotra (2012), with the aim of investigating the needs and desires of high school students regarding their professional ambitions. To compose the sample of this stage, the public and private schools with the largest number of enrolled students located in a city in the southern region of Brazil were contacted. Of the nine schools invited to participate in the study, six accepted, four public and two private. Questionnaires were applied to students within their own schools during regular class hours with the consent of the principal. The final sample consisted of 345 students, 242 from public education and 103 from private schools.

The data treatment was performed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software and included, in addition to descriptive statistics, the Mann Whitney chi-square and non-parametric association tests, according to the recommendations of Hair (2010).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through the first phase of the research, it was identified that the professional ambitions of young people after completing high school include: starting a college, taking technical courses, taking a pre-university course, working and even exchanging. The responses received at this stage of the research provided support for the construction of the questionnaire for the quantitative stage. The sample surveyed in the quantitative stage consisted of 345 students, 70% from public schools and 30% from private schools, with a predominant age of 17 (68%) and 18 years (23%). 86.7% live with their parents and are concentrated in economic classes B1, B2 and C1.

As for the plans after completing high school, 72% of the students surveyed stated that they intend to enter higher education, 13% replied that they intend to take a technical course. Other answers, such as taking a pre-university course and not being interested in continuing to study, also appeared. Through the chi-square test, it was observed that there was a strong association between the desire to take a higher education course and students from private schools, as well as between interest in the technical course and students from public schools. In addition, 56.8% showed interest in a public institution to continue their studies, while 39.4% intend to seek private institutions.

Aos respondentes que revelaram a intenção de ingressar no curso superior foram questionadas as áreas de formação de maior interesse, permitindo-se até três marcações por estudante. As áreas do conhecimento que se destacaram foram as de Ciências Sociais Aplicadas e Ciências da Saúde. Os cursos com maior índice de marcações foram: Direito, Medicina, Psicologia, Administração, Educação Física,

Arquitetura, Medicina Veterinária, Fisioterapia, Ciências Contábeis, Enfermagem, Ciência da Computação e Engenharia Civil. A partir da identificação dos cursos de interesse dos estudantes, o estudo de Marques, Salviano e Silva (2016) contribui no sentido de que, para a escolha do curso, o estudante leva em consideração a capacidade de o curso acompanhar as evoluções do mercado, flexibilidade e adaptabilidade da profissão e potencial de empregabilidade.

Students were also asked if they received influences from others to outline their professional plans. Family, friends and teachers, respectively, were identified as the most influential factors, which is consistent with the studies by Bohoslavsky (2015) and Nepomuceno and Witter (2010).

Regarding personal influencing factors, the most scored were, respectively, their desires and preferences, their own will and individual skills. In this line, Ryan and Deci (2000) contribute to the finding that the factors intrinsic to the individual are consistently reinforced as determinants of the choice for the profession and the external factors are stimuli that accentuate or strengthen the choice.

As for the reasons for choosing the educational institution, the participants were asked to assess the degree of importance of 14 attributes on a five-point scale. The factors that received the highest score were: quality of teaching; qualified teachers; teaching method; course curriculum; infrastructure; monthly fee; and the possibility of financing, agreements and discounts for the payment of studies, which contrasts with the studies by Kalil (2010) and Ibdaiwi, Garcia and Lopes (2009). Less important attributes were shown, such as duration of the course; indication of already trained; possibility of carrying out exchanges abroad; location; social and extension projects during the course; bibliographic collection of the library and concept - note from MEC (Ministry of Education).

The results found pointed to the existence of a strong statistical association of students from public schools for the following attributes: tuition fee, possibility of financing, agreements and discounts for payment of studies and duration of the course; demonstrating that public school students take these three attributes into account when choosing an educational institution. The duration of the course may be related to the possibility of quickly entering the job market to obtain income, results that reinforce the findings of Marques and Machado (2015).

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

In a scenario in which there are many options for both higher and technical courses, placing educational institutions in a highly competitive environment, this study found the professional ambitions of high school students. In this sense, the study contributed to the literature both in the area of consumer behavior and educational marketing. Punctually, the study advanced in the discovery of two new attributes considered of high importance by the respondents when choosing an institution: "Teaching method" and "Course Curriculum", demonstrating that young people are aware of these criteria. These two attributes may be related to the demand of young people for updated curricula and in line with the dynamic and modern context that is presented in the market, in addition to being interested in innovative and creative classes that offer different teaching methods and in fact contribute to their training. This perception of students in the process of choosing a teaching institution is linked to the precepts addressed by both active teaching methodologies and educational marketing.

Regarding needs and desires, it is important to highlight that young people of the studied age group are in the pre-purchase stage of the professional decision process. In this sense, the study demonstrated the intentions of this audience after completing high school, the type of institution they intend to seek and the areas of training of interest for entering higher education. These topics are not commonly addressed in previous studies.

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