

Survey Study of Key Motivations and Drivers for Students to Enroll in Online Programs of Study

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Abstract : Increasingly borderless learning opportunities including online learning are expanding. Singapore University of Social Science (SUSS) conducted research in February of 2017 to determine the level of consumer interest in undertaking a completely online distance learning degree program across three countries in the Asian Pacific region. The target audience was potential bachelor degree and post-degree students from Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam. The results gathered were used to assess the market size and ascertain the business potential of online degree programs in Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam. Secondly, the results were used to determine the most receptive markets to prioritise entry and identify the most receptive student segments. In order to achieve the key outcomes, the key points of understanding were as follows: - Motivations for higher education & factors that influence the choice of institution, -Interest in online learning, -Interest in online learning from a Singapore university relative to other foreign institutions, -Key drivers and barriers of interest in online learning. An online survey was conducted from from 7th Feb 2017 to 27th Feb 2017 amongst n=600 respondents aged 21yo-45yo, who have a basic command of English, A-level qualifications and above, and who have an intent to further their education in the next 12 months. Key findings from the study regarding enrolling in an online program include the need for a marriage between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors and the flexibility and support offered in an online program. Overall, there was a high interest for online learning. Survey participants stated they are intrinsically motivated to learn because of their interest in the program of study and the need for extrinsic rewards including opportunities for employment or salary increment in their current job. Seven out of ten survey participants reported they are motivated to further their education and expand their knowledge to become more employable. Eight in ten claims that the feasibility of furthering their education depends on cost and maintaining a work-life balance. The top 2 programs of interest are business and information and communication technology. They describe their choice of university as a marriage of both motivational and feasibility factors including cost, choice, quality of support facilities, and the reputation of the institution. Survey participants reported flexibility as important and stated that appropriate support assures and grows their intent to enrol in an online program. Respondents also reported the importance of being able to work while studying as the main perceived advantage of online learning. Factors related to the choice of an online university emphasized the quality of support services. Despite concerns, overall there was a high interest for online learning. One in two expressed strong intent to enrol in an online programme of study. However, unfamiliarity with online learning is a concern including the concern with the lack of face-to-face interactions. Overall, the findings demonstrated an interest in online learning. A main driver was the ability to earn a recognised degree while still being able to be with the family and the ability to achieve a 'better' early career growth.

Keywords : distance education, student motivations, online learning, online student needs

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