Article

Does University Ranking Matter? Choosing a University in the Digital Era

Tai-Ming Wut *[ID]**, Jing (Bill) Xu and Stephanie Wing Lee**

College of Professional and Continuing Education, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University,
Hung Hom, Hong Kong SAR, China; bill.xu@cpce-polyu.edu.hk (J.X.); s.lee@cpce-polyu.edu.hk (S.W.L.)
* Correspondence: edmund.wut@cpce-polyu.edu.hk

Abstract: Each year, final year high school students choose the university that they would prefer to attend. Past studies have found that family, friends, course availability, university reputation, distances from home, and job prospects were factors affecting students' choice of university. However, the relative weight of these factors might have changed in the digital era; also, electronic word of mouth was ignored in the past. The purpose of this study was to identify the important factors affecting students' university choice. We distributed a questionnaire which was completed by 472 Form 6 secondary school students in Hong Kong. Conjoint analysis was used to simulate a real situation and what human beings would do: human being usually make up their mind using a few criteria at the same time. The contribution of the study is that it reveals that electronic word of mouth is the most influential factor, followed by peer influence and university reputation, in choosing a university.

Keywords: conjoint analysis; electronic word of mouth (eWOM); reputation; peer influence; university choice

1. Introduction

Each year, many secondary school leavers choose which university they would prefer to attend. Extensive research has been conducted on the decision-making of high school graduates when choosing a university. The factors that have been found to affect students' choice of university in earlier studies include family, friends, course availability, university reputation, distances from home, and job prospects [1]. Researchers also identified university entry qualifications and tuition fees as factors in the decision [2]. However, there might be other considerations in the choice of a university in the digital era. The purpose of this study was to identify the critical factors in the process of selecting an institution for higher education.

In the digital era, comments posted online might satisfy secondary school leavers' information needs for choosing a university [3]. Secondary school leavers are 15–18 years old and currently belong to Generation Z, which was born into and has grown up in a world of computers and the internet. This generation spends over 10 h every day obtaining and sharing material online [4].

Online comments are usually from people who are unknown to us. Although such opinions carry weight due to the absence of conflicts of interest, we may also wonder whether we can trust the opinions of strangers. Opinions from friends are therefore important and can have higher credibility as the source of the opinion is known. According to the theory of needs, once people's needs have been satisfied they engage in certain behaviour. This behaviour will tend to follow advice found online or given by friends [3].

Over the past two decades, there has been extensive research on high school graduates' university choice around the world. Most of these studies have been quantitative, using survey data [1,2]. Focus groups were carried out in some studies [5] to identify major

factors for the questionnaires or to follow up on survey results. For sampling, most of the studies targeted prospective university students, with others recruiting high school students or first year university students [6]. In terms of geographical distribution, most studies have been conducted in a single country and a few across countries in the same region. Almost all of the studies have been cross-sectional in design, with only a few having adopted a longitudinal approach [7,8]. This provides an opportunity to analyse the methodology of how high school students consider a group of factors in one go. A conjoint analysis was used in this study to address the literature gap.

2. Literature Review

Reviews of relevant studies have summarised some of the key factors in university choice. Obermeit (2012) compared German and US research on university choice criteria and information sources, and recommended explorative research methods to uncover more possible factors in university choice [9]. Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka's (2015) systematic review of university choice summarised papers published from 1992 to 2013 and found a range of common factors, such as student demographics, academic quality, outcomes and benefits, facilities, characteristics of institutions, price sensitivity, information sources, and geographical locations [10]. With the shared purpose of providing suggestions to universities for development and marketing strategies, these reviews are useful references for universities to better accommodate students' expectations.

2.1. Personal Relations

Multiple studies have observed that family, friends, and teachers influence students' university choice and that their social networks provide them with information on universities. Undergraduates are strongly influenced by parents, siblings, and extended family because most are reliant on family for financial support [11]; this explains why parents are the highest ranked among all stakeholders [12]. In Malaysia, parents with higher socioeconomic status have greater involvement in their children's education [13]. Peers and friends also have a certain influence because some young people want to attend the same university as their high school peers to maintain close friendships and bonding [14,15]. They may also consider recommendations by secondary school teachers and professional counsellors during the decision-making process [12,15]. After considering the opinions of others, students rely on their own will to make the final decision [6], based, for example, on their own perception of their intellectual ability [13]. Furthermore, students who begin the process of searching for a suitable university in their early years of high school have a greater awareness and set of considerations than those who begin the process later [16].

2.2. Reputation

One of the utmost concerns of students is university reputation, for which the ranking of a university is the most obvious measurement [6,8]. Prestigious universities are highly sought after because they offer an objective benefit in that employers use university rankings as an indication of the quality of graduates and thus prefer to recruit from among the graduates of more highly ranked universities; university prestige also provides a psychological benefit to students and their families as they have a sense of pride and satisfaction when telling others that they attend a top-ranked university [17]. Nonetheless, Walsh et al. (2015) found that in the UK, the benefits of attending a highly rated university were undervalued in families with no direct experience of higher education [2].

When considering a university, a strong reputation suggests higher academic quality, greater suitability of programmes offered, high-calibre lecturers, and good career prospects for graduates [1,2,15,18]. Awards for recognition can increase a university's reputation: Horstschräer's (2012) study of German medical schools found that institutes that had won a competition for excellence run by the government to reward outstanding research performance attracted more applications from highly able students [19].

2.3. Marketing

Apart from working to improve academic performance, advertising is commonly used to enhance the image and reputation of institutions. Students' first-hand impressions of a university mainly come from interactions with personnel during education fairs or campus visits. Some scholars have argued that the impact of education fairs on university choice is limited, whereas campus visits and personal contact (either face-to-face or by telephone) with front-line administrative and academic staff has a strong influence [15,16]. However, Rudhumbu et al. (2017) countered this argument using data from undergraduates at a US university, finding that career fairs were more influential than campus visits, ref. [18] and a study of Chinese students in New Zealand by Wang et al. (2009) found that the two were equally important [20]. Johnston (2010) found that university employees in the US generally underestimated the influence of university representatives and campus visits as sources of information for prospective students [21].

Universities are now using diverse promotion channels to attract the attention of prospective students. A study by Dao and Thorpe (2015) in Vietnam found that undergraduates were more sensitive to the influence of advertising than postgraduates [11]. Soedijati and Pratminingsih (2011) recommended a marketing mix of seven elements: programme, place, price, promotion, physical facilities, people, and process [22]. In the past decade, some papers have focused on the online marketing of higher institutions. Although social media is highly popular among young people, students in the Netherlands ranked it last in the list of information channels that influenced their university choice, which may be explained by a low degree of content contribution and lack of suitable platforms for higher education [23]. Le et al. (2019) studied the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)-seeking behaviour of Australian students when selecting a university and found that they most frequently searched for information related to course content and the reputation of the university and their degree of interest [24]. They also sought answers to questions about employment prospects, psychosocial life, course difficulty, and entrance requirements.

2.4. Price Sensitivity

Money is predominately a concern of working-class students and those applying for private schools. Callender and Jackson (2008) surveyed prospective students in the UK and found that due to fear of debt, those from low-income families tended to consider the cost of living and opportunities for term-time employment when applying for university [25]. Similarly, US students consider tuition fees and scholarship prospects [18]. The availability of bursary schemes and other forms of financial aid is even more important for those who apply for self-financed private schools, regardless of the ranking of the institutions [8,15,22]. Broader economic circumstances, such as a financial crisis, have been found to heighten students' interest in graduate employability due to pressure from limited employment prospects [7].

2.5. Location

The geographical location of a university offers push and pull factors in terms of proximity to home and the benefits of living in economically prosperous areas. Universities with longer histories often have the advantages of a centrally located single campus with good transport links [16]. To save on rental and transport costs, low-income students tend to choose universities that are closer to their homes [12,14]. When there is no high-ranking university nearby, high-achieving students prefer to apply to better schools further away from home, which can place working-class students at a disadvantage because their financial situations make it more difficult for them to relocate [26]. According to Alonderiene and Klimavičiene's (2013) survey, Lithuanian students preferred to attend universities in larger cities that could provide more job opportunities; they were less concerned with the infrastructure and social life advantages [6]. Hagel and Shaw (2010) found that study mode, which influences the learning and social environment of students,

was also a factor: although undergraduates prefer face-to-face teaching over fully online or hybrid modes, they appreciate flexibility in the lecture timetable [27].

2.6. Learning Environment

Good campus facilities contribute to a pleasant learning environment for students. Universities in well-developed countries may use extravagant facilities as a selling point, while those in less-developed regions, such as Ghana, gain an advantage if they can offer internet access and a well-stocked library [28]. Although some universities in the UK invest in facilities for the purpose of attracting students, an analysis of students' ratings by Price et al. (2003) found that these were not as important as academic factors, such as a university's reputation for quality teaching and research [29]. In the US, a study by Agrey and Lampadan (2014) found that sports facilities and a safe and friendly environment were considered less important than student life programmes, extracurricular activities, and support systems [5]. Furthermore, the importance of hardware facilities might decrease in the age of digitalisation, especially with the increased proportion of online learning during the pandemic.

2.7. Demographics

Comparative studies that have considered the influences of demographic characteristics have observed major differences in preferred type of university by culture and, to a lesser extent, by gender. To assess cultural differences, studies have compared foreign and local students. Dawes and Brown (2002) observed the effect of stronger family ties among ethnic minority students in the UK, with Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi students more likely to target a university that will allow them to continue to live with their parents [16]. Another study conducted in the UK by Ivy (2010) surveyed college students in Leicester and confirmed the role of ethnic origin in the choice of university to apply to, with family influence of utmost importance for Pakistani and African students but academic and social considerations uppermost in the minds of Asian students. However, no relative strengths of common motivators were found for Caucasian students [30]. Padlee et al. (2010) investigated international students' choices of private universities in Malaysia and found that the quality of the learning environment (especially the qualifications of teaching staff and the extent of English use), influencers, customer focus, cost, facilities, socialisation, and location were the most prominent factors [31]. Interestingly, ethnic minority students in the UK have a greater preference for "old" over "new" universities than do their white peers [32].

Prospective students of public and private universities might value different aspects of university offerings. Joseph et al. (2012) reported that US private university students appeared to evaluate institutions on reputation, selectivity, personal interaction, facilities, and cost, whereas public university students evaluated institutions on programme offerings, athletics, reputation, cost, housing, and location, with the relevance of reputation for students at public institutions limited to perceptions of a quality education and accreditation [33]. However, a Turkish study by Çokgezen (2014) found that the tuition fees had a major impact on the decision of public university students, whereas private university students were more concerned about academic performance [34].

The differences in the concerns of male and female students are mainly determined by socially prescribed gender roles. In general, men are more career-oriented in their university choices, whereas women focus more on the educational experience [7]. Females in the UK are more likely to choose universities with low entry requirements [2], demonstrating how some students' choices are driven by anxiety about the application process combined with a fear of failure [8].

Another student-level variable that has been less often considered is field of study, with students in different fields having divergent mindsets. Raposo and Alves (2007) found that medical students generally preferred proximity to home, cost, and staying close to

their families, whereas previous knowledge about the institution was more important for social science and economics students [12].

Student demographics, student academic performance, university quality, facilities, fees, and geographical factors have been considered by students when choosing a university in the past [10].

3. Background

There has been a great change in university education during recent decades in Hong Kong. The university education sector has expanded very fast compared with other sectors such as secondary and primary school sectors. There have been more and more international students come to Hong Kong to study a university programme ranging from an associate degree to a doctoral degree. Most of them have been mainland Chinese people, especially during the pandemic period. There are eight government funded universities. They are University of Hong Kong (rank 22), The Chinese University of Hong Kong (rank 39), The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (rank 34), City University of Hong Kong (rank 53), The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (rank 66), Hong Kong Baptist University (rank 287), Lingnan University (rank 581–590) and The Education University of Hong Kong [35].

The reason for this growth starts with the new policy of introduction of associate degrees in year 2001. According to the figures provided by the Hong Kong Education Bureau, there has been a 40% increase in post-secondary education qualifications. The aim of pushing up the proportion of young people with post-secondary education from 30% to 60% has been meet.

There are at least nine self-finance colleges or private universities offering degree courses, including Caritas Institute of Higher Education, University of Wollongong College Hong Kong, University of Hong Kong SPACE Community College, Hong Kong Community College, Tung Wah College, and Chu Hai College of Higher Education. Hong Kong Shue Yan University, Hong Kong Metropolitan University (Former Open University of Hong Kong), and Hang Seng University of Hong Kong are private universities offering their own degrees. Most of them do not have university ranking.

Higher education institutions are increasingly aware of their marketing activities [36]. The relevance of opinions from friends and online comments to choice of university has not yet been examined in great depth. This study addresses this research gap by examining the weighting of different factors in the choice of university by secondary school students in the digital era using a conjoint analysis method. We aim to identify the factors affecting students' university choice.

4. Methodology

4.1. Objectives

Conjoint analysis has been used in the marketing field for several decades [2], and there are a few papers that have adopted the method for studies of education [1]. The conjoint method aims to examine the importance of several factors together rather than assessing each factor separately. In reality, multiple factors are at work simultaneously. Conjoint analysis is a suitable method for studying students' choice of university as it can determine the relative importance students attach to particular university attributes and the utilities they attach to certain levels of these attributes. This is the objective of our study. Conjoint analysis simulates the real state of the student mind. There are three important considerations when using this method. First, researchers must decide on the attributes and their levels to construct the simulation. Second, a full-profile approach must be taken to present the combinations of all levels of all attributes to the respondents. Third, it is not necessary for the respondents to assess all possible combinations, as the number of simulated profiles can be greatly reduced using orthogonal arrays [37]. The dependent variable was the possibility of choosing a given university, which the respondents were asked to rate on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = very unlikely . . . 4 = neutral . . . 7 = very likely).

A dummy regression model was used for the conjoint analysis. The model's goodness of fit was assessed by *R* squared.

4.2. Research Design and Attributes

Before administering the main survey, a focus group was held with ten final year secondary students of one school. They were five boys and five girls. Three main attributes emerged from this group for further analysis: university reputation, opinion from friends, and opinions from the internet (see Table 1). A convenience sampling method was employed. Secondary school students from eight schools were recruited for the main survey. Questionnaires were distributed to all classes of final year students. There were two or three classes from each school. Participation in the survey was entirely voluntary and not all students filled in the questionnaire.

Table 1. Conjoint analysis and attribute levels.

Attribute	Level
Reputation	The university has a very good reputation The university has a good reputation The university has an acceptable reputation
Friends	My friends support the university I choose My friends are neutral on the university I choose My friends do not support the university I choose
Electronic word of mouth	Comments on the internet are acceptable Comments on the internet are bad Comments on the internet are very bad

Fractional factorial design was used in the design of the questionnaire. Its aim was to reduce the number of evaluation tasks while maintaining orthogonality among the levels and subsequent part-worth estimates [38].

To make the survey more workable, three levels were assigned to each attribute, giving a total of 27 combinations. A three-factor conjoint analysis with three levels per factor ($3 \times 3 \times 3$) would result in 27 combinations. Time would not permit going through all 27 combinations in a questionnaire (it takes around 45 min). To make the task manageable for the respondents, a fractional factorial design was used and a set of 9 scenarios was constructed for the estimation simulation, which took around 15 min to finish. This also made it easier to obtain an accurate picture. One sample scenario was:

a. This university has a very good reputation;
b. My friends do not support the university I choose;
c. Comments on the internet are acceptable.

Students were asked to assess their likelihood of making this university choice. A 7-point Likert scale was used for the preference ratings.

5. Results

A total of 671 questionnaires were distributed to Form 6 secondary school students in Hong Kong, a special administrated region of China. In Hong Kong, Form 6 is the final year of secondary school. After six years of secondary school, students take a public examination called the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE). During their final year of secondary school, students apply to universities through the Joint University Programmes Admissions System (JUPAS). A total of 472 valid questionnaires were returned, giving a response rate of 70.3%. Questionnaires were considered invalid if the answers were incomplete. IBM SPSS version 27 was used for the analysis. The *R*-squared value of 0.985 indicated a good model fit.

The profile of the respondents is provided in Table 2. The sample was made up of 58.5% male and 41.5% female students, mostly aged 17 or 18 years (90.9%). Less than 10%

students were aged 20 and 16. They might defer their secondary school studies for health and other reasons. The annual household income was mostly USD 46,150 or below (59.1%), which is reasonably representative given that the average annual household income in Hong Kong in 2016 was around USD 40,000 [39].

Table 2. Respondent profile.

	Category	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	276	58.5%
	Female	196	41.5%
Age	16	3	0.6%
	17	269	57%
	18	160	33.9%
	19	31	6.6%
	20	9	1.9%
Annual household income (USD)	$30,800 or below	143	30.3%
	$30,801–$46,150	136	28.8%
	$46,151–$61,500	59	12.5%
	$61,501–$76,900	45	9.5%
	$76,901 or above	89	18.9%

The relative importance values of the three factors were 39.7% for opinions on the internet, 35.44% for the opinions of friends, and 24.86% for university reputation (see Table 3). Opinions on the internet, which have not been mentioned in previous studies, were therefore the most important factor affecting students' choice of university, followed by the opinions of friends, and then university reputation.

Table 3. Conjoint analysis results—relative utilities and importance.

Attribute	Relative Importance	Level	Average Utility
Reputation	24.845	Very good	0.736
		Good	0.490
		Acceptable	0.245
Friends	35.545	Support	1.408
		Neutral	0.938
		Do not support	0.469
Electronic word of mouth	39.610	Neutral	1.523
		Negative	1.016
		Very negative	0.508

A student's subjective answer indicates the overarching view on university choice. Utility is formed by the combination of part-worth estimates. It is useful also to look at the average utility of each attribute. As expected, the respondents had the greatest preference for a good reputation in the choice of university. Support from friends provided the greatest motivation, and comments on the internet were basically neutral.

6. Discussion

When choosing a university, three apparently important factors—university reputation, friends' opinions (peer relations), and e-WOM—were identified in our study. According to Nuseir and Rafae (2021), university reputation, scholarship, location, facilities and services, and marketing channels, are the drivers of students' choices in the United Arab Emirates [40]. A content analysis was done on a social media question-and-answer site. Reputation, career prospect, teaching, administration, and student life are considerations in Australia [23]. The results of this study are consistent with those of Nuseir and Rafae (2021) and Le et al. (2019) on university reputation. In contrast, programme,

price, and employment prospects were the important considerations reported in the United Kingdom [41].

Reputation, with some other factors, affects students' choice of university in the United Arab Emirates [40]. A hundred students in two public universities and three private universities were chosen to do a survey. This sample size was too small to use structural equation modelling. Another issue is that students in universities were surveyed, which implies that researchers relied on students' memory to recall their choices in high school. This raises a question of validity. In contrast to the Nuseir and Refae (2020) study, we surveyed more than 400 secondary final year students. In our data collection period, respondents had to make their university choice. This was a good opportunity for us to collect the responses.

University rankings bring a prestige effect, affecting student choice [17]. The prestige effect transforms university reputations. Our study provides solid empirical evidence for this claim. Additionally, with a good reputation, it is easier to offer more corporate internships, exchanges, and further study opportunities. Students can enrich their resumes by working in companies that participate in these programmes, and their various work experiences might make the process of seeking a desirable job after graduation easier and smoother.

Dutch high schools' students follow their peers on university choice. Living arrangements are another consideration [14]. Peer influence can be positive or negative [42]. An individual with friends who study hard and have ambitious goals and dreams may choose a higher-ranked university, whereas an individual with friends who are not serious about their studies may make the choice of university arbitrarily and miss out on attending a reputable or high-ranked university. Either way, the influence of friends is a determining factor in university choices. Our findings concur with Homel et al. (2020)'s results.

Other than university reputation and the influence of friends, eWOM was found to be a major factor in our study. Students seeking a second opinion about their university choice might turn to comments, news, or videos posted on social media platforms [43]. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are popular social media platforms for seeking out trends and novel information [44]. Information related to the content of applicant interviews is also shared between students online. Although the information might not always be accurate, students do consider the opinions expressed in eWOM when making their university choices [45], which gives eWOM a powerful impact. eWOM was ignored in the past literature. We showed that eWOM is a driver on its own. It could also have some impact on university brand [36].

In summary, we found eWOM was the most important factor. It was followed by peer influence and university reputation. University ranking, which is highly correlated to university reputation, was not the most important factor.

7. Theoretical and Managerial Implications

This is the first study to examine the university choices of secondary school leavers in Hong Kong using conjoint analysis. Indeed, there has been limited research worldwide assessing university choices using conjoint analysis [46]. Hong Kong has many prestigious and high-ranking universities and is a preferred destination for many international students. This study contributes to the field of education by the conjoint analysis of different factors in the choice of university, and the findings contribute to the body of evidence on university choice. Conjoint analysis aims to assess the importance of multiple factors simultaneously rather than assessing each factor separately [47]. The factors hypothesised to affect university choices in the earlier literature were family, friends, course availability, university reputation, distance from home, and job prospects. eWOM was neglected in the past. The results of this study show that university reputation, friends (peer influence), and eWOM were the most salient factors affecting choice of university among the sample of Form 6 students in Hong Kong, who have grown up in the digital era.

This study has significant implications for university marketing. Certain strategies are recommended to attract students to a university. First, universities should update their rankings regularly [48]. Second, universities should provide updated information on internship opportunities, employability, graduate opportunities, and articulation pathways on the university website or in top-tier magazines [49]. Third, universities should implement marketing strategies that respond to how friends influence their peers in making university choices [50]. For example, posting alumni success stories, including details of their further study and career, gives secondary school leavers stories that they can take as a reference to choose their preferred university. Fourth, given the power of eWOM in influencing choice of university, universities should innovate beyond the traditional methods for promoting university programmes. Traditionally, universities give programme exhibitions in secondary schools and hold information days on campus. However, this style of promotion only provides information on the programmes, which is not successful in attracting students who are deciding on a preferred university. To benefit from eWOM, universities should make use of social media. For example, a university could open an account on the popular Instagram platform, on which attractive promotion materials regarding their programmes can be posted with captions providing programme information. Most importantly, universities should post Instagram posts and Instagram stories regularly so that students receive up-to-date information on social media.

8. Limitations

Despite these theoretical and managerial implications, this study has several limitations. First, not all attributes were considered, as this would have made the questionnaire unreasonably long and led to drop-outs due to respondents' perceived fatigue. Further studies should include more levels for each attribute to increase the accuracy of the data. The complexity of the stimuli can then be reduced by adopting the adaptive conjoint analysis and hybrid conjoint analysis methods. Second, the study only considered preferences and not performance. Further studies could include both preferences and performance through structural equation modelling to examine the holistic outcomes. Third, data were obtained only from students in Hong Kong. Hong Kong was a British colony in the past. The existing educational system was modified from British system. Future studies could obtain data from other countries, in which have different educational system, (e.g., India, Malaysia, Thailand, China, and the United States) to extend the investigation. Last but not least, this study was done before COVID-19. It would be interesting to do the survey again during the pandemic period.

9. Conclusions

Making the right decision in choosing a university is essential given that students will spend four or more years of their lives in higher education learning the skills they need to adapt to society, achieve their goals, and pursue their dreams. Entering a preferred university is a life milestone, and students need to consider their preferences carefully. This study used conjoint analysis to assess the factors in university choice among secondary school leavers. The results suggest that eWOM is the most influential factor, followed by peer influence and university reputation. It shows students have new considerations in the digital era. They pay more attention to information from social media and peers rather than to traditional media, as in the past. University ranking is one of the influencing factors but not as important as we expected. The theoretical and managerial implications of the study include recommendations to promote universities to prospective students, and some limitations of the study are provided as inspiration for further investigations.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, T.-M.W.; methodology, T.-M.W.; software, J.X.; formal analysis, T.-M.W.; investigation, T.-M.W.; resources, S.W.L. and J.X.; data curation, T.-M.W.; writing—original draft preparation, T.-M.W.; writing-review and editing, S.W.L., visualization, T.-M.W.; supervision, S.W.L. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

References

1. Soutar, G.N.; Turner, J.P. Students' preferences for university: A conjoint analysis. *Int. J. Educ. Manag.* **2002**, *16*, 40–45. [CrossRef]
2. Walsh, C.; Moorhouse, J.; Dunnett, A.; Barry, C. University choice: Which attributes matter when you are paying the full price? *Int. J. Consum. Stud.* **2015**, *39*, 670–681. [CrossRef]
3. Xu, X.; Yao, Z. Understanding the role of argument quality in the adoption of online reviews. *Online Inf. Rev.* **2015**, *39*, 885–902. [CrossRef]
4. Djafarova, E.; Bowes, T. "Instagram made Me buy it": Generation Z impulse purchases in fashion industry. *J. Retail. Consum. Serv.* **2021**, *59*, 102345. [CrossRef]
5. Agrey, L.; Lampadan, N. Determinant factors contributing to student choice in selecting a university. *J. Educ. Hum. Dev.* **2014**, *3*, 391–404.
6. Alonderiene, R.; Klimavičiene, A. Insights into Lithuanian students' choice of university and study program in management and economics. *Manag. J. Contemp. Manag. Issues* **2013**, *18*, 1–22.
7. Cattaneo, M.; Horta, H.; Malighetti, P.; Meoli, M.; Paleari, S. Effects of the financial crisis on university choice by gender. *High. Educ.* **2017**, *74*, 775–798. [CrossRef]
8. Whitehead, J.M.; Raffan, J.; Deaney, R. University choice: What influences the decisions of academically successful post-16 students? *High. Educ. Q.* **2006**, *60*, 4–26. [CrossRef]
9. Obermeit, K. Students' choice of universities in Germany: Structure, factors and information sources used. *J. Mark. High. Educ.* **2012**, *22*, 206–230. [CrossRef]
10. Hemsley-Brown, J.; Oplatka, I. University choice: What do we know, what don't we know and what do we still need to find out? *Int. J. Educ. Manag.* **2015**, *29*, 254–274. [CrossRef]
11. Dao, M.T.N.; Thorpe, A. What factors influence Vietnamese students' choice of university? *Int. J. Educ. Manag.* **2015**, *29*, 666–681. [CrossRef]
12. Raposo, M.; Alves, H. *A Model of University Choice: An Exploratory Approach*; Munich Personal RePEc Archive: Munich, Germany, 2007. Available online: https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/5523/1/MPRA_paper_5523.pdf (accessed on 14 March 2022).
13. Kutty, F.M. Mapping their road to university: First-generation students' choice and decision of university. *Int. Educ. Stud.* **2014**, *7*, 49–60. [CrossRef]
14. Sá, C.; Florax, R.J.; Rietveld, P. Living arrangement and university choice of Dutch prospective students. *Reg. Stud.* **2012**, *46*, 651–667. [CrossRef]
15. Sia, J.K.M. University choice: Implications for marketing and positioning. *Education* **2013**, *3*, 7–14.
16. Dawes, P.L.; Brown, J. Determinants of awareness, consideration, and choice set size in university choice. *J. Mark. High. Educ.* **2002**, *12*, 49–75. [CrossRef]
17. Dearden, J.A.; Grewal, R.; Lilien, G.L. Strategic manipulation of university rankings, the prestige effect, and student university choice. *J. Mark. Res.* **2019**, *56*, 691–707. [CrossRef]
18. Rudhumbu, N.; Tirumalai, A.; Kumari, B. Factors that influence undergraduate students' choice of a university: A case of Botho University in Botswana. *Int. J. Learn. Dev.* **2017**, *7*, 27–37. [CrossRef]
19. Horstschräer, J. University rankings in action? The importance of rankings and an excellence competition for university choice of high-ability students. *Econ. Educ. Rev.* **2012**, *31*, 1162–1176. [CrossRef]
20. Wang, C.L.; Chung, K.C.; Holdsworth, D.K.; Li, Y.; Fam, K.S. Chinese "little emperor", cultural values and preferred communication sources for university choice. *Young Consum.* **2009**, *10*, 120–132. [CrossRef]
21. Johnston, T.C. Who and what influences choice of university? Student and university perceptions. *Am. J. Bus. Educ. AJBE* **2010**, *3*, 15–24. [CrossRef]
22. Soedijati, E.K.; Pratminingsih, S.A. The impacts of marketing mix on students choice of university study case of private university in Bandung, Indonesia. In Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Business and Economic Research (2nd ICBER 2011), Kedah, Malaysia, 14–15 March 2011.
23. Constantinides, E.; Stagno, M.C.Z. Higher education marketing: A study on the impact of social media on study selection and university choice. *Int. J. Technol. Educ. Mark. IJTEM* **2012**, *2*, 41–58. [CrossRef]
24. Le, T.D.; Dobele, A.R.; Robinson, L.J. Information sought by prospective students from social media electronic word-of-mouth during the university choice process. *J. High. Educ. Policy Manag.* **2019**, *41*, 18–34. [CrossRef]

25. Callender, C.; Jackson, J. Does the fear of debt constrain choice of university and subject of study? *Stud. High. Educ.* **2008**, *33*, 405–429. [CrossRef]
26. Mangan, J.; Hughes, A.; Davies, P.; Slack, K. Fair access, achievement and geography: Explaining the association between social class and students' choice of university. *Stud. High. Educ.* **2010**, *35*, 335–350. [CrossRef]
27. Hagel, P.; Shaw, R.N. How important is study mode in student university choice? *High. Educ. Q.* **2010**, *64*, 161–182. [CrossRef]
28. Fosu, F.F.; Poku, K. Exploring the factors that influence students' choice of higher education in Ghana. *Eur. J. Bus. Manag.* **2014**, *6*, 209–220.
29. Price, I.F.; Matzdorf, F.; Smith, L.; Agahi, H. The impact of facilities on student choice of university. *Facilities* **2003**, *21*, 212–222. [CrossRef]
30. Ivy, J. Choosing futures: Influence of ethnic origin in university choice. *Int. J. Educ. Manag.* **2010**, *24*, 391–403. [CrossRef]
31. Padlee, S.F.; Kamaruddin, A.R.; Baharun, R. International students' choice behavior for higher education at Malaysian private universities. *Int. J. Mark. Stud.* **2010**, *2*, 202. [CrossRef]
32. Dawes, P.L.; Brown, J. The composition of consideration and choice sets in undergraduate university choice: An exploratory study. *J. Mark. High. Educ.* **2005**, *14*, 37–59. [CrossRef]
33. Joseph, M.; Mullen, E.W.; Spake, D. University branding: Understanding students' choice of an educational institution. *J. Brand Manag.* **2012**, *20*, 1–12. [CrossRef]
34. Çokgezen, M. Determinants of university choice: A study on economics departments in Turkey. *Yükseköğretim Derg.* **2014**, *4*, 23–31. [CrossRef]
35. Quacquarelli Symonds Limited. QS University Ranking. 2022. Available online: https://www.qs.com (accessed on 14 March 2022).
36. Carvalho, L.; Brandao, A.; Pinto, L. Understanding the importance of eWOM on higher education institutions' brand equity. *J. Mark. High. Educ.* **2021**, *31*, 261–279. [CrossRef]
37. Malhotra, N.K. *Marketing Research*; Pearson: London, UK, 2010.
38. Hair, J.F.; Black, W.; Babin, B.; Anderson, R. *Multivariate Data Analysis*; Pearson: London, UK, 2010.
39. Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department. 2016 Population By-Census. 2022. Available online: https://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/ (accessed on 21 February 2022).
40. Nuseir, M.T.; Refae, G. Factors influencing the choice of studying at UAE universities: An empirical research on the adoption of educational marketing strategies. *J. Mark. High. Educ.* **2021**, 1–23. [CrossRef]
41. Maringe, F. University and course choice. *Int. J. Educ. Manag.* **2006**, *20*, 466–479. [CrossRef]
42. Homel, J.; Thompson, K.; Leadbeater, B. Changes in positive and negative peer influences and depressive symptoms from adolescence to young adulthood. *J. Adolesc.* **2020**, *84*, 113–122. [CrossRef]
43. Thorson, K.; Rodgers, S. Relationships between blogs as EWOM and interactivity, perceived interactivity and parasocial interaction. *J. Interact. Advert.* **2006**, *6*, 5–44. [CrossRef]
44. Yang, J.; Mundel, J. Effects of brand feedback to negative eWOM on brand love/hate: An expectancy violation approach. *J. Prod. Brand Manag.* **2022**, *31*, 279–292. [CrossRef]
45. Ahmad, F.; Guzman, F. Consumer skepticism about online reviews and their decision-making process: The role of review self-efficacy and regulatory focus. *J. Consum. Mark.* **2021**, *38*, 587–600. [CrossRef]
46. McManus, R.; Haddock-Fraser, J.; Rands, P. A methodology to understand student choice of higher education institutions: The case of the United Kingdom. *J. High. Educ. Policy Manag.* **2017**, *39*, 390–405. [CrossRef]
47. Kodapanakkal, R.; Brandt, M.; Kogler, C.; Beest, I. Self-interest and data protection drive the adoption and moral acceptability of big data technologies: A conjoint analysis approach. *Comput. Hum. Behav.* **2020**, *108*, 106303. [CrossRef]
48. Watermeyer, R.; Crick, T.; Knight, C. Digital disruption in the time of COVID-19: Learning technologists' accounts of institutional barriers to online learning, teaching and assessment in UK universities. *Int. J. Acad. Dev.* **2021**, 1–15. [CrossRef]
49. Bilsland, C.; Carter, L.; Wood, L. Work integrated learning internships in transnational education. *Educ. Train.* **2019**, *61*, 359–373. [CrossRef]
50. Crittenden, W.; Biel, I.; Loverly, W. Embracing digitalization: Student learning and new technologies. *J. Mark. Educ.* **2019**, *41*, 5–14. [CrossRef]