

DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF PROSPECTIVE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: A PROPOSED GENERIC COMPLEMENTARY MODEL

Background

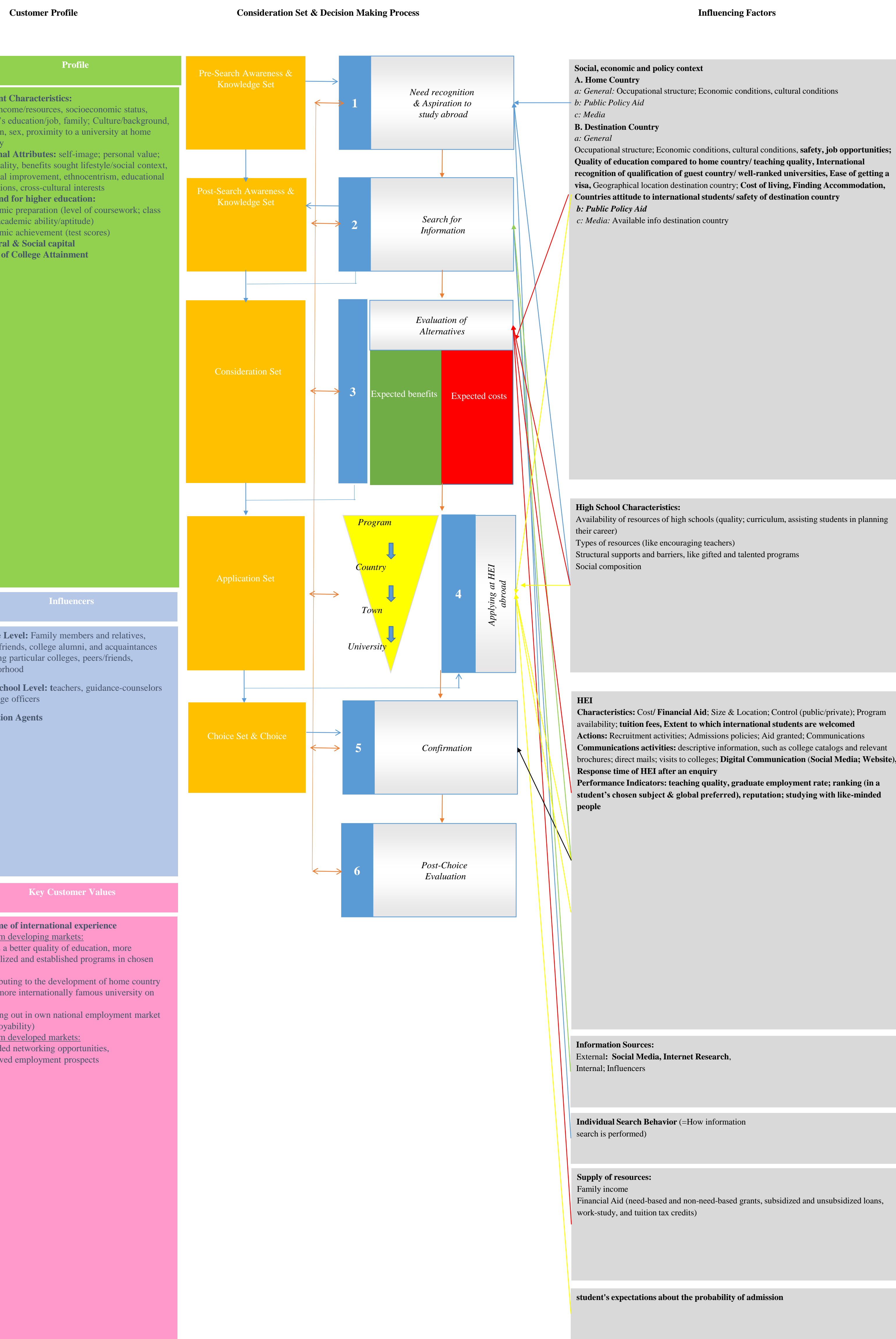
- The global education market is rapidly expanding and the number of students has increased significantly over the last years. Despite this positive development, German universities are affected by a high international competition. Prospective international students (PIS) can choose of a broad variety of educational products and will apply at several universities at the same time.
- To support German Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in meeting these challenges, the DAAD (= German Academic Exchange Service) has set up different research and supporting programs (GATE-Germany 2018). However, these programs do not fully support HEI marketing departments in understanding the decision-making process of PIS. Knowledge of the decision-making process and its influencing factors are a central prerequisite for attracting PIS to study programs at German HEIs.

The purpose of this research was to propose a generic conceptual model on the decision-making process of PIS including influencing parameters.

Method

- Scoping study and content analyses upon theoretical concepts in this field but also upon the latest empirical findings ((Hobsons EMEA 2014; QS Enrolment Solutions 2017, 2018; QS Intelligence Unit 2016, 2018)

Age of concept	Author	Year	Title of the conceptual framework	Research Approach	Population	Integration of para-meters
≤ 10 years	Oliveira & Soares	2016	Conceptual Model for the decision process of international students	Literature Review & Qualitative Study (interview with currently-enrolled students in engineering programs at a public university in North of Portugal)	PIS	X
11-20 years	Vrontis et al	2007	Concept a: Preliminary integrated generic higher education student-choice model	Generic Concept build upon Jackson (1982); Chapman (1986) & Hanson and Litten's (1989)	US/CA	X
	Vrontis et al	2007	Concept b: A contemporary higher education student-choice model for developed countries	Conceptual Model	Students from developed countries	X
	Cubillo et al	2006	A model of international students' preferences	Conceptual Model	PIS	X
	Perna	2006	Conceptual model of student college choice	Conceptual Model	US	X
21-30 years	Hanson & Litten	1989	Mapping the road to academe	Conceptual Model	n.d.	X
> 30 years	Hossler & Gallagher	1987	Three-Phase model of college choice	Generic Concept build upon Alexander (1978); Anderson, Bowman, and Tinto (1972); Jackson (1982); Litten (1982); Chapman (1981)	US/CA	X
	Chapman	1981; 1986	A behavior model of the college selection process	Behavioral Model	CA	X
	Jackson	1982	Combined student choice model	Conceptual Model	US	X



Findings

- After performing a scoping analysis it was concluded that **another generic concept would be characterized by the same limitations** as the existing theoretical concepts: too complex and less practice-oriented for use in HEI-Marketing. For this reason, we have tried to transfer our knowledge on the decision making process and its influencing factors to a practical marketing tool.
- The Buying Proforma by Dibb/Simkin was used** as a basic framework as it is "built on the accepted best practice principles from the buying behaviour literature and, over the years, has proved very successful in portraying the nature of the customer challenge" (Dibb and Simkin 2008, p. 42). The Buying Proforma integrates
 - a **Customer Profile**;
 - Buying Center Composition** (= people involved in the purchase and their respective roles);
 - Key Customer Values** (= factors considered most important by customers);
 - Buying Process Mechanics** (= steps involved in the buying process)
 - and the **Core Influences** (= any factors which have an influence on the buying decision) (Dibb and Simkin 2008).
- The developed Buying Proforma (s. left) **holds all the relevant information on a general PIS, making choices to study abroad**. More relevant influencing factors which were highlighted in the empirical studies are in bold print.

We advise marketing departments to use the provided proforma as a starting point and ask to develop target market specific proforma (PIS of a specific region or country in focus) and integrate their findings.

Additionally, we hope our idea stimulates creative thinking about communication and service offers to PIS. Not to mention the opportunity to create more efficient marketing activities by considering pull (= marketing measures to create demand for studying abroad) as well as push (= focus on countries in which conditions support study abroad aspirations of PIS) dynamics in attracting PIS.