Marketing of IT Programs – A Comparative Study of Two Branches of CMC Ltd. In West Bengal

Anamitra Roy
* Freelance Writer and Management Professional, Salt Lake City, Kolkata, West Bengal, India.

Abstract

The current study is on two branches of CMC Ltd. (a pioneer in imparting training on information technology based courses) located in the province of West Bengal (India). One is in Salt Lake and another is in Konnagar. From 2003 to 2013 the contribution of the Salt Lake campus has decreased from 28% to 1% of student intake of entire state of West Bengal (for CMC). During the same period the other campus increased its contribution from 31% to 37%. The Salt Lake campus has location advantage being in proximity to IT hub of Kolkata (provincial capital) whereas the other one is located in a suburban area. Both the branches were identical in terms of type & quality of courses, quality of faculty (as same people used to teach in both the campuses), advertisement and other policies. Poor student intake of Salt Lake campus posed a significant challenge for the organization. It is in this context this study attempts to explore the possible causes that led to a sharp contrast between the campuses in terms of student intake.

Key Words: *Information Technology, students' perception, students' satisfaction.*

1. Introduction:

Computer Maintenance Corporation (CMC) Academy, Salt Lake was established in 1996 in BD 86, Sector 1, Salt Lake City, Kolkata 700064. It started with its training operations in 1997. Immediately since the beginning this institute gained acceptance among the students. This can be proved from the fact that the number of admissions in this institute was 12% of CMC'S total admissions in Kolkata in October, 1997 and this rate was steadily maintained for the next 22 months (**Source:** CMC Academy, Salt Lake).

It was in 2001 that this institute got awarded with "Highest Business Volume Trophy" by achieving 37% of CMC's total admissions in West Bengal. In its effort to get this trophy this branch had beaten CMC Academy, Konnagar who was the winner in 1996, 1997, 1998 and 1999.

At present this institute is situated in BD 29, Sector 1, Salt Lake City, Kolkata 700064.

If we go to the recent past it can be seen that this institute was able to maintain its track record of student enrollments all the way since its inception. But the picture changed 2011 onwards. This can be proved by the series of statistics shown in Table 1.

Table 1:

Enrollment details of CMC Academy, Salt Lake branch and its % contributions to total number of enrollments

Year	Number of Enrollments			% Contribution of Salt Lake Branch
	CMC, Salt Lake	CMC, Konnagar	CMC Ltd, West Bengal	
2003	2150	2367	7681	28% (aprox.)
2004	1823	2589	8298	22% (aprox.)
2005	2220	1972	8548	26% (aprox.)
2006	2445	2874	9064	27% (aprox.)
2007	2699	2543	9342	29% (aprox.)
2008	2982	3764	9634	31% (aprox.)
2009	2199	3463	10022	22% (aprox.)
2010	2558	2832	10640	24% (aprox.)
2011	2062	3777	10866	19% (aprox.)
2012	114	4198	11415	1% (aprox.)

Source: CMC Ltd, Regional Head Office – Eastern Zone.

Previously from 1997 to 2011, on an average 40% of the annual earnings of the Salt Lake branch were spent for marketing activities. It was in 2012 that in spite of maintaining almost the same budget for marketing activities there was a sharp fall in the volume of business in terms of student admissions. Uniformity in syllabus, teaching methodology and teaching personnel also could not change the picture.

2. Literature Review

i) Zemsky and Eisenstein (2000) wanted to explore if there is a relation between the expenses for training and the increase in the use of technology.

In order to find out the relation between the degree of use of technology and the demand for training, the researchers attempted to analyze the technical environment of the firms and the investments made by the employers for training employees. They reached the conclusion that there is a direct relation between the degree of the technology used and the expenses for training.

ii) Ivergard (2000) wanted to judge if the requirements for the training programs are met or not and the importance of the service delivery of training programs. Through his research reached the conclusion that demand for training will increase if the skill requirements of the trainees are being met through training. He also concluded that a training program can become more effective if the service delivery is done by considering the existing culture of the organization.

iii) Payton (2000) with the objective to judge the factors on which the demand and supply of technically skilled workers depended started a research. He reached the conclusion that the demand and supply for technically skilled workers depend on the application of the theory of social contract between the employer and the employee, the use of technology, restructuring the work force and training the workers adequately.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

As indicated in the introduction part, the research questions are as follows:

1) To identify the difference in expectation between existing and prospective students and to identify the courses of action to bridge the gap?

2) To what extent the existing students are satisfied about the academic and non-academic services for which they turned up in the institute and got admitted?

3) What are the factors that caused dissatisfaction?

4) What prompted the existing students to choose the Salt Lake branch for thinking about getting admitted?

5) What is the USP of the institute?

6) What media of advertising activities caught the attention of the existing students to enquire about the course and the branch?

7) Do perceptions about CMC Ltd. and the Salt Lake branch match? Is there any difference in satisfaction between students of Salt Lake branch and other branches about their campus and course?

8) Why students are joining other branches of CMC Ltd and not choosing CMC Academy, Salt Lake?

3.2 Data

Equal number of students from both the campuses i.e. 75 students from each campus took part in a survey. The data received from the survey was put under cross tabulation from the point of view of demographic factors of course enrolled into and in some cases age wise. This enabled to explore responses of each and every demographic group and explore if any particular demographic section has significantly different opinions about the same matter/ factors or not. Such cross tabulation of responses also helped to explore the concentration of a variable around a particular group, if any, the main objective being, studying responses and its deviations from four different standpoints. Also the data captured has been put under statistical analysis (T-test analysis) to examine the statistical relation between the data from the two centres. This is done to capture those relations between the various portions of the data that may not seem to have a significant relation by a superficial study but actually may have a statistical relation.

A summary of distribution of demographic variables of respondents participating in the survey are as follows:

i) **Distribution of Age:** 139 (92%) respondents are young falling under the age group of 20 years and below to 40 years. 7 (5%) were middle aged falling under the age group of 41 to 50 years and 4 (3%) were from the heading of seniors falling under the age group of 51 years and above

ii) **Gender Profile:** Among the respondents 104 (69%) were male and 46 (31%) were female

iii) **Performance of Participating Students:** 46 (30%) students were falling under the category of 40% to 59% marks comprising the group of low marks students. 104 (69%) students were falling under the category of 60% to 76% and above marks and NA comprising section high marks students

iv) **Disciplines of Study:** 15 respondents were chosen from each of the five disciplines (MCA, BCA, PG and UG Diploma, Short Term Courses) from each of the centres to participate in the survey.

4. Results and Discussions

Questionnaire required respondents to rate their satisfaction with respect to academic & non-academic factors as well as overall satisfaction with the campus. From these ratings (of individual students) average scores for each factor have been estimated for each campus and compared. Apart from the comparison of absolute mean satisfaction scores, statistical significance of different scores is also tested through t-test (of the mean satisfaction score). For Null Hypothesis was that there is no significant difference in satisfaction between the two campuses and variance of satisfaction rating are unequal.

Based on such premises null hypothesis is tested at 95% confidence level. Finally it is on basis of all the above analysis, that research questions have been answered and conclusions reached.

Observations from Cross Tabulation:

a) Factors triggering Enrollments:

In Salt Lake campus, factors leading to enrollments were placement facilities (ranked "1" to "3" by 56%), quality of course curriculum (ranked "1" to "3" by 55%) and good teachers (ranked "1" to "3" by 51%) respectively.

In Konnagar campus, factors leading to enrollments were good teachers (ranked "1" to "3" by 53%), acceptance of CMC's certificates (ranked "1" to "3" by 43%) and lastly quality of course curriculum and placement facilities (ranked "1" to "3" by 41%).

b) Satisfaction Level – Academic Factors:

In Salt Lake centre, students were satisfied with faculty's knowledge level (3.0) and faculty's teaching skills (2.8) respectively. This was followed by timely coverage of sessions (2.2), maintenance of class timings (2.2), quality of study materials (2.2) and confidence level on the topic (2.2)

In Konnagar centre, students were satisfied primarily with timely coverage of sessions (4.6), secondarily with faculty's teaching skills (4.4) and quality of study materials (4.4) and thirdly with maintenance of class timings (4.3).

c) Satisfaction Level – Non Academic Factors:

In Salt Lake centre, students were satisfied with condition of computers in labs (3.0), access to computers (2.2) and collection of books in library (1.8) respectively.

In Konnagar centre, students were primarily satisfied with condition of computers (4.4) and access to them ((4.4). This was followed by collection of books in library (4.2) and access to library (4.0) respectively.

d) Overall Satisfaction:

Mean score of satisfaction of Salt Lake (2.0) centre was lower than that of Konnagar (3.9) centre.

e) Factors Influencing Selection of Branch:

In Salt Lake campus, factors influencing selection of branch were image of CMC (ranked "1" to "3" by 80%), ease of commuting/ close proximity (ranked "1" to "3" by 62%) and performance of branch (ranked "1" to "3" by 52%) respectively.

In Konnagar campus, factors influencing selection of branch were ease of commuting/ close proximity (ranked "1" to "3" by 50%), image of CMC (ranked "1" to "3" by 48%) and convincing advertisement (ranked "1" to "3" by 46%) respectively

f) Perceptions about Better Services in Other Branches:

Responses of Salt Lake campus students [66 (88%)] saying that better services are available in other branches was higher compared that of Konnagar campus [3 (4%)].

g) Effectiveness of Medium of Advertising of CMC:

In Konnagar campus only 6 students said that they have not seen advertisements of CMC that made them enquire about courses compared to 43 students of Salt Lake campus.

In Salt Lake branch, students had seen advertisements of CMC (that made them enquire about courses) in newspapers (2.1), hoardings (2.7) and banners (3.4) whereas students of Konnagar branch had seen such advertisements in education fairs (1.2), newspaper (2.1) and radio (2.9)

h) Comparison of CMC with Competitors:

According to students of Salt Lake centre, CMC is ahead in terms of quality of education (1.6) than career development (1.0), NIIT is at par with both these parameters (4.2) and BRAINWARE is ahead in terms of career development (3.2) than quality of education (3.0).

According to students of Konnagar centre, CMC is ahead in terms of career development (4.4) than quality of education (4.0), NIIT is ahead in terms of career development (2.4) than quality of education (2.2) and BRAINWARE is ahead in terms of career development (2.2) than quality of education (1.8).

i) Comparison of Visibility of Advertisements of CMC in Various Media with Competitors:

According to students of Salt Lake centre, advertisements of CMC have been seen mostly in banners (29.0), seminars (28.0) and newspapers (27.0). Advertisements of NIIT have mostly been seen in hoarding (70.0), newspapers (68.0) and seminars (55.0). Advertisements of BRAINWARE have mostly been seen in hoarding (65.0), newspapers (63.0) and seminars (60.0).

According to students of Konnagar centre, advertisements of CMC have mostly been seen in newspapers and hoardings (59.0), banners (55.0) and seminars (52.0), advertisements of NIIT have mostly been seen in newspapers (69.0), hoardings (51.0) and banners (40.0) and advertisements of BRAINWARE have mostly been seen in newspapers (68.0), hoardings (46.0) and banners (43.0).

j) Comparison of Advertisements of CMC and its Competitors:

According to students of Salt Lake branch, primary features of advertisements of CMC are frequency (1.8), distinguishability (1.4) and sharing relevant information (1.4) respectively. Those of NIIT are distinguishability (5.0) and frequency (4.6) respectively. Those of BRAINWARE are distinguishability (4.0) and frequency (3.4) respectively.

According to students of Konnagar branch, primary features of advertisements of CMC are distinguishability (4.0) and frequency (3.8) respectively. Those of NIIT are distinguishability (2.8) and frequency (2.4) respectively. Those of BRAINWARE are distinguishability (3.0) and transparency (1.8) respectively.

k) Will to Get Admitted again in Same Centre:

Responses of Salt Lake [15 (20%)] branch towards will to upgrade in same centre were lower than Konnagar [72 (96%)] branch.

l) Will to Refer Someone in Same Centre:

Will to refer someone in same centre was lower in Salt Lake [15 (20%)] branch compared to Konnagar [72 (96%)] branch.

m) Meeting of Expectations:

Responses of students saying that their expectations have been fulfilled in Salt Lake [11 (14.6%)] branch was lower than that of Konnagar [68 (90.6)] branch.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

A) Conclusions:

a) Expectations and Perceptions:

Students in Salt Lake centre joined this institute with the expectation of benefitting through placement facilities, quality course and good teachers respectively. In Konnagar centre students expected to benefit through good teachers, acceptance of CMC's certificates, quality course and placement facilities.

Students of Salt Lake centre ranked faculty's teaching skills (rank 2) and knowledge level (rank 1) highly among academic factors. Quality of study materials (rank 3) and timely coverage of sessions (rank 3) which can be connected to course curriculum were also ranked highly. However, only 40% MCA (6) and 40% PGD (6) students ranked quality course curriculum between "1" to "3". Only1 BCA student felt the importance of professional gain.

Placement facilities were ranked last among the non-academic factors, particularly STC, UGD and MCA students thought it was less important as 6, 5 and 6 of them ranked it from 1 to 3 respectively. This lead to 88% students in Salt Lake branch say that they think better services are being given in other branches compared to 4% of Konnagar branch and 46% of combined responses. An echo of the above could be heard when 20% students in Salt Lake centre said that they have the will to get admitted to other courses and will to refer someone in the same centre compared to 96% of Konnagar campus and 58% of combined responses. These in turn lead to only 14.6% students in Salt Lake branch say that their expectations have been fulfilled compared to 90.6% of Konnagar branch and 52.67% of the combined responses**.**

b) Satisfaction :

The mean score of overall satisfaction of students of Salt Lake (2.0) centre are lower than figures of all 150 participants (2.9) and Konnagar branch (3.9). The repercussions of this can be seen in the fact that Salt Lake centre students were dissatisfied with academic (2.23) and non-academic factors (1.56) compared to the figures of the academic (4.13) and nonacademic factors (3.67) of Konnagar centre and the figures of academic (3.18) and non-academic factors (2.61) of 150 students. The STC students of this branch were most dissatisfied with academic factors (1.43) and second most dissatisfied with non-academic factors (1.44). Their dissatisfaction was due to placement (1.0), uninterrupted power (1.0) and lack of extra time given to them (1.0).

Among academic factors in Salt Lake centre the area of utmost dissatisfaction was extra consultation time with faculty (1.0) compared to Konnagar (3.4) centre. Salt Lake branch students were also dissatisfied with seminars (1.0), addressing of grievances (1.2) and placement facility compared to Konnagar's 3.0, 3.6 and 3.8 respectively.

T-test analysis tells us that there is a significant statistical difference between the mean scores of satisfaction of academic factors and overall satisfaction of the two centres but it is not there between the mean scores of satisfaction of non-academic factors of the two centres.

c) Factors Triggering Selection of Salt Lake Branch:

Students selected the Salt Lake centre for enrollments depending on image of CMC, ease of commuting/ close proximity and performance of branch.

In Konnagar centre students selected the branch depending on ease of commuting/ close proximity, image of CMC and convincing advertisement. Apart from this 45% students in Konnagar felt the importance of a convincing counselor and ranked it from "1" to "3" compared to 25% students of Salt Lake.

d) Advertising:

43 students in Salt Lake branch, out of which 12 were STC students, said that they had not seen advertisements of CMC which lead them to enquire about courses compared to 6 students of Konnagar branch [Table no. 13 (i)].

Those noticing advertisements in Salt Lake centre ranked banner (1), seminars (2) and newspapers (3) as the most effective medium. In Konnagar newspapers (1), hoardings (1), banners (2) and seminars (3) emerged as the most important medium.

Students from both centres rated transparency among the least important feature of CMC's advertisements. Sharing relevant information was rated as the second most unimportant feature of CMC's advertisements in Salt Lake centre.

More importantly, only 5.33% (4) students in Salt Lake centre rated convincing advertisement an important factor influencing selection of branch and assigned ranks from 1 to 3 compared to 46% (34) in Konnagar centre.

B) Recommendations:

a) Expectations and Perceptions:

In both these branches placement facilities is an important expectation which catalyzed admissions, although with varied intensities. So it has to be given more attention as students joined the Salt Lake centre with this expectation primarily and the dissatisfactions from it are spoiling perceptions about this branch. This has to be done particularly keeping in mind STC, UGD and MCA students.

Quality of course can be bettered for MCA and PGD students by timely and detailed coverage.

The BCA students can be counseled on a regular basis to improve their perceptions about professional gain and social recognition.

b) <u>Satisfaction:</u>

Efforts should be given to increase the satisfaction from academic and non-academic factors in Salt Lake campus as in turn these will help to increase overall satisfaction. Due to prevailing centralized policies it is difficult to bring in changes in working pattern of most of such factors. But there are areas where such changes can be easily brought in without disturbing centralized policies. For example, extra time donated to students by teachers (1.0) which is an area of utmost concern for students from all courses can be increased easily. Also changes can be brought in delivery methods. More interactive delivery methodology, flexible class timings and weekend batches for working executives can help in this regard to increase satisfaction from academic factors. Also faster addressing of student grievances, keeping in mind the demand of STC students and introduction of more seminars can accelerate the purpose.

c) <u>Selection of Branch:</u>

Improvement of placement facilities will enable the management of Salt Lake branch to get written matters of appreciation from the HR heads of the organizations where pupils are getting absorbed. Highlighting of these written matters and performances of students will further improve image of this branch which is expected to have a positive impact on number of admissions.

A convincing counselor may help to improve image of the branch in front of prospective students who walk into the Salt Lake branch to gather information about various courses.

d) <u>Advertising:</u>

There are three aspects of CMC's advertisements. Firstly, for advertisements also there are centralized policies. Same advertisement is getting published everywhere. It is getting noticed in Konnagar but not to that extent in Salt Lake. Secondly, mediums selected by students in both branches prove that localized advertising mostly attracts students. This proves that more of local advertising should be done in Salt Lake through advertisements in local newspapers and television channels. This also questions the central policy behind everything.

Moreover, there is room for improvement in advertising through seminars (rated 6th most important medium) and setting up kiosks (rated 7th most important medium).

Secondly, low rating of transparency and sharing relevant information proves that the matter of advertisements needs to be altered.

Thirdly, STC students are depending on impulses for getting admitted if they are not depending on visibility of advertisements and convincing counselor. This is because such students stay in the institute for a short time and are usually influenced to get admitted to fill the skill gap in them. This impulsive buying behavior can be converted into planned buying through increasing local advertisements in the IT hub in Sector V. The working

executives who require short term courses to fill up the skill gap in them can be tapped easily and sales of slots of short term courses can be rocketed.

References:

- Ivergard, T. (2000). Information Technology and Knowledge based Business Development. *Behavior and Information Technology,* 163 -169.
- Payton, W. (2000). Influences of the 'social contract', technology and restructuring, and training on the supply and demand fopr skilled technology workers. Behavior & Information Technology, 211- 219.
- Zemsky, R, & Eisenstein, R, (2000, September – October). Gauging the Demand for Education & Training by High Tech Employers. *Change*, 51 -54.

<u>Appendix 1</u>

Questionnaire Used in the Survey:

<u>Questionnaire:</u>

Name: (optional)

Age: (years)   Course Name: Branch Name:
Date of Commencement: Performance:

1) Rank your expectations prior to enrollment in CMC Ltd.

Expectations	Rankings
Quality course curriculum	
Placement facilities	
Good teachers	
Acceptance of CMC's certificates	
Improving/ upgrading your acceptance in your profession	
Social recognition	
Improvement of your knowledge level	
Excellent infrastructure	
Others (specify) _____	

2) Rate the following academic factors in a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is the least.

Particulars	1	2	3	4	5
On time coverage of sessions					
Faculty's teaching skills					

Particulars					
Faculty's knowledge on the subject					
Maintenance of class timings					
Quality of study material					
Your confidence level on the topic					
Extra consultation time with the faculty					

3) Rate the following nonacademic factors in a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is the least.

Particulars	1	2	3	4	5
General health and hygiene conditions					
Uninterrupted power supply					
Library facility – collection of books					
Library facility – access to it					
Condition of the computers in the labs					
Access to the computer labs					
Placement facility by the HR department					
Addressing of student grievances (if any)					
Extracurricular activities like seminars, session with industry experts, functions etc.					

4) Rate your overall satisfaction as a student of the institute in a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is the least.

Particulars	Rating

Overall satisfaction	

5) Rank the reason(s) that made you join this branch of the institute.

Reasons	Rank
Ease of commuting / close proximity	
Image of CMC Ltd.	
Referral of ex-students / known people	
Performance of branch	
Convincing advertisement	
Convincing counselor	
Legal recognition	
Others (specify):	

6) Do you think students studying in the other branches are getting something that you are not getting in your branch?

Yes   No

 If yes, specify: (optional)

7) Have you noticed ads of CMC Ltd that made you enquire you for courses?

Yes   No

If yes, rank in terms of numbers the media of advertising that caught your attention (if

Applicable to you) and prompted you to enquire about the courses and the branch.

Media of Advertising	Rank
Newspaper	
Radio	

Hoarding	
Banner	
Kiosks	
Seminars in schools, colleges etc.	
Others (specify): _____	

8) Rate CMC Ltd. and it's below mentioned competitors on the basis of the following grounds in a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is the least.

Particulars	CMC Ltd	NIIT	BRAINWARE
Quality of Education			
Career Development			

9) Tick the medium in which you noticed ads of CMC and its competitors like NIIT, BRAINWARE etc. (if any).

Particulars	CMC Ltd	NIIT	BRAINWARE
Newspaper			
Radio			
Hoarding			
Banner			
Kiosks			
Seminars in schools, colleges etc.			
Others (specify):			

10) Rate the following aspects of CMC'S ads in response to its below mentioned competitors in a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is the least.

Particulars	CMC Ltd	NIIT	BRAINWARE
Transparency			
Sharing relevant information			
Distinguishability			
Frequency			

11) If you want to get admitted to another course, would you like to do it in this branch or in any other branch?

This Branch   Other Branch

State reasons: _____ (optional)

12) Would you refer someone to study in this branch or any other branch?

This branch   Other Branches

State reasons: _____ (optional)

13) Have all your expectations been met after joining the institute?

Yes   No

If no, give reasons and suggestions:
_____ (optional)