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By the People for the People: People's influence on students in selecting Technical Educational Institute

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Abstract

Purpose

There is a rapid growth of technical education in last decade in terms of the no. of institutes and the intake capacity in India. However, there is noticeable gap in between the actual no. of enrollments and intake capacity of these institutes. In Maharashtra 41% of seats were vacant in 2016. 'People' factor of service mix is very important mix of education services. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the people factor that influence students in selecting technical educational institute of their choice.

Design methodology

A qualitative research was conducted with a survey of students those who are presently enrolled (pre-students) and those who have completed their study (post-students) belonging to the institutes offering technical education affiliated to the North Maharashtra University, Jalgaon.

Findings

The study found that there are some reference groups/influencers related to students and institutes that have a direct influence on the students in the making decision of selection of technical education. Their satisfaction of this decision also has relationships with the influencers.

Research limitations

The survey is limited to the students of technical education belonging to North Maharashtra University, Jalgaon.

Practical implications

The marketing segmentation of technical education will be better if we consider these reference groups (people mix) as an influencer. It is found that there are some People Mix - influencers - related to the institute and previous schools along with peoples associated with the students. So, it is useful to consider all these influencers rather than considering only traditional students related influencers. This article provides empirical support for the importance of interpersonal influence for educational choices. Different communication strategies can be used for these influencers who motivates students towards their decision in selecting technical education. The paper represents new form of influencers that motivates students in selecting their technical educational institute.

Keywords People mix, influencers, Technical Education, North Maharashtra University, Jalgaon.

Introduction

Lewis and Smith observed that every college and university has a mission but very few fully identify who they serve [1]. Customers of educational organization are classified as Internal customers; students, staff and management and External customers such as parents, other schools and colleges, alumni and community [2]. The college searching process is a long one. McDonough (2004) stated that the transition/searching process begins during the middle school years. Students begin to develop college awareness and ideas of academic aspirations. During 10th (SSC) and 12th (HSC) students began looking for schools that meet their needs socially and academically (McDonough 2004).

After searching internal sources, if the student realizes that the information gathered is not enough to base on and decide, external sources of information are considered. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2008) the sources of information available to prospective customers includes: (i) personal non-marketer controlled sources. These include family, friends, acquaintances, teachers, colleagues etc. (ii) personal marketer controlled sources whose examples include sales representatives; (iii) non-personal non-marketer controlled. Publicity in the mass media is an example of this source; (iv) non-personal marketer controlled, examples include but not limited to advertisements, prospectuses, websites. Family opinions, peer influence, secondary school support, and academic preparation are the examples which ultimately influence students' decisions to attend institute [3].

People Factor such as; Parents, Brother & Sisters, Relatives, Friends/Peer, Current & Post students of institute, previous School/Coaching Teachers, Staff and Management People of Institute, act as a reference group for the pre-students (prospective students) to take their decision on institute selection. Reference Group is the group to which the individual relates or aspires to relate himself or herself psychologically and a source for framing his or her experiences, perceptions, cognition, and ideas of self. Robert K. Merton hypothesized that individuals compare themselves with reference groups of people who occupy the social role to which the individual aspires [4]. There are several people who influence a student's institute decision, but their degree of impact on students varies from school to school [5].

People factor of Service Mix

The tradition four Ps marketing approaches work well for goods but additional elements require attention in service business; People, Physical Evidence and Process. Because most services are provided by the people and experienced by the people by their motivation and behavioral characteristics, they make a huge difference in customer satisfaction [6]. This is the main principle of service management; 'By the people for the people'.

Parents: The home setting is a particularly rich and ongoing source of information for college-educated families [7]. The collision between the worlds of institute and of home and family must be understood by institutions as lower-income students become

more prevalent [8]. Many studies have connected parent support and encouragement to institute plans [9]. Parents are main source of financial aspects; however, their support is determined by the education level. When parents lack firsthand “institute knowledge” and have limited financial and social resources, they consequently have a lessened capacity to facilitate institute planning [10]. According to Hossler, Schmit and Vesper (1999), parental support was a key factor in influencing students' aspirations to go onto college. Typically, students whose parents did not attend college/institute graduation find it more difficult to address the issues related to choose, chances, and application needs when it comes to college. Typically, these students begin thinking about institute much later than do students who have parents and family members who have attended higher education institutions.

Brothers & Sisters: When parents are not educated or unknown about the institutes, the supporting information is provided by the siblings. However, graduate elder siblings or undergoing graduate siblings have a major role in the decision of selection. In rural area where the parents are uneducated and are unable to provide information, elder siblings play a vital role even; they become a financial source for the pre-students if they are employed.

Relatives: Relatives are contacted, particularly those are residing in urban area, as they supposed to have more knowledge on the institutes and programs. Students contact their relatives for getting information on cost involved in the related education and for knowing number of colleges/institutes available in the urban area and compare them with the budget.

Friends / Peer: If students are exposed to other individuals such as friends, who have studied in that institute, students will often rely on those individual for their valuable guidance on campus life, infrastructure, teaching methodology, examination pattern etc. A peer group of friends, is both a social group and a primary group of people who have similar interests, age, background, or social status. They prefer to talk about school and their careers with their parents and other interpersonal relationships with their peers [11]. Peer influence is dependent upon variables of friendship closeness, high school track placement, race, and gender composition of the relationship [12]. Intuition reinforces the finding that peers who are academically-oriented are an asset for career aspirations [13]. Peer influence for these youths appears to be the most influential factor in the decision about institute [14]. But if those peer effects are asymmetric so that students at different levels of behavior or characteristics are influenced differently by their interaction with others, then peer effects introduce an issue of economic efficiency, too. Taylor (1992) is of the belief that friends' advice is the major source of information influencing students' choice of tertiary educational institutions.

School / Coaching teacher: Students do report the desire for a quality high school counselor who might guide them through a process that seems daunting, complicated and time-consuming [15]. School counsellor can increase the confidence of families who may otherwise shy away from the institute. Parents' discussions with counselors are a significant step toward in making

institute decision, which highlights the benefits of cultivating early positive parent-counselor relationships [16]. Students who do not have family members who have attended institute often look towards the school as their main support. The school creates the environment closest to the institute setting for these students. School and coaching teachers act as a career advisor.

Staff of Institute: While there are undoubtedly numerous factors that influence to enter the technical education, the relationships built during formal and informal counselling exercises adopted by the institute can affect personal decisions. Counseling by institute staff is necessary for students when preparing for institute, as they are the measures of service delivery. "We know that counselors influence students' aspirations, plans, enrollments, and financial aid knowledge. Meeting frequently with a counselor increases a student's chance of enrolling in a four-year institute, and if students, parents, and counselors work together and communicate clearly, students' chances of enrolling in college significantly increase". An institution's own members of staff, through telephone conversations and email correspondences to prospective students, also play a major role in influencing student choice decision.

Management of Institute: Management people are the in-direct source of influencers. These people are the main service providers in the education services. Here, pre-students may not approach management people, however, pre-students have a perceived value or an image for the management and brand of the institute. Management people communicate their culture, style and brand through their publications, sponsored programs, paid and non-paid sources of advertisements and social events. Pasternak (2005) pointed out that the information given by the management through institution's own printed materials is also very influential in student choice process. Despite numerous sources of information, there is still a general lack of adequate information for prospective students and their parents to make meaningful comparisons among universities offering the same or similar academic program, due to poor and less informative and promotional materials designed by the managements of educational institutions.

Current-students (Prospective Students): Current-students are the real experience holder of the service which is offered by the institute as they are currently in touch with the service and facilities of the institute. They are the real word of mouth for the institute as well as for the pre-students. But, their positive message delivered to the pre-student will depend on the type of experience they are receiving. However, families reveal a growing trend in which current-students commonly identify parental encouragement as a primary reason for deciding selection of institute [17]. Pre-student approaches current-students to update recent information regarding the institute as all other resources may provide old information regarding the institute. Again, they may verify the information provided by the other resources with the current-students. Pre-students often associate themselves

with other individuals who have experienced the same cultural and social experiences and compare their institute going behaviors with those who are attending institute now.

Alumni (Post-Students): Alumni are the finished product of the educational institutes. They had experienced a service and are in the perfect position to tell the value of that service in the present market. Alumni share common characteristics and interest with the pre-students. Pre-students take information from the Alumni for the future scope and value of educational program provided by the institute. However, opinion and the information provided may be different from alumni to alumni depending on the services and the level of satisfaction the alumni received from institute.

Pre-Student themselves: Pre-students take their decision mostly after collecting all information from all available sources and compares them with their personal factors. Most pre-students after collecting primary information from school teachers, friends, family prefer to visit directly to the concerned institute to verify physical evidence. They interact with administrative staff as well as faculty of the institute on academic or financial aspects. Pre-students look for institute settings that are consistent with their own environment and culture. Most of time, pre-student himself is not capable of taking decision without making a contact with the network of information sources. They make coalition, a temporary alliance to get this information. Coalition is defined as a group of an interacting group of individuals, deliberately constructed, independent of the formal structure, lacking its own internal formal structure, consisting of mutually perceived membership, issue oriented, focused on a goal or goals external to the coalition and requiring concerted member action.

Conceptual Model – Service Mix: By the people for the people

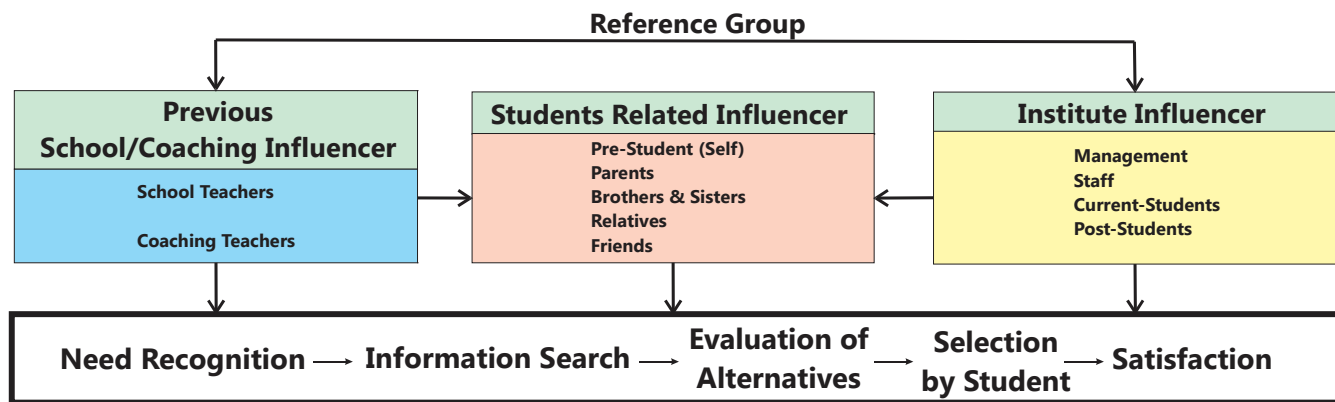


Fig. 1: Conceptual Model adopted and modified from Riley - A buyer's decision-making process, 2012

Objective and Research Methodology

The objective of this research was to find out people's influence, which is a referred group for a student, in selection of technical educational institute for a student and how is the of influence when compared to satisfaction of their decision of

selection. A qualitative research through a survey was made. It comprised of a structured questionnaire sent through e-mail to the current-students enrolled and passed-out students (alumni) belonging to the technical institutes affiliated to North Maharashtra University. Sample size (n) was calculated at 95% Confidence Level for which Standard Normal Variate (Z) is 1.96 & at Standard Error (e) of 0.03 by $n = Z^2 \frac{p(1-p)}{e^2}$; where n = Sample Size to be used for this study, N = unknown population, p = Estimated Portion of Population N. For p = 90%, 'n' comes out to be 553. However, sample size of 641 was selected by quota sampling from technical institutes offering different programs in engineering, pharmacy and management. The questionnaire comprised of demographic factors of students with questions measuring influencers impact on the selection of technical institute on a scale ranging from 0 to 5, where value zero, was no influence at all and value five, was most influence. The demographic characteristics of the sample is described as below;

By Gender

Male: 429; Female: 212

By Native Place

District: 156; Taluka: 274; Village: 211

By technical educational program

Engineering: 474; Pharmacy: 111; Management: 56

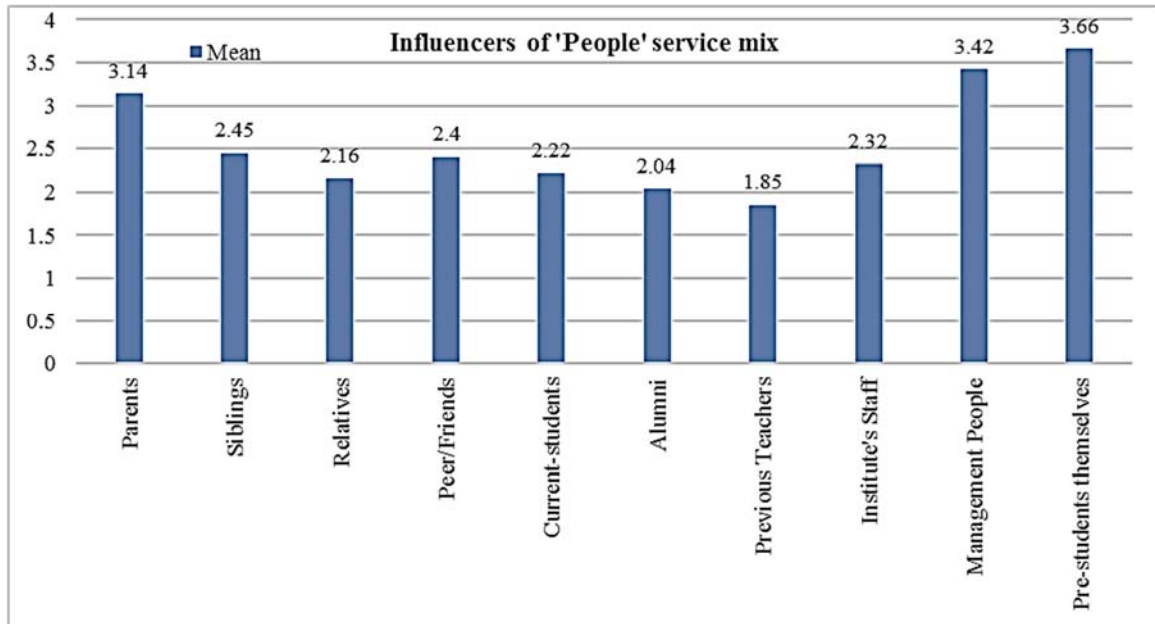
Hypothesis

- H1:** The people factor of service mix influence the student’s decision of selecting a technical education.
- H2:** Satisfaction due the decision of selecting a technical institute is affiliated with influence of people mix (influencers).

Data Interpretation and Findings

Influence of people mix (Influencers)- (Testing H1)

Descriptive statistics for the responses collected on the influence of people mix in selecting technical educational institute are summarized in following table & bar char with their mean, standard deviation, variance & coefficient of variance.



Influencers	Descriptive Statistics						One-Sample T test of $\mu=3$ vs $\mu\neq 3$		
	N	Mean	SE Mean	Std. Dev	Variance	Coef. Var	95% CI	T	P
Parents	641	3.1435	0.0711	1.8005	3.2419	57.28	(3.0039, 3.2832)	2.02	0.044
Siblings	641	2.4540	0.0752	1.9035	3.6233	77.57	(2.3063, 2.6016)	-7.26	0.000
Relatives	641	2.1591	0.0726	1.8379	3.3778	85.12	(2.0166, 2.3017)	-11.58	0.000
Peer/Friends	641	2.4056	0.0730	1.8492	3.4196	76.87	(2.2622, 2.5490)	-8.14	0.000
Current-Students	641	2.2215	0.0753	1.9066	3.6352	85.82	(2.0736, 2.3694)	-10.34	0.000
Alumni	641	2.0499	0.0737	1.8668	3.4850	91.07	(1.9051, 2.1947)	-12.89	0.000
Previous Teachers	641	1.8565	0.0734	1.8594	3.4575	100.16	(1.7123, 2.0007)	-15.57	0.000
Institute's Staff	641	2.3276	0.0766	1.9386	3.7581	83.29	(2.1773, 2.4780)	-8.78	0.000
Management People	641	3.4290	0.0662	1.6757	2.8078	48.87	(3.5342, 3.7856)	10.31	0.000
Pre-Students themselves	641	3.6599	0.0640	1.6211	2.6279	44.29	(3.2991, 3.5590)	6.48	0.000

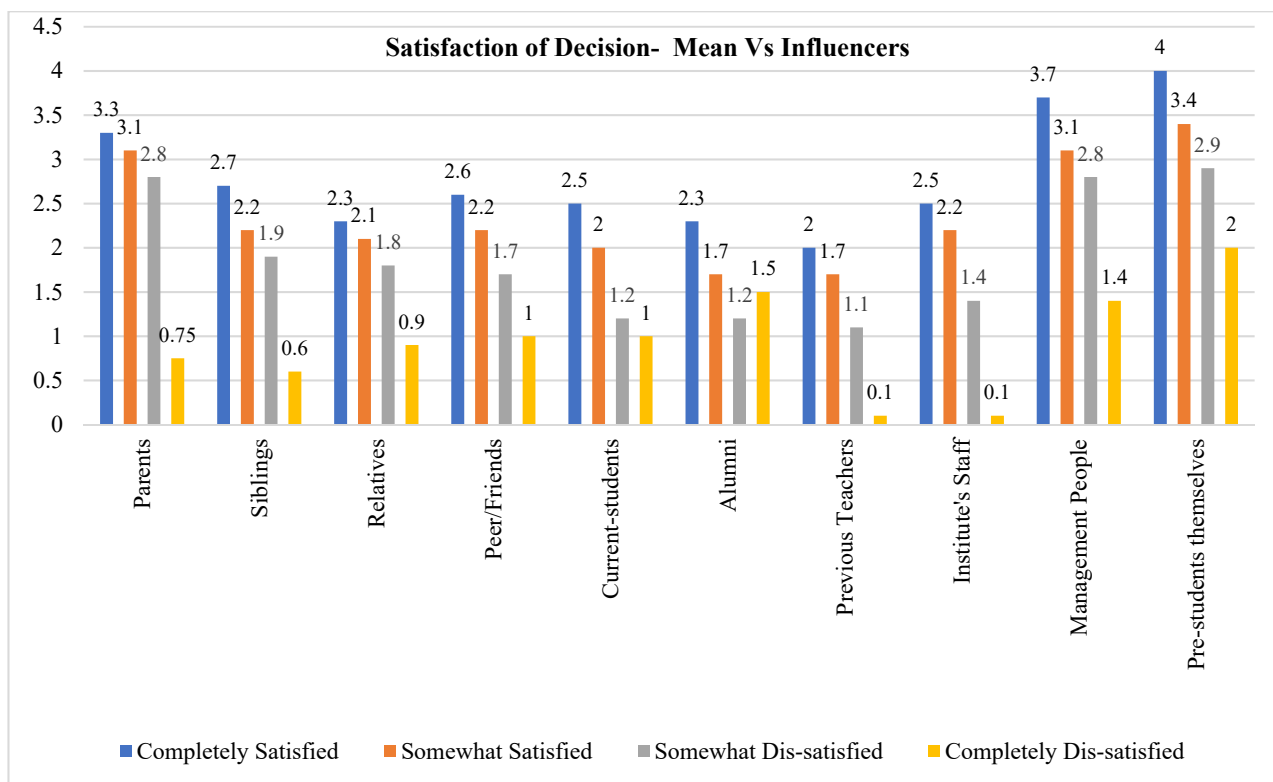
(Table 1: Descriptive statistics for testing hypothesis H1 with One-Sample T test)

From the Table 1, the student's decision of selection is most influenced by pre-student themselves (M=3.66, SD=1.62), followed by management people and brand (3.43, 1.68) and parents (3.14, 1.80). Pre-students are less influenced by previous (school/coaching) teachers (1.86, 1.86), Alumni (M=2.04, SD=1.87), Relatives (M=2.15, SD=1.83) among all people factor of service mix. Other people mix such as Sibling (M=2.45, SD=1.9), Peer/friends (M=2.40, SD=1.85), Current-students (M=2.22, SD=1.91) and Staff of Institute (M=2.32, SD=1.94) have moderate influence on the selection of technical educational institute.

From the table $\mu \neq 3$, at confidence level 95%. Hence H1 is accepted which state that the people factor of service mix influence the student's decision of selecting a technical education.

Satisfaction of decision of selection Vs Influencers - (Testing H2)

Now, to know whether the satisfaction of decision for the selection of technical educational institute has a relationship with the influencers, the responses collected on satisfaction level; completely satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dis-satisfied and completely dis-satisfied, were measured and were found as shown in following bar chart with their mean.



From the above bar chart, it is observed that the students are most Completely Satisfied when the decision is influenced by the Pre-students themselves (Mean=4), followed by Management People and brand (Mean=3.7) and Parents (Mean=3.3). However, the students are most Completely Dis-satisfied when their decision of selection of technical educational institute is influenced by Pre-students themselves (Mean=4), Alumni (Mean=1.5), Management People (Mean=1.4). Thus it can be seen that there is relationship of satisfaction of decision taken with the influencers those who have motivated towards that decision.

To prove statistically two different tests were conducted through Minitab Statistical Software (Minitab 17). The first test, Chi-Square test was conducted for finding association of each influencers with the level of satisfaction of decision. The Person Chi-square was calculated at significance at $p < 0.05$ for whole influencers combined vs satisfaction of decision for selection of technical educational institute. The second test, General MANOVA (Multi-analysis of Variance) was conducted to find F-value & p-value at significance at $p < 0.05$.

The test results have shown that all influencers have a relationship with satisfaction level of decision for selection of technical educational institute. The results are shown below (Table 2).

	Test for testing Hypothesis 2		
	Chi-square test for Association	General MANOVA	
Influencers	p-value	F-value	p-Value (Significance Level)
Parents	0.007	4.31	0.014
Siblings	0.000	8.57	0.000
Relatives	0.021	2.93	0.050
Peer/Friends	0.002	8.13	0.000
Current-Students	0.005	9.20	0.000
Alumni	0.000	12.26	0.000
Previous Teachers	0.001	7.78	0.000
Institute's Staff	0.000	10.93	0.000
Management People	0.000	17.11	0.000
Pre-Students themselves	0.000	14.50	0.000
People Mix - Combined	Pearson Chi-Square = 29.919, DF = 18, p-value = 0.038; Significant at $p < 0.05$	Wilks': F value 3.325, p-value 0.000 Significant at $p < 0.05$	

(Table 1: Chi-square test for Association and General MANOVA for Hypothesis testing H2)

H2 hypothesis is accepted as p-value from Chi-square test for Association and General MANOVA are $p=0.038$ and $p=0.00$ with F-value=3.325 respectively, both are significant at $p < 0.05$ when all influencers combined. Among all influencers, the influence of Management People ($F=17.11$, $p=0.00$), Pre-students themselves ($F=14.15$, $p=0.00$), Alumni ($F=12.26$, $p=0.00$), Institute's Staff ($F=10.93$, $p=0.00$) and Current-students ($F=9.20$, $p=0.00$) have high relationships. This means that their level of satisfaction for a decision is highly associated when their decision for selection are influenced by these influencers. On the other hand, the level of satisfaction with their decision are less associated when their decision has influenced by Relatives ($F=2.93$, $p=0.50$) and Parents ($F=4.31$, $p=0.14$)

Summery and Conclusions

In educational services, 'People Mix' plays a vital role as 'People' here are the service providers (management people, staff) as well as service receivers (students). In today's scenario where technical education is gaining it's important due to its vital contribution towards economic growth of the country, it is important for the technical institutes to whom to serve and when, where and how? At the same time, institutes should know what sources students and the influencers are using to search institutes. Without guidance from a friend, teacher or a family member, many students fear to take decision at their own, even if they decide to take at their own, they end up with the same setting.

It is important to know institute's strongest influencers, so that the institute can create a communication strategy that incorporates them into the outreach process. For example, if professors are one of strongest influencers, make sure they are sharing institute's strategic value messages when they have conversations with prospective students. If parents are strongest influencers, make sure that the institute has an appropriate communication channels set up with the parents. Schools and school teachers can be targeted by delivering seminars on career counselling, through technical educational awareness programs, education fairs at their places. Alumni and Current-student's relationship are the assets without cost for the institutes in term of 'word of mouth' because their communication is based on true experience of the service. Social media (engagement through Facebook pages, LinkedIn) is an important part of alumni, current-students and pre-students' engagement. It's a means to stay connected for long way and forever.

It is now a must, to build relationships, not just links and not just clicks! Relationship building though, is a toughest job, as meeting people face to face and having a cup of coffee with them might be tougher, but with today's technology sources the world might be not enough to build relationship. The institutes must identify the tools to connect and re-connect the influencers. All influencers are needed to work to explore all possible avenues towards the growth and development of technical education by motivating the prospective students towards technical education. However, the institutes those who will act a lubricant for relationships will only survive, after all 'for the people by the people' cannot run without bonds and relationships.

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