



# ROLE OF STUDENT'S PERCEPTIONS IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF SELECTING A PROFESSIONAL ACADEMIC PROGRAM IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A STUDY IN PERSPECTIVE OF WEST BENGAL

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## ABSTRACT

*In this paper a study on the role of student's perception was carried out to understand how it effect their course selection in private higher education institution. The perceptions of a student depend on various factors that may be students' present condition and their socio-economic background. Primary data was collected from 518 students perusing course in Engineering, MBA, Hotel Management and Allied Health Sciences in various private institutions in West Bengal. Print media advertisement were collected from various private professional Institutes offering multiple courses. Content analysis of advertisements were done to evolve attributes. Multidimensional Scaling (MDS), a unique data analysis techniques adopted here to examine and develop a 2-dimensional matrix to set out (dis)similarity variable. MDS will create a perceptual map (multidimensional space) of students opting various professional course.*

**Keywords:** Perception, Perceptual Map, Gross Enrollment Ratio, Content Analysis, Multi-Dimensional Scaling

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## Introduction

A professional course is a striding step for any students for their careers. Choosing the accurate professional course prudently is vital in accomplishing career goals and success in life. There are wide variety of professional courses to select from various academic institutions. Each student is accountable for their own choices they made. Following their own career path to determine and attainment the goal is a dream come true for each student.

## Role of Student's Perceptions in The Decision-Making Process of Selecting A Professional Academic Program In Higher Education: A Study In Perspective of West Bengal

Gratifying such dreams requires correct information and knowledge about each course, and on the other hand acquaintance of one's strengths and limitations.

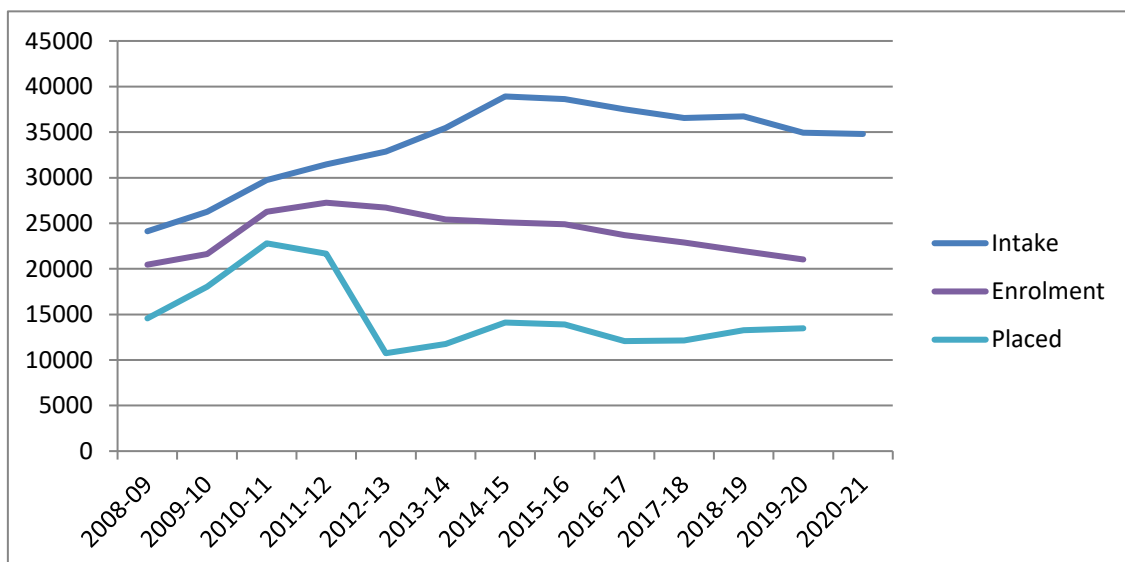
Pursuing a professional course student has to take up and undergo through a critical decision-making process. For a professional to be successful, he must possess a critical thinking ability which will induce one's decision-making skills. Before thinking of any professional course, one should must obtain the information that is indispensable for the necessity of reaching one's career goal. Peer and parent pressure are apparently the most important variables which will influence the complete decision making of the student so as to select his desired course. Parent involvement in the early education is always resolute to be positively related to a child's academic and overall performance. The peer pressure also impacts each and every one's life, from early academic life in school, hanging out with buddies, loitering all around, finishing the others assignment & projects, refusing the regulated norm to enjoy the association with friends.

### Present Scenario

At present West Bengal has 47 Universities of which 11 are private. The total student enrolment in higher education has risen from 13.24 lakh in 2010-11 to 20.36 lakh in 2017-18. But according to 2019 AISHE Report there are 876 PHEIs out of total 1370 HEIs in the state which is around 63%. 6.2 lakhs students enrolled in PHEIs and 9.8 lakhs enrolled in government institutions in 2018-19 academic sessions. The enrollment in private institutions is only 38%. In 2018 5 new PHEIs were established compare to 2 by the government. But the situation is not as conducive as per below explained data.

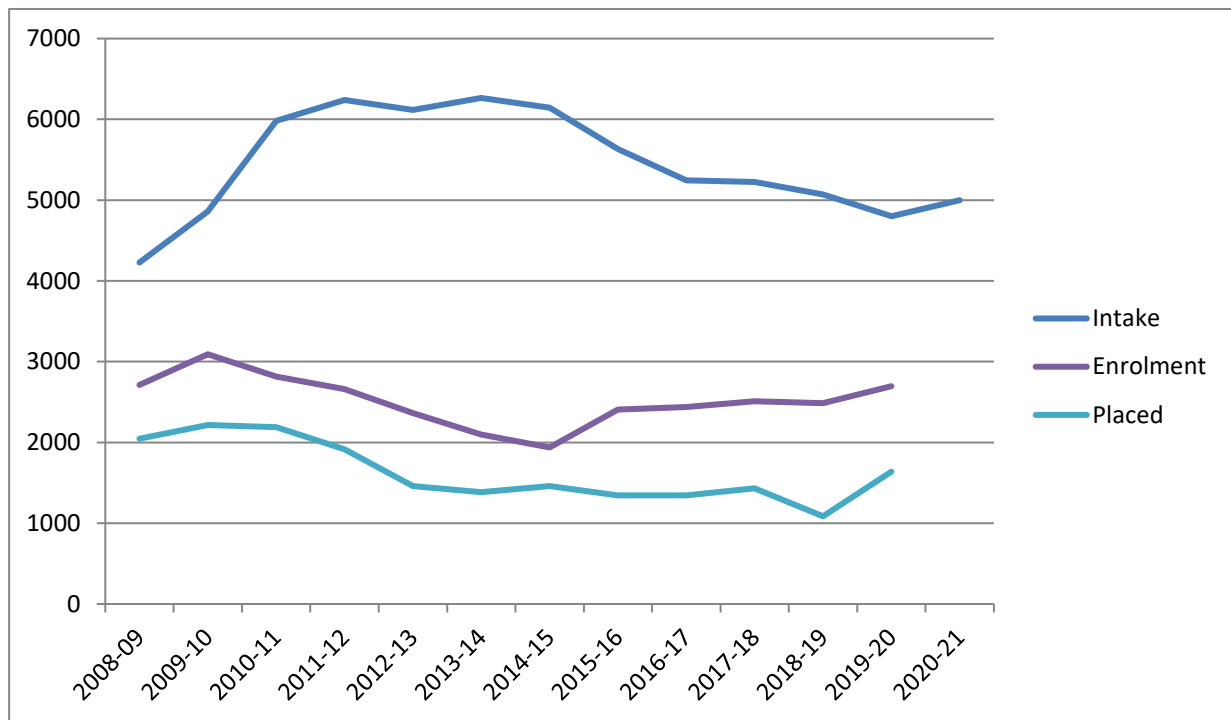
Secondary data in respect to four courses are plotted in a line curve portraying time line of 10 years (2008-09 to 2019-20). There are four figures depicting representation of 4 courses in terms of Approved intake, Enrolment and Placement. The source of the data is AICTE as all the courses are AICTE approved.

### Engineering (B.Tech)



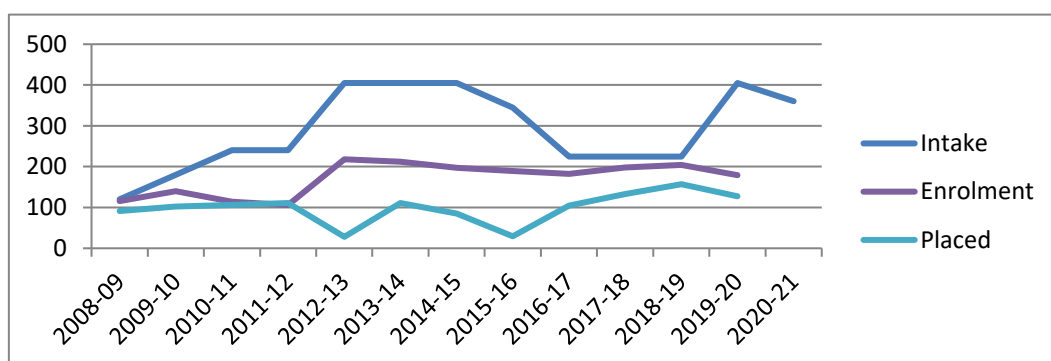
There has been a continuous increase in seats from 2008-09 to 2013-14 and onwards the curve has become a plateau due to the fact that enrolment shows a declining trend. Placement initially picked up with admissions and then falls flat. The enrollment initially picked up with the intake but from 2010 sessions it was not able to keep up pace. The decline in admissions starts from then onwards and it continues till the end.

## Management (MBA)



Classical intake PLC curve with growth, saturation and followed by huge decline. Growth in intake continues till 2009-10 academic session. Enrolment curve has 2 phases, growth, decline, again growth and plateau. Due to poor performance in admissions rationalization of intake was initiated from 2013-14. In spite of that the gap between intake and enrollment continues, Placement line is ever declining and slight revival at the end even though the gap between admissions and placement was a true reality. The unique feature of MBA story is the revival in terms of admissions in one end and over expectation of revenue from the point of view the management.

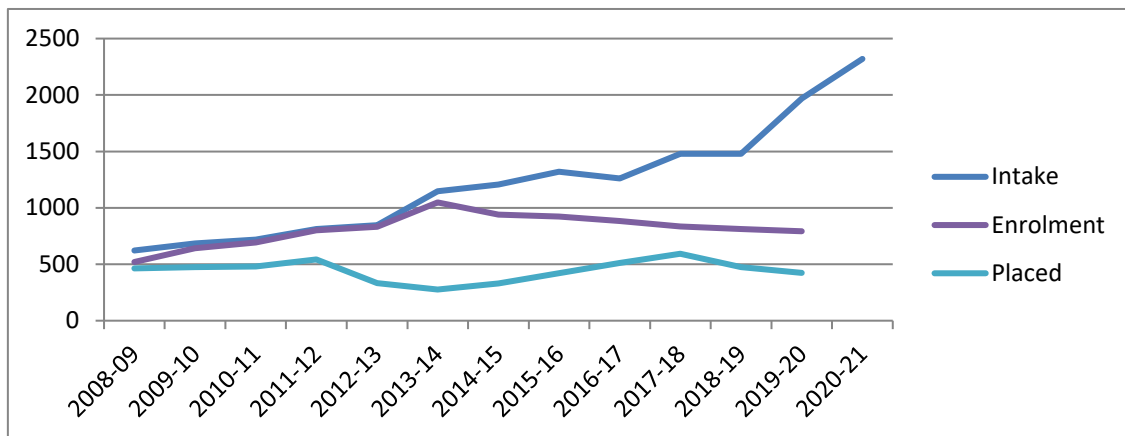
## Hotel Management (BHMCT)



At the beginning the intake shows growth potential but reduced due to fewer admissions. The intake is not steady because the promoters lack market expectations. On the other hand the 3 years Non AICTE Hotel Management program was very popular with 100 % intake as per University data. May be the assumption was the popularity of the 3 years program will influence the admissions in 4 years AICTE programs. Placement curve was fluctuating but most of the time it was not par with admissions.

# Role of Student's Perceptions in The Decision-Making Process of Selecting A Professional Academic Program In Higher Education: A Study In Perspective of West Bengal

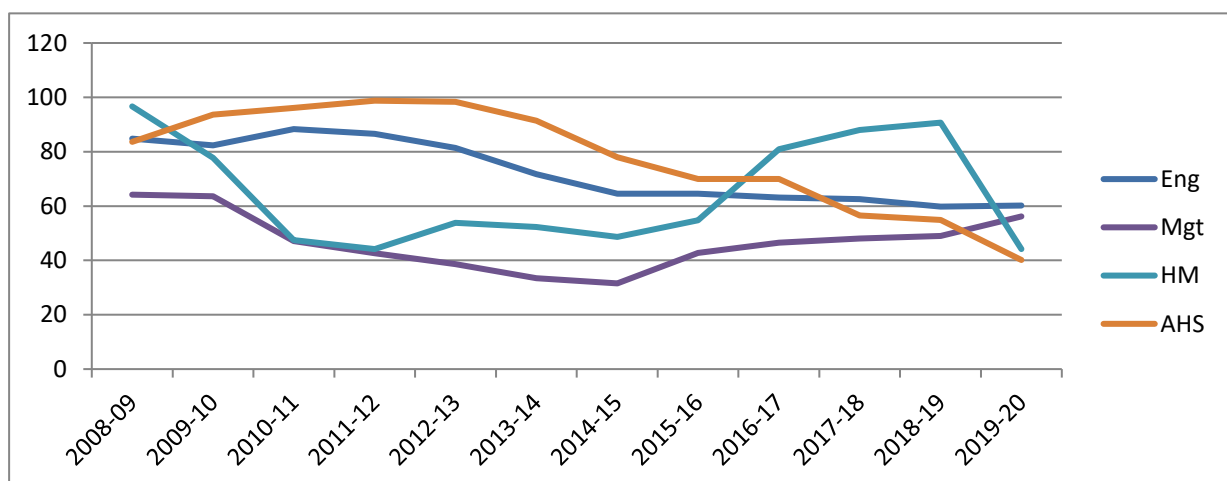
## Allied Health Science (B. Pharma)



Both Intake and enrolment has steady growth in the beginning. But the placement figures didn't pick up as a result admissions fell drastically. Intake is still growing. This has been the performance for professional courses in West Bengal in PHEIs.

## Problem Statement

### Gross Enrolment Ratio on Intake (GERI) Curve



In B.Tech Course initially GERI curve has ups and down and then followed by a huge decline. Later on the rate of decline as decreased. For MBA it was a rapid and steady decline followed by a massive recovery. In case of B. Pharmacy GERI has an initial steady growth followed by a continuous decline till the end. Hotel management has been erratic throughout with continuous ups and down.

The Problem Statement is that;

Engineering (B.Tech): Slow decline

Management (MBA): Steady Decline, recovery and slow growth

Hotel Management (BHMCT): Decline, Growth, Decline

AHS (B. Pharm): Steady decline

The GERI & Enrollment Curve of all four Professional Courses in PHEI has declined in last 10 years.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many factors that influence the students in selecting their higher learning programs in various higher learning institutions (Abdullah Sarwar and Haque A 2012). The researchers examine the role of perception in selecting higher education courses in Malaysia. The researcher collected 300 filled questionnaires from UG students of a particular university in Malaysia. Each of attributes is elaborately analyzed followed by descriptive statistics and ANOVA. The most important factor that influences a student choice of higher education are campus facilities, program structure and accreditation, knowledgeable faculty, cordial academic staffs and good counselors.

Student's perceived quality regarding a particular educational brand determines its long term success. Student's perceived quality is a determinant of student satisfaction (Marwa Medhat Headar, Nadia Elaref and Omneya Mokhtar Yacout, 2013). The researchers measures the importance of several attributes like e-service quality, interactivity, comfort, familiarity on student satisfaction and behavioral intentions with e-learning in private universities in Egypt. In this paper the researcher collect data sample from the students of private university. They use structural equation modeling, with factors like e-service quality, interactivity, comfort, and familiarity.

The perceptions toward academic Institutions propels academic brand image and induce admissions (Husain SalilulAkareem and Syed Shahadat Hossain, 2012). In this study the researchers have taken primary data of 400 students were taken from the five renowned private universities of Bangladesh. An exploratory factor analysis was done to determined important factors affecting perception. Regression analysis was done for measuring relationships towards perceptual factors and its effect on enrollments.

Understanding of student's perceptions and expectations are absolutely important for the success of a HEI. The essence to survive in the competitive environment, establishing a reliable educational brand in the minds of the student is of vital importance. Private HEIs must make a deliberate attempt to know how students associate their academic courses with the various parameters. Every Private HEIs differ in their marketing communication content and advent global campuses in have resulted in paradigm shift in the student's mind set as well as perceived values against each professional courses. Therefore perception (Kotler & Keller 2009) of the students regarding various available courses will definitely vary as the choice is different. So understanding of shifting perception among various courses is important as it has to be in tandem with the content strategy.

Developing perceptual maps will make such understanding and decision making for edu-marketers will be easier. How an academic product is placed in the students mind and their perception will influence their respective choices has to be determined (Reketttye & Liu, 2001Schweiger & Schrattenecker, 2009; Helm, 2009;).

## RESEARCH GAP

The stagnation and decline in four professional courses namely B.Tech, Hotel Mamagement, MBA and B.Pharma may be due to several reasons. Huge expenditure is made over the years on marketing communication and the efficacy and effectiveness of the same is a subject of extensive research. Most of the research on student's perception is based on institutional brand, brand image, perceived quality and enrollment. There is no significant study neither in the state nor in the country how student's perception plays a significant role in determining a particular course. There was no course wise study even. Developing student's perceptual maps is a key determinant to develop content and promotional strategy. In this paper we have concentrated on student's perception by developing perceptual maps in respect to professional courses and to find underlying gap if any in designing the commination strategy in the print media.

# Role of Student's Perceptions in The Decision-Making Process of Selecting A Professional Academic Program In Higher Education: A Study In Perspective of West Bengal

## Objective of Study:

1. To find out course wise variable gaps in promotional content
2. To develop student's perceptual maps on various professional courses
3. To find out student's perceptual gaps among various professional courses

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data was collected in two forms; Primary and Secondary data.

Primary data was collected in form of questionnaire from the 518 students of the AICTE approved colleges in Engineering, MBA, Hotel Management and Pharmacy in West Bengal. Variables of the questionnaire were determined through pilot survey of 100 respondents. Purposive sampling (non-probability sampling) is used to collect the primary data. In order to measure perception and effectiveness 5 point Likert scale is used. The variables (stimulus) selected by students are Employment Opportunities, Scope for Further education, Subject Combination, Admission Criteria, Career Aspiration, Duration of Course, Industry Integrated, Approval, Internship Opportunities, Fees and International Recognition.

The sample size is as follows;

Sample Size - Students	
Management Students (MBA)	129
Engineering Students (ENG)	127
Hotel Management Students (HM)	140
Pharmacy (AMS)	122
<b>Total</b>	<b>518</b>

As a form of secondary data, Print media advertisement were collected from various private professional Institutes offering multiple courses. Content analysis of advertisements were done to evolve attributes. Multidimensional Scaling (MDS), an unique data analysis techniques adopted here to examine and develop a 2 dimensional matrix to set out (dis)similarity variable. MDS will create a perceptual map (multidimensional space) of students opting various professional course.

## Hypothesis:

Null Hypothesis H<sub>0</sub> : There is no significant observational difference in variables considered by students in selecting a professional course.

Alternate Hypothesis H<sub>1</sub> : There is significant observational difference in variables considered by students in selecting a professional course.

## Analysis

### To find out course wise variable gaps in promotional content

**Content Analysis:** Advertisement content of the various private higher education institute were studied pertaining to the four professional courses were analyzed. The important attributes of all the advertisement content are as follows;

Content 1	Content 2	Content 3	Content 4	Content 5
Courses	Courses	Courses	Courses	Courses
Affiliations	Affiliations	Affiliations	Affiliations	Affiliations
	Accreditation	Accreditation	Age of Institution	Placement
	Age of Institution	Awards	Research	Govt. Ranking
		Faculty	Placement	
		Industry Tie ups	Faculty	

The time span of content publication is 2016-2019, focus more on the Institution rather than individual courses. Information about various available courses and their respective affiliation is common with all the advertisement content. Other attributes includes placement, faculty, accreditation, ranking and industry tie up. Each student has their respective career aspiration and accordingly they have choice set for various courses.

We have streamlined our research to find out whether student perception varies with each course or not as institutes focus only on their USPs. Effectiveness of creative content will also depend on student perception on each course.

### Multidimensional Scaling

Multidimensional Scaling (MDS) is a unique data analysis techniques adopted here to examine and develop a 2 dimensional matrix to set out (dis)similarity variable. MDS will create a perceptual map (multidimensional space) of students opting various professional course in a meticulous manner that the similar perceived variables are plotted close together, while those unapproved variables are placed far apart.

The variables ( stimulus) selected by students are Employment Opportunities, Scope for Further education, Subject Combination, Admission Criteria, Career Aspiration, Duration of Course, Industry Integrated, Approval, Internship Opportunities, Fees and International Recognition.

Euclidean distance is used a tool to measure as well as to classify the multivariable dissimilarity. Kruskal (1964) defined ‘Stress’ as residual ‘sum of squares’ which will always be positive and lesser will be ideal. ‘Perfect’ stress signifies absolute good relationship between dissimilarities and farness. He elaborated it further;

Stress	Goodness of fit
.2	Poor
.1	Fair
.05	Good
.02	Excellent
.0	Perfect

Similarly An R-squared value is also calculated in SPSS to understand the “proportion of variance” among the considered variables. The RSQ value signifies the “squared correlation coefficient” between the “estimated distances” and the “observed distances”. According to Hair et al (1998) an RSQ value of 0.6 is considered as bare acceptable, higher the better.

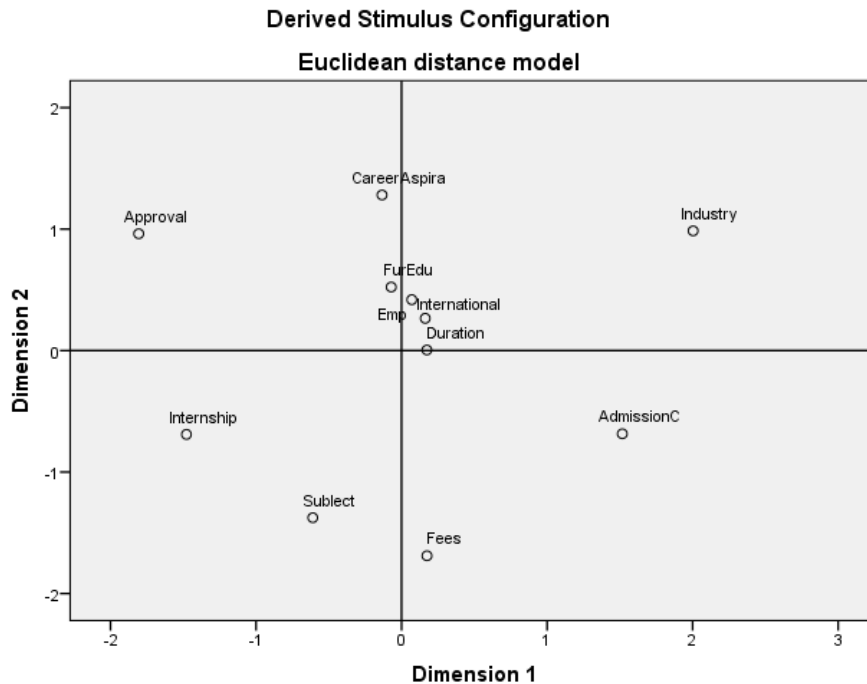
### To develop student's perceptual maps on various professional courses

#### MBA

129 students pursuing MBA were asked to rate 11 variables on 5 point Likert Scale. Multidimensional Scaling (ALSCAL) was done using SPSS.

Stress - .11263 [Acceptable stress statistic 'Fair']

RSQ - .92818 [RSQ > 0.90 suggests high correspondence]



Stimulus having positive coordinates in both the Dimensions is Employment Opportunities, Course Duration, Industry integration and International Recognition.

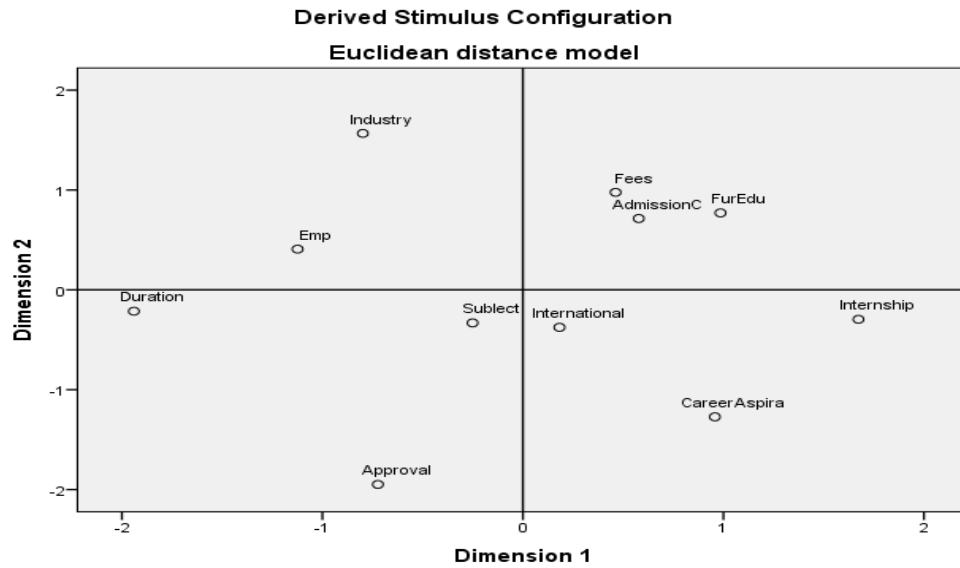
#### Engineering

127 students perusing Engineering were asked to rate 11 variables on 5 point Likert Scale. Multidimensional Scaling (ALSCAL) was done using SPSS.

Stress - .10996 [Acceptable stress statistic 'Fair']

RSQ - .91783 [RSQ > 0.90 suggests high correspondence]





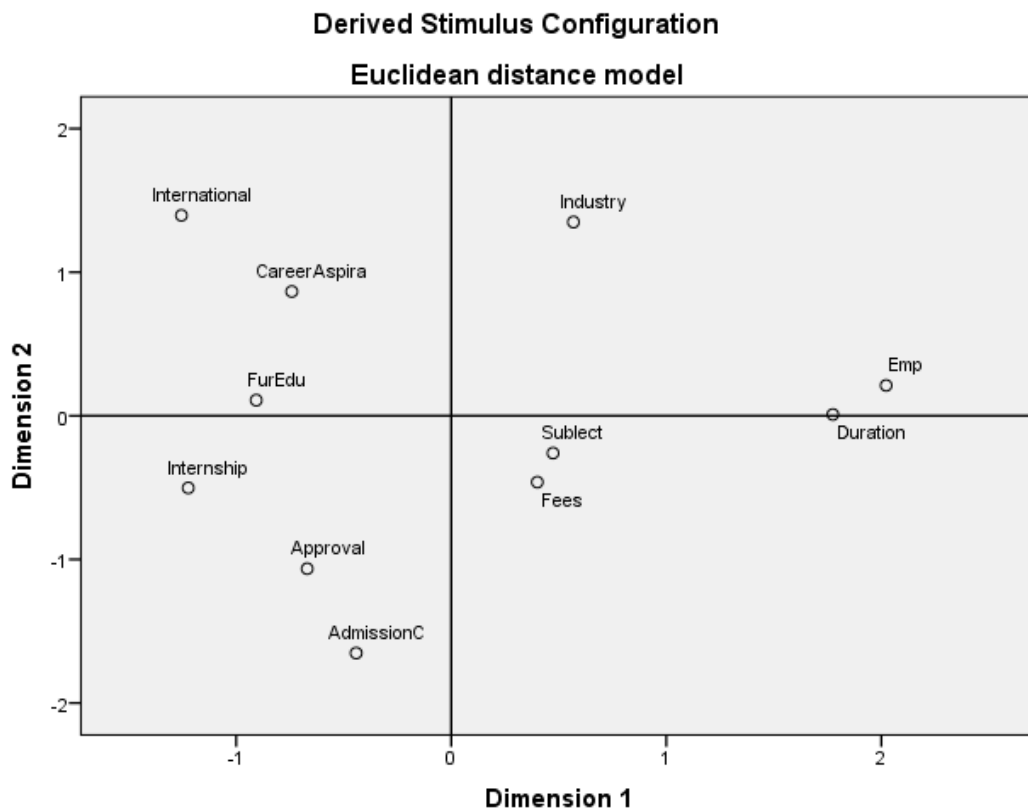
In B. Tech Stimulus having positive coordinates in both the Dimensions Fees, Admission Criteria and Scope for Future Education.

### Hotel Management

140 students pursuing Hotel Management were asked to rate 11 variables on 5 point Likert Scale. Multidimensional Scaling (ALSCAL) was done using SPSS.

Stress - .07488 [Acceptable stress statistic “Good”]

RSQ - .96323 [RSQ > 0.90 suggests high correspondence]



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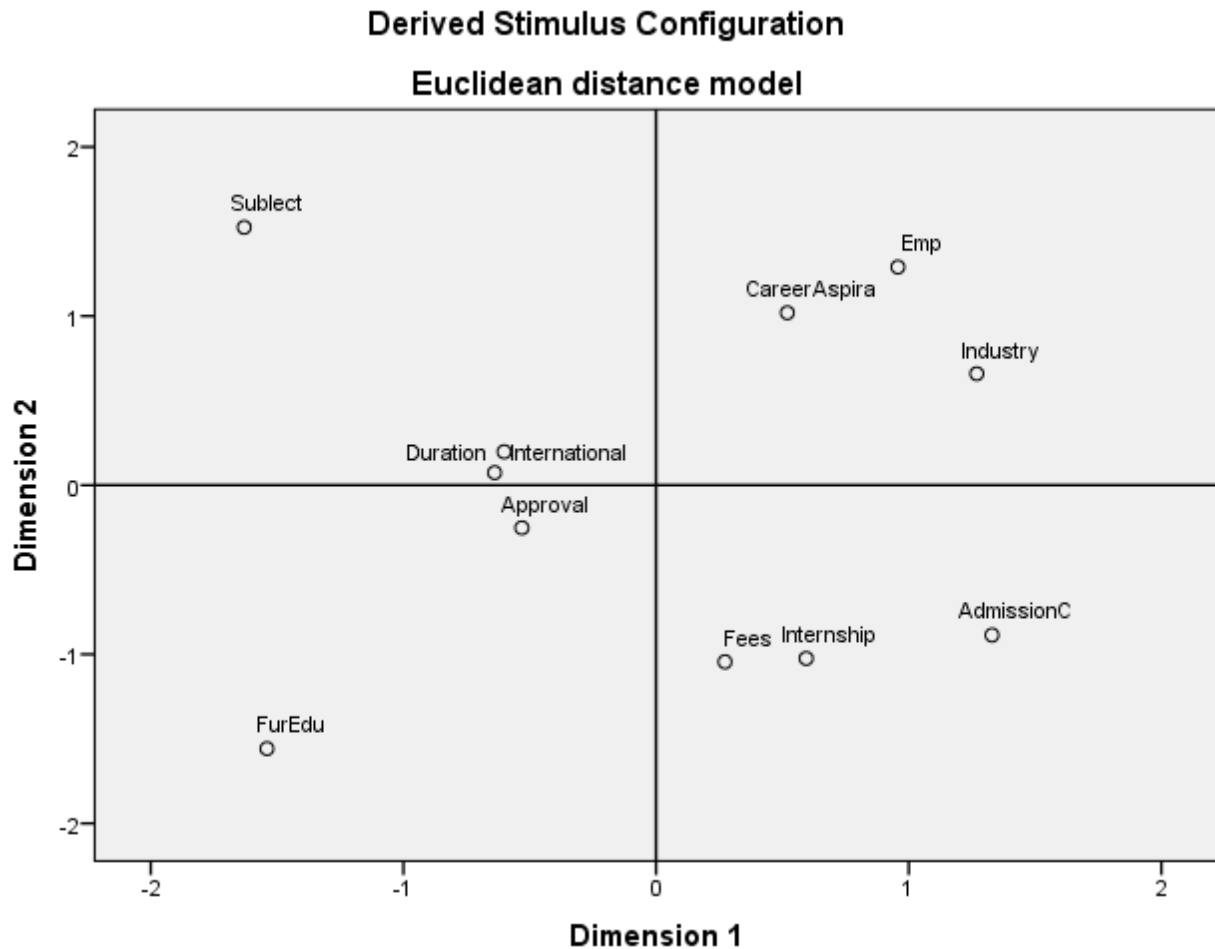
In BHMCT program stimulus having positive coordinates in both the Dimensions is Industry Integration, Duration and employment opportunities.

### AHS (Pharmacy)

122 students pursuing Pharmacy were asked to rate 11 variables on 5point Likert Scale. Multidimensional Scaling (ALSCAL) was done using SPSS.

Stress - .10455[Acceptable stress statistic 'Fair']

RSQ - .93422[RSQ > 0.90 suggests high correspondence]



Among B.Pharm students stimulus having positive coordinates in both the Dimensions is industry Integration and employment opportunity.

### Hypothesis:

Null Hypothesis H0 : There is no significant observational difference in variables considered by students in selecting a professional course.

Alternate Hypothesis H1 : There is significant observational difference in variables considered by students in selecting a professional course.

## To find out student's perceptual gaps among various professional courses

### Perceptual Difference

There are only 2 Stimulus having positive coordinates in both the Dimensions namely Industry integration and Employment only in respect to three courses. The courses are MBA, Hotel Management and Pharmacy.

Course	Variables
MBA	Industry Linkages, Course Duration, International Recognition, Employment
B.Tech	Fees, Admission Criteria, Further Education
BHMCT	Industry Linkages, Employment
B. Pharma	Industry Linkages, Employment. Career Aspiration

Similarly, Stimulus in negative coordinates in both the Dimensions is as follows;

Course	Variables
MBA	Internships, Subject Choice
B.Tech	Course Duration, Subject Choice, Approval
BHMCT	Internship, Approval, Admission Criteria
B. Pharma	Approval, Further Education

Approval is common for B.Tech, Hotel Management and Pharmacy. Internship is common for MBA and Hotel Management only. Thus we can conclude perception of students varies with the choice of courses.

So we accept the Alternate Hypothesis that there is significant observational difference in variables considered by students in selecting a professional course.

### Limitations and Scope

The same study can be extended to other professional courses also. The content analysis can be made more elaborative and exhaustive by taking more institution into considerations and of multiple years. The research is extended only within the state of West Bengal and institutes of other states can also be included in further comprehensive study which can have a pan India perspective.

### Conclusions

As we have streamlined our research to find out whether student perception varies with each course or not as institutes focus only on their USPs. At the end we have accept the Alternate Hypothesis that there is significant observational difference in variables considered by students in selecting a professional course. Effectiveness of creative content will only depend if it is only align with student perception on each course. The performance of professional courses in West Bengal has a declining tendency primarily the marketing communications of the private institutes are not focus on individual courses. As a results the students are not able to link their career aspirations.

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