A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF CANADIAN BUSINESS SCHOOLS’ PROMOTION OF MBA PROGRAMS

This paper evaluates the extent to which messages conveyed by Canadian business schools about their MBA programs coincide with the desires of students and the demands of employers. This is done within the context of the media ranking systems, including that of the Canadian Business Magazine. This paper evaluates the representations made by Canadian Business Schools in their major communication piece to prospective MBA students. The paper also examines the promotional messages of Business Schools using a program evaluation model to highlight areas of emphasis.

The Canadian Business Magazine uses fifteen different factors to determine their final ratings. Return on investment, career placement and advice services, strengths, percent of students employed after 3 months, and percent change in salary are each weighted 10%. Another ten factors contribute 5% each, namely, average entering GMAT score, percent female students, percent female faculty, percent international students, percent international faculty, number of years work experience required, student assessments of aims achieved, student ratings of satisfaction with the program, students’ willingness to recommend to others, and students work experience outside of Canada.

Employers are indirect consumers of MBA programs whose interests are not directly represented in the MBA rankings. Employers are interested in MBA programs that develop graduates with leadership and interpersonal skills. Other important areas for employers include a strong School reputation, the need to expose students to the day-to-day life of an executive, to provide specialized MBA programs and to provide additional coursework including the topics of ethics, entrepreneurship, global business, production and operations/quality management. Less is known about the interests of students. Future research should examine prospective Canadian MBA students’ interests and their decision-making process.

Content analysis was conducted on the text messages used by Business Schools to promote their MBA programs to prospective students. The results showed that the top messages include functional specialization, city location, length of program, faculty quality, mentoring by faculty and international topics. The promotional emphasis has little commonality with the rating emphasis of the magazine ranking. Although employers’ interests are generally ignored, the prominence of functional specialization addresses the preference of employers to favour specialized MBA programs over broad based ones.

Using an input-output program evaluation model to organize promotional messages, there is an apparent emphasis on process-oriented messages while the student benefits-oriented phases

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are less promoted. This is in contrast to the magazine rating systems that emphasize student benefits in their rankings. Although, there is little differentiation in the key promotional messages of Schools, this paper can provide administrators with a starting point to assess current messages and guide future message composition.