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Influence of Pricing, Learner Testimonials and Institutional Credibility on the Enrollment Decision Making in Indian Online Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on studying the influence of pricing, learner testimonials, and institutional credibility on the enrollment decisions in online higher education (OHE) in India. It employed a descriptive research design, and data was gathered through a cross-sectional online survey that consisted of 421 respondents which included 16 university coordinators (UC), 15 platform coordinators (PC), 193 enrolled learners (EL), and 197 non-enrolled learners (NEL). Results suggest that the credibility of the institution (mean 4.50/5), which was bolstered by platform partners (mean 4.30/5) was the most effective factor in making enrollment decisions; meaning, learners put a lot of emphasis on the reputation of the institution. Price (mean 4.25/5) has a significant role, especially for non-enrolled learners (NEL) (mean 4.60/5), who find it a 'make or break' factor, unlike enrolled learners (EL) (mean 3.80/5). The learner testimonials (mean 4.05/5) is also important but it ranks lower in importance than institutional credibility and price. However for marketing, it has significance (mean 3.90/5) and there is a strong preference for video testimonials (39.1%) followed by success stories (28.1%). Qualitative recommendations of the study suggest that the institutions should consider integrating an outcome-driven approach (career growth, 42.8% and affordability (flexible payments/EMIs, 39.2%), in the online higher education (OHE) programs. Holistically, it is important for the online higher education programs to leverage on institutional credibility, have defined career outcomes, consider flexible payment options and must showcase authentic and engaging video testimonials of he learners to build trust and increase enrollments.

Keywords: Pricing, Learner Testimonials, Institutional Credibility, Online Higher Education, Enrollment

INTRODUCTION

The online higher education sector in globally has witnessed a massive change in its landscape in recent years, mostly due to technological advancements and the changing expectations of learners for easily accessible, flexible, and outcome-oriented education programs. This worldwide trend is particularly seen in India, where there is a large and varied learner base and a fast-developing digital infrastructure. Online higher education (OHE) has emerged as the most obvious option for learners and working professionals who want to up-skill, reskill or pursue advanced degrees without the need to go to the traditional on-campus programs, which have their own geographical constraints. However, in order for OHE providers

to adequately serve the demand and at the same time optimize for enrollments, a nuanced understanding of the factors affecting the enrollment choices is important.

Among many things a prospective learner takes into account, one of the first ones is the pricing and flexibility in payment methods. According to the results of the study, learners who did not enroll considered program's price as the deciding factor. The research data also shows that there are different pricing models that the OHE providers are using, among which are EMI options, early bird discounts, subscription models, per-course fees, and bundled pricing. Understandably, those who participated in the survey pointed out that being able to pay in monthly installments, such as EMIs, the existence of scholarships, and pay-as-you-go significantly influence the enrollment intent. This points to the market-sensitivity to affordability and payment convenience.

Further, the learner testimonials are a significant factor in shaping the opinion and trust in the Online Higher Education (OHE) programs. In the absence of physical campus interactions, prospective learners mostly believe in the feedback of already experienced learners in order to determine if the online program is worth enrolling in. The research participants unanimously confirmed that the testimonials were quite significant, with a considerably large proportion stating that they were a decisive factor in their choice of an online program especially for the ones who enrolled. The most effective formats were the video testimonials, success stories, and social media ratings, thereby pointing to the learners' preference for the authentic and engaging feedback that provides assurance of the program's quality and its career outcomes. The reliance on the validation of peers thus shows that OHE institutions and partners have to actively solicit testimonials and subsequently showcase them to enhance their credibility.

The institutional credibility of the university makes a big difference in making learners interested and less worried about their choice. This is the most important factor, especially because the market is crowded with online education providers. Learners do consider the institution's reputation as a signal of quality and legitimacy of the online education program. Respondents expressed the university's credibility, faculty quality, accreditation, rankings, and industry partnerships as the most important factors when it comes to choosing an online education program. This notion of institutional credibility is in line with India's old tradition of values that educational brands have to be reputable ones. Even though the initial traction may be caused by the price and testimonials, the strongest one is usually the credibility of the institution, which the learners can ultimately commit themselves to, in a long academic journey.

Through this research, it is expected to explore the interplay that exists among these three factors: pricing, learner testimonials, and institutional credibility in the enrollment decision-making in online higher education in India. Thus, by analyzing the data collected for this research through surveys and in-depth interviews, the aim is to provide clear and practical suggestions to online higher education providers. The recommendations need to be actionable and must establish the need for the OHE providers to design compelling, accessible, and outcome-oriented programs that the aspiring Indian learner is looking for.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In their article, Aggarwal, Neha & Gujral (2025) made reference to online reviews and testimonials; this collective term electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), is a crucial parameter in the mind of potential learners regarding the choices of higher education institutions (Yang, 2015; Chen, 2022). This 'digital' shift has already beaten the traditional modes of information sources, such as brochures, by allowing peer-generated insights that minimize information asymmetry, thereby prompting the learners to think of academic quality and job opportunities. The convincing power of the eWOM was firmly based on the social-proof

heuristics, where the presence of many positive reviews gives a "bandwagon effect," relying on the source-credibility emphasizing on reviewer expertise and trustworthiness (Cialdini, 2001; Hovland et al., 1953). Stories based on actual experience consistently mention valence of review (positivity/ negativity), recency, and diagnosticity of content (its ability to clarify real-world consequences) thereby aiding prospective learners with sufficient information about the program (Qiu, 2024; Yi, 2022). Also, the choice of specific platform (e.g., affect-rich social media vs. detailed institutional review sites) and the perceived similarity between the reviewer and the prospective learner (e.g., same program, age group or nationality) proved to have a significant role in the eWOM impact (Rathnayake, 2024; Torabi et al., 2021). With online feedback of today still being criticized for its authenticity with cases of fake reviews, biased advertising, and potential misinformation, all of which reduce trust and hence there is a requirement for corroborating evidence, most often through peer verification (Lin et al., 2025). That is why institutions are requested to select authentic, detailed, and outcome-focused testimonials while also checking their website and social media platforms for any misrepresentation.

It was observed that marketing at the institutional level have a significant impact on learners' higher education enrollment decisions (Yasmin Sabir et al, 2022). The effects of marketing on learners' perceptions are quite convincing and include the formation of the institutional image, which, in the end, determines their application and enrollment decisions (Jones & Smith, 2011; Smith & Wilson, 2014; Minor et al., 2003). Digital platforms such as social media and online advertising are among the channels known to be the most effective for attracting and engaging the attention of prospective learners (Brown & Johnson, 2012; Miller & Davis, 2019; Martin et al., 2016). The literature further talks about the importance of institutional reputation, brand image, and strategic communication in the promotion of an institution's strengths and unique value propositions (Brown and Wilson, 2016; Wrenn & Hightower, 1997). Specialized studies showcase the relevance of these marketing trends, such as the use of social media, institutional image, and data analytics, which eventually guide learners' enrollment choice (Gupta & Mishra, 2016; Shukla & Aggarwal, 2017; Jain & Singh, 2018; Goel & Gupta, 2019).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research incorporated a comprehensive research methodology to study the multifaceted effect of the price, learner testimonials, and institutional credibility on the decision-making process of enrolling in online higher education in India. This study adopted both data collection methods, i.e., the quantitative and the qualitative, to get all possible set of insights from the stakeholders. Qualitative data was gathered through key informant interviews and focus group discussion (FGD) of the learners.

Research Objectives

This study was mainly focused on the following objectives:

- To identify and analyse the interplay of the important factors that are responsible for the decision to enroll in online higher education programs in India.
- To evaluate the role of different pricing strategies and their significant impact on learners' enrollment choices, which include the availability of flexible payment options (e.g., EMI) and financial aid/scholarship.
- To evaluate the efficacy of different formats of learner testimonials, like written, video, and success stories, on enrollment decision-making of the potential learners.
- To understand the perceived importance of university's credibility, sources like university reputation, faculty quality, accreditation, and rankings in enrollment decisions.

- To introduce the methods to improve the accessibility, affordability and penetration of online higher education programs in India through insights gathered in qualitative survey of learners and coordinators.

Research Design

A descriptive and exploratory research design was the approach taken for this study. The objective of understanding perceptions and their influence was met by employing a cross-sectional survey to collect data from a large, diverse group at a specific time. The questionnaire had questions for both, qualitative (open-ended responses) and quantitative (for structured rating scales and categorical data) research.

Sampling Technique

The target population included individuals directly involved with or who are considering enrollment in online higher education in India. This included:

- **University Coordinators**: Individuals responsible for the administration or oversight of online programs at universities.
- **Platform Coordinators**: Individuals managing the business aspects of online platforms which market and deliver these programs on their platforms.
- **Enrolled Learners**: learners currently undertaking online higher education programs.
- **Non-enrolled Learners**: Individuals who inquired about or considered online higher education but ultimately did not enroll.

Sampling Method

Convenience sampling, a type of non-probability sampling method, was chosen. This technique was both feasible and effective in terms of engaging a wide range of stakeholders in the online education ecosystem. The participants were people who belonged to various online communities, the researchers' contacts at educational institutions, partner networks, and those who were the direct subjects of the survey. The distribution of responses is as follows:

- University Coordinators: 16 respondents
- Platform Coordinators: 15 respondents
- Enrolled Learners: 193 respondents
- Non-enrolled Learners: 197 respondents

Total Respondents: 421 individuals

This diverse sample provided a comprehensive set of perspectives from various angles of the online higher education landscape in India.

Data Collection

- **Method**: We used a survey questionnaire that we conducted on the Internet by ourselves as a source of data. This method made it possible to collect the data efficiently from the participants who were geographically dispersed and varied, thus ensuring a wider range of representation.
- **Content**: The questionnaire was prepared in such a way that it could gather information on the following areas::
  - **Demographic Profile**: Age, gender and highest educational qualification.

- **Influence of Pricing:** Questions were to assess the importance of pricing in enrollment decisions, specific pricing models utilized (for coordinators), factors in pricing considered when they were deciding to enrol (for learners).
- **Learner Testimonials**: The questions helped determine if the participants had seen or heard the testimonials. In case they had, the questions further checked their general opinion of the testimonials; which format was seen as the most powerful, and the degree of trust they had in the each format.
- **Institutional Credibility**: Questions examined the impact of university credibility factors (e.g., faculty quality, ranking, alumni network, accreditation) on the choice of online higher education programs.
- **Motivation for OHE**: Questions were designed to probe the main motivators for enrolling in online higher education programs.
- **Barriers and Concerns**: Questions shed light on the factors that might make learners not consider enrolling in the program, such as program fees, scholarships that one is not eligible for, personal issues, and doubts about the faculty or curriculum.
- **Recommendations**: Open-ended questions to collect specific ideas on how to make online education programs affordable, more accessible, and outcome oriented.

Tools of Data Collection

The primary tool for data collection was a structured online questionnaire comprising:

- **Closed-ended questions**: These were used to gather demographic information and through likert scale the measurement of the degree of influence of various factors (where the endpoints were usual 1 and 5, 1 meaning 'not at all important/helpful' and 5 meaning 'extremely important/helpful').
- **Open-ended questions**: This was integrated in the questionnaire so that the respondents can express their worded feedback, express concerns and give detailed recommendations.

These responses were required for a deeper understanding to put things into perspective, and to get a broader layer of the qualitative data for the study.

All the data received from the 421 people were put together and analyzed to establish the patterns, correlations, and themes in relation to the objectives of the research. Findings and recommendations provided in the article are based on this methodology.

RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Key Influential Factors (All Learners)

Factor	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
How influential is pricing in enrollment decisions for online higher education in India?	390	4.25	0.85	Pricing is perceived as highly influential in enrollment decisions, indicating its significant role for prospective learners.
How crucial are learner testimonials for promoting your online higher education programs?	390	3.90	0.92	Learner testimonials are seen as quite crucial, highlighting their importance in marketing and credibility building.

How significantly does university credibility influence enrollment decisions?	390	4.50	0.65	University credibility is considered extremely influential, suggesting it's a most important factor for potential learners.
How much do prospective learners trust learner testimonials?	390	4.05	0.78	Prospective learners show a high level of trust in learner testimonials, reinforcing their utility as credible information sources.
How much does a partnership with a reputable University enhance the credibility of OHE programs?	390	4.30	0.70	Partnerships with reputable universities significantly boost program credibility, as perceived by learners.

Table 1 displays findings that depict the decision-making process for online enrollment in higher education from a comprehensive perspective. Trust in institutions and their quality are the most important in this process. High scores in institution credibility and partnerships indicate that in the absence of physical assurances of quality, these two factors play a significant role. Learners seek to mitigate risks by relying on such cues of credibility. People are more likely to enrol in an online higher education program if there are known and reputed names behind.

Program pricing plays another major role. The high mean score of pricing which is slightly lesser than credibility indicate that the consumers might give first importance to the credibility and then to the price. Therefore, the price still has its part in the decision-making process, i.e., affordability is important too. It therefore refers to the fact that, in spite of having a well-known institute, learners may not enroll if the pricing is not rightly set for the target market. Hence it is important for the OHE providers to keep the price competitive keeping a strong balance between credibility and price.

Thirdly, learner testimonials also play a vital role. The analysis indicates that learners not only consider testimonials as important in deciding to enrol, but also to a great extent believe in them. Thus, the testimonials are portrayed as very useful in the method of social proof, by way of them accentuating the institution's credibility and increasing the program value. Even though testimonials may not be the first reason for a learner's decision to enroll, they might be an important factor that certainly supports in learners' decision-making. A slightly lower mean for 'crucial' as compared to 'trust' might indicate that testimonials are trusted a lot when they are readily available, however in the absence of it, does not trigger a decision to not enroll. Together all of this mean, credibility is the pull, pricing determines feasibility and testimonials are validators for the learners in enrollment decision making for online higher education programs in India.

Table 2 Relative Frequency Distribution of Primary Focus (Coordinators) (N = 31: 16 UC, 15 PC)

Company Focus	**N (Coordinators)**	**Percentage (%)**	**Interpretation**
Online Degree Programs	10	32.3%	A significant portion of coordinator's companies focus on offering only online degree programs.

Online Degree Programs, Online Certifications, Online Up-skilling Courses	8	25.8%	Many companies adopt a diversified approach, offering multiple types of online education.
Online Certifications	6	19.4%	Only certifications are a key offering for a notable segment of providers.
Online Test Preparation	4	12.9%	A smaller segment concentrates on only test preparation services.
Online Short Courses	3	9.7%	Short courses, while offered, represent a smaller primary focus compared to degrees or certifications.
Total	31	100.0%	The online higher education market is characterized by diverse offerings, with a strong emphasis on degree programs and broader portfolios.

Table 2 indicates that the main focus of the companies are diversified and reflects how mature the online higher education market in India has become. Online degree programs were offered by the majority of companies of which, 32.8% offered it exclusively and an additional 25.8% offered it along with other types of programs like certifications and shorter up-skilling courses. Another 19.4% of the companies offered only online certifications which constituted a sizeable number. This mix in the market suggests that there is a clear effort by the companies to meet the varying needs of the learners starting from academic progression to professional development to much needed up-skilling.

Not only are the companies offering exclusively online test preparation (12.9%) or short courses (9.7%) a sign of market's fragmentation, but they also show the market's concern for the learners' specific, short-term learning objectives.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics of Pricing Importance by Learners (Enrolled/Non Enrolled) (Q: How important was pricing in your decision to enroll in OHE program? Scale : 1-5)

Learner Group	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Dev.**	**Interpretation**
Enrolled Learners (EL)	193	3.80	0.95	For those who enrolled, pricing was important but perhaps less of a critical barrier. This could indicate successful navigation of pricing or perceived value outweighing cost.
Non-enrolled Learners (NEL)	197	4.60	0.60	For those who did not enroll, pricing was perceived as significantly more important, suggesting it might have been a considerable barrier or a major decision factor against enrollment.
Overall	390	4.20	0.85	Overall, pricing holds significant importance in enrollment decisions.

The data shown in Table 3 makes it very clear that price is a significant factor in the choice of online higher education in India, as given by the mean score of 4.20 out of 5. However deeper study reveals that the perception of price by the learners who enrolled versus who did not enroll was very different.

The mean was calculated to be much higher for Non-Enrolled learners (NEL) (mean: 4.60/5, SD 0.60). Furthermore, low standard deviation suggests that there was a great unanimity among this group with the belief that pricing was very important. It can be said, with a high degree of certainty, that for those people, the main reason for not enrolling could have been the price which means they gave a greater emphasis to affordability. To put it in other words, their expectation was not met from the online higher education programs with respect to price.

Enrolled learners (EL) rated the importance of pricing lower with a mean score of 3.80 (SD 0.95), in contrast to non-enrolled learners (NEL), who had rated pricing with a mean score of 4.60 (SD 0.60). This mean, either pricing did not play a major role or they were able to successfully navigate through pricing by looking at the perceived value, benefits, ROI and credibility of the program . It is also possible they were able to find pricing not so important because of payment flexibility they got. Moreover, the fact that the enrolled learners (EL) group had a higher standard deviation seems more than likely that they all still looked at pricing very differently, where, it did not matter too much to some of them however was an important parameter to some others which they navigated through to arrive at the decision to enroll.

This table showcases a critical point of interest for the online higher education. While all learners consider pricing as important - it appears to be a 'make or break' factor for the ones who chose not to enroll. Those learners who overcame this barrier through looking at other program attributes eventually enrolled. This suggests that for the university and platform coordinators, it is important to communicate program attributes well along with keeping the price competitive. Program attributes such as flexible payment modes, scholarships, placement record, career transitions etc need to be vocally put in communications. Failure to communicate these leads to non-enrollment no matter how so ever strong program attributes are if the pricing is not set right.

Table 4

Relative Frequency Distribution of the importance of Testimonial Formats

Testimonial Format	**N (Learners who read testimonials)**	**Percentage (%)**	**Interpretation**
Video Testimonials	125	39.1%	Video testimonials are the most influential format, suggesting a preference for dynamic and authentic visual content.
Success Stories	90	28.1%	Stories detailing successful outcomes are highly effective in motivating prospective learners.
Ratings & Reviews	55	17.2%	Aggregate ratings and short reviews also play a significant role, providing quick validation.
Social Media Reviews	30	9.4%	Social media content holds some influence, indicating the importance of digital presence.

Written Testimonials	20	6.3%	Traditional written testimonials are least influential among the listed options, though still carry some weight.

Table 4 suggests that in order to arrive at the decision to enrol, among the learners who looked for testimonials, maximum of them (39.1%) looked for *Video Testimonials*. This indicates a strong inclination towards moving, true-to-life video content that speaks directly and honestly, and this could certainly be the reason for the increased trustworthiness due to more personal looking content. The second choice, *Success Stories* with 28.1%, is next preferred choice, signaling that stories that are the communicated by the enrolled learners are one of the best ways to convince the prospective learners that they can also make it through and be just as successful. Although, still considered important *ratings & reviews* (17.2%) and *social media reviews* (9.4%) were less preferred as trusted source of information by the learners. *Written testimonials* (6.3%) is not a significant format of testimonials influencing learner's enrollment decision which also means, narrative rich and engaging formats outweigh the outdated written format of testimonials.

This spread of preferences clearly suggests that the online higher education providers (both universities and platforms) must take into account the learners' preference of visual and storytelling format, if they are to use the testimonials effectively to influence the decisions on enrollment.

Table 5

Thematic Analysis of Recommendations for Enhancements (N=421)

Theme	**N (Mentions)**	**Percentage (%)**	**Interpretation**
Affordability			
Flexible Payment Options (EMIs)	165	39.2%	Top recommendation: more flexible payment, including 0% EMIs.
Reduced Overall Fees	110	26.1%	Direct requests for lower tuition costs.
More Scholarships/Financial Aid	95	22.6%	Increased availability of aid packages.
Accessibility			
Wider Reach (Tier 2/3 cities)	130	30.9%	Need to market and provide programs to smaller towns and rural areas.
Varied Program Domains	80	19.0%	Expansion beyond traditional subjects (e.g., arts, journalism).
Omni-channel Approach	60	14.3%	Integrating online with offline support or resources.
Outcome-Driven			
Career Advancement/Job Support	180	42.8%	Strongest desire for clear career outcomes and placement assistance.

Industry-Relevant Curriculum	140	33.2%	Curriculum needs to be updated regularly to match market demands.
Skill-Based Modules	105	24.9%	Preference for smaller, monetizable skill-based modules.
Authentic Success Stories	90	21.4%	Highlight real-world impact and testimonials.
Credibility/Quality			
Faculty Quality/Expertise	70	16.6%	Importance of highly qualified and experienced instructors.
University Reputation	55	13.0%	Emphasize institutional brand and recognition.
Transparency/Trust	40	9.5%	Avoid overselling, build genuine trust.
Other Considerations			
Batch Quality	20	4.7%	Concern for the peer group quality in online cohorts.
Use of AI/Technology	15	3.5%	Leveraging technology for interactive learning and doubt resolution.

Table 05 displays the thematic analysis of recommendations from learners and coordinators and sheds light on the most suggested areas of improvements in India's online higher education, while steps to make them 'Outcome-Driven' was the most frequently suggested in all categories.

Under outcome-driven, the *career advancement/job support (42.8%)* inclusion is the most cited recommendation, showing the primary reason for learners to go for online programs. The second recommendation is the *industry-relevant curriculum* (33.2%) and then, the availability of *skill-based modules* (24.9%), which shows a strong desire for practical, job-oriented education.

Then, affordability is the second most suggested area for improvement, and provision for *flexible payment options/EMIs* (39.2%) is the top suggestion. It is then followed by the demand for *reduced overall fees* (26.1%) and the call for more *scholarships/financial aid* (22.6%), which collectively show that many of the prospective learners still have financial barriers.

On accessibility, *wider reach into tier 2/3 cities* (30.9%) and *varied program domains* (19.0%) suggest more geographical and academic inclusiveness. The suggestion for the *omni-channel approach* (14.3%) connotes even more the desire for flexible learning path integrating offline networking events and immersions in the courses.

The respondents emphasis on *faculty quality/expertise* (16.6%), *reputed university* (13.0%), and establishing *transparency/trust* (9.5%) by avoiding over-advertising program features was another crucial finding for the OHE providers. These instill a sense of value and legitimacy in the online education programs.

Finally, references to *batch quality* (4.7%) and *effective use of AI/technology* (3.5%) shows a trend towards a high-quality peer learning atmosphere and the use of innovative pedagogical tools. To put it in a nutshell, the results of the study clearly show that learners are mostly interested in job-focused, cost-

effective, and geographically spread virtual courses with innovative pedagogy provided by trustworthy institutions at competitive pricing with an option to pay flexibly.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study illustrated a multi-faceted decision-making landscape for online higher education enrollment in India that is complex, defined by a subtle interplay between institutional credibility, pricing, and learner testimonials. The first to emerge is institutional credibility as the main driver, with learners giving the first preference to the strong reputation of universities and the additional trust comes with the branding of a university through reputable partnerships (platforms). This means that in a world that is increasingly digital and where learning is often impersonal, the established brand and the perceived quality of the education provider would work as a shield against the perceived associated risks, hence learners prefer to go with the recognized universities. (Table 1).

Pricing, though largely acknowledged is important factor in the decision to enrol for online higher education programs, become a 'make or break' factor for non enrolled learners (NEL) (Table 1 & Table 3). While enrolled learners (EL) also consider price as important factor, non enrolled learners (NEL) consider it as a much higher barrier. This suggests while the program value is important, it is price that deters a lot of prospective learners from enrolling. This means the providers must offer a competitive pricing but also ensure that flexible payment methods and scholarship to make the programs affordable are also there.

Learner testimonials are closely related to credibility and, as a consequence, they are a very important factor in validating the program. Often testimonials are not the initial triggers but validators. A testimonial is a reliable source of information because the person is real; it is the testimony of the one who actually studied in the program, and it is a certified quality of the program for learners. Moreover there is a clear preference for dynamic and engaging video testimonials over written ones because the prior offers a tangible proof of program value and career outcomes. (Table 4). This implies that the platform and the universities should invest in soliciting video testimonials from the learners and showcase them prominently.

Table 05, which represents both learners' and coordinators' recommendations, points to a few observations and suggests areas of improvements. Majority suggested to have outcome-oriented programs, of which 42.8% of total suggestions were for career advancement and job linked programs, shows that online education is widely viewed by learners as a way to make them employable and advance in their careers. This is in line with the prioritization of industry-relevant curriculum and skill-based modules, and the learners' demand for programs that can make them job market ready. Affordability was next most common recommendation especially the option of flexible payments (39.2%) and reduced fees (26.1%) signaling pricing barrier as a prominent factor. Recommendation to widen the accessibility to smaller cities (30.9%) and varied program domains (19.0%) suggest opening up learning opportunities even in smaller cities and in fields which are not so readily available. Moreover, concerns around faculty quality, university reputation, and transparency in communication signal towards age old expectation of institutional integrity and reputation.

Table 2 suggests most of the platforms and institutions are either focused on degree programs or have a varied offering including certifications and courses. However qualitative recommendations suggest a need of much more focused short term courses and modules which are more outcome oriented, job focused, accessible and most importantly affordable for the vast untapped market of India.

The complex interplay of the decision-making process for online higher education in India is a confirmation of the fact that new learners are primarily attracted by institutional credibility, then affordability determining feasibility and finally, authentic learner testimonials becomes a crucial source for validation. Sustained growth can be assured only when the providers adopt a holistic strategy to leverage their institutional credibility, career outcomes and addresses the concerns of affordability and solicits engaging testimonials to foster trust to influence enrollment.

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