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Is Internet the Right Medium for ‘Don’t Quit Campaign’?

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Abstract

This paper examines the effectiveness of promoting post-16 education and training via Internet. It examines the differences between those who intend to continue the post-16 schooling and those who do not. The implication of the findings challenges the effectiveness of ‘Don’t quit campaign’ which was to offer support and guidance on the choice of post 16 options. This study found that the campaign has done very little for those who decided not to continue post-16 education. Consequently, disadvantaged young people need constant support and resources to eliminate the disparities between different groups.

Introduction

The UK Government in their recent 'Don't quit campaign' has deployed modern marketing methods to encourage young people to stay in education and training after the age of 16. In a £3 million advertising campaign, they used digital business cards containing hyperlinks to web sites, which offer support and guidance on the choice of post-16 options. The effectiveness of this campaign and the choice of medium are questionable, as the target group is unlikely to have Internet access. To verify this argument, this study focuses on the use of Internet among young people in relation to their post-16 schooling.

The end of compulsory schooling is an important time for young people; the choice of whether to continue with academic education, enter the world of work or follow vocational training has a direct impact on a person's sense of identity and their future employment prospects. Understanding the way young people perceive their options, choose their options and the factors that may affect their decisions is of crucial importance to educators, government and policy makers.

In the 1980's the undertaking of post-compulsory education was less than 50 per cent by 16 year olds. During the 1980's and 1990's, participation increased significantly; it has however, more recently levelled off. New research identified the levels of post-compulsory education in the UK are still relatively low compared to other European countries (Hodgeson and Spours, 1997). According to the latest figures from the Department for Education and Employment 87 per cent of 16 year-old girls, and 83 per

cent of 16 year-old boys now continue in education. There is a large increase in participation in post-16 education at schools, most in full-time attendance at Further Education colleges.

Vocational Training and Government Policy

Davies (2000) recently poses the question, “why have we accepted for so long that education is academic?” In his study of schools in Holland, he found that the Dutch have established an successfully alternative system of schooling based on the student’s choice and vocational needs (*The Guardian*, 12 July 2000). National Schools Task Force conducted a survey among 23,000 employers found that technical and craft skills were so short that employers had been forced to recruit 2 million people who are not proficient for the jobs they undertake. The Labour government has suggested radical transformation in the delivery and provision of education. In response to this concern, the government has decided to launch new vocational GCSEs, ‘A’ levels and ‘foundation’ degrees in 2002. Some maintained secondary schools will be allowed to specialise in teaching manufacturing and engineering as part of a new business backed specialist school movement, which is expect by 2006. It is predicted that these specialist schools will account for 1 in 3 of all secondary schools. Market assessment reveals 88 per cent of young people aged 13-18 in England feel that the increasing cost of student loans and tuition fees will affect their choice of where or when they study. Girls were slightly more confident that cost would not be a deterrent factor than boys. Unsurprisingly, a greater number (32%) of affluent young people in the AB category did not believe that cost was

an issue compared with only 14 per cent of the poorest young people in the DE category (MAI Strategic Report, 1999). Considering the long-term benefit for the society as a whole, the government and educators should provide equal opportunity for the disadvantaged group and young people with different talents in the pursuit of further education.

Individual Characteristics on Post-16 Education Participation

It is widely recognised that academic attainment at age of 16 is the best predictor of subsequent destination. Research suggests that there is a linear relationship between further education participation and the formal qualifications young people obtained in the examinations they undertake at the end of their period of compulsory school (Gray, *et al.*, 1993). In addition, Jenson, *et al.*'s (1991) highlighted the significant differences between state school and independent schools, i.e. 93 per cent of young people in independent schools continued in full-time education after age 16 compared with 39 per cent in state school. This difference is largely influenced by socio-economic status and academic attainment between these two types of school. The socio-economic factor is stressed by the increasing disparities in post-16 participation with 85 per cent of young people from middle-class backgrounds (usually refer to A,B,C1 groups) and 72 per cent of their peers from working class backgrounds choosing to participate further study in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Those from middle class backgrounds were twice as likely to opt for academic courses and appeared to view vocational qualifications with less enthusiasm. The difference in choice of participation, non-participation, academic, vocational, part-

time and full-time, may partially explained by family influences, educational pre-dispositions culturally inherited from parents (Foskett and Hesketh, 1997). Working class children whose parents were both in employment are brought up in a culture where work is of central importance that accounts for the differences in choice after compulsory schooling (Mizen, 1995). However, Wilkinson (1995) found that young people whose parents were both unemployed were more likely to drop out and have negative perceptions of training and education than those with parents in work.

Marketing and Competition between Post 16 Providers

A diverse range of institutions, such as schools, FE colleges, Careers Services, Training and Enterprise Councils and Employers, market post-16 options. A study of sixth forms in maintained schools provides evidence of the increasing competition between post 16 providers. Schools had developed strategies either to recruit students from outside the school or to limit 'poaching' of their students by other post-16 providers (Schagen, *et al.*, 1996). This largely resulted from the consequence of changed funding structure of the Further and Higher Education Act in 1992.

Aggressive marketing strategies employed by the post-16 providers had a significant impact on young people's decision-making processes. When choosing an institution at which to pursue post-16 education, young people had engendered 'a growing consumerist approach' and were increasingly influenced by factors such as published examination

results, advice of careers teachers, parents and friends. (Fosketh and Hesketh, 1997; Witherspoon, 1995)

Internet Use amongst Young People

Although it is possible to identify the characteristics of the Internet users (Mai, et al., 1999), it is difficult to specify Internet usage, particular among young people. According to the most recent statistics published by the National Statistics Office, an average of 6.5 million households could access the Internet from home in March 2000. This represents approximately 25 per cent of total UK households. For families with children, Internet penetration is higher, approximately 31 per cent of households with one child and 35 per cent with two children have Internet access. There are substantial regional differences with regard to access, with high penetration in London and the South East of England, the lowest access is in Northern Ireland with relatively low access in the North of England. Unsurprisingly, access is related to the socio-economic factors. The fastest growth occurred recently in the moderate and middle-income households. With respect to the use among young people, young people with access to a PC are twice as likely to use that as a source of information rather than open a book. Information technology is taking the lead as a primary information source and television is becoming a source of narrative (Livingston, 1999). However, twice as many children have access to the Internet at school than at home; 57 per cent of boys between 6-17 have accessed the Internet compared with 47 per cent of girls.

Confronted with a combination of different issues addressed above, it is clear that young people who do not have access to Internet are likely to be from disadvantaged groups, such as lower socio-economic groups. Similarly, these groups are identified with lower likelihood of continuation of post-16. Therefore, Internet may not be the most appropriate medium for 'Don't quit campaign' and it is not a panacea for success in all types of promotion (Chaffey, *et al.*, 2000). The function of promotions is to influence the target group's decision-making process and the choice of media is one of the essential elements in communication. The communication media should be able to reach the target and carry the information effectively (McArthur and Griffin, 1997; Alwitt and Prabhaker, 1994).

Hypotheses

The primary research focuses on an analysis of young people's media use and marketing post 16-education participation. The objective is to examine whether there is a significant difference between the media behaviour between those who intend or have continued in post compulsory education or training and those who do not intend to continue or have gone into work without training.

The hypotheses to be tested are stated as follows:

H1: Young people who participate (or intend to participate) in post-compulsory schooling are different from those who do not, in terms of time spent on media.

H2: Young people who do not participate (or do not intend to participate) in post compulsory schooling are less likely to use the Internet.

Data Collection

A pilot study was conducted among 10 young people aged 13-19 to verify the design of the research. Young people aged 18-19 felt that the issue of post-compulsory schooling is no longer relevant to them. Subsequently, the sample of this study is determined between 14-17 year olds. According to the latest statistics from Department for Further Education and Employment approximately 85 per cent of the population continue in academic education at 16. A survey was conducted by using stratified sampling method. Two strata were defined: *Group 1*, those who intend or have continued in post compulsory education or training; *Group 2*, those who do not intend to continue or have gone into work without vocational training. With a sample size of 128, it is comprised of 98 from Group 1 and 30 from Group 2.

Data Analysis

Amongst all young people surveyed in this study, 58.6 per cent were male and 41.4 per cent were female. 64.1 per cent of respondents expressed the intention of pursuing post-16 schooling; on the contrary, 25.8 per cent did not and 10.2 per cent 'don't know'.

In Group 1 of the young people surveyed, who intend to continue in education or training, the average amount of time spent on watching TV are 12.6 hours per week and for Group 2 was 11.7 hours per week. The result from chi-square test indicated a significant difference between these two groups in terms of media time spent (significance level = 0.01). However, with respect to the magazines, newspapers and radio time-spent, there is no significant difference between those intend to participate post-16 education and those who do not. (See Table 1) Therefore, the results are not conclusive for accepting or rejecting *H1* and it may need to be further tested.

Insert Table 1 here

In *Group 1*, 87 per cent used the Internet. In *Group 2*, only 42 per cent used the Internet. *H2* is strongly supported by the results from chi-square test at 1 per cent significance level ($\chi^2=29.004$; $P = 0.0001$). That means there is a significant difference between *Group 1* and *2* in terms of Internet use. In particular, those who decided not to participate in post compulsory schooling are less likely to use the Internet or have access to the Internet. Upon further analysis of the data, we found the average amount of time spent online per week by *Group 1* who use Internet is 4.35 hours compared to 3.25 hours by *Group 2* ($\chi^2=21.020$; $P=0.007$) that illustrates another differences between two groups. Among 98 respondents (from both groups) who used Internet, only 40 (40.8%) of them used Internet to find out about their post 16 options but 58 (59.2%) did not.

Findings and Conclusions

Data analyses have indicated that there is a significant difference in Internet use and the number of hours spent online between the post-16 education participants and non-participants. This shows that those young people who go or intend to go into work at the age of 16 are less likely to use the Internet than young people who continue into academic education or vocational training. This highlighted the question addressed in the beginning of the paper regarding the effectiveness of 'Don't quit campaign' promoted through the Internet. By examining the individual characteristics such as school attended, academic attainment, gender and socio-economic background, the policy-makers and educators should be aware that the disadvantaged young people need more support and resources to increase their likelihood of pursuing post-16 education. In the mist of developing alternative communication media to reach the target group, it is important to understand the target group's behaviour and attitudes and their abilities of access to the media so we can make sure that the objective of to influence people's decision-making is achieved.

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Table 1 Media Time Spent by Young People

n=128

Avg. hours spent on	Group 1	Group 2	χ^2	Significance
TV	12.6	11.7	22.900	.001
Magazine/Newspaper	4.9	4.2	8.150	.419
Radio	8.6	7.6	6.295	.614