

# A Conceptual Study on Employer Perception towards Hiring Employee with Online Degree/Certification

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## ABSTRACT

Higher education is enduring a transition across the world. This transition leads to the introduction of technology into the education system and provides opportunities to pursue a degree through online participation. According to Bramble and Panda, globalization plays a vital role in recognizing the necessity of providing online learning opportunities in higher education. The stakeholders and education institutions are very much concerned about the massive potential of online learning models. In the span of a decade, the demand for online courses has increased due to change in technology, lifestyle, economics, concerns of employees to develop knowledge, new competency skills and thinning out the geographical differences, etc. The innovative archetype of the online education is significant in quality, course content, satisfaction, and the perception of the users from various levels when compared to traditional face-to-face classroom systems. As a result, online education is more effective and efficient than the model of face-to-face education. The main objective of this research is to analyse and measure the various factors that affect employer perception towards online education systems in their recruitment process and cycle. 549 articles have been examined in terms of integrated literature review system to measure the impact. The result indicates, awareness, readiness, credentials and reputation are the major factors that affect employer perception on hiring decision.

## KEYWORDS

Awareness, Credentials, Credentials, Employer Perception Of Online Education Systems, Online Education System, Reputation, Online Education

## INTRODUCTION

Globalization has a great influence in the revolution of education system. The technological rebellion and the internet have helped to overcome the limitations of time, place, space, languages, etc. and has empowered the user to share access and transform information across the globe economically. Internet and technology satisfy the student's expectations by providing them flexible and infinite opportunities across the globe. With over 460 million internet users, India is the second largest online market, ranked only behind China. By 2021, there will be about 635.8 million internet users in India (a report by IMAI and Kantar IMRB). Educational bodies undergo significant changes due to introduction of web and internet technology in distance education (Arinto, 2016). According to Bramble and Panda (2008), globalization plays a vital role in recognizing the necessity of providing online learning opportunities in higher education. In a span of decade, the demand for online courses has been increased due to change in technology, lifestyle, economic, urge for employee to develop

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knowledge, new competency skills and thinning out the geographically difference, etc. (Conceição, 2007).

The innovative archetype of online education is significant in quality of the course material, satisfaction and perception of the users of various levels when compared to traditional and face to face education system. As the results on comparison, online education is more effective and efficient than the legacy face-face education (Almala, 2007; Albrecht, 2002; Casey, 2008; Means, Toyama, Murphy & Baki, 2010; Norton and Hathaway, 2008; Russell, 1999; Schutte, 1997; Sitzmann et al., 2006”).

At the same time, on the grounds of employment, employers hesitate to hire candidates with online degree but similarly, there is a gradual growth in number of courses offered through online. Even though organizations offer training and development programs through online still they are hesitating to hire online degree graduate (Carnevale, 2005).

## **Background of the Study**

According to The Hindu newspaper report India is a youngest nation in the world consist of average age group population of 29years. The demand for the online education programs increases not only as they provide an alternate mode of education and also, they endow opportunities to the working class of pupil to keep them updated and upgraded with improved skills that are related to their employment. It provides opportunity to pursue undergraduate and post graduate degrees in spite of their job responsibilities. According to the University Grants Commission (2012), India is home to 659 universities which includes 45 central, 312 states, 173 private, and 129 “deemed to be” universities and around 33,023 colleges respectively. India has adapted to various forms of E-learning format which includes MOOC’s - Massive Open Online Course. India stands as second biggest market next to United States for MOOC’s. The Top US- based MOOC’s like Coursera, Udacity, etc. comprises largest Indian population than others. Many institutions has included online program along with the distance education as part of their strategic plan for sustainability and long run (Benton-King et al., 2005), same-way students are also demanding, lifelong learning environment for their convenient, updated skills set and expected outcome in their career growth and job sustainability.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Evolution of Online Education in India**

India makes use of Information and Communication Technology in an organized manner to attain 100% literacy rate including rural population as its long-term plan (Linardopoulos, N., 2012). The tools used to achieve its long-term plan are Open Source, Local language interface, Satellite, Digital Library, etc. “Mission 2007” was implemented in aim of providing connectivity and knowledge sharing to each and every villages of India within 15 Aug 2007. An open source online learning has been developed by IIT Kanpur and named it as “Brihaspati”. It was funded by Ministry of Communication and Information Technology. This online platform has been deployed in more than 80 universities across India and used to post notes, reference materials and handout by faculties in electronic mode. A similar project funded by Ministry of Human Resources named – “National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning” (NPTEL) in 1999.

Along with government many institutes in India taking initiation in developing and delivery quality multimedia contents. Jadava University has started a trimester interdisciplinary master’s degree course in 2001, under the school of educational technology. This is the first courses that get formal approval from AICTE in India for online education system. BITS Pilani introduced “Virtual University” that offers technology-oriented courses through master’s degree and doctoral programs in numerous streams like science, management, civilizations and also offers engineering and technology courses. In efforts to deliver education to larger number of pupils by eliminating the barriers like time, space and other constraints, Sikkim Manipal University of Technological Sciences and Health, Medical,

Gangtok under the supervision of Ministry of HRD and Universal Grant Commission in association with “Manipal Academy of Higher Education” (MAHE). U University offers courses like Diploma, Bachelor and master’s degree in information technology and Management.

### **Characteristic of Online Course, Program and Technology**

The trending online course and technology differs from the traditional classroom model. There are two types of online learning - real time and asynchronous online learning. When students and tutors interact at the same time in different location, then it is known as “Real Time” Online learning. When the interaction between instructor and student take place at different location and different time, it is known as “Asynchronous” Online learning environment. To be more detailed, in a real time online learning communication takes place through chat or messaging platform while in asynchronous online learning the communication includes online assignments, Bulletin message postings, etc. (Bills, 2003). According to Miller, in an asynchronous learning environment, students can significantly focus on the faculty and peer interaction in course time and can process the information later whenever he finds time to do so.

Students can access online labs from any location in any time. They can choose the portion that meets their learning needs by moving around the website and they are allowed to have learner control of information access. Learners can move from one concept to another easily through hyperlink provided in the learning material which means from one document to another to have a clear idea on inter-related concepts (Brookfield, 2003). Bills (2003) explains the characteristic of online courses and technique for interaction which includes,

1. Small group formation
2. Discussion boards
3. E-mailing to group or only to intended users
4. Group or individual assignment posting
5. Chat availability for class and small groups

There are several recommendations and contributions are provided to understand the online course material and teaching methodology of it. Goodyear (2002), examines the link between belief, philosophy and pedagogy of higher education tutors on online education environment. The analysis also provides the information related to procedures used in online education and serious areas of beliefs and knowledge related with it. Good-year states a clear definition on e-learning, online learning and asynchronous learning as “A distinguishing feature of contribution to an asynchronous communication is that it does not allow interruption-individual contributions to an asynchronous electronic discussion are relatively self-contained and well-formed and cannot depend on linguistic supports such as rapid turn-taking” (Cooper & Schindler, 2003).

### **Student Learning and Program Outcomes Obtained through Online Education**

Lot of studies was conducted on the assessment of student’s achievements in online education and traditional educational environment. The studies conducted by few researchers which has no significance difference (Toyama et al., 2010; Tallent-Runnels et al., 2006) and few found relative difference in the performance of students (Creswell, Hanson, Clark, & Morales, 2007).

The Meta -analyses on learning outcomes based on online delivery mode and traditional delivery mode results. The analyses are similar and there was no significance transformation in achievement and performance of the students (Hostetter & Busch 2006). Few studies have found difference in the performance and outcome of the students in online and traditional based learning (Dabbagh, 2007). In terms of knowledge the level of achievement of students found is similar in some studies and better in online learning and vice versa in other studies (Sitzmann et al., 2006; Dell et al., 2014; Heale et al., 2010 and Abdous & Yoshimura, 2010). A Relative difference has been found between online learning

and classroom instructions depending on the knowledge domain. When students are provided with independence of time and they practice the materials provided by online learning, then the online learning will be 19% better than classroom teaching (Hostetter & Busch, 2006).

### **Online Learning: Employer Viewpoint**

The quality of online learning cannot be decided only based on accreditation and content of course. In spite of efforts and initiatives taken by institutions, tutors, accrediting agencies and students, the important factor that drives all is the effort of “Employer”. If an employer feels that the quality of an online course is not up to the standards then, they won’t hire the candidates who pursued that course and down the lane that course will lose its significance and will not sustain in the market. Thus, it is very important for each educational institution to join hands with employer while legitimizing the standards and policies of the course. The perception, awareness, readiness and reputation of the employers on online education are also considered as the major important factor in the research. The qualities that are expected by the employer from online education and online graduate are

1. Integrity
2. Communication skills
3. Self – motivation
4. Interpersonal skills
5. Teamwork
6. Innovative and Initiative

They are also expected to be strong enough in hard skills like critical thinking, mathematics, etc. There has been little research has been conducted on employer’s perception even though it plays an important role in online education. In a nearby future perception of employer will play major role in prototype of an online education (Selznick, 2011).

### **Research Gap**

Even though higher education improves over the period of time with the help of innovative instructive model, still concern lingers. The comparability between traditional classroom education and online education has some issues like quality, acceptability efficiency, effectiveness, etc. Among them acceptability of online learning or education has failed among the employers. There are only limited literatures available on how the acceptability of online education influences the hiring decision among stakeholders especially, when it comes to employer. The employers are unwilling to hire online graduates, even though students find them economical and effective (Adams and DeFleur, 2007). In 2007, Seibold - The clients of “National Career Counseling and Job Placements” were advised not to reveal their degree obtained through online education mode, since the employers weigh them less when compared to the traditional degree (Rao et al., 2011). It is important to explore the perception and attitude of employer towards online education even though they are provided by prestigious institutions.

### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

1. To understand the online education system and employer viewpoint on online education system
2. To analyses the factors affecting employer perception on online education system
3. To measure the employee awareness on online education system

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, the integrated literature review method has been adopted for analyzing the research. Integrated literature review is distinct as “reviewing, analyzing and blending the respective literatures or topics in an integrated way, where a new structure or viewpoints has been catalyst for further study” (Torraco, 2005). This study analyses the critical part of various literatures ideas and relationships towards employer perception on online education system and provide a new knowledge on topic, logic, reasoning, critiques and concepts for upcoming facts.

Data’s are collected through online database and various journals like, SCOPUS, ABDC, Emerald, EBSCO, ProQuest and Google Scholar. This research plays a vital role in understanding the perception of employer towards online education system and analyse the various factors that affect the employability of students holding online degree.

506 articles in SCOPUS, 235 articles in ABDC, 187 articles in Emerald, 547 articles in EBSCO and 1059 articles in ProQuest are used to analyse the segment of factors affecting employer perception on online education. From the overall database, 549 articles are reviewed for this study. Online education system, employer perception on online education, factors affecting employer perception on online education, credibility and acceptability of online education, accreditation and reputation of online education, employer awareness on online education environmental, online education readiness, recruitment and selection process, are the keywords used for analysing this research. Based on the literature review outcome, conceptual and theoretical framework are framed out to understand the research in-depth (Raj & Al-Alawneh 2011).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Factor Affecting Employer Perception on Online Education

Lot of criticism from employers is there in regard to online education. Employers perceive online distance degree are not on par with traditional degree and provide derisory credentials based on various factors. Among them apparent lack of academic rigidity, apparent lack of interactivity apparent lack of student commitment and concerns over credibility of online education are the four main issues that affects the perception over online education (Adam et al., 2012; Bolliger & Halupa 2012; Dabbagh, 2007). Large number studies state that, employers perceive that there is a lack of communication between peer to peer or students, faculties and mentors (Seibold, 2007). They believe lack of interactivity is due to acuity improper or completely not utilizing the communication tools and technology in online education sector. Employer relates lack of academic rigidity, risk of cheating, quality of instruction and mentored learning experience with online education. These perceptions arise due to the opinion that academic standards and educational policies of online education are not overseen (Columbaro and Monaghan, 2009). Reputation and credibility of online institutions are not satisfactory to employer which includes distress related to few fraudulent degrees (Hostetter & Busch 2006). Finally, the employer’s perception on students feels that students have lack of commitment towards online education. Since, they are willing to go to campus regularly these are the four factors that identified as perception affecting employer on online education and students opting for online degree (Falloon, 2011).

### Credibility and Acceptance of Online Education

Online education has improved and it serves as platform to improve their skills, gain knowledge, keep them updated, and even complete their graduation in short span of 10 years (Benson, 2002). Skepticism among employers regarding online higher education prevails even though more colleges offers many online courses and academic programs through online (Carnevale, 2007). The reports of research work regarding the employer’s acceptance of online graduation for employment are unreliable

even though they throw lights on insight of employer's perception regarding online education and considering them as one of the valid credentials for employment.

The students who pursue online education enchanting the risk of being not valuing credential they earn through online degree by employers. "The Acceptability of Online Degree Earned as a Credential for Obtaining Employment" – an empirical study conducted by Adams and DeFleur in the year of 2006 to examine the job opportunities are similar to candidate who has online degree and candidate of traditional regular degree (Barrett, B. 2010).. Around 270 HR professionals participated in the survey. Among them 96% says that they would choose the candidate from traditional degree holder rather than that of who completed their degree either partially or completely through online for employability in the organization. 4% chose online candidate rather than traditional graduate (Adams 2008).

### **Accreditation and Reputation of Online Education**

University Grants Commission is primarily responsible for regulating and approving distance education since after Distance Education Council has been dissolved (Capra, 2011). Conversely, there is no proper recognized accrediting agency for regulating and accrediting distance learning. NBA and NAAC should find alternate criteria rather than physical standards like infrastructure, size, etc. to accredit ODL in order to innovate and improvise the education sector. Countries like United States have unique accrediting agencies like "Distance Educational and Training Council Accrediting Commission, Middle States Commission on Higher Education", etc. to accredit and enhance distance learning (Cho, T. 2011).. Middle State Commission accredits and approves both traditional and online distance learning whereas Educational and Training Council Accrediting Commission concentrates on only distance education. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education acclimatizes its criteria according to traditional and online education respectively (Birochi & Pozzebon, 2011).

NBA has reformed its criteria for online education with touch base of ABET's criteria. ABET is an engineering accreditation agency of United States. Rather than physical requirements, criteria are based on the outcome of online education through the ability of students to apply the knowledge gained through distance education on mathematics, science and in other soft skills like, ability to work in teams, communication, etc. NBA also collects feedback from industries and professionals that recruit them, from faculties and alumni who completed the course successfully and the opinion of media regarding course. Evaluation of feedback and outcome of ability of students, serves as an important factor to measure the satisfaction of interest group regarding program (Huss, 2007).

### **Employer Awareness on Online Education Environmental**

There exists a gap between employers and online education as the employers are unacquainted about how the virtual universities provide degree or certificate to coursers undergone by students and environment of online learning (Kambutu, 2002). Information regarding the course content and transparency in learning environment and certificate they provide should be clearly explained by the institutions in order to avoid skepticism among employers regarding online degree. Along with institutions, learners should be in a position to explain their educational environment, educational experience and communication and collaboration with their peer, tutors and recruiters or employers (Theresa, 2010). One of the major reasons for reluctance regarding online education by employers is that it has higher degree of fraudulent activities and cheating in process and procedure of assessment. Studies also states that, online learning environment lacks in real time interaction and less chances of communication between learners and tutors which is one of the reasons to hesitate to hire online graduates. Steps to be taken to reduce the obstacles that prevails in hiring online graduates like, lack of communication, teamwork and interaction, cheering collegiality, improving learning and assessment methods, etc. (Bidwell, 2013).

## **Employer View on Online Education Environmental Readiness**

Assessment of readiness in online education is becoming critical even though e-learning is gaining its popularity as the level of e-maturity is low. Assessment should consist of variables that are crucial and touch base with previous and existing research. It also should consist of factors like, content readiness, financial readiness, HR readiness, technical readiness, etc. and demographic factors are most important factor for e-learning that consists of gender, age and educational qualifications (Meyer, 2002). Sheila Paxton of Business Wire insists that before institutions of higher education introduce the e-learning it should assist the technical readiness in prior as it uses internet, interact and collaborate with the peers and trainers (Moore & Kearsely, 2005). A path analysis model has been developed and conducted in University of Nairobi by Gakuu in the year of 2007.

Result of the analysis states that, there is no significance difference in attitude towards adaption of e-learning and distance learning. It is very difficult to build the model of employer e-learning readiness that satisfies all the factor and parameters (Ary & Brune, 2011). Most of the institutions are in chaos in selecting the parameter that are used to assess and fulfills the expectations of employers and assess their OLE readiness in accepting graduation through e-learning technology in this Globalized era. A Survey was conducted by Global Information Technology (GIT) in the year of 2012 on “Living in Hyper-connected World”, the result of this survey states that level of OLE readiness is low in developing countries as they have poor infrastructure of OLE and also lack skills that enables society to make use of technology in the optimal way.

## **Human Resource Recruitment and Selection Process**

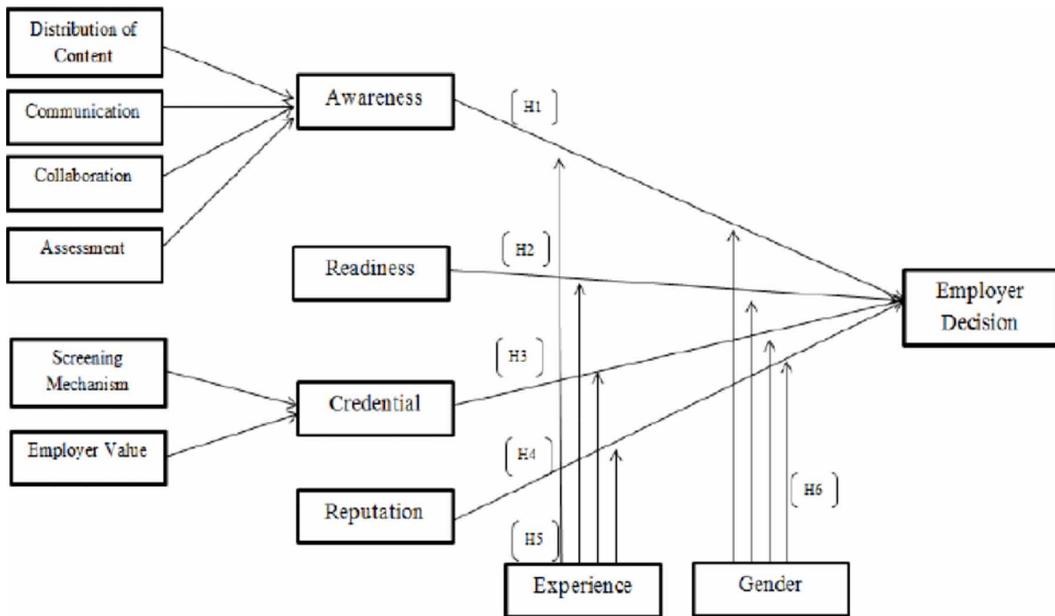
Main source for hiring the professionals, technicals and managerial level jobs is recruitment of college graduates and those jobs are highly important to economic feat of both nation as well as business. The higher-level jobs of various organizations are reserved for internal resources through promotions, transfer, etc. whereas, the entry job levels are allotted for candidate who completed their graduation recently (Muilenburg & Berge, 2005). Recruitment and selection process of new employees is the most important role carried by the HR Professionals. Selection processes of large firm are taken by dedicated HR staffs while it is taken care by the top management in small firms (Nance, 2007). The Performance of organization and outcomes of an individual of that organization depend on the decision of employers regarding the selection of suitable employee (Wilk and Cappelli, 2003).

Online Recruitment process has replaced traditional Recruitment and selection process in the span of 10 years which has undergone many drastic changes. Currently online recruitment is the emerging trend of human resource management (Pallant, 2005). Internet and various technologies are used in the process of recruiting and selection effectively and efficiently hence called e-recruiting. The selection process take place through computer assisted screening and predication that helps in reduction of cost and time incurred in it and increases employee selection (Smith and Rupp, 2004). Organizations can collect resumes in electronic format and evaluate those using technologies like resume application system and warehouse for resume are organized for future openings by posting and updating the job openings through online recruitment (Ryan & Ali, 2004). There are ethical and legal concerns while obtaining personal information through web, information's about the candidate may have many pitfalls that information accurate while conducting background verification with the help of online and web technologies. It is the responsibility of an HR professional to be cautious while gathering information through social networks and recruiting candidate through online (Society of Human Resource Management, 2009). Staffing professionals should take necessary precautionary to avoid inequity and immorally invading privacy data of the applicants (SHRM, 2008).

## **Conceptual Framework**

Figure 1 shows the conceptual model.

Figure 1. Conceptual model



## DISCUSSION

The literature of Employer’s perception describes that the Human Resource executives of any organization should look forward for online graduate in near future (Simonson, M. 2007). By creating awareness about alternate way of pursuing degree other than the traditional classroom mode helps to reduce lack of knowledge or readiness about the distance education. The reason behind the “Skepticism” on the distance learning is lack of knowledge about it (Elizabeth Griffin, 2002). The lack of awareness about online environment of employer is the main reason to hesitate hiring online graduate (Dutta & Bilbao-Osorio, 2012). The important factors of advancement and improvement factors of online education are perception, attitude and policies of employer online education. The lack of understanding on how an online education can compete or enhance with face-face employee skills and knowledge is the grand reason of unwillingness of employer to hire online graduate (Skylar, Higgins, Boone, & Jones, 2005). In spite of skepticism it was agreed that there was huge demand for online education in various academic disciplines like management. On the other hand, few studies completely differ and reveal that employers have negative views regarding the online education (Kirtman, 2009) and Levernier (2005). Few respondents are uncertain with their perception while considering online education as a part of degree program (Kirtman, L. 2009). and perception of Dean Wilson also goes with the above finding regarding online education.

According the various literature review, employers are very keenly looking for Reputation of online courses. Whereas, the government agencies need to create a regulatory body to accredit the online degrees which will create major changes in Indian higher education sector. Brick and Motor College should take more initiatives on providing online courses. The institutions and universities which are offering online education need to maintain transparency and quality in course content creation, delivering-medium, communication mode, interactive feature, collaborative environment among learner to learner and learner to faculty, assessment feedback of online courses and have to make sure the workplace relevancy of course subjects according to the industry’s needs. Organization

credentials plays a vital role in recruitment process whereas, the course recognized by government agencies and courses offered by the premium institutes or university will change the organizational perception on evaluating the credentials in favor of employees to get their jobs.

## CONCLUSION

First, in regard to current administrator perceptions regarding online education in general, all the administrators who participated in the interviews appeared to hold very positive perceptions and attitudes toward online education in general. In fact, all study participants indicated there was a need and demand for online education at their respective institutions. While Dean Alan expressed skepticism toward online education in the art discipline, he did agree that there was a place and demand for online education in other academic disciplines such as education. These findings differ with those of Stanistreet (2004) and Strivens and Grant (2000) that found administrators held slightly negative views of online instruction. However, Stanistreet (2004) indicated that many of his study participants expressed uncertainty with regard to their level of comfort when online instruction is a component of degree completion. This finding is consistent with Dean Wilson's perception of online education.

Additionally, Sumner (2000) and Swail and Kampits (2001) reported that academic leaders at institutions with online offerings now have a much more favorable opinion of the relative learning outcomes for online courses than those at institutions with no online offerings. This illustrates that the perceptions toward online education is shifting ever so slightly in a favorable direction. All of the administrators who were interviewed for this study indicated that their respective institutions did offer a variety of online options for students. Therefore, it may be reasonable to conclude that there was a positive bias toward online education as a result of the direction in which the administrators' colleges or institutions were headed in regard to online learning. In short, administrator perceptions may be shaped based on their personal and institutional experiences with online education. However, favorable administrative perceptions of online learning did not significantly influence their hiring practices. The study findings suggest that when faced with two types of job candidates, a traditional doctoral candidate and an online degree candidate (especially one who earned their degree from a for-profit institution), administrators are far more likely to choose the former. This finding ratifies Stanistreet (2004) study that concludes that the majority of the time, administrators will choose the traditional doctorate over the candidate with a doctorate earned online. It is important to note however that administrator' decisions may change when faced with a candidate with an online degree from a traditional/reputable institution of higher education. Some administrators clearly indicated that they would give consideration to candidates with an online degree from reputable institutions Tesone, Severt, & Carpenter (2008).

In current global economy the candidates should possess minimum qualification as degree either through online or traditional mode even though the employers are anxiety about hiring an online graduate, since the school level education or diploma is not sufficient to secure well versed job in this competitive workforce scenario. It advisable to educational institution to join hands with industries for more innovation technology and strategic planning for sustainability and work with HR professionals to have better idea regarding the industrial requirement and design courses based on it and make them to understand the significance of online mode of learning (Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006). This difference arises based on industries they belong to like engineering, finance or accounting and the degree of expertise they require or degree required for current job opening. Moreover, the quantity of percentage of employees with credential has a greater impact on differences on decision making in hiring online graduate. The stakeholders of educational sector should recognize the growing demands for online education among students in recent times. Employability of the applicants with online degree perhaps not at par with the rapid growth of the online learning environment. Consequently, employers also realize the impact of their decision on evolution of education to offer courses completely through online mode.

## **Future Research**

This study focuses only on the perceptions of employers to online graduation, whereas in the future, perception of other stakeholders like students, faculties, institutions, content and technology providers in India can be explored. Comparative studies should be carried out regarding acceptance of online degree by employers and perception of employers between developed and developing countries. In this field, Qualitative research will explore the in-depth view on employer perception towards hiring online degree graduates.

Apart from employer perception, the stakeholders like students, faculties, technology providers, content providers and institutions should perceive the need of online education explore in India.

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