TheUnipedia.Com: Fit or a Misfit?

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Abstract

This case is based on the entrepreneurial venture of MBA students from Mehran University of Engineering and Technology, named Ali Gohar (CEO) and Mubashar Qureshi (CTO). Both studied at Cadet College and remembered the struggle they faced when they were looking for pretest preparations for the university admissions. That's when they partnered to build the Unipedia, an easy way for struggling students to find quality aptitude test preparation at the low prices in comparison to coaching centres. This case is a brief about the online aptitude test preparation services in Pakistan. It will be a quick understanding of the industry dynamics and as to how the customer functions in this industry.

Keywords: Online aptitude test preparation service, entrepreneurial venture, online business

JEL Classification: L00, L16

UNIPEDIA INTRODUCTION

Unpedia is a coaching service that prepares students for aptitude test to get admission in high ranked universities of Pakistan. The business idea was the result of bad experience of one of the founders Mr Ali (The CEO), who passed his exam with distinctive grades in Hyderabad, but faced problems in preparation for aptitude tests and getting admission in universities of good repute. After qualifying intermediate with flying colours he struggled to find coaching centres in Hyderabad and travelled to Karachi searching for coaching centre, with flexible timings, customized services but failed to find one. As there is an opportunity in every problem, the gap was identified by Ali. He discussed the idea with his close friend Mr Mubashar (The CTO), and Unipedia was formed. Both decided to start a new of its kind coaching enter that serve the unique needs of students who are seeking admissions in universities for higher studies and to make them prepared based on their unique needs for the pre-admission aptitude tests.

The Unipedia is different as compared to another run of mill coaching centres. It is very cost effective (The Subscription fee is Rs. 10 a month), ventured with over 100 institutions, the options of mock tests with high possible accuracy, free demonstration before registration, and strong online presence. As the penetration of 3G and 4G is growing in Pakistan, the availability of internet is more than water in remote areas including Larkana, Nawabshah, Hyderabad,
Sukhur etc. This has given a huge boost to the online businesses in Pakistan, as the reach is not that expensive as it was. It is right to say that masses are rapidly embracing online businesses (Including online aptitude test preparation) in their daily lives nowadays.

Roughly 10,000 students apply for universities every year in Pakistan and almost eighty percent approach aptitude test preparation services, travelling to urban areas. This is a huge market if multiplied by the number of times these universities intake students in one year. Still, there are a huge number of people that are yet to be explored. Along with great opportunities, there are problems too. One is completion that cannot be ignored. This entire industry roughly consists of more than fifteen online websites serving the same kind of customers with the same offers. Almost half of the share is enjoyed by the big players like pakprep.com, entrytestmcq.com and gotest.com. However, there are gaps in the market that are still not served.

The Unipedia next plan is to target and serve the unmet needs of students preparing for GRE, GMAT and SAT. Both Ali and Mubashar is working on algorithms to create a competitive edge in the market. The mobile application is one of the top priorities that are in progress. The partners are sure that mobile apps bring more convenience to users and will widen the market.

“The entire business of The Unipedia is built around focusing on delivering “Customers’ Convenience”. The idea is to provide a service which can help students prepare for their aptitude tests at low prices from the comfort of their homes”.

(Ali Gohar, CEO the Unipedia)

The Industry

The global online education Industry is fully grown and too much advanced than Pakistan. There are big fishes in the global market who actually makes or breaks the entire industry. These companies connect all the students from around the world to their desired learning courses at the convenience of their homes. In Pakistan, there is not much innovation seen in this education system. If there are some changes, they are negligible and also not sufficient as depicted by the illiteracy rate of this country. People who could not afford high admission fees, accommodation and travelling settle down for the government universities. Which is again no less than a sacrifice.

In this condition, online education in Pakistan is no less than a blessing. It’s just a dream come true for all those students who cannot afford to burn a large amount of money for knowledge, as one thinker once said, “Knowledge is something which should be free“. It has also become the need of time, as the lifestyles of people are improving in Pakistan. In the conventional mechanism, the flow of the customer is the same for all the competitors in the industry as mentioned in the customer flow section of the case. The customer is supposed to make an account on the website and share his/her contact details. He/she has to choose the difficulty level and the mock tests can easily be purchased by simply making a payment through mobile phone. Hence, each customer needs to know their desired program and amount of tests he/she would want to practice in one time.
Number of Players in Pakistan’s Online Education Industry

Due to the immense and ever-growing competition in the market. Players like parprep.com and gotest.com are offering almost every feature a student could wish for in the most convenient manner at the higher price. Whereas the new and comparatively smaller players like goet.com, mymcqtestpreparation.com and “Ilm Ki Duniya” are aggressively competing with almost the same features with less pricing.

All these services are now becoming more popular in remote areas of Pakistan. These are those places from where a large number of students travel to cities to get their selves enrolled in different coaching centres.

Pakprep.org

Pakprep.org is one of the highly recommended choices for the students, successfully reaching the number of attempted MCQs to fifteen thousand. Founded in 2012, Pakprep is widely used by the students for the preparation of aptitude test due to its convenience and the features offered. These features include a variety of subjects namely Biology, Physics, Chemistry and mathematics etc. There are multiple options for chapters and topics also including the choice of difficulty level. Students can easily enrol by making an online account over the website and by paying the subscription of Rs 2,000 per year. This subscription includes the access of fifteen thousand MCQs for a year along with the online counselling service which can be availed any time during the year. The payment can be done through easy paisa or through the pakprep.com prepaid card, available at near book stores. Pakprep offers its customers with the availability of the explanation of each question along with the detailed results in the end. Proper blogs are also published on a monthly basis for students. See exhibit 1.1

Gotest.pk

Another competitor is gotest.com, which is providing almost all the features that are desired by the target audience. Features include a variety of free mock tests available for the students, variety in subjects (Biology, chemistry and physics etc.) and topics. Go test gives the added feature of CSS exam preparation as well. The additional features include informative blogs, consultation, free coins, referral program and much more. The subscription of these above-mentioned services can be purchased in Rs 3,000 for three months period. The payment can also be done through any easy paisa shop, through a bank or direct deposit. See exhibit 1.2

New Players in the market

Entrytestmcq.com

This website offers multiple test preparation services at cheap rates. The interface of this website is quite interesting and attractive for the target audience. The features include 4,000 MCQs which can be practised without even purchasing the premium version of the website. These MCQs are categorized as subject wise as biology, chemistry and intelligence. The price they charge for all these features is Rs1500 for a three month time period. They provide the service or payment and support centre as well. See exhibit 1.3
This website was a joint venture by the students of NUST and this is the reason that they are more focused over targeting the students of NUST. The website offers a wide range of facilities to its customers including variety in subjects, topics and difficulty level for each test attempted. The additional features include informative blogs, charming interface, detailed results, 24/7 counselling and also a very cooperative customer support centre. These features can be availed in the package for Rs 1,000 for ten months’ time period. Depending upon the number of mock tests purchased during this time. Payment method is also convenient for the target audience including cash deposit, easy paisa etc. (See exhibit 1.4). Other competitors include gneeet.com, ilmkiduniya.com, geekmcqs.com etc. See exhibit 1.5

Rules of the game

This industry of online education and test preparation revolves around some factors which are said to be the rules of the game are as follows:

• **Validating ideas**

It is very important for any startup to do a small research before putting in any cost in terms of time or money. This also is essential in order to calculate the existing demand for any course that is to be introduced to the market. It is likely that the entrepreneurs get stuck into their “idea Locks” and consider their ideas, the winners, not considering any feedback from the audience and relevant personnel. Reassessment of ideas is also important when the communication strategies are considered to be made. Resulting in an enhanced product.

• **Content mediums**

This includes the multiple ways in which the content can be created and delivered to the customers. The model of delivery for online education courses varies with respect to the method of course design. Considering primary models includes ad hoc online courses and programs, fully online programs, School-as-a-Service, educational partnerships, competency-based education, blended/hybrid courses and the flipped classroom, and MOOCs(Massive Open Online Courses).

• **Shooting high-quality videos**

Creating and publishing videos is a vital part of an integrated communication plan. Video is essential in order to complete a marketing plan and if this is not taken into consideration it can limit the company in reaching the people who are the target audience and can be influenced. This has now become the industry norm to introduce videos containing features like audio and sound consideration, editing and post-production effects etc.

• **Attractive screen flows**

Screen flows are also considered to attract the target audience in this industry. Students looking for courses are targeted through a comprehensive walkthrough of screen flow with some tutorial resulting in the conversion of the customer to sales.

• **Pricing**

Pricing is one factor which is taken as the key to the competition in this sector. Almost all
the competitors are competing with nominal price differences.

- **Marketing and Promotions**

  It is an industrial norm for an online business to enter with a fanfare strategy at launch. It is also important to invest money in developing a market plan. Not doing this would ultimately lead to the closure of the business. It is a tactic used by almost all online businesses to sign in more customers and multiplying their revenues. Online marketing tools include the following:

  - Online advertising
  - Online personal selling
  - Online sales promotion
  - Online public relations
  - Online direct marketing
  - Websites

**Forums and Communication Channels:**

Preparation sites provide discussion forums and other communication channels like chats e.t.c with the administrators, teachers, and other participants. These forums and communication channels are used as a communication medium between participants and teachers. Participants can post questions that can be answered by other participants or can directly ask teachers. Other essential characteristics of the competition include the following:

  - Explanation of each Question
  - Performance Reports
  - Demo/Mock Test Feature
  - Easy Payment Methods
  - Interactive Interface
  - Admin Support
  - Blogs and Forums
  - Accreditation by Teachers, Universities and Students
  - Counselling and Coaching
  - Past Papers
  - Tips and Details of Specific University Test
  - Notes and Learning Material
  - News Portal for University Admission Test Dates and Details

**Customer Flow**

The entire competition was studied and following customer, the flow was found to be consistent in all the websites:

- **Main landing page:** Explaining the features of the course with a consistent call to action buttons to sign up.
- **Demo of some sort:** This is either an HD video explaining the features of the site, with
screenshots or this is done in the form of screenshots. On some websites, there were tutorials that users could avail right away, like attempting a part of the test or viewing initial 1 to 2 parts of a long course.

- **Signup to the main website:** A signup is required to enrol into courses or to take the tests.

- **Course Detail Page / Test Detail Page:** Almost all websites had a page on which the tests and courses are displayed along with the details on the same page. The page also includes a number of questions/number of lectures, cost, time taken, author, sources, reviews, people who have taken the tests, number of people currently enrolled etc.

- **Actual Test / Course:** Actual test is mostly mistaken less and has a very responsive nature. Test questions are relevant, sorted and filtered specific to the type of test selected. Participants have the option to comment, suggest and give feedback related to the test questions, interface and their overall experience.

- **Community area:** Many famous sites provided a community area sort of thing where the users were able to ask questions and start a discussion about the problems they may be facing.

- **Direct Communication:** The customer has a mean to communicate directly to the facilitator or the admins of the site for assistance anytime.

- **Personal Portal / Space:** All the websites provided a detail report of the tests taken or courses taken along with their progress and communication with the administrators of the site and community. Users were able to see their previous activities and resources related to their programs.

**The Differentiation Mantra of Unipedia**

In Pakistan, unfortunately, Student test preparation is limited to Google searches or expensive tuition centres with little feedback on how to improve. For something as important as entry test preparation, The Unipedia has created a solution where students can prepare for entrance tests such as the ECAT, MCAT, BCAT etc. Students can access all mock tests using their smartphone or laptop starting at as low as PKR 10 for access to 800+ mock tests. The Unipedia is an online portal that prepares students for appearing in university entry tests. Right now, the portal employs Artificial Intelligence to provide a detailed analysis of a candidate’s present standing. Using that knowledge, the platform provides practice MCQs and suggestions to the students, enabling them to actively self-assess themselves, improve, and ultimately make their way to the best universities.

Over 3 million students prepare for different university entry tests every year. Many of these students end up applying to different academic institutions which mean multiple trips, payments and preparation materials. The Unipedia counters this with a result-driven approach by challenging the student with mock tests from their desired university on their first day. Analyzing their results, the AI then provides a detailed report highlighting areas of improvement for each student, chapter-wise, and topic-wise. Based on a student’s performance, the AI also makes recommendations to the student for which tests can help improve performance. Founded in January 2016, the Unipedia was incubated at the Nest i/o before being invested in by 10xciC. Since releasing their product to the general public, The Unipedia has partnered with over 100 institutions and academies with users having successfully completed 800+ mock tests. Each
new user is able to take XYZ tests as part of The Unipedia’s free demo before being asked to subscribe for as little as PKR 10 per month.

The target audience of the Unipedia caters to both male and females from the age of 18 to 22 and above in the SEC A, B and C. This service is mostly availed by the students who belong to remote areas of Sindh. The usual spent over test preparation institutes is very high also these students travel from their hometowns to cities to prepare for the aptitude tests. See exhibit 1.6A

**What Does it Offer?**

Following are the services that are offered by the Unipedia:

1. Mock tests for practising
   - MCAT
   - ECAT
   - BCAT
   - NAT
   - NET

   See exhibit 1.6B

After logging in to the Unipedia account, there are many features which can be availed by the users. These features include leader board, a platform where one student can compare his/her results with other students and referral program, where after referring the service to friends, Rs 20/- coins can be availed. Other services include the transaction history, test history, result history, explanations, badges and orders history as well.

**Company’s Mission**

The Unipedia’s mission is to build a connection between the intellectuals and learners to remove the hindrance and barriers that are coming in their way of an academic career. They want to provide the value addition to every individual either belong to any corner of Pakistan. The Unipedia has the will to empower these students with quality education at an affordable price. The Unipedia consider the guidance of such students as their utmost responsibility.

**How does it work?**

The Unipedia’s head office is located in Karachi at the area of Tariq road at the 10xC accelerator building. The entire process of providing the service is Online. Once a customer registers over the website and requests for a test, the algorithms help him/her through. The notification is sent to the portal and if the payment is made the portal allows the customer to access the requested test. This is how this service can be availed from any part of the world. See exhibit 1.7(Activity Model)

**Order Placement Medium**

*Website*
The entire business is done on through the website, the Unipedia’s website is an online portal through which the requested mock tests are delivered to the customers. Every customer has its own dashboard which contains the information regarding the tests taken, tests ordered, history of test results, number of transactions done, balance(amount) in the account and also a number of people referred. See exhibit 1.8

**Pricing Structure**

Pricing is being done keeping in mind the need of these students travelling from interior areas and also who cannot afford to pay a large sum of money to get an education and go forward with their lives. Pricing starts with as low as Rs 10 per test including separate topic tests in both English and Mathematics. The tests are designed in 10 questions each and results in providing the detailed analytics of each question a student attempts. Furthermore, if some student wishes to attempt the test for universities like IBA, CBM and NUST they would have to pay around Rs 80/- per test. The pricing structure has been attached in the exhibit 2.1.

**How payment is done at the Unipedia?**

The Unipedia has worked rigorously as to answer the question, “what should be the mode of the payment for the customers?” Mr Ali kept this factor in mind that they should eliminate the hassle of small payments. This is why, the Unipedia provides its customers with ease with not only its product but also with the wide variety of payment methods namely, easy paisa, Sim Sim by Finja and also BitCoin. Still, after introducing this they faced an important issue in which people without ID cards were not able to make the payments through any of these platforms. In order to tackle this Mr Ali along with telco introduced Direct Career Billing (DCB) in which people could make a smaller pavement as low as Rs 50/-

In this method, the company could only earn over large amounts as they have to pay a large percentage in taxes. The percentage of this service tax by the government is around 70% i.e if someone is paying Rs 50/- as a payment. The company will only receive Rs.15/- in their pockets, the rest of the money will go to the Government as the service tax. See exhibit 2.2

**Marketing Strategies at the Unipedia**

Marketing tools used for promotions are:

**Social Media**

The Unipedia heavily advertises through various mediums of social media. These include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and google+. Through advertisements in these social mediums, the Unipedia is trying to create a viral impact and to build a strong word of mouth relationship with their customers. It updated its customers through various admission related information through the Facebook page. See exhibit 2.3

**Word of Mouth Strategy**

To get a better understanding of customers and to gain trust, the Unipedia aims to increase customer satisfaction.

**Email Marketing**

The Unipedia do email marketing seasonally and also believe that the result of this medium
is slow but long term. Although the marketing funnel seems to be missing, as the students who enrol but don’t avail the service are not considered to be poked.

**Website**

The Unipedia’s user-friendly and convenient website is the cherry on the cake as it simplifies the entire order process flow. The team is working very effectively to generate algorithms to entertain the complaints within the shortest possible time. See exhibit 2.4

**SMS Marketing**

The Unipedia relied on SMS marketing at the launch in order to aware the target audience.

**Student and Teacher Testimonials**

The Unipedia very creatively portrayed the point of views of both students and teachers. The comments of these people were all combined in a video and presented over the public platform to create positive word of mouth. See exhibit 2.5

**Shaking hands with the big fishes of the market**

The Unipedia while focusing on the target audience of interior Sindh realizes the fact that the market is not as good as it seems. The education business in these areas is mostly run by the people in power. These teachers running the coaching centres are considered as the godfathers, which can sway away from the entire competition. In order to target the students in these coaching centres, the Unipedia decided to shake hands with them. The deal was made and a handsome amount of money was paid as profit to those teachers who introduce the Unipedia’s services to their students. After sometime, this introduction of a new service put the image of the teachers in question as they were unable to entertain the students, questions about the lessons they took from the Unipedia a night ago.

**Mapping the Activity System**

An activity map is a diagnostic tool to identify the organization’s competitive advantage and its value propositions of the organization’s activities. In the case of the Unipedia, there are three activity systems which are mapped together including the interface and use of artificial intelligence, convenience and competitive pricing. Furthermore, the linked activities in these four factors include its quality mock tests, pricing methods, marketing strategies, variety of tests and efficient mobile application. (See Exhibit 2.6)

**Strategic Profile**

There are three major factors that make the Unipedia’s profile strong are focus, divergence and compelling tagline. Since the birth of the Unipedia, the sole purpose of the organization is to provide the quality mock test service to its clients in the minimum time possible. They are continuously striving to satisfy the needs of their customers with better interface, algorithms and low prices but the behaviour of the market seems more focused in terms of offering features. When we look into the perspective of divergence, the unique interface and the lowest pricing cannot be ignored. The Unipedia has worked very hard in providing the best and user-friendly interface to its customers. Unlike other features, the interface is also something the competitors have taken very seriously.
The final exam is passed with flying colours when the good strategy lends itself well in the tagline. "Prepare, Assess, Enroll" this is the tagline for The Unipedia. It is essential for a tagline to deliver a clear message and advertise an offering honestly to its customers if this is not done right the customer might not find the product worthy. The Unipedia has done justice to his tagline from their side and also to the features promised to its customers. But these features are not enough to attract customers.

**Value Chain Analysis**

Value chain analysis is a tool in strategy which is used to analyze the internal activities of the firm. The basic goal of this tool is to recognize which activities are more valuable to the firm and which activities could be improved to create a competitive advantage in the market. In the case of the Unipedia, the differentiating activity is the interface and the lowest pricing along with easy payment methods. These factors support them in creating a competitive edge over others. Although, these factors are also imitated by other players in the market. The Unipedia has to come up with a unique strategy to sustain its uniqueness in the market.

**WHAT NEXT IN PLATE FOR THE UNIPEDIA?**

A few days back, Ali while studying the sales data noticed a negative conversion rate and also observed an increase in the bounce rate of the website for the period of four months continuously. He also logged in to his analytics account and noticed that the traffic is also lesser at the Unipedia's social platforms (Facebook, Google+ etc.) in comparison to the previous months. For a moment he thought of not launching his mobile application any time soon, due to the decrease in traffic at the website. Same day in the evening, Ali along with his friend discussed and had no clue what to do next. They are confused as to whether there is something wrong with the brand positioning or marketing plan.

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APPENDIX

Exhibit 1.1

Exhibit 1.2
Exhibit 1.3

Exhibit 1.4
### Exhibit 1.5

| Factors                              | OETP.com | Entry class test | Gotest | Pak Prep | The Unipedia |
|--------------------------------------|----------|------------------|--------|----------|--------------|
| Explanation of questions             | Yes      | Yes              | Yes    | Yes      | No           |
| Performance Report                   | Yes      | Yes              | Yes    | Yes      | Yes          |
| Demo/Mock test Feature               | yes      | yes              | yes    | yes      | yes          |
| Easy Payment Method                  | yes      | yes              | yes    | yes      | yes          |
| Interactive Interface                | yes      | yes              | No     | No       | yes          |
| Admin Support                        | yes      | yes              | yes    | yes      | No           |
| Blogs and Forums                     | yes      | yes              | yes    | yes      | yes          |
| Accreditation by teachers            | yes      | No               | yes    | yes      | yes          |
| Counselling/coaching                 | yes      | No               | yes    | yes      | No           |
| Past Papers                          | yes      | yes              | No     | yes      | No           |
| Pricing                              | Rs 1000-2500 | Rs 1500    | Rs 3000 | Rs 2000 | Starting Rs 10 |
| The time period of service           | 3 months | 3 months         | 3 months | Yearly  | Any time     |

### Exhibit 1.6A

![Unipedia Website Banner](image_url)
Exhibit 2.1

Exhibit 2.2
Exhibit 2.3

Exhibit 2.4
Exhibit 2.5

MR. ABDULLAH SOOMRO
GIKI GRADUATE

Wish I had this while I was preparing for college. It's a great tool with a great team behind it.

DR. M. NABEEL
PhD Scholar, IUM, Germany

Education is the key for the development of Pakistan and students need to be trained accordingly. UniPedia has a vision to groom the students in the best possible way. I encourage all the students to join the hands of UniPedia to make Pakistan a developed country.

Exhibit 2.6

[Diagram showing quality mock test, competitive pricing, lowest pricing, mobile application, artificial intelligence, interface, marketing strategies, convenience]