

Effective brand positioning of universities in the ethnic Chinese community: A New Zealand perspective

Kim-Choy Chung
Assistant Professor
School of Business Administration
Al Alkhawayn University
Ifrane, Morocco

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Abstract

Although branding has become the latest focus in tertiary education to attract international students, little has been written about the influence of brand messages in Asian markets on student's choice of education destination. A literature review led to hypotheses developed, and hypothetical model validated by questionnaire research. The results suggest that effective brand positioning of a university is contingent on the type of message projected, promotional media used, and the cultural values of the potential student. The results have important implications for marketers of export tertiary education. This paper recommends further research into the influence of emotion in student's choice of study destination.

Introduction

A brand's positioning sets out what and who the brand is, and what it offers (Rositer & Percy 1991). Traditionally, brand positioning involves focusing on points of difference (differentiation), and the unique benefits that set each brand apart from its competitors (Aaker 1996; Hart and Murphy 1998) to make the brand more desirable and relevant *per se*. The underlying logic is that such points of differentiation are what customers remember about a brand (Keller, Sternthal and Tybout 2002). An effective brand position captures the distinctive mission, aspirations, and strengths of an institution and appeals to the motivations and interests of the marketplace. A positive perception of a tertiary brand is expected to have an impact on recruitment of students and academic staff, attracting resources and to create goodwill (Belanger, Mount & Wilson 2002). Despite the extensive studies on choice in international education, there is a scarcity of discussion on the impact of cultural values and brand positioning statements in education purchases.

This paper investigates:

- i) How Chinese Confucian values influence a Chinese student's decision-making in study destinations?
- ii) Which are the most effective brand positioning statements (promotion messages) in drawing ethnic Chinese students to New Zealand (a Western society)?
- iii) Which communication media are effective channels for university promotion in Chinese society?

Chinese society was chosen as sampling population for two reasons. First, Chinese Confucian culture, values the importance of education (Hall and Ames 1987) and encourages families to provide the best education for their children (Gatfield 1997). In return children are expected to show filial piety. In Confucian thought, filial piety means to take care of one's parents; not be rebellious; show love, respect and support; display courtesy, and to uphold fraternity among brothers (Baker 1979). Second, ethnic Chinese from both mainland China and elsewhere formed the largest foreign student population (77%) in New Zealand (Education Count 2005). For the purpose of this paper, tertiary education refers to university education at the undergraduate and post-graduate levels.

Conceptual framework

Generally, major factors identified in the literature attracting Asian students to undertake international higher education have been identified as: Quality of institutions, quality of courses, reputation in a selected field of study, and the potential for improved job prospects (Baker, Creedy and Johnson 1996); geographical proximity (Kemp et al. 1998; Gatfield 1997); the desire to understand Western culture and the lack of education opportunity in their home country (Mazzarol et al. 2000). Four major perspectives have been developed about consumer decision-making processes, namely economic, passive, cognitive and emotional models (Bednall and Kanuk 1997). Amongst these, the economic (DesJardins, Ahlburg and McCall 2006) and cognitive perspectives (Kotler and Fox 1985; Lawley 1998) are most commonly used to explain a student's decision-making process. Economic models of choice such as those developed by Becker (1975) and Desjardins et al. (2006) are based on

assumptions that students make rational choices based on precise or imprecise calculations of the relative rates of returns associated with participating in tertiary education. For instance, the random utility model (RUM) is being used by Desjardins et al. (2006) to study student choice with the underlying assumption that students have a set of schooling and non-schooling alternatives and they will attempt to maximise their net utility when making their schooling decisions. This utilitarian quest for perfect information in decision-making seems imperfect due to an individual's limited economic resources and the inability to seek, store and process large amounts of brand information. De Chernatony and McDonald (2003) argue that most consumers do not strive for perfect information, and when presented with the economist's view of perfect information, they are unable to comprehend it. Instead, consumers settle for a satisfactory decision, one that is 'good enough' (March and Simon 1958; de Chernatony and McDonald 2003). Within the education industry, this observation is being supported by Hodkinson et al. (1996) and Payne (2003) who articulate that choice is a rational process that is constrained by a realistic perception of opportunities and shaped by individual personality, university and program availability. For these reasons, this paper does not adopt the economic perspective but rather subscribes to the cognitive perspective.

One cognitive model that is widely accepted and formed the basis for studies of consumer buying behaviour is the Engle, Blackwell and Kollat's (1968) extended problem solving model. This model begins with problem recognition (a problem to be solved or a need to be satisfied) leading to information search about the various alternatives (alternative evaluation) of solving the problem, ending with the purchase and post-purchase experience. The outcome of the evaluation process is the identification of a preferred brand and 'purchase intent' formation. Such purchase intent is then implemented by the actual purchase. The purchase of international tertiary education can be described as extended problem solving. In the eyes of potential overseas students, tertiary education is a high-priced purchase, of diverse quality programs that may not meet their expectations. For, example, a typical three years undergraduate tuition fee in New Zealand costs NZ\$60,000-80,000. Given the complexity and variety of choices involved, one would classify student decision-making process as extensive problem solving. Thus, the extended problem solving model is used as the research underlying framework.

The model presented in this study summarises three hypotheses about the impact of Chinese cultural values, advertising media and brand positioning statements on student's choice of tertiary education. Purchase intention is used as the predictor for the student's preferential choice regarding the destination country (New Zealand) as the provider of undergraduate and post graduate studies.

Hypothesis one: Chinese cultural values have a positive influence in student's choice of tertiary education

A culture is viewed as a set of control mechanisms- plans, recipes, rules, instruction for governing behavior (Geertz 1973) or a patterned way of thinking, feeling and reacting (Kluckhohn 1954). It is "the collective mental programming of the people in an environment where its characteristics are dependent on the collective individuals that were conditioned by the same education and life experience" (Hofstede 1991, p. 5). A value is an enduring belief of a very specific kind (Rokeach 1973) or widely held beliefs about what is acceptable and desirable (Hofstede 1980; Neal et al. 2006). In consumer behavior literature, values are recognized as a powerful force shaping consumers' motivations, lifestyles and product choices (McCort and Malhotra 1993; Engel et al. 1990; Bednall and Kanuk 1997).

Paternalism, group orientation and relationship are some of the prominent characteristics in Chinese society (Bond 1991; Luk, Fullgrabe and Li 1999; Wang 1986). These characteristics have their roots in the teachings of Confucianism. The basic tenets of Confucianism include harmony, hierarchical relationships, developing one's moral potential and kinship affiliation, which in turn influence the interpersonal norms of emotional constraints, social obligation, and the inter-relationship of work, family and friendship life domains (Shenkar and Ronen 1987; Yan 1994). Maintenance of harmony in relationships is the core doctrine of Confucianism (Bond 1991). Confucianism specifies five hierarchical relationships to define each individual's position role and role to ensure harmony in society: The relationship between father and son, sovereign and subjects, husband and wife, older and younger siblings, and among friends (Luk et al. 1999). Guiding these five sets of hierarchical relationships is a set of five virtues of humanity: benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and trustworthiness. According to Bond (1991), several traditional cultural values and norms greatly contribute to the maintenance of harmony and the continuity of these relationships: group orientation, respect for authority, face value, interdependence ('guanxi'), friendship ('ganqing'), and reciprocity ('renqing'). Confucian's group orientation can be viewed as being similar to the collectivist construct of Hofstede's (1980) Individualism-Collectivism cultural dimension. According to Hofstede, 'collectivists' (low on the individualism index) tend to be concerned with affiliating closely with others and maintaining connectedness, placing strong emphasis on group decisions. Norms, obligations and duties to their groups are collectivists' primary concerns, and they tend to place a high

value on group harmony and solidarity. This collectivist nature is reflected in the Chinese family and kinship system (Hofstede 1980). Genzberger (1994) and Wang (1986) suggest that Chinese culture has a tendency towards individualism in an increasingly interconnected world. However, it is believed that Chinese culture is still predominantly collectivist in nature in Singapore and Malaysia (Hofstede 2000). Based on this belief, this paper investigates how the following Chinese values influence student's decision-making process in study destinations: Self discipline for success (Yang 1957), strong work ethic for success (Yang 1957; Redding 1990), deep respect for education for personal advancement (Hall and Ames 1987), living in harmony (Bond 1991; Wang 1986), the importance of orderly society (Pye 1985; Tung 1984), helping other as way of life to gain reciprocity (Yang 1957), and honesty/trustworthiness (Luk et al. 1999).

Hypothesis two: Effective Brand positioning statements are contingent on assurance content

It is claimed that branding contributes to a reduction of uncertainty (or perceived risk) in consumer purchases (Garbarino and Mark 1999; Gommans, Krishan and Scheddold 2001), and helps to reduce social and psychological risks that are associated with ownership or use of the wrong product (Berthon, Hulbert and Pitt 1997). A brand's positioning sets out who and what the brand is, and what it offers (Rossiter and Percy 1991). Traditionally, brand positioning involves focusing on points of difference (differentiation), and the unique benefits that set each brand apart from its competitors (Aaker 1996; Hart and Murphy 1998) to make the brand more desirable and relevant *per se*. The underlying logic is that such points of differentiation are what customers remember about a brand (Keller et al. 2002). There is common agreement that the main marketing activity that implants those ideas about a brand's uniqueness in a consumers' mind or brand positioning communication medium is advertising (Aaker and Biel 1993). However, there is a lack of discussion in the literature on the type of brand positioning statements that are effective in student recruitment.

The brand positioning statements utilised in this study are adapted from several international advertising and promotion works in tertiary education (Baker et al. 1996; Gatfield et al. 1999; Kemp et al. 1998; Mazarrol 1998; Mazarrol et al. 2000). These are the promotion messages relating to institutional safety (peaceful/harmonious atmosphere), political stability, international recognition, course quality, institutional experience, student support services (counselling, accommodation and advice, orientation programmes, co-curricular activities, national student's association), excellent teaching staff, affordable tuition fees, course flexibility, employer's view of graduates (graduate quality), graduates' employment prospects and graduate's earning power.

Hypothesis three: An effective advertising channel reflects the high Context nature of Chinese culture

In order to develop an effective brand positioning strategy, a university needs to ascertain the communication channel that would be most effective at reaching their target audience (Gray et al. 2003). Traditionally, universities rely on print media, word of mouth and public relations to recruit international students. As the world becomes digitalised, televisions and the Internet (Web) have become alternative communication channels. According to Hall (1976), a culture can distinguish itself along ten universal anthropological "Primary Message Systems, of which four (Context, Space, Time and Information flow) later become popular among marketers. In particular, the Context concept is useful for understanding consumer behavior across cultures. According to hall, members of low Context cultures have less personal contact with each other, and therefore, communications within this culture are very detailed, explicit and direct, often by way of written texts. In contrast, members of high Context cultures have closer and more familiar contact with each other, where information is frequently shared via indirect communication, often based on symbols and pictures. Who says it and when, how, and where it is said can be more important than what is said in high-Context culture (Hall and Hall 1987). This is unlike the low-Context culture where accurate communication is not so dependent on long-standing personal relationships or other contextual factors. Consistent with Hall's (1976) arguments, Pascale (1978) reports that managers in Japan (high-Context culture) place greater emphasis on face-to-face communication over written communications in organizational settings. It has also been observed that the Japanese prefer indirect and implicit communication, in contrast to Western cultures direct and explicit communication (Condon 1978). Similarly, Glenn (1981) noted the importance of associative communication in Japan with a focus on situation and context, and the abstractive communication in Western cultures (low-Context culture) which focuses on arguments and facts. In particular, Hofstede (1991) concludes that high Individualism is often connected to low Context communication, whereas Collectivism (low Individualism) is often connected to high Context communication. A high Individualism ranking indicates that individuality and individual rights are paramount within the society and loose interpersonal ties (Hofstede 1980).

While studies have shown no significant tendency of preference in print media versus TV consumption in Europe (de Mooij 2004; Medienlandschaft Westeuropa 2005), an exception occurs in East Asian countries like Malaysia, Japan and Korea which exhibit both high TV and print media consumptions (de Mooij 1998; Mueller 2004; Usunier 1991). This research investigates which of these advertising media are effective channels for

university promotion in Chinese society, namely: print media (magazines, newspapers and brochures), word of mouth (representative agents, testimonials and alumni), electronic media (TV, Web) and public relations (trade/education fairs, sponsorship, open day).

A quantitative linear model was conceptualised to summarise the three hypotheses developed (Figure 1).

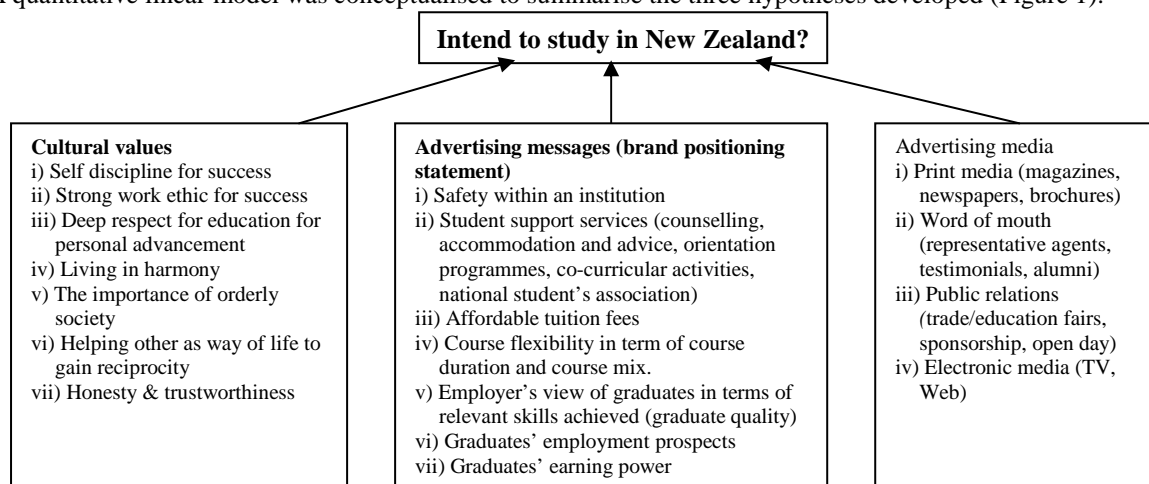


Figure 1: Conceptual 3-factor model of intention to take up tertiary study in New Zealand among ethnic Chinese residents in Singapore and Malaysia

Methodology

Questionnaire: The interviewer assisted questionnaire used here comprised four sections: Demographic questions, questions on Confucian values (How does the following best describe you?), questions on promotional media (How important is the following promotion media importance in communicating advertising messages to you as a potential international student?) and brand positioning statements (How important is the following message in recruiting you as a student?). The questionnaire was pre-tested on a group of twenty Singapore and Malaysia students at the University of Otago, New Zealand (NZ). On average, the questionnaire took between 10-15 minutes for the student to complete. The students were asked for their opinion about the difficulty of completing the questionnaire. No problems were found with their understanding of the questions.

Sampling: The targeted sample was high school and junior colleges students in Singapore (predominantly Chinese) and Malaysia, where the Chinese constitutes 33% of the population (Malaysia Department of Statistics 2001). Students in their school uniforms are a common sight in the various shopping malls in these two countries. Thus, they are easy to identify and solicit responses for the survey. To ensure that all possible times were represented when students went to a mall, preliminary observations were taken to discover the time frame the mall has the largest concentration of students. The time from 1-6pm was observed to have the greatest concentration of students in all randomly selected malls in Singapore and Malaysia. The author positioned himself at high traffic locations near mall entrances to intercept respondents. Out of the 674 questionnaire collected, 258 questionnaires were rejected due to respondents not being interested in New Zealand tertiary studies. Out of the remaining questionnaires, 205 were collected in Singapore and 211 from Malaysia.

Factorial validity tests: The final 416 samples met the primary requirements for factor analysis (5:1 case/variable ratio as recommended by Coakes and Steed 2001). All three factor scales in the study were subjected to exploratory factor analysis using SPSS's Principal Component Analysis (varimax rotation) techniques. All three factorial scales had a KMO index greater than 0.8 and Bartlett's $p < 0.05$ indicating the appropriateness of the responses for factor analysis. The factor analysis result is shown in Figure 2. The analysis indicated that the measurement scale of promotional messages could be represented by two constructs (factors). Thus, the initial 3-factor conceptual model was re-specified into a 4-factor model.

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using AMOS ver. 6.0 was conducted on all four factor scales prior to a full model test. All outputs of the SEM estimation process advised that the discrepancy between the sample covariance matrix S and the population covariance matrix $\Sigma(\theta)$ is minimal (that is, $[S - \Sigma(\theta) = \text{minimum}]$). Elimination of items to improve factorial fit statistics resulted in the hypothetical model (Figure 3). The structural test statistics revealed sufficient evidence of goodness-of-fit between the 4-factor model and the sample data for hypothesis testing (CMIN/DF=1.42, RMSEA=0.03, CFI = 0.98 and GFI= 0.96). In addition, all

measurement models showed internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient value greater than 0.7. This confirmed that all the measurement scales in the 4-factor model were statistically valid.

Component Matrix ^a			Component Matrix ^a			Rotated Component Matrix ^a		
	Component			Component			Component	
	1	2		1	2		1	2
self discipline	.736		open days	.743		student support services	.798	
harmony is imp	.735		sponsorships	.729		safety within institution	.777	
work ethics	.688		trade fairs	.713		affordable tuition fees	.649	
helping others	.683		representative agent	.645		teaching standard	.619	
honesty is imp	.662		testimony	.603		course flexibility	.593	
orderly society	.624		brochures	.499		experience of institution	.570	
deep respect for education	.574	.548	web	.446		stable political environment	.563	
open to new ideas	.453	.641	television		.683	quality courses	.485	.456
			newspaper	.551	.582	graduates' employment prospect		.789
			magazines	.537	.561	employer's view of graduate		.742
						graduates earning power		.737
						international recognition		.706
						brand of institution		.545

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis
a. 2 components extracted.

a) Individual values

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis
a. 2 components extracted.

b) Advertising media

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

c) Promotion messages

Figure 2: Factor analysis results of the measurement scales

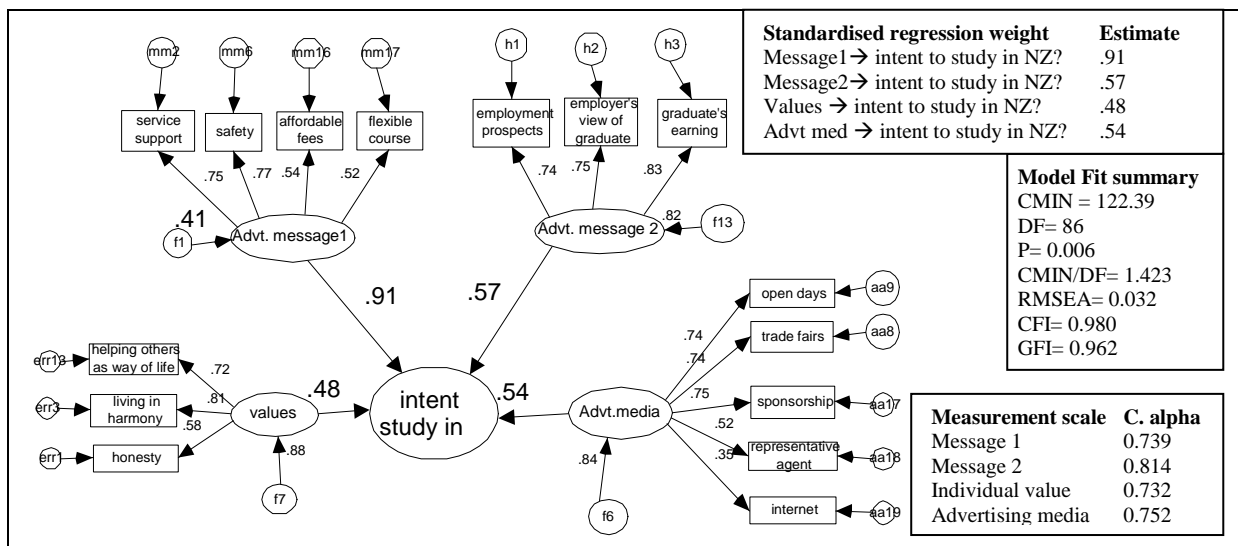


Figure 3: Structural test statistics (standardised) of the hypothetical model of intention to take up tertiary study in New Zealand among ethnic Chinese residents in Singapore and Malaysia

Findings and discussions

The test for homogeneity of variance between the samples from Singapore and Malaysia was not significant ($p > .05$) for all measurement items. Consulting the t-value, degree of freedom and two-tail significant, again no significant difference are apparent ($p > .05$) for all measurement items. Thus, no major differences between Singapore and Malaysia were found in expressed cultural values, influence of brand statements on their choice of education destination and preferences in type of advertising media as a source of information for their tertiary studies.

Chinese cultural values

Respondents showing a positive indication of the possibility to study in New Zealand, exhibit Confucian values of personal honesty, living harmoniously in society and helping others as a way of life (regression weight = 0.48). These values seem to be in accord with the perceived image of NZ as a 'fair-go' society (Hazeldine 1998; Mitchell 1972), high in individual honesty/low corruption (Transparency International 2006), and low crime relative to the USA, Britain and Canada (Segessenmann 2000), which contributes to a peaceful/harmonious society. In addition, both Chinese societies in Singapore and Malaysia exhibit high Masculinity, with the

Masculinity indexes for both countries almost on par with New Zealand (Hofstede 2000). This suggests the ability to integrate into the host country society and being able to live harmoniously there, is an influencing factor in students' choice of study destination (or suggests cultural similarities is a 'pull' factor). It also potentially contradicts argument by de Mooij (2004) about the negative correlation of the cultural dimension of Masculinity with education (Hofstede 2000). Masculinity stands for a society in which social gender roles are clearly distinct: Men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. A further study of the relationship between Masculinity and student's choice of study destination is needed.

Brand positioning statement

Respondents showing a positive indication of studying in New Zealand express the importance of the following promotional messages in their decision-making process:

i) *Message one* (regression weight=0.91): Safety within an institution, student support services (counselling, accommodation and advice, orientation programmes, co-curricular activities, national student's association), affordable tuition fees and course flexibility in term of course duration and course mix. The importance of the messages of safety within the institution and the availability of student support services suggest that respondents are worried about being able to live their student life harmoniously/peacefully in the host country. This is because the student support service provides the necessary social and practical support to make the student feel at home. Given the high Context nature of the Chinese community, it could be interpreted that the presence of their national student's bodies (as a symbol) provides greater assurance that they can rely on their fellow citizens for social support. Among the Chinese, social needs are stronger than the need for autonomy (Bond 1986). Also, the high context communication nature of a collectivist society facilitates information flows within the groups (de Mooij 2004) allowing new students in the host country to quickly acquire trusted (perceived) information to reduce uncertainty. Course flexibility and affordability are also important factors in student's decision-making so as to avoid undue monetary pressure on their parents.

ii) *Message two* (regression weight=0.57): Employer's view of graduates in terms of relevant skills achieved (graduate quality), graduates' employment prospects and graduates' earning power. The importance of these messages suggests future employability and future earning are key issues in Chinese students deciding their choice of tertiary education. In view of the norms conformance and the Confucian heritage of the Chinese society, the availability of information about graduate future employability and future earning may be interpreted as respondents being concerned that their investment in time consuming and costly education will be rejected by the community; or that their future earnings may not be able to perform their filial piety. It potentially shows the indirect influence of 'emotion' in the student decision-making process. Alternatively, the importance of the message on graduates' employment prospects and graduates' earning power may suggest the influence of materialistic lifestyle (overly concerned with material possessions and wealth) in a society. That is, the pursuit of material rewards and lifestyle influence a students' destination choice.

The significance of advertising message one and message two supports the hypothesis that an effective brand positioning statement is contingent on assurance content (uncertainty avoidance). However, the observed uncertainty avoidance characteristic found among the sample of students is contrary to low Uncertainty Avoidance (UA) index of Singapore (Hofstede 1980, 2000). This classification of Singapore as a low uncertainty avoidance country would suggest that Singaporeans would readily accept change and risk. This is not supported in this research. Hofstede's individualism index has been criticized by Triandis (1994) on the ground that it ignores differences between individuals inside a society. Singapore is a multi-racial country (predominantly Chinese) which may affect the UA ranking. To further explain the low UA ranking, Singaporeans may show a low aversion to risk (other than investment in education) because their government provides high stability. Thus, Singapore's citizens possibly do not fear uncertainty as much as they do in countries with less political stability.

Advertising media

The SEM results show that the form of advertising media has an impact on whether an institution's promotional message reaches their target audience (regression weight = 0.54). This study shows that traditional print media (magazines, newspapers, and brochures), television and word of mouth (testimonials, alumni) are not the most effective advertising channels to potential tertiary student from Singapore and Malaysia. Respondents in Singapore and Malaysia show preferences for representative agents, trade/education fairs, open day, sponsorship and the Web to obtain information on international tertiary education. While Gray et al. (2003) points out the importance of using the print media in delivering promotional messages to potential students in Singapore and Malaysia; this was not found to be the case here. The expressed desire of using open days and education fairs to acquire educational information means students of Chinese ethnicity in Singapore and Malaysia value some

form of physical presence by the providers to advise them about overseas study. From high Context communication perspective (Hall 1976), this form of face-to-face contact provides the potential student with the opportunity for tangible (social) interaction. This is consistent with Hall and Ames's (1987) argument about who says it and when, how, and where it is said can be more important than what is said in high-context culture. It also explains the expressed importance of representative agents in disseminating university's information in these two countries. Thus, this study supports hypothesis three that effective advertising channels in Chinese society are reflected by its high context nature. The non-importance of testimonials and alumni as information sources for tertiary education is a surprise, given the strong emphasis on group decisions and norm conformity in the collectivist society of Singapore and Malaysia. It further supports the contention by Genzberger (1994) and Wang (1986) that Chinese culture has the tendency to shift towards individualism in an increasingly interconnected world.

Marketing implications for exporter of tertiary education

The expressed desire of using open days and education fairs to acquire educational information means universities need to consider some form of physical presence to advice/attract potential students from the Chinese community in Singapore and Malaysia or other collectivist/high context communication cultures. Universities promoting their education services in societies with considerable ethnic Chinese populations are advised to disseminate/position their promotional messages relating to safety within their institutions, their various student support services, comparative tuition fees with other foreign-based universities, and the flexibility (course duration, course mix) of their degrees. Most importantly they need to communicate the earning power of their graduates, their graduate qualities and industry demand of their graduates internationally. Besides using the Web, education fairs and representative agents, universities can piggyback on sponsorship (scholarships advertisements from sponsoring organizations) to carry across their promotional messages to potential students of Chinese heritage. Our survey respondents indicated that scholarship is an important source of the advertising messages for tertiary study. This is not surprising given that Chinese culture emphasizes great importance on education and scholars have great prestige in their society. In imperial China, Confucian teaching is a big subject in imperial exams and those who passed are sent to the best universities and offered an official post. Similarly, Singapore's early successes were built largely on the back of a scholarship system that - broadly speaking - followed imperial China as a way to recruit the "best and brightest" to serve the country (Seah 2005).

The displayed uncertainty avoidance characteristics of the students demonstrate the need to re-evaluate student decision-making process within an emotional model. The emotional model is associated with deep feelings (joy, fear, love, fantasy) in certain purchases or possessions. Product-wise, when a consumer makes an emotional purchase decision, the emphasis is on current mood or feelings and less emphasis on pre-purchase information (Bednall and Kanuk 1999). These feelings are likely to be highly involving with the consumer still being rational. For instance, a consumer may buy a designer label not because they look good in it but because status labels make them feel better. Like-wise in education, a student's purchase-making decision can still be highly involving, rational and emotional through enrolling in a good brand university, while not entirely enjoying the course mix or education discipline. A student may enrol in a medical program from a certain university, knowing that its graduates are in high demand and highly paid (either to enjoy a future materialistic lifestyle or to perform their filial piety) while not overtly interested in medical work, treating it as just a functional day job.

Appropriate brand positioning statements allows an individual institution to provide information and images that combine neutral information with information intended to create emotional ties between various stakeholders and a given institution. For example, the authenticity of the promise conveyed by a brand name is particularly important in higher education, where the college or university brand becomes part of individuals' identities, one of the key badges that we all wear in understanding and explaining ourselves (Moore 2004). Understanding and communicating the validity of that experience to target audiences is a vital part of the branding process. If one chooses a college or university-or trust their child to one, based on the promise of a specific experience and then that promise is not fulfilled, the impact can be profound, embittering, and lasting. In fact, the reason cited for the recent closure of the University of New South Wales (Singapore campus) is poor student enrolment due to the lack of authentic Australian campus experience (Hilmer 2007). Similarly, universities can utilise emotional marketing to gain customer loyalty to encourage repeat purchase (enrolment) and to influence their family members and peers study's destinations/university choice.

Limitations and further research

There are several significant limitations with this study. First, the mall-intercept sampling design is more of a convenience than a probability sample (Murry et al. 1989; Zikmund 2000) although the large sample size (n=416) improves its validity. While this study tried to increase the randomness of the sample by randomly selecting the malls, a comparison of the demographic variables collected in this research with a validation

sample (collected in the same geographical areas) would be advisable to ensure the generalizability of the results to the resident population and to test the comparability and stability of the proposed hypothetical models (Hair et al. 1998; Spector 1992). However, a validation sample was not available for this study. Second, the various ethnic Chinese groups under study are living under different social environment (countries) and this may well influence the decision-making process. This prevents the generalisation of this paper's finding to a broader context within Chinese Culture.

Conclusion

The study suggests that the ability to integrate into the host country society and being able to live harmoniously/peacefully in the host country is an influencing factor in ethnic Chinese students' choice of study destination. The study also suggests that student's decision-making is not purely cognitive but rather has some element of emotional influence. Emotion is indirectly linked to the fulfilment of filial piety, a Chinese Confucian value which mandates every individual to respect their parent and to support their parent at old age. This in turn affects a student's desire to get a well-paying job after graduation to support their aged parents. As such a university's brand message statement relating to safety, student support services, reasonable tuition fees and course flexibility (to avoid undue monetary pressure on parents), graduates' expected income, employment prospect and employer's view of graduates are sought after. Respondents express the importance of education fairs, sponsorship, open day, representative agents and the Web in communicating advertising messages to them as a potential international student.

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