

FINAL YEAR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARD
THE UNIVERSITY ADVERTISING

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This thesis is dedicted to ...

My beloved husband

Ehsan ParsaMehr

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify final year undergraduate students' attitude toward university advertising. A total of 306 final year undergraduate students from four different faculties (Education, Science, Electrical, and Mechanical) at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia were selected using a multi-sampling method. In order to assess students' attitude, the important factors that influence students' decision to choose a university were identified. These factors were divided into six main categories: i) educational, ii) economic, iii) university campus environment, iv) environmental facilities (on campus), v) environmental facilities (outside the university campus), and vi) related career opportunities. In addition, parental education, family monthly income, and students' personality were considered as other potential factors to be assessed. In this study data analysing process were done through development statistical tests such as T-test, Cronbach's alpha, Spearman correlation, and Multiple Regression. The findings indicated that there were significant positive relationships between students' personality and their attitude toward the six main categories. The findings suggested that Educational Category was a strong predictor that influenced students' attitude with the Accepting and Rational personality types. The environmental facilities (on campus) influenced students' attitude with the Responsible and Reserved personality characteristic types. The results of this research may help universities to provide appropriate and useful information in their advertisements to prospective students. Such information may contribute to career and decision making among prospective students for higher education.

ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengenalpasti sikap pelajar tahun akhir ijazah pertama terhadap pengiklanan universiti. Seramai 306 orang pelajar tahun akhir ijazah pertama dari empat fakulti yang berbeza (Pendidikan, Sains, Elektrik dan Mekanikal) di Universiti Teknologi Malaysia telah dipilih dengan kaedah persampelan pelbagai. Dalam usaha untuk menilai sikap pelajar, faktor-faktor penting yang mempengaruhi keputusan pelajar untuk memilih universiti telah dikenal pasti. Kemudian, faktor-faktor ini telah dibahagikan kepada 6 kategori utama: i) pendidikan, ii) ekonomi, iii) persekitaran kampus universiti, iv) kemudahan persekitaran (di dalam kampus universiti), v) kemudahan persekitaran (di luar kampus universiti), dan vi) peluang kerjaya yang berkaitan. Tambahan pula, tahap pendidikan ibu bapa, pendapatan bulanan keluarga, dan personaliti pelajar telah dianggap sebagai faktor-faktor lain yang berpotensi untuk dinilai. Dalam kajian ini, proses analisis data kajian telah dilakukan dengan menggunakan ujian statistik seperti T-test, Cronbach's alpha, Korelasi Spearman dan Regresi Berganda. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa terdapat hubungan positif yang signifikan antara personaliti pelajar dan sikap mereka terhadap enam kategori utama tersebut. Penemuan kajian mencadangkan bahawa Kategori Pendidikan merupakan peramal yang kuat yang mempengaruhi sikap pelajar dengan personaliti jenis Bersikap Terbuka dan Rasional; Faktor Kemudahan Persekitaran (di kampus) mempengaruhi sikap pelajar dengan personaliti jenis Bertanggungjawab dan Konservatif. Keputusan kajian ini dapat membantu universiti untuk menyediakan maklumat yang sesuai dan berguna dalam pengiklanan universiti. Maklumat seperti ini dapat membantu pelajar dalam membuat keputusan untuk memilih kerjaya mereka dan melanjutkan pelajaran mereka di peringkat pengajian tinggi.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

There has been a trend that graduating students would like to continue their studies upon graduation. Higher education not only entails knowledge advancement and more adequate preparation for workplace but also provides the opportunity for students to make new friends, meet people with diverse cultural backgrounds, and gain experience of various issues. The knowledge and the skills that individuals attain in this period may stay with them forever.

Students' attitude toward tertiary education and higher learning may be formed over years by various means; such as their needs, things they think they need, their experiences, their knowledge, and the effects of other people such as family, friends, peers, teachers on their thoughts and mind-set. Students manifest their attitude through behaviours and actions. Basically attitude has three components namely emotional, cognitive and behavioural (Fennis & Stroebe, 2010). These concepts related to feelings, information or thought processing, and the course of action, respectively.

Students, attitude toward the university advertising can be based on cognitive information about the attributes that characterize the university. This knowledge can drive from the students own evaluation of the attitude object, such as direct experience (visit the university) or from communications (advertising, family and friends). Attitude can also be based on affective or emotional reactions extract by the

attitude object. For example, the advertising unite of university has an exclusively program for a certain faculties (specialized advertisement for some major of study) in the hope that the positive emotions stimulate by these stimuli will become associated university to attract potential students (Fennis & Stroebe, 2010).

Finally, attitude can be based on behavioural information. Sometimes students evaluate their attitude from their past behaviour to make the attitude object. This assumption was central from self-perception theory (Daryl J Bem, 1973). He discussed that people rarely have direct information about their attitude and therefore often have to infer them from their own behaviour. For instance, if a student were asked whether he likes a certain university to continue his tertiary education? His answer would be “I got my bachelor degree from that university, therefore I like it.”

These components affect individuals differently and result in having different types of attitude that one may or may not be aware of them. Education counsellor can help students to gain awareness of the consequences and the benefits of tertiary education. One of the significant considerations to tertiary education is choosing a proper university. Making a wise decision in this regard would contribute further success such as finding a well-paid job. In addition to this, the condition of the university should match the needs and the desires of the students, since they will be spending a lot of time on campus during their studies. Therefore, continuing education entails a multi-dimensional decision making process. Wagner and Fard (2009) suggested that there were six main factors which influence students' decisions about higher education: i) cost of education, ii) degree (content and structure), iii) physical aspects (facilities and resources), iv) value of education, v) institutional information, and vi) family, friends and peers.

Universities may play an important role in helping students to make decisions through proper advertisements that inform public of facilities and services they offer. Traditional higher education in educational marketing is not the same as physical product marketing. As a result, they need to adopt suitable policies to choose proper commercialized approaches to make their services visible (Anctil, 2008).

Using quality materials and strategic information for creating advertisement is critical especially when it involves graduates' decision in selecting a higher education institute among many choices. In order to make the university advertisement effective, graduates' behaviours and attitude toward university advertisement should be studied and considered. Such studies may contribute to effective advertising for higher education institutes.

1.2 Background of the study

Career guidance and counselling is widely accepted as a practical and effective method of helping to bridge the gap between education and the world of work, as well as between university and society. Such services assist students to make appropriate decision about selecting a university that enables them to develop their potential and to have access to job opportunities that are compatible with their interests and abilities. Career guidance and counselling can also help to enhance students' confidence level and positive attitudes to derive fulfilment from their chosen areas of learning and work. Most importantly, to inculcate an eagerness for lifelong learning (Hiebert & Borgen, 2002).

It is generally agreed that in contemporary society, students are in need of career guidance and counselling in a very wide range of issues. Too often, students who have finished their studies at the bachelor degree do not have clear plans to continue their studies to higher education level. They may choose to continue their studies in the same disciplines in the former universities, or decide to shift to another discipline in the previous or another university to meet the requirements of their dream occupations. In any case, these individuals need to be aware of their future job expectations, their interests, abilities, and the type of personality they have. Career guidance and counselling services may offer valuable systematic help to hesitant and indecisive students who are in the stage of decision making process. As mentioned before, university advertisements contribute greatly to graduates' decision making. Therefore, informing university authorities on the factors that affect such

decisions are useful. As a result of such guidance, universities could improve their educational advertisements that inform and attract students to further their studies.

Continuing higher education has increasingly become a major priority for a majority of secondary school leavers. Students like finding high position jobs with good salaries. New trend in the modern society motivates students to continue their education at the tertiary level based on their interested field of studies. Students have different talents and abilities. Therefore, they need to find the best field of study to match with their talents and interest. However, many of them have some difficulties in selecting appropriate field of the studies based on their talents and interests.

Sometimes, students have doubts about which program of studies match with their talents and interests. Career counselling provide a better understanding about their personal abilities, attitude and career interests. The process of career counselling helps students to choose their appropriate field of studies and universities. But unfortunately the resources of educational counselling for individual consultation are limited. Some examples, those limitations would be time limitation for individual counselling, students cannot pay the expenses of counselling sessions and also limited number of educational counsellors compare to huge number of potential students. Therefore, this research tried to find innovative ways in educational counselling by studying the students' attitude toward the university advertising. Educational counselling messages would be sent to potential students by using the power of university advertising that spread the information among wide range of potential students.

Many decisions were made by students during their educational life. Some of them are low-involvement decisions, especially when they were made during secondary or primary schools, but sometimes they made critical decisions which were high- involvement, like selecting a major or university to study in.

The following items indicated the significance of choosing a university for students (Kotler, 1997)

- i. Self-esteem significantly influences students' decision which results in long lasting consequences.
- ii. Economical or personal sacrificing is carried out by this decision making.
- iii. Making a 'wrong' decision may have high personal and social risks
- iv. Students' decisions in some certain conditions may considerably affected by their parents and peers. Consequently, their decision may be taken based on the expectations of their desired group.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Technological advances and economic conditions may bring about relatively rapid changes in the university programs which in turn will have an important role on decisions concerning educational and vocational choices. Thus, guidance and counselling of a scientific and professional character will be more necessary than ever before in universities and technical colleges. Therefore, this study provides good information to identify final year undergraduate students' attitude toward the university advertising. Even though, many studies considered the important factors which influence students' decisions for choosing higher education, there were several researches that studied the important factors in university advertising. Therefore, it seemed necessary to gain deep understanding of the factors in the information in advertisements that universities publish which affect students' attitude to select an appropriate university. Unfortunately, little information is published on students' attitude toward the information in university advertising.

A literature review in Malaysian studies, revealed a gap in the knowledge of measurement of student's attitude toward university advertising. However there were some studies (Munusamy & Hoo, 2007) which studied about student's beliefs and attitude toward advertising that focus on other type of advertising. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the factors that students prefer to find in university

advertising and also investigate that are student's personality can affect their attitudes.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate students' attitude toward the important factors in the information in university advertising which influence their decisions for selecting prospective universities. It would provide important information on the final year undergraduate students' attitude toward the university advertising.

Finding of this research will assist the university to improve the quality of the information in university advertising. Moreover, the study intended to identify the differences between the demographic traits which could influence students' attitude during their decision-making process; and finally the relation between students' personality and their attitude toward the information in the university advertising.

1.5 Objective of the research

Five main objectives of this research were identified as follows:

- i. To identify the differences of students attitude toward the information in university advertising based on demographic (gender and faculty) among final-year undergraduate students at UTM.
- ii. To investigate the correlation between students' parental level of education and students attitude toward educational category among final-year undergraduate students at UTM.
- iii. To investigate the correlation between family monthly income and students attitude toward the economic category among final-year undergraduate students at UTM.

- iv. To identify the correlation between students personality and attitude toward the six main category of information in university advertising among final-year undergraduate students at UTM.
- v. To identify the contribution of the six main categories of information in university advertising toward students personality among final-year undergraduate students at UTM.

1.6 Research questions

This study answered the following research questions:

- i. What are the differences of students attitude toward the information in university advertising based on demographic (gender and faculty) among final-year undergraduate students at UTM?
- ii. What are the correlations between students' parental level of education and students' attitude toward educational category among final-year undergraduate students at UTM?
- iii. What are the correlations between family monthly income and students' attitude toward the Economic category among final-year undergraduate students at UTM?
- iv. What are the correlations between students personality and students attitude toward the six main category of information in university advertising among final-year undergraduate students at UTM?
- v. What are the contributions of the six main categories of information in university advertising toward students' personality among final-year undergraduate students at UTM?

1.7 Significant of the research

Students often would select a university for higher education without having adequate information or reasoning. It is being argued that career guidance by counsellors played a major role in helping students make the right choice. This could be figured out in terms of the information in university advertising which has an important role in informing the students. As a result of such guidance, students may experience a sense of satisfaction in the process of making a selection to further their studies at a particular university.

Therefore, the results of this research may help career guidance and counsellors to provide more useful information in their counselling sessions which would help students to find the appropriate higher education institutes and programs in continuing their higher education. Thus, universities and other higher education institutes may be able to optimize their career counselling programs to guide the potential students for the higher education. Accordingly, the output of this research may help the academicians to find better ways of promoting information about continuing education for the potential students.

Every year graduates consider joining higher level of education, and therefore universities need to market themselves effectively to attract students they most want (Noel-Levitz, 2010).

The finding of this research has been useful to a university like UTM which aspire to become an innovative research university. The research output provided important information on students' attitudes toward the university advertising. Students could make use of valuable sources of information that were provided by the university. Such services reduced the risk of making wrong decisions during their decision making process. As a result, the academic performance of the students will be boosted which greatly contributes to the success of the university.

Potential students seek specific information in the university advertisements. Students seek a list of degrees offered, academic program details, and cost of

attendance. If such information is hard to find, unclear, or part of poorly designed advertisements, candidates may remove the institution from their list of potential institutions that they might choose from (Noel-Levitz, 2010). This study was tended to find students' attitude toward the significant factors that influence students' decisions in choosing a university.

1.8 Scope of the research

In order to identify students' attitude toward the information in university advertising, this research focused on the final year undergraduate students, who were the potential students for the postgraduate programs at the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). The study investigated the differences in students' attitude between Engineering and Non-Engineering students, the Educational and Science students and Mechanical and Electrical students' attitude toward the university advertising. Respondents of this research consisted of 306 males and females final year undergraduate students at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. They were selected through a multiple sampling method by the researcher. The data were collected using a set of questionnaire distributed to the identified samples at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (Skudai campus).

1.9 Theoretical framework of the research

The researcher applied two psychological theories to support this study and to explore the student's attitude toward the information in university advertising.

1.9.1 Theory of reasoned action

Ajzen and Fishbein (1977) reviewed studies that considered the theory of reasoned action that could predict and understand behaviours and attitudes. As the

Theory of Reasoned Action began to take hold in social science, Ajzen and other researchers realized that this theory was not adequate and had several limitations (Godin & Kok, 1996). One of the greatest limitations was with people who have little or feel they have little power over their behaviours and attitudes. Ajzen described the aspects of behaviour and attitude as being on a continuum from one of little control to one of greater control. To balance these observations, Ajzen added a third element to the original theory. This element is the concept of perceived behavioural control. The addition of this element has resulted in the newer theory known as the Theory of Planned Behaviour.

1.9.2 The Theory of Planned Behaviour

In psychology, the theory of planned behaviour is a theory about the link between attitude and behaviour. It was proposed by Icek Ajzen as an extension of the theory of reasoned action. It is one of the most predictive persuasion theories. It has been applied to studies of the relations among beliefs, attitudes, behavioural intentions and behaviours in various fields such as advertising, public relations, advertising campaigns and healthcare. The theory stated that personal attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, together shape an individual's behavioural intentions and behaviours.

The theory of planned behaviour specified the nature of relationships between beliefs and attitudes. According to these models, people's evaluations of, or attitude toward behaviour are determined by their accessible beliefs about the behaviour, where a belief is defined as the subjective probability that the behaviour will produce a certain outcome. Specifically, the evaluation of each outcome contributes to the attitude in direct proportion to the person's subjective possibility that the behaviour produces the outcome in question (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977).

Outcome expectancy was originated from the expectancy-value model. It is a variable-linking belief, attitude and expectation. The theory of planned behaviour's positive evaluation of self-performance of the particular behaviour is similar to the

concept to perceived benefits, which refers to beliefs regarding the effectiveness of the proposed preventive behaviour in reducing the vulnerability to the negative outcomes, whereas their negative evaluation of self-performance is similar to perceived barriers, which refers to evaluation of potential negative consequences that might result from the enactment of the espoused health behaviour.

1.10 Definition of Terms

This section is divided into two parts to discuss the definitions of the concepts which were used in this study.

1.10.1 Conceptual Definition

The important terms used in this study that require explanation are as follows:

- i. University: An institution for higher education with teaching and research facilities constituting a graduate school and professional schools that award Doctorate and Master Degrees and an undergraduate programs that award Bachelor degrees (Pandya, 2011).
- ii. Final year undergraduate student: Someone who attends an educational institution and currently study in final year of his/her in undergraduate studies (Kasworm, 1990).
- iii. Higher education study: Education beyond the secondary level, especially education at the college or university level (Brubacher, 1969)
- iv. Advertising: Any form of presentation and promotion for ideas, services or products which are paid and non-personal are called advertising (Kotler, 1997).
- v. Attitude: According to Katz (1960), attitude is a preliminary thinking manner dependent on one's own value system through which an individual perceives a symbol, an object, an individual or the world as good or bad, or benevolent or malevolent (Katz, 1960).

1.10.2 Operational Definition

This section presented a brief explanation of the specific concepts that were used throughout the text repeatedly:

- i. University: in this research, the university is referred to Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) Skudai campus.
- ii. Final year undergraduate student: in this study it refers to students who were studying in the last two semesters of their undergraduate studies at UTM.
- iii. Higher education study: in this study it refers to postgraduate studies, Masters and PhD programs, which are available after undergraduate studies in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.
- iv. University advertising: it refers to any form of information which inform students about university plans and programs which is produced and broadcasted by the official advertising unit in the university.
- v. Students' attitudes: it refers to students' viewpoints on important factors which they expect to see in university advertisements that could provide good information about the university plans and programs.
- vi. Responsible personality: In this study, the responsible person is someone who gets involved easily with his environment and people around him. Also, he feels responsible about some issues happening around him and always tries to find new information about a variety of things. He is an intuitive person and trust easily.
- vii. Accepting personality: In this study, the accepting person is someone who likes to experience new situation. He likes to observe and examine the objects by himself instead of trusting the word of mouth, and he likes to compare the information received from others and his own findings.
- viii. Rational personality: In this study, the rational person is someone who tries to analyse everything before making a decision and he accepts the information that are logically acceptable. When he makes a decision about something it would be hard to change his mind.
- ix. Reserved personality: In this study, the accepting person is someone who always tries to evaluate the information that he received from others in

details. He only accepts information which is in line with his own experiences. He thinks logically and it is hard for him to believe others.

In this study the phrase of “university” and “higher education institute” were used interchangeably.

1.11 Summary

Career guidance and counselling helps individuals to achieve greater self-awareness, develop a life/work direction, increase their understanding of learning and work opportunities and become more self-directed in managing learning, work and life. Career counselling facilitates the acquisition of skills, interests, beliefs, values; work habits and personal qualities enable each participant to create a satisfying life in constantly changing cultural, social and occupational environments.

As the applicants of higher education institutes, they need adequate information to choose their postgraduate program and university. Advertisement could help them in their decision making process. University advertisements usually targets final-year undergraduate students. Through such kind of advertisements individuals could easily find necessary information of the programs that a university offers. This research focused on students’ attitude toward the university advertising that focused on the necessary information for potential students in this kind of advertisements. In this chapter the researcher use the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behaviour to support this study.

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