IMPACT OF VARIABLES ON THAI STUDENTS' DECISION EVALUATION FOR ENTERING DENTISTRY PROGRAM IN BANGKOK

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ABSTRACT

This study concerns the decision of students to choose to join the dentistry program in universities located in the province of Bangkok. Programs are the main product universities to maintain their brand as the most important stakeholders are students and will be associated with the university and that particular program for the rest of their careers. As the competitive market is wider than ever, due to the variety of choices available on the market. If they want to have advantages within the market, it is essential for them to set up new programs and to improve the current ones in order to tolerate their competitive edge in the future. Universities are therefore looking for new alternative and creative ways to develop and maintain an adaptive relationship with students. University Image, Program Characteristics, Information Availability, Decision Evaluation and Decision Performance are variables to be investigated by university students in this study. Findings show that the characteristics of the program have the highest effect on the assessment of decisions. After that, the availability of information indicated a strong association with the assessment of decisions. Eventually, in order to have a stronger impact on decision- making, it recommended to the public relations of the university to develop a strategic marketing strategy to improve the image of the university.

INTRODUCTION

Since late 20 century universities went through various transformations to cope with society's essentials and strains. There is a demand for various majors such as dentistry with international standard and curriculum to be established as the number of students demanding to study in such international

program where curriculum is taught in English and provide them with more job opportunities and wider ranges of choices for their career in the future. Thailand is a potential market for students interested in dentistry program. Thailand being an affordable country to live and study as well offering good number of reputable universities in ASEAN along with high quality programs could potentially attracts many Thai as well as foreign students.

Furthermore, international movement of labors across the world in particular in ASEAN as the region is becoming more integrated than ever high light the importance of international education in a broader assortment of university programs. Considering education competitive environment specially in demanding majors such as dentistry on market point out the fact that rivalry among universities position themselves as brands which their program characteristic, information availability, curriculum play a crucial role on student's decision on what program and university to choose and why to choose them (Chapleo, 2010; Schee, 2011; Bunzel, 2007). Various research from university of Cornell as well as beaver university show that university's name, program characteristic is among the most important matters as a leverage when it comes to which university and program to choose (Bunzel, 2007). Mainardes, Alves, and Raposo, 2013 mentioned that programs are the main product universities sustain their brand as the most important stakeholders are students and they will associate themselves with the university and that particular program for the rest of their careers. As the competitive market is broader than ever due to varieties of choices available in market. If they university would want to have advantages within the market its essential to establish new programs and improve the current ones to tolerate their competitive edge in the future. Therefore, universities search for new alternative and creative ways to draw and maintain adoptive relationship with students (McAlexander, Koenig and Schouten, 2004). Hence it is vital to recognize student's decision-making factors and mindset to create and brand an attractive program and faculty within the university (Bunzel, 2007; Schee, 2011). Therefore, based on the theory of reasoned action a model is presented to understand factors influencing student's decisions on choosing the program among various universities in Bangkok. This study is unique in the sense that it's one of the few studies regarding dentistry faculty and student's decision factors in Bangkok and the results are believed to lead a better understanding on future program establishment and management.

In the future it's likely that there are even more competition and a dynamic global approach on education programs. Researchers found which students aim to pay both public and private universities certain fees for quality of education. The differences between various courses, universities and colleges make a significant different for student's future and how they shape their future. Therefore, a global quality education based on information universities put out there and the way they communicate as well as university image and marketing tools they use are essential on student's final decision and choices to which program to enroll. Communication is the key to awareness and greater influence universities create to brand themselves. Furthermore, another alternative is student's characteristic as gender and interest in their academic achievement (Oxford Group, 2013). Learning methods such as blended

learning is significantly be reliant on various application and computer learning programs and internet (Picciano & Seaman, 2007). Such founding indicates the possibilities of university programs using blended learning method. According to Hadad 2007 the success of various programs such as e-learning depend of teachers and students' capabilities and participation on how to interact in blended learning. According to the research of Abubakar & Adetimirin, (2015) 72% of teachers along with 75% of students lack knowledge and expertise in e-learning and ICT based learning module. The lack of knowledge in internet and computer applications may lend of insufficient way of using blended learning, as computer knowledge is essential in success of blended learning effectiveness (Abubakar & Adetimirin, 2015). According to Rovai (2003) Computer general knowledge is critically important in success of online class. Selim in (2007) mentioned that computer and time management skills are equally important for the effectiveness of learning. As numerous universities now offering courses and programs that are hybrid or partially online, it is important for the universities to have computer knowledge in the center of their educational program and modules. Lynch and Dembo (2004) also mentioned that university programs need to provide assistance for students and teacher to be able to interact more which led into better performance for the learners and outcome for the university as a whole which also impact university image and marketing communications. The other key factor ij student's decision making on programs are learning hours and program flexibility as some may have family or employment responsibilities e-learning and blended learning offer this function to attract more students with such requirement and interest (Cohen, Stage, Hammack, & Marcus, 2012).

OBJECTIVE

To Study the relationship between the factors that influence Thai student's decision making to study dentistry program in universities based in Bangkok.

Literature review and proposed model

University Image

As Balmer in 2010 mentioned University image has been one of the main agenda among educators for sometimes but has not yet received notable attention. As image of university is one of the most important factors among students choosing certain university to proceed their education there are series challenges among universities to managing themselves as organization with unique brands where their branding play a crucial role on their educational performance as well as the number of students they attract to their programs (Llanes, Gray, and Fam 2003). Furthermore, considering there are numerous choices for students as in today's competitive environment the factors that influence student choices should be utterly studied (Tanyeri and Nardali 2015). Studies indicate that university image has a significant impact on student's preferences upon their ultimate choice (Mazzarol, 1998; Bourke, 2000; Gutman and Miaoulis, 2003). Therefore, universities need to progress a distinctive image to uphold their competitiveness (Paramewaran and Glowacka, 1995)

Program characteristic

Program characteristic according to various studies show one of the main driving factors that affect student's decision to what program to choose and which university to attend to as there are various numbers which include their future career, the level of quality, the program standard and international reputation which drive students on their decisions (Mainardes, Alves, and Raposo, 2013). Values relate to students' future career along with tuition fee as well as the level of education and knowledge students gain from the program along with self fulfilment are among the main factors which the studies show student satisfactory is also about assurance of education high quality as well as warm affiliation and compassion toward them by the university.

Program information availability (need more citation)

Students generally obtain their brand image over universities from the information available to them from the word of mouth to availability of information on universities websites and brochures as well as various sites and links on internet where they provide information related to various program belonging to different universities. Students decision factors rely on what information they have on different programs and how they can compare them and make their decision to the program that suits them best from location to tuition fee course structure languages taught the program with university level of reputation and international ranking as well as how this led into having fruitful future for them through the knowledge they gain and their careers. Student opinion is shaped with university marketing activities, information availability and communication method upon choosing the program (Ivy, 2001).

As the technology is more integrated in our life now than ever before it is essential for universities to provided blended learning and technology-based education to be able to cope with the need of students and improve university's image. Researches show that one of the factors students drop out of university (Zielinski, 2000) is the lack of computer knowledge as many programs offer blended learning without preparing students on how to use the computer learning applications effectively (Willging & Johnson, 2009). According to Pazalo (2007) in blended learning efficiency driven from learning technology, reliability and quality as well as program user friendliness. Computer program functions and user friendliness significantly effect learning experience and quality (Pituch & Lee, 2006) and possibly lead to failure of such education ingenuity (Shrain, 2012).

Tselios, Daskalakis, and Papadopoulou (2011) mentioned that the users once go through a learning management system, the program determine its effectiveness for the users. Furthermore, blended learning system is one of the key tools to attract students to the program specially after 2020 and covid pandemic as many classes formed fully online or offered partially online but this attractiveness is only visible as long as there is information available regarding their program and learning system. Therefore, communication is

equally important to attract students as information needs to be in front of the users.

Student Decision evaluation and performance

University students' choices involve various step such as leaning, segregation and assessment step (Jackson 1982) as students in the first step their inspiration and behavior on program enrollment essence into family back ground, level of education and social setting. In the second step, segregation students go through reducing the number of schools and prospects programs and in the last step assessment, students make their ultimate choice from the program choices they have in their final list by a form of rating arrangement. Furthermore, in 1981 Chapman's proposed a model which student program choice is the combination of their own characteristic as well as various exterior effects. These exterior effects can be categorized in three groups. The influence of important individual, program characteristic as well as information availability and institutions' own ability to communicate with prospect students effectively.

These factors along with expectation of college life contribute in their decision evaluation toward choosing the suitable program. One of the most important factors in student's decision performance is reputation of the institution (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003). Smith (2001) mentioned that it's important for organizations to improve and distinguish themselves in order to maintain viability in the market. Universities have to engaae more in marketing activities in order to sustain a expeditive well recognize brand as well as boost alertness and differentiate themselves and their programs from the rest (Ali-Choudhury et al. 2009).

Durate Alyes and Rapose in 2010 mentioned that factors along with university location, its physical appearance such as campus and architecture, university facilities, cafeterias theatre where students also use and involve in various services offered by university which provide a social life for students and engagement of them even more with the university and program though them are among other decision factors to pursue student's decision making. Study by Mainardes, Alves and Raposo's in 2013 found that among career opportunities, connections to the industries along with university brand identity and location as well as social accommodations learning culture are among the main prospect of university student's decision-making factors and outcome expectations. as these studies demonstrate that decision performance related factors which include services and physical appearances which also have effect of choices of students it also include, teaching staff, program curriculum, program relation to other universities and programs across the world, employment opportunities, industry connection, information available in internet and other sources, university social lifestyle along with program reputation are among the the most important factors that influences students decision based on the program character, university image as well as information available to them program the program on going further and choosing certain major at university.

Proposed Model

The literature shows that students decision evaluation result in several matters. After students evaluating various options through a rating scheme then they will choose the ultimate program which result in a wide range of issues such as University reputation, location, international collaboration, program characteristic all the way to student's quality of life, campus and facilities, international openness university ranking would all contribute on the university prestige and reputation which significantly affect student's decision toward choosing their ultimate program. Qureshi mentioned in 1981 student's decision evaluating the program through availability of courses, curriculum characteristic as well as admission condition (Bourke, 2000) and program quality and range (Shanka, Quintal and Taylor, 2005); as well as value and elasticity of the program and course assortment (Holdworth and Nind, 2006). University image create brand for universities and their program attractiveness would generate loyalty Oliver (1999, p. 34). Brand loyalty is the Concluding measurement of consumer brand quality representing the consumer's decisive affiliation toward a brand (Keller, 1993). Student decision performance and loyalty comprises both intellect of community and also a aspiration to endure bond with a university (Sung and Yang, 2008). Students contribute to university prestige and reputation through their support to the university by providing donation, lectures and publishing research as well through word of mouth toward other prospect students (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2001). Furthermore, performance related factors included in the proposed model based on variables aim to explore and understand the student decision evaluation on their ultimate academic choice to pursue their education through latent variables such as university image, program characteristic, information availability. The model proposed that the mentioned variables through decision evaluation as a mediating variable impact student's decision performance. Therefore;

H1 University Image to Decision Evaluation

H2 Program Characteristic to Decision Evaluation

H3 Information availability to Decision Evaluation

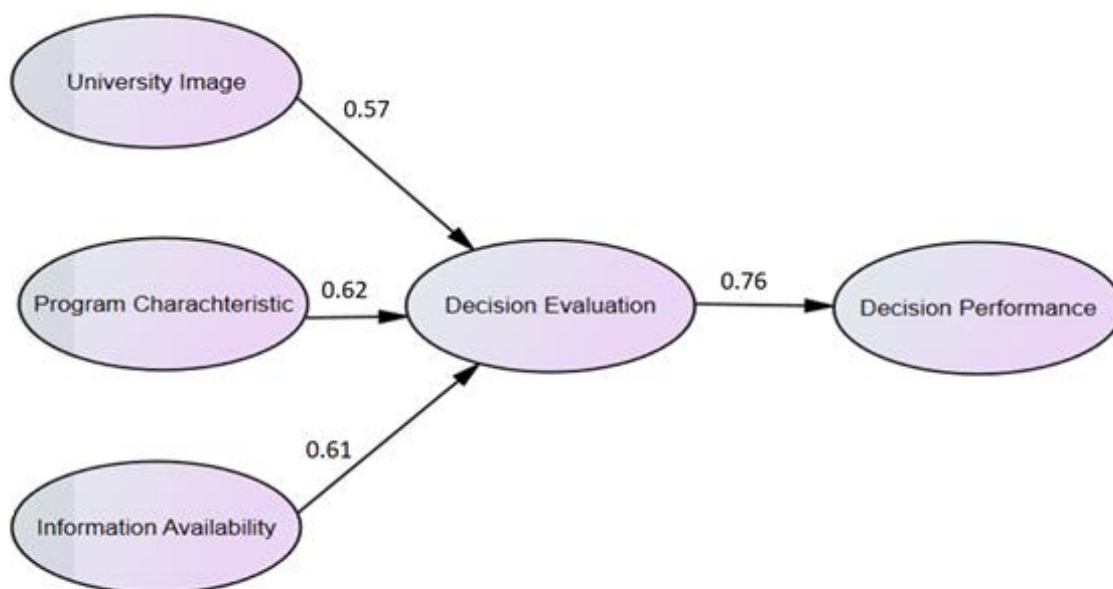*H4 Decision Evaluation to Decision Performance*

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Study

Data Analysis and result

Based on the results of the study, University Image is moderately positive related to Decision Evaluation r = 0.57, p < .05.

Based on the results of the study, Program Characteristic is moderately positive related to Decision Evaluation r = 0.62, p < .05.

Based on the results of the study, Information availability is moderately positive related to Decision Evaluation r = 0.57, p < .05.

Bayes Factor Inference on Pairwise Correlations[a]

		universityima gemean	programchar acteristicsME AN	informationav ailabilityMEAN	decisionevalu ationMEAN	decisionperfo rmanceMEAN
universityimagemean	Pearson Correlation	1	.744	.472	.578	.583
	Bayes Factor		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	430	430	430	430	430
programcharacteristicsM EAN	Pearson Correlation	.744	1	.522	.627	.594
	Bayes Factor	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	430	430	430	430	430
informationavailabilityME AN	Pearson Correlation	.472	.522	1	.611	.600
	Bayes Factor	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	430	430	430	430	430
decisionevaluationMEAN	Pearson Correlation	.578	.627	.611	1	.761
	Bayes Factor	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	430	430	430	430	430
decisionperformanceMEA N	Pearson Correlation	.583	.594	.600	.761	1
	Bayes Factor	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	430	430	430	430	430

a. Bayes factor: Null versus alternative hypothesis.

ts of the study, Decision Evaluation is strongly positive related to r = 0.76,

Table 1. Variables Correlation p < .05.

Figure 2. Pearson Correlation Test of the Study Variables

Table 2. Hypotheses testing results.

Hypotheses		Sig	Level	Acceptance

| H1	University Image to Decision Evaluation	.000	Moderate positive correlation	Accepted
H2	Program Characteristic to Decision Evaluation	.000	Moderate positive correlation	Accepted
H3	Information availability to Decision Evaluation	.000	Moderate positive correlation	Accepted
H4	Decision Evaluation to Decision Performance	.000	Very strong correlation	Accepted

CONCLUSION

There was a lot of research and writing about the corporate image. The difficulty in identifying its origins, calculating the effects of any factor accurately and the difficulty in managing the subjective assessment of the recipient and expecting a stable result, however, highlights the need to expand this study to cover the diversity of institutes.

This study aimed at reviewing the structure of the organizational picture, understanding the image building process and evaluating the effects the different sources had on the image of the university.

The analysis of the literature showed consent to the multidimensional nature, but at the same time it revealed an inexistence about the causes, the weight, and the measurement of image creation. In the image creation process, the studies agree unanimously that the image is composed of two parts, one cognitive and one affective.

This research used a set of metrics based on the work of (Palacio et al. 2002) and Arpan et al. (2003) to calculate the four key dimensions of the image of universities that they had defined as predictors and successively demonstrated a statistically significant impact on the image.

The study also detects the limited research that has been undertaken on this topic, in spite of an agreed importance of university images to the
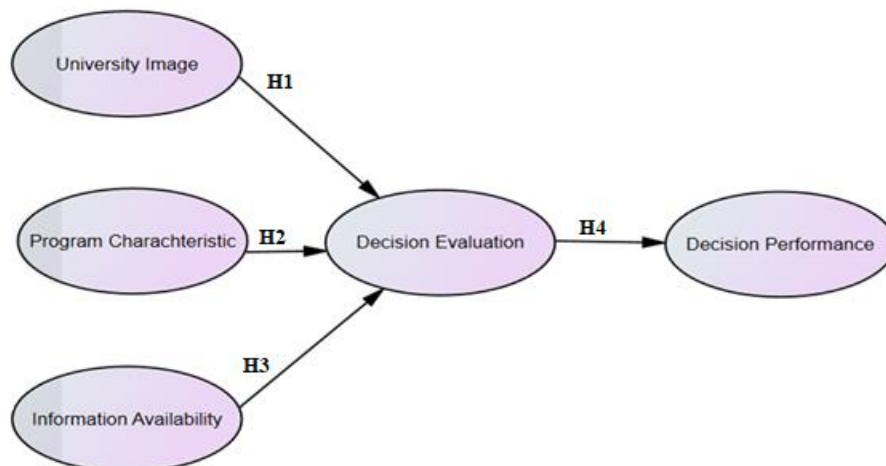
competitiveness of higher education institutions.

Of course, the information sources of students and their significance in this sense of limited study are two matters which require further and more comprehensive research. Present findings suggest the need to improve the communication techniques and models that are being used, based on online communication and public relations with families, friends and especially current students, since they represent the voice and face of the university and are primarily responsible for the institutional picture.

It may also be concluded that the overall picture of the university is related to issues related to the education itself, but also to matters not especially central to education, such as academic life and facilities.

The research has revealed that University communications, degree programs, prospects for jobs and university life can clarify the multidimensional existence of the picture 94.7%. Despite this fact that the academic life and job prospects are the most influencing the academic image with 0.55 and 0.17 pathway coefficients respectively, as all these effects have proven important.

This seems to suggest that students are very susceptible and affected by the perceptions and assumptions about academic life experiences and how easily they can find a job after the course is over. Another important topic worth attention in depth is that contact, prospects for employment and courses have essentially the same effect on picture. From a realistic point of view, this suggests that administrators of universities need to focus on all aspects rather than focusing a lot of time and efforts on just one dimension.

Limitation and Future Studies

While this research helps enhance awareness about the picture and training of universities, some drawbacks may need to be taken into consideration. In this study the extrapolation of results was restricted by the students of only one university. It is necessary in this sense to test this model with students from other universities and to check whether the model acts consistently by using a student sample from various subject areas. On the other hand, testing the model with postgraduate students will be significant, because they often have professional experience and this could impact on their university photos.

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