



## Using YouTube Videos to Promote Universities: A Content Analysis

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**Abstract:** In today's global higher education environment, international students represent not only an important source of external income for universities: the degree of cross-border student mobility also reflects the internationalization of higher education sector. Universities have engaged in efforts to sell themselves to prospective students and promotional videos are among the most widely used marketing tools for this purpose. This study reports the results of a study analyzing the content of 140 higher education promotional videos from 14 countries available on YouTube. The results reveal that while the pattern of use of YouTube for two-way communication with viewers, information contents and appeal messages among sampled universities is fairly homogenous, some marked differences emerge when cultural background and global position ranking of the university are taken into account. The implications of these findings are that, although, transnational higher education has been profoundly globalized, culture still plays a significant role in marketing practice for the recruitment of mobile students. In addition, different universities have various student-targeted segments. These findings provide the basis of a series of recommendations for universities looking to optimize their use of YouTube and promotional video design to market to international students.

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## INTRODUCTION

The last five decades have seen an increasing flow of students across the world. During the 1960's, the annual growth rate of mobilized students was around 9%<sup>[1]</sup> and stayed stable at 5 and 6% over the following 30 years.

Over the last decade, as the knowledge economy has discoursed enhanced the value of education, accompanied by a global labor market constantly looking for knowledge workers and by the increasing demands from emerging middle-income class from South countries it has resulted in a more highly liberalized industry than ever

before<sup>[2]</sup>. As a consequence, we have observed an unprecedented jump in the number of transnational students. In 2010, the global population of mobile students was 4.1 million-twice the figure in 2000<sup>[3]</sup>.

On the map of competition for the transnational student market, the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and New Zealand collectively known as the Major English Speaking Destination Countries (MESDCs) are acknowledged leaders. There are two major motivations for universities in MESDCs to enter the international student market. First, historically, MESDCs most particularly the US and UK have used scholarships for the children of political elites from developing countries as a method of maintaining off-shore political sway<sup>[4, 5]</sup> or to lure brain power for future research and development<sup>[6]</sup>. Second, as universities in MESDCs have fallen victim to decreasing levels of government funding since the early 1990s, higher education institutions in MESDCs have had to shift their strategies to aggressive campaigns for the recruitment of international students, increasingly relying on them as a source of income<sup>[4]</sup>. With the growth of the higher education industry in countries not traditionally associated with the mobilized student market, especially, those from Asia, the interface of student recruitment has changed dramatically. While MESDCs are still leaders in the transnational higher education market in terms of international student's volume, they are declining as nation destinations in terms of international student's proportion<sup>[7]</sup>. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development<sup>[3]</sup>, MESDCs lost 2.3% of their market share between 2006 and 2010. The figures show a fall from 45-42.7 out of every 100 internationally mobile student making MESDCs their study destination of choice. In other words while the number of international students attending MESDCs continues to increase, the rate of increase is greater for non-MESDCs, particularly from Asia. With strongly performing economies, some of the more developed countries in Asia such as Korea, Taiwan ROC, Singapore or Malaysia have turned their attention to developing their national knowledge base through increasing investment in higher education. Attracting both international students and talented faculty has been among their top priorities<sup>[8, 7]</sup>. Add these economic and social developments to the inclusion of international student numbers as one of the indicators in institutional rankings such as the Times Higher Education World University Rankings or QS World University Rankings and the result is a highly competitive and dynamic market of international student mobility.

The use of YouTube in higher education marketing video is one of the most common means of product promotion employed by managerial marketers in any

industry. According to Stern and Resnik<sup>[9]</sup>, magazine advertisements have traditionally been considered a better option for advertisers in terms of involvibility of large volumes of viewers where a television advertisement typically runs for 30 sec has limited scope for the inclusion of detailed information and an emphasis on being entertaining rather than informative, a magazine ad is able to provide more information and does not have the same time limits imposed. This trend, however, appears to be reversing due to the rapid growth YouTube which was established in 2005. As a type of social media, YouTube has proven its advantages and efficiencies not only in attracting viewers<sup>[10]</sup> but also in the potential for uploader-viewer and viewer-viewer interaction. At the current time, practitioners in every sector across the world consider YouTube as 'an efficient platform for advertising and marketing'<sup>[11,10]</sup> and higher education makes no exception. Creating a YouTube channel and uploading videos to promote institutional identity and the university's up-to-date achievements and activities has become increasingly popular in higher education management practice.

While the use of social media in general and YouTube in particular-as a marketing vehicle is already ubiquitous in management and business practice, the body of scholarly research on social media is also growing<sup>[12]</sup>. Within the higher education sector, however, little is known about how universities are exploiting social media for management and promotional purposes. The purpose of this study is to fill this gap in understanding by conducting a content analysis of 140 university promotional videos from 14 countries from 2007 to the present. This research provides an understanding of how universities from different cultures and global rankings are currently using YouTube to advertise to international students as well as suggestions as to how marketers in higher education institutions can effectively harness YouTube to promote their university to the international student market.

### **Literature review**

**YouTube as a toolkit for university promotion:** Founded in 2005 by three young entrepreneurs in California, YouTube is an open social-network for sharing videos and along with Google and Facebook is currently one of the most popular websites in the world<sup>[13]</sup>. Predominantly used for sharing non-professional videos for entertainment purposes<sup>[12]</sup>, YouTube has rapidly attracted the attention of managerial marketers as an essential vehicle of promotion in both the for-profit<sup>[11]</sup> and not-for-profit sectors<sup>[10]</sup>. Organizations involved in advertising on YouTube range from small-scale, newly established beauty salons to well-known philanthropic foundations. There are several reasons why organizations

prefer advertising on YouTube to traditional means of communication like television or print media. On the one hand, thanks to YouTube's low costs and two-way communication<sup>[10]</sup>, managerial marketers enjoy a flexible platform where they can upload longer advertisement videos and more detailed information than television; not only this it is also possible to receive feedback from viewers. On the other hand, thanks to HTML embed code provided by YouTube organizations can easily share their promotional videos on official websites. Stakeholders such as customers, employees or partners in turn, may share these promotional videos on their own websites. Thus, advertisements about the organization or company expand remotely and are disseminated broadly, potentially to millions of viewers, regardless of where they are located and when they want to watch. Television, of course cannot boast such an advantage.

Universities have not been immune to the benefits of social media in general<sup>[14, 15]</sup> and YouTube in particular and have increasingly employed YouTube as a tool for contact with their prospective students in general and international students in particular.

**Information content:** Previous studies have identified and investigated the kind of persuasive information content promotional videos in general and YouTube's ones in particular may contain. For example, according to Waters and Jones<sup>[10]</sup> in the not-for-profit sector, the fundamental purpose of the promotional video is to 'inform and educate viewers about missions, programs and services'. In other words, not-for-profit organizations regard promotional video as a means to build corporate identity. By analyzing the content of 100 official not-for-profit videos uploaded in YouTube, Waters and Jones<sup>[10]</sup> found that mission statements and organizational programs and services were the most frequently cited attributes (56%). Thus, we suggest that, similar to the not-for-profit sector, a promotional video issued by a university must communicate to the audience basic attributes about the institution such as its logo, mission, vision, slogan and history and core values.

Moreover, like other methods of advertising, it is widely acknowledged that a successful promotional video must be one that addresses the demands of its intended customers<sup>[16]</sup>. In the higher education context, the 'demands of customers' equates to the motivations of mobilized students to study abroad and these factors are well established in the literature. For example, in surveying 2485 prospective students from four countries including Indonesia, Taiwan (ROC), China and India, Mazzarol and Soutar<sup>[1]</sup> developed a comprehensive 'push-pull' model for cross-border education where 'push' factors are those that operate within the source country and 'pull' factors operate within the host country.

In this present study, we hypothesize that only 'pull' but not 'push' factors are present in university promotional videos. This is for two reasons: the most common 'push' factors such as 'course not available at home' or 'difficult to get entry at home' are not as relevant to students considering studying abroad. According to Mazzarol and Soutar<sup>[1]</sup> in contrast, the 'pull' factors such as 'reputation for quality' or 'qualification recognized by employer's remain at the forefront in encouraging students to study overseas. As promotional videos are created by the 'host' institution it is more likely that their producers include information they deem attractive and persuasive in building trust and credibility among potential students. In brief, the existing research indicates that institutional attributes and 'pull' factors are likely to form the content of university promotional videos.

**Emotional versus rational appealing messages:** The 'emotional versus rational' appeal model is one of the most common frameworks for understanding the effect of advertising on audiences and it has been widely applied by previous authors in analyzing the advertising strategies of business<sup>[17]</sup>. According to Kotler<sup>[18]</sup> while 'emotional appeals attempt to stir up negative or positive emotions that will motivate [customers] purchase rational appeals engage self-interest by claiming the product will produce certain benefits such as value or performance.' Existing empirical studies have shown that, based on different conditions, that is differences in targeted customers, the nature of the business (goods versus services) and cultural background-managerial marketers will adopt different advertising strategies incorporating different combinations of emotional and rational appeals in order to attract their targeted customers. For example, a study conducted by Albers-Miller and Stafford<sup>[17]</sup> revealed that rational appeals were used more frequently for goods compared with services, regardless of where the business transaction occurred. This argument is also consistent with other findings such as those from<sup>[19]</sup>. However, Albers-Miller and Stafford<sup>[17]</sup> also showcased the significant role of culture in determining the use of emotional and rational appeal with the same product type (goods or services). By examining different print advertisements in financial services and travel services across four different countries, they found that advertisements in Taiwan employed a greater number of emotional and fewer rational appeals than those in Brazil, Mexico and The United States. This argument can be understood through the lens of Hofstede<sup>[20]</sup> in which Taiwanese customers, identified as having a more collectivistic cultural character are likely to be persuaded more by emotional appeals such as 'affiliation' or 'community' over those of the more individualist and achievement-oriented cultures such as the United States, Mexico or Brazil.

However, while the research has explored various aspects of the uses and effects of advertising messages on different audience in detail, no one has yet investigated how universities use YouTube as a social media toolkit for promotional purposes and the kinds of messages their content contains; that is, how ‘pull’ factors and appeal messages are being represented in their promotional videos. This study fills this gap and addresses the following questions:

**Question 1:** How is YouTube used to engage with viewers across universities with different cultural backgrounds and global ranking positions?

**Question 2:** What information content do universities include on their YouTube promotional videos and do cultural differences and global ranking positions have an impact on this content?

**Question 3:** What appeal messages do universities employ in their YouTube videos and do universitie’s cultural differences and global ranking positions have an effect on the nature of these messages’?

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Samples:** Data collection was undertaken in September, 2013. The researchers used the following keywords to search for university promotional videos in YouTube’s search engine: ‘university+promotional video/film/movie’, ‘university+introduction video/film/movie’, ‘welcome to university’. YouTube displayed different outcomes with different keyword commands, ranging from the lowest 79,400 outcomes with keyword ‘university+promotional movie’ to the highest 8,150,000 videos with keyword “welcome to university”, however, there was duplication across these searches and not all were appropriate for this study. The following criteria were used to refine and focus the sample: only English speaking videos were included, based on the assumption that a university creates a video for the purpose of recruiting international students and English is widely used as the Lingua Franca in the higher education sector. All videos uploaded before 2007 were excluded in order for the analysis to be of contemporary videos only. Videos created for the purpose of promoting a sub-institutional unit such as a school, a department or a university special event/service such as an anniversary celebration, a new opening program or an alumni activity’s event were dropped for data consistency. Videos produced by individuals for instance, students in journalism or communication majors who created videos for practice or educational purposes were excluded. Only promotional videos from English speaking countries and East and

Table 1: Krippendorff’s Alpha of reliability

Indicators	P/L index
Degree of engagement with viewers	1.000
Information content	
Institutional attributes	0.875
Educational quality claims	0.764
Supportive and flexible administrative systems	0.909
Facilities and resources	0.817
Finances	0.955
Learning and employment outcomes	0.907
Environmental factors	0.852
Tourism factors	0.981
Appeal messages	
Rational appeals	0.978
Emotional appeals	0.995

South East Asian countries were selected as these groups have been the most active players in the international student market in recent years. This latter divide revises and updates, Javidan *et al.*<sup>[21]</sup> cultural clusters in which countries are grouped by culture. For the purposes of this present study, we will adopt the Javidan *et al.*<sup>[21]</sup> term for the English-speaking countries included in this research, thus ‘Anglophone’ will represent the group of the US, UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. We will use ‘Post-Confucian’ to describe the group of sampled universities from East and South East Asian countries in this study these are China, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia. This term is adopted from<sup>[22]</sup>. Following the application of the refining criteria described before, 140 videos from 14 countries were finally selected for this study (Table 1).

**Coding procedures:** The researchers chose content analysis as the methodology to examine how universities use YouTube for identity-development and promotional purposes. The coding sheet was synthesized by the consensus of all three researchers based on different coding schemes from the existing literature in various industries<sup>[17, 19, 10]</sup> with three different groups of items/indicators linked to the three research questions.

Two of three authors of this study, both fluent in English and whose countries of origin are the same were chosen as coders. According to Peter and Lauf<sup>[23]</sup>, coders with the same cultural and language background may result in higher reliability. When an item was found present in whatever form of the ‘three Vs’ of communication-vocal, verbal or visual-in a promotional video it was coded with a value of ‘1’; otherwise as ‘0’. According to Hall and Schmid<sup>[24]</sup>, the ‘three Vs’ of communication together impact significantly on an audience’s awareness and interest about a video’s message. To estimate reliability, Krippendorff’s alpha was employed as it is the most appropriate formula for ratio scale coding. Table 1 presents P/L Index coefficients for all coding items, ranging from lowest of 0.764 to highest of 1.000.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

As mentioned earlier, a total of 140 promotional videos were identified for this study of which 90 (64.3 %) belong to English speaking countries (the ‘Anglophone cluster’) and 50 (35.7 %) belong to East and Southeast countries (the ‘Post-confucian cluster’). The leading country where university promotional videos were used was the US (46 commercial clips or 32.9%), followed by the UK (29 clips, 20.7%) and South Korea (17 clips, 12.7%). Detailed information about the selected videos with regards to cultural origin can be seen in Table 2. With regards to global ranking position, the authors chose Academic Ranking of World Universities 2013 (<http://www.shanghairanking.com/ARWU2013.html>) to divide the 140 selected university’s videos into two clusters: 51 within the top 500 (36.4%) and 89 outside the top 500 (63.6%).

As Jarboe<sup>[25]</sup> has suggested organizations would be well-advised to use YouTube to harness both online and offline communication with their target audience and this study’s first research question asks whether there is a difference in the level of engagement of universities with viewers on YouTube’s platform. Thus, we adopt four criteria to measure the degree of ‘interactive openness’ of a university using YouTube: does the university create an official brand channel to upload the video? Does the university upload other videos updating its daily/special activities or promoting its sub-institutional units? Does the university enable the like/dislike button for viewers to express their reactions to the video? Does the university enable the comment feature for viewers to express their opinions and arguments about the video? If the answers to all four above questions are ‘Yes’, a university will be assigned a score of ‘4’ reflecting a high degree of engagement with audiences and viewers. For any question to which the answer is ‘No’, a point will be subtracted. Thus, a university will have the highest degree of two-way communication with audiences when it gets a score of ‘4’ or answers ‘Yes’ for all four questions; in contrast, the lowest degree receives a score of zero if the answers for all four questions are ‘No’. As indicated in Table 3, there is significant effect for cultural background ( $F = 14.60, p = 0.0002$ ) but not ranking position and interaction (between cultural background and ranking position), suggesting differences in the use of YouTube in

engaging with viewers based only on culture. These results are further illustrated in Table 4 which shows the degree of engagement with viewers by each cultural and ranking cluster. Regarding cultural background, universities from English-speaking countries (average score of 3.22/4, SD 1.04) appear to be more willing to interact with their audiences than East and Southeast Asian institutions (average score of 2.56/4, SD 0.86). However, there was no statistical difference in the use of YouTube for uploader-viewer communication between the two clusters of different rankings as the average scores of ‘Within Top 500’ group and ‘Outside Top 500’ group are 3.02 (SD 1.12) and 2.97 (SD 0.97), respectively.

The second research question sought to determine the nature of the information content used to promote a university. This question also asks how this content differs across cultural backgrounds and global ranking positions. As noted at the outset and as the literature describes, there are two main ways that a university will attempt to sell itself: the first, similar to not-for-profit organizations (citation) is by reference to institutional attributes such as logo, mission, vision, slogan, history and core values. Given the specific context of present global higher education, we add ranking and internationalization as sub-indicators of institutional attributes. In total, the content of ‘Institutional Attribute’s or INA, are comprised of nine sub-indicators including also sub-indicator others (Table 5).

Table 2: University promotional video correspondent with country’s origin

Country	Number of university promotional video	Percentage
Anglophone cluster	90	64.3
Australia	8	5.7
Canada	6	4.3
New Zealand	1	0.7
UK	29	20.7
US	46	32.9
Post-confucian cluster	50	35.7
China	7	5.0
Cambodia	1	0.7
Japan	8	5.7
Malaysia	4	2.9
Singapore	2	1.4
South Korea	17	12.1
Taiwan ROC	2	1.4
Thailand	2	1.4
The Philippines	5	3.6
Vietnam	2	1.4

Table 3: ANOVA result F-tests

Variables	Degree of engagement with viewers	Information content							Appealing messages		
		INA	EQC	SFS	FAR	FIN	LEO	ENF	TOF	RAT	EMO
Culture	14.60	10.10	1.36	1.53	0.78	0.52	2.00	0.11	0.00	3.88	1.77
Ranking	0.00	1.25	2.30	0.04	0.29	0.07	0.10	0.15	2.13	9.79	6.95
Culture*	0.60	0.11	0.07	0.10	1.30	0.69	0.09	6.75	0.30	0.29	0.26
Ranking											

Table 4: Degree of engagement with viewers

Variables	Degree of engagement with viewers	
	Mean	SD
<b>Cultural background</b>		
Post-confucian cluster	2.56	0.86
Anglophone cluster	3.22	1.04
<b>Global ranking</b>		
Outside top 500	2.97	0.97
Within top 500	3.02	1.12

Table 5: Lists of sub-indicators

Indicators	Number of sub-indicators	Sub-indicators
Degree of engagement with viewers	4	Official brand channel, uploading other relevant videos, enable of like/dislike button, enable of comment feature
<b>Information content</b>		
Institutional attributes	9	Ranking, Slogan, vision; mission, principles/core values;, history, logo, internationalization, others
Educational quality claims	7	Overall quality of education, academic staff quality, notable professors, ranges of courses and programs, reputation of teaching, reputation of research, others
Supportive and flexible administrative systems	6	Professional support staff, reputation for being responsive to student needs, offer flexible entry throughout the year, visa application and acceptance, institution willing to recognize student's previous qualifications, others
Facilities and resources	6	Use of latest information technology, large campus and excellent facilities, dormitory, library, Gym and pools and leisure facilities, others
Finances	7	Tuition fees, travel cost, living cost, part-time jobs, financial aid, scholarship, others
Learning and employment outcomes	8	Understanding of new culture, Job opportunities after graduate, qualification recognized by recruiters, Foreign language improvement, Broaden personal experience knowledge, opportunity to become a global citizen, becoming more mature, independent and responsible, others
Environmental factors	12	Safe (low crime) environment, low racial discrimination, established population of overseas students, comfortable climate, exciting place to live, supportive learning environment, strong alumni network, lifestyle of the host country, ranges of students clubs and society, modern/technological advance country, political/democratic country, others
Tourism factors	11	Natural scenery, entertainment and gaming, people and local resident, historic building and heritage, tourism facilities and infrastructure, cultural facilities, activities and festivals, flag, map and sign, parks and gardens, local cuisine and dining, Shopping, others
<b>Appeal messages</b>		
Rational appeals	13	Cheapness/economy, convenience, competition, durability/quality, independence/individualism, modernity, naturalness, neatness, technology, safety, wisdom, work, productivity
Emotional appeals	13	Adventure, affiliation, community, dearness, Distinctiveness/ uniqueness, enjoyment/leisure, freedom, maturity, modesty, morality, nurturance, tradition, youth

The second way a university will promote itself is through use of the ‘pull’ factors that have been well established by previous studies examining the drivers behind student intentions to undertake cross-border education<sup>[1,7]</sup>. These drivers were re-categorized into five indicators, including ‘Education Quality Claims’ or EQC; ‘Supportive and Flexible Administrative Systems’ or SFS; ‘Facilities and Resources’ or FAR; ‘Finances’ or

FIN; ‘Learning and Employment Outcomes’ or LEO; ‘Environmental Factors’ or ENF; each containing six to 12 sub-indicators (Table 5). Apart from these indicators, we add ‘Tourism Factors’ or TOF (Table 5) as the last indicator that may be found in the information content of university promotional videos. This inclusion is due to the concept of ‘educational tourism’ that was firstly studied by Weiler and Hall<sup>[26]</sup> and followed by

Table 6: Average number of environmental factors observed per video aggregated based on interaction effect

		Average number of environmental factors observed per video aggregated based on interaction effect	
Cultural background	Global ranking position	Mean	SD
Post-confucian cluster	Outside top 500	1.92	1.51
Post-confucian cluster	Within top 500	2.94	1.39
Anglophone cluster	Outside top 500	2.31	1.45
Anglophone cluster	Within top 500	1.94	1.30

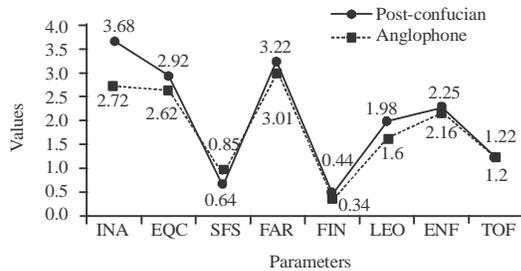


Fig. 1: Average number of sub-indicators observed per video aggregated across different cultural background

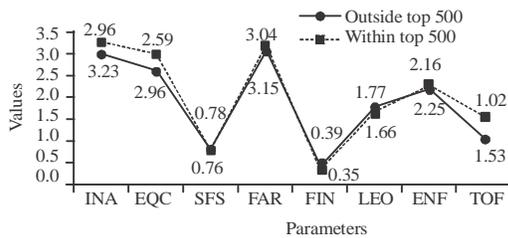


Fig. 2: Average number of sub-indicators observed per video aggregated across different ranking background

Lam *et al.*<sup>[27]</sup>. This concept describes that while a student chooses to study overseas for educational purposes, he or she may travel around the host country for leisure purposes. As a consequence, student’s choice of destination may be affected by tourism considerations. In this current study, the authors employed the categorization with 11 sub-indicators which had been used by Dadgostar, *et al.*, to understand how the tourism factors of host countries were projected into university promotional clips. The details of 11 sub-indicators may be found in Table 6.

Figure 1 and 2 illustrate how universities deploy information content to promote to prospective students, in respect of different cultural backgrounds and global ranking positions, respectively. These figures show that the sampled universities, regardless of ranking and background have used a very similar pattern in terms of information content. Based on these results, the pattern with the original seven indicators may be broken into three roughly equal categories: high-use (with average

observation of sub-indicators per video ranging from 2.59-3.68 included INA, EQC and FAR); low-use (with correspondent figure ranging from 0.34-0.85 included SFS and FIN) and medium-use (with average observation ranging from 1.02-2.29 included LEO, ENF and TOF).

As indicated in Table 2, the only two significant effects were found with INA based on different cultural backgrounds ( $F = 10.10$ ;  $p = 0.0018$ ) and ENF based on interaction between culture and ranking ( $F = 6.75$ ;  $p = 0.0104$ ). Figure 1 illustrates the difference in INA’s sub-indicators between the post-confucian and Anglophone clusters. While, on average, there are 3.68/7 INA’s sub-indicators ( $SD = 2.12$ ) found in a promotional video produced by the post-confucian cluster, the corresponding number for the Anglophone cluster was 2.72/7 ( $SD = 1.42$ ).

Table 6 reveals a significant difference in ENF’s sub-indicators with regards to a two-way interaction effect, implying that the use of environmental factors is dependent on both cultural background and global ranking position ( $F = 6.75$ ,  $p = 0.0104$ ). While the earlier part of this section categorized ENF as medium-use compared to other indicators, the two-way interaction indicated that with further analysis the use of ENF in turn, may be further grouped into 3 sub-groups: high-use (Post-confucian and Within Top 500), medium-use (Anglophone and Outside Top 500) and low-use (Post-confucian and Outside Top 500; Anglophone and Within Top 500). To examine this relationship in detail, the means and standard deviations are represented in Table 6.

This study’s final research question examines the nature of the advertising appeals employed by universities on YouTube promotional clips, asking if there were differences between universities from different cultures and ranking positions. To answer this, the coding framework identified by Waters and Jones<sup>[10]</sup> was adopted in which 47 advertising appeals developed by Shen<sup>[19]</sup> (basing on the studies of Albers-Miller<sup>[28, 17, 29, 30]</sup> and were then divided into two categories: rational (16 appeals) and emotional (31 appeals). As described by Shen<sup>[19]</sup>, the range of appeals are generically applicable across any sector or type of product (goods or service). The present study found there were only 13 for each type of appeals (rational and emotional) included in the transnational higher education context (Table 5).

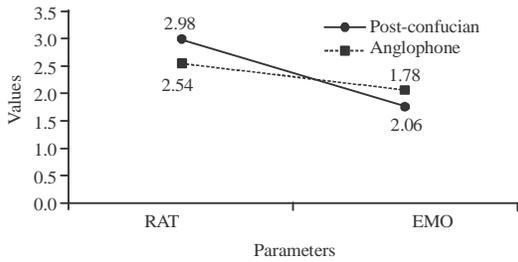


Fig. 3: Average number of advertising appeals observed per video aggregated across different cultural backgrounds

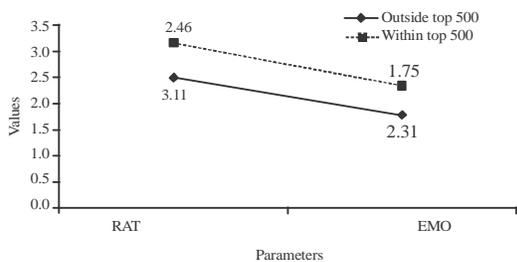


Fig. 4: Average number of advertising appeals observed per video aggregated across different ranking backgrounds

As illustrated in Fig. 3 and 4, a common pattern emerged in that both rational and emotional appeals were used in all the sampled universities' videos but with rational appeals presenting slightly more frequently than emotional. With regards to the differences between clusters, contrasting results were found when global ranking position and cultural background were considered. While these were the main effects of rational appeals ( $F = 9.79, p < 0.0022$ ) and emotional appeals ( $F = 6.95, p = 0.0094$ ) for universities with different ranking positions this was not the case for universities from different cultural backgrounds.

One of the major phenomena shaping contemporary global higher education is cross-border student mobility<sup>[4]</sup>. In recent years, higher education institutions across the world, regardless of cultural origin and global ranking, have been proactively involved in campaigns to entice international 'student-customers'. To that end, universities have adopted a number of marketing methods to promote themselves to prospective students. Thanks to its many advantages over traditional advertising vehicles, YouTube is increasingly being employed by universities as a marketing tool. However, up until now it has not been known how universities use YouTube for advertising purposes and how information content and appeal messages in these promotional videos may vary across different higher education institutions.

This current project addresses this gap and three key findings have been yielded according to three research questions as follow:

First, in respect of YouTube's use, evidence from this study shows that higher education institutions across the world have been aware of the flexibility and advantages of this social network platform in strengthening their brand identities with their 'customers'. However, as the vanguard in the international student recruitment market, Anglophone universities tend to more radically exploit the two-way communication features provided by YouTube than their post-confucian counterparts.

Second, in the information content of promotional video, a quasi-homogenous pattern was found across the sampled universities. Only two distinct differences were found with the number of Institutional Attributes (INA) and Environmental Factors (ENF) observed per video when considering the main effect of cultural backgrounds and interaction effect (of cultural backgrounds and global position rankings), respectively.

Third, with regards to appeal messages, again, this study uncovered a similar pattern in which rational appeals were slightly higher than emotional appeals. However, among different clusters of ranking positions, higher-ranking universities are prone to employ more advertising (both rational and emotional) appeals than lower ones. These results pose a number of questions that beg further investigation. These are discussed below.

**The level of 'interactive openness' across different universities:** Researchers have argued that the more open organizations/enterprises are to engaging in two-way communication, the more positive viewers will respond<sup>[31]</sup> which will consequently, then lead to an increase in consumption/sales<sup>[32]</sup>. Despite this, some sampled universities, especially, in the post-confucian cluster, appear less inclined to openness than their Anglophone counterparts. In this respect these universities appear to repeat the mistakes of companies included in Kanso etc., study that applied 'traditional advertising strategies to the dynamic web environment while ignoring the unique features possible through the interactive nature of the medium'. While post-confucian universities appear to be less aware of the potential of YouTube for promotional purposes than Anglophone institutions, given the historical penetration of English-speaking countries into the international higher education market as well as their maintained lead in the contemporary cross-border higher education market<sup>[7]</sup> it is to be expected that they would be savvy in designing advertisements and thus, be more active in adopting new marketing methods.

**A quasi-standardized 'recipe' in both information contents and appealing messages:** As described earlier, this study found that universities across the world have employed a standardized format to design promotional

clips in terms of both information contents and appeal messages. This finding is not particularly surprising and can be explained by Global Marketing Strategy theory as described by Zou and Volz<sup>[33]</sup> in the multinational business context, the degree of global advertising positively correlates with the convergence of the customer's demands, the availability of the media toolkit and the similarity of competitive positions across different markets. These propositions had been also confirmed by earlier empirical studies for instance Okazaki *et al.*<sup>[34]</sup> work on the advertising strategies of 574 American and Japanese firms in the European market. Given the homogeneity of factors underpinning a student's motivation to study abroad, the ease of use and popularity of YouTube and the development of the international higher education market it is understandable that universities in our study should adopt a quasi-standardized pattern of information content and appeal messages.

However, what is surprising is our finding that the factors that encourage students to undertake offshore education were weighted differently to those elucidated in the student choice-behavior literature: that is, our findings are not wholly consistent with past research in this area.

For example, in one of the most cited and influential papers investigating on factors underlying international student destination conducted by Mazzarol and Soutar<sup>[1]</sup>, the researchers found that an institution's reputation for quality, the alumni factor and the willingness of the host institution to recognize student's prior qualification were among the top factors impacting on destination decision making of mobilized students, regardless of their cultural origins. In contrast, analysis of our results showed the above factors actually fall into three groups with different degrees of use in YouTube promotional videos. Similarly, Roberts *et al.*<sup>[7]</sup> suggested that scholarship, study in a foreign language (i.e., Chinese/Mandarin) and the safety of the environment are the primary factors motivating international students to choose Taiwan as a host country for higher education services. As Kang and Mastin<sup>[16]</sup> suggested in their study on the tourism industry, marketers must consider the viewpoints and cultural orientation of targeted customers. What is the reason for this contradiction? Have the 'pull' factors motivating students to study abroad changed, since<sup>[1,7]</sup> studies? Or is it that university marketers using YouTube simply not aware of the relative magnitudes of 'pull' factors which have been well established in the literature when designing their promotional videos?

While the nature of 'pull' factors may be liable to change over time and across different locations it is highly improbable that they are opposite to those observed in this study. In addition, given the broad and profound development of marketing knowledge, marketing

personnel, especially those from the higher education sector are likely to understand to a greater or lesser extent, the profile and perspectives of their targeted students. But how then can the discrepancy be explained? The answer is that universities are likely to have adopted a mixed-media advertising strategy such as that suggested by Kanso *et al.*, in which YouTube is one part of an integrated promotion approach. Under this approach, university advertisers provide specific, 'first-step' content such as Institutional Attributes, Educational Quality Claims or Environmental Factors in their YouTube clips while other content such as Supportive and Flexible Administrative Systems or Finances will be delivered in subsequent steps through different advertising vehicles such as a website or exhibition.

Another finding of note was revealed when we considered the relative use of the two different kinds of appeal messages. Higher education institutions in this study, regardless of their cultural origins and position rankings, used both rational and emotional appeals in their YouTube clips with the latter rating slightly fewer than the former. This finding reinforces the idea that the emergence of YouTube has radically altered promotional-video design.

As mentioned earlier, video-format advertisements were traditionally deemed less informative and appropriate to emotionally congruent advertising in contradiction of our findings. The finding also illustrates the nature of higher education as a special service. That is, once a student considers studying abroad, they will spend a relatively long time living offshore where they will 'consume' two 'bulks of services': education services as their primary purpose and all other relevant services the student accesses during his or her time living overseas including those surrounding the campus, tourist services in the host country and so forth. On the one hand, education services are by nature, categorized as utilitarian and a higher-involvement product such that a rational appeal approach is appropriate and advised. On the other hand, it is reasonable to employ emotional appeals for the other services marketed to the student which are categorized to some extent as hedonic or lower-involvement products (for instance tourism or the residential environment). Moreover, as education is the major reason why a student goes beyond the border of his or her country to live abroad it is understandable that more rational appeals are used than emotional ones.

**The effect of cultural background and global ranking position on the design of university promotional videos:** While this study found that there were similarities between universities sampled in terms of information content and appeal messages what became clear was the influence of institution's cultural background and global ranking positions on the design of promotional videos.

As presented in the results section, significantly, post-confucian universities deployed more Institutional Attributes (INA) in their videos than did Anglophone universities. One explanation for this is that as late movers in the global higher education market, universities from the East and Southeast Asian region are indisputably less popular than their competitors from English speaking countries. Thus, post-confucian universities must focus attention on identity-building features such as logos, slogans and statements of vision or mission. However, an alternative explanation for this may reside in the possibility that Anglophone universities are using promotional videos to sell themselves to dual targets, that is both international and domestic students while post-confucian institutions opt for two types of videos: one in English targeted at international students and the other in the local language targeted at domestic students. As emerging host destinations it is understandable that East and South East Asian universities employ a higher number of INA in order to enhance their basic identities, with which international students are likely to be unfamiliar.

Regarding the effect of interaction, results revealed that among the four sub-clusters (Post-confucian Outside Top 500; post-confucian Inside Top 500; Anglophone Outside Top 500; Anglophone Inside Top 500), higher-ranking Post-confucian universities relied the most on Environmental Factors to entice international students, far surpassing the three other sub-clusters. As Mazzarol and Soutar<sup>[1]</sup> have suggested, although, in the eyes of international students the relative magnitude of Environmental Factors (ENF) was less important than the other factors for instance Educational Quality Claims (EQC), host nations and higher education institutions should not neglect the role of ENF when developing marketing strategies.

In the light of this, thanks to their inherent cultural background and English speaking environment, Anglophone countries enjoy the advantages of possessing Western living and learning environments that attract more mobilized students<sup>[1]</sup> so, it is understandable that they do not place a lot of attention on ENF. In contrast, East and Southeast Asian universities, especially, key and elite ones with heavy support priorities and financial subsidies from their governments in recent years<sup>[8]</sup> are inclined to focus more on ENF in order to overcome the inherent marketing disadvantages associated with cultural origin. In addition, the fact that lower ranking post-confucian cluster did not use a lot of ENF can be explained by the fact that their process of internationalization is only in its infancy and they may not yet be in a position to recruit, serve and support Foreign students.

The study's results also reveal a marked difference in the use of rational and emotional appeals across different ranking groups. Analysis showed that higher-ranking

universities tend to put greater emphasis on both rational and emotional appeals than their counterparts from the lower-ranking clusters. Based on the assumption that higher-ranking universities target to more elite students, does our finding imply that higher-knowledge students are more rational and emotional sensitive than their 'lower-knowledge' peers? The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) initiated by Petty and Cacioppo<sup>[35]</sup> and recently followed by Chiou *et al.*<sup>[36]</sup> gives us a half the answer to this conundrum. These researchers contested that higher-knowledge customers rely more on central (and less on peripheral) routes of persuasion or more on rational (and less emotional) cues to make a final decision to consume a product or not. In contrast, the opposite trend is observed for lower-knowledge customers. On the basis of this model, to better match their prospective student's demands and perceptions<sup>[16]</sup>, higher-ranking and lower-ranking universities are well-advised to reduce and enhance, respectively, their emotional cues when producing future advertisements.

## CONCLUSION

In a newly liberalized market, transnational higher education marketing practice is a vastly under-investigated area in comparison to other sectors. To shed some light on this gap this study has provided one of the primary analyses of the use of YouTube as a method for universities to advertise to prospective students. Using the two lenses of cultural background and global ranking position we examined the extent to which different higher education institutions took advantage of YouTube's features and the nature of the information content and appeal messages used to entice prospective mobilized students. The results show that regardless of the institution's cultural origin or global ranking position, in general, universities adopt a quasi-standardized 'recipe' in both information content and appeal messages on YouTube. However, cultural background and global position rankings still play a significant role such as the degree of 'interactive openness' in using two-way communication YouTube's platform and the use of institutional attributes as information content (effect of culture), environmental factors as information content (interaction effect of culture and ranking position) and the use of appeal messages (effect of ranking position).

## IMPLICATIONS

The above findings have several implications for university marketers involved in designing advertisement campaigns. First, as suggested by Leppäniemi *et al.*<sup>[31]</sup> or Chevalier and Mayzlin<sup>[32]</sup>, the more an enterprise interacts with their customers, the more benefit they earn; universities, especially, late movers in the transnational higher education market such as those from East and

Southeast Asia should consider using more of YouTube's features to enhance interaction with prospective students.

In addition, given the increasing convergence of the current transnational higher education market, a systematic approach should be taken by universities when conducting advertising strategies in which YouTube's video could be considered as among the first options to provide viewers with primary images and impressions of their institution. On the other hand, university marketers may follow the so-called 'distorted mirror' advertising strategy<sup>[37]</sup> in which only inherently cultural information content and appeal messages that could help generate selling products are selected to adopt in their promotional videos. Ultimately, the demands and values of different student target markets should also be considered when designing marketing strategies.

### **LIMITATIONS**

While, we have endeavored to conduct this research robustly and reliably, we acknowledge that it still has its limitations. Two coders were selected among the researchers who were already familiar with the objectives of the research and this could potentially, mean a decrease in reliability. Future research could eliminate this problem by hiring external coders blind to the research questions. Second, with only seven groups of keywords searched in YouTube's engine, we may not have captured all available videos for inclusion. Future research may broaden the selected sample and enhance objectivity through using further keywords or an innovative method of collecting data for instance cross checking the search results in other locations, for example, on universities official websites. As mentioned in discussion section, future studies may broaden the scope of this research by examining other videos uploaded by universities on their YouTube channels as well as investigating in tandem, other promotional programs implemented by universities (such as websites, exhibitions and printed materials).

It should also be noted that, due to limitations on scope, an important aspect of promotional video as a medium had to be neglected in this current study and that is the technical design of the videos including their length, music choice, use of spokespersons and the use of digital effects. This also has potential for further investigation. Finally, there is an arena that this study did not attempt to address; that is how international students actually perceive university promotional videos. This is, of course, a worthy topic for further investigation which can be tapped for an emerging strategic advantage in today's fast-changing world: serendipity-based market opportunities<sup>[38]</sup>.

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