

Advertising message strategies for encouraging young White working class males to consider entering British universities

Roger Bennett*

*Centre for Research in Marketing, Department of Business and Service Sector Management, London Metropolitan University,
84 Moorgate, London EC2M 6SQ, United Kingdom*

Received 1 June 2006; received in revised form 1 December 2006; accepted 1 January 2007

Abstract

One hundred and sixty-one 16 to 18 year old White working class youngsters currently enrolled on post-school vocational courses at two further education colleges in central London viewed four advertisements designed to arouse interest in the idea of going to university. Two of the advertisements contain visual images with no accompanying text; two contain purely documentary information. Each advertisement relates to either a hedonistic or a utilitarian theme. Participants' responses were analyzed with respect to a person's financial status, prior knowledge of the characteristics of university life, perceptions that university attendance carries a high-risk of not obtaining long-term financial benefit, levels of personal ambition, and fear of possible social isolation consequent to enrolling on an undergraduate programme.

© 2007 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Advertising; Student recruitment; Hedonic versus utilitarian messages; Widening participation; Non-traditional students

1. Introduction

The failure of British universities to attract and retain White students from working class backgrounds is a major and pressing issue currently facing UK higher education (Archer and Yamashita, 2003; Collier et al., 2003; Gillborn and Kirton, 2000; Gorard, 2005; Quinn, 2004). Successive governments voice their commitment to widening access to higher education (HE) yet, by the turn of the millennium, barely 15% of British children whose parents were unskilled or partly skilled attended university versus 70% of youngsters with parents who worked in professional occupations (Blanden, 2005). Inequality is acute particularly in relation to White working class boys. By 2000, females outnumbered males in British higher education by a ratio of 60 to 40 (UCAS, 2004), and the difference was even higher where non-White women were concerned. Fifty-nine per cent of all (predominantly lower social grouping) ethnic minority females aged 18 or 19 years attended university during 2001 compared with 32% of this age cohort for the rest of the nation (Baty, 2002). Overall, ethnic minorities accounted for 15% of

all UK undergraduates, while comprising just 6% of the working population.

In sharp contrast, participation in higher education (HE) by White males from lower socio-economic categories (at 11% of the total UK student population) is disappointing (the average for working class females between 1994 and 2004 was 14.5% — see UCAS, 2004; Hill, 2005). This state of affairs does not reflect the proportion of White working class boys attaining post-school qualifications, however, as more than 80% of British youths from lower socio-economic groups remain in post-compulsory education or training after age 16 (DfES, 2005). Moreover, White working class British boys do *not* underachieve at school relative to males in most other low socio-economic status categories. Indeed, according to Gillborn and Kirton (2000), White working class males perform significantly better at school on average than working class boys of Afro-Caribbean, Pakistani or Bangladeshi ethnic heritage.

1.1. Aims of the research

Several government initiatives have attempted to induce working class youngsters to enter university. In January 2002,

* Tel.: +44 020 7320 1577; fax: +44 020 7320 1465.

E-mail address: r.bennett@londonmet.ac.uk.

for instance, an advertising campaign spearheaded by famous celebrities was launched using hedonistic visual imagery designed to illustrate (*via* pictures rather than words) the *pleasures* of university life and hence to encourage working class youngsters to consider progressing to HE (Ahmed, 2002). Other state-funded programmes have been more somber and informative in nature and document the financial and other material benefits of HE (Gewirtz, 2001). In particular, the government's 'Aim Higher' campaign attempted to describe the enhanced employability and improved earning power of university graduates, targeting this information at youngsters from very poor backgrounds (Blenden, 2005). Growing governmental demands that individual universities develop their own schemes for inducing working class Whites to enroll on undergraduate programmes accompanied these initiatives (Baty, 2002; Bryson, 2004; Lea et al., 2003). Raising the willingness of White working class boys to explore the possibility of progressing to higher education necessitates the production of advertisements that possess the capacity to arouse their interest in this matter. The present investigation includes a sample of White working class 16 to 18 old males currently at further education (FE) colleges and attending level 3 courses in vocational subjects that are not normally associated with progression to university. In the British system, level 3 programmes occur after basic secondary school has been completed and can lead to university level study. Entry requirements for vocational level 3 courses are normally the same as for conventional university matriculation qualifications. For operational purposes, a working class youth is someone whose family falls within the UK Market Research Society's C2, D and E social grade classifications. This incorporates people from manual, partly skilled and unskilled occupational backgrounds and who, in addition, experience some degree of economic disadvantage. Although rather crude, the above definition has been widely used in previous research and correlates substantially with other measures of working classes (see Gorard, 2005; Li et al., 2002). The investigation defines a White person as anyone who self-reports their ethnicity as being White, thus recognizing that whiteness has a cultural as well as a color dimension (Heilman, 2004).

1.2. Literature review

As many dimensions of HE are novel to the above-mentioned target audience, marketers employ second-hand devices (essentially pictorial images and factual information) to show the prospective student the nature of life at university (cf. Hill et al., 2004). Advertisements aimed at this audience could comprise, for instance, pictures of obviously happy young people engaged in leisure pursuits completely unrelated to academic study (dancing, playing football, socializing in a bar, windsurfing, etc.), hence projecting exciting and pleasurable images (cf. Mittal and Baker, 2002). Alternatively, advertisements might focus on the objective quality of the education on offer, on a university's facilities, student support services, future job and career prospects, and so on. The following sections briefly review prior academic literature concerning the benefits and drawbacks of the strategic advertising options available.

1.3. Visualization strategies versus documentation strategies

An advertisement can consist of pictures with hardly any words, of words alone, or of a mixture of pictures and words. The messages conveyed may be mainly hedonistic, mainly utilitarian, or involve both hedonistic and utilitarian elements (Hill et al., 2004). Hedonistic messages focus on pleasure and personal enjoyment and are intended to make a person feel more involved in the activity, issue or entity described or portrayed in the advertisement (Wakefield and Barnes, 1996). This sense of involvement allegedly makes the individual more motivated to process the relevant information (Wakefield and Inman, 2003). Utilitarian messages, conversely, emphasize practical matters such as, in the current context, the quality of a university's library, laboratories, lecture theatres and IT facilities, and enhanced job prospects. Messages of this nature are unlikely to evoke emotional involvement (Hill et al., 2004).

Documentation strategies focus on the provision within an advertisement of specific facts, figures and other information that explain or demonstrate a situation or justify a claim or proposition (Mittal and Baker, 2002). They represent a rational, straightforward and objective approach to advertising (Berry and Clark, 1986) and are found to work best when activities (i) can be easily described and recorded, and (ii) do not require subjective evaluations (Mittal, 1999). The information provided could include details of an institution's facilities, the proportions of its students obtaining certain types of well-paid jobs, and examples of blue-chip companies that have employed the university's graduates. Celebrities or past students who are similar to the target audience might give endorsements of an institution and/or of university life in general. Documentation strategies supposedly confer a number of advantages, for example, making a potential student feel safe and that 'university is for people like me', creating familiarity with and knowledge of relevant issues, and facilitating understanding and interpretation (cf. Mittal, 1999). Hill et al. (2004) find that individuals are more attentive to documentary information when messages contain hedonic themes, due to a greater tendency of people to search carefully for information about things they find enjoyable and emotionally engaging. Documentation strategies can also help a university (as a service provider) to overcome some of the problems associated with the intangibility of the HE experience (Mittal, 1999; Berry and Clark, 1986). Hill et al. (2004) note that many people associate intangibility with a high level of risk. *A-priori*, therefore, potential students who regard university entry as inherently risky might seek relatively large amounts of documentary information about university life (cf. Grove et al., 1995), as opposed to relying on visual images.

A possible danger with the use of a documentary approach in the present context is that the approach could make the idea of going to university seem even more remote and incomprehensible to the target audience than previously. Also, documentary advertisements are often more effective when message recipients are highly motivated to obtain information (Aaker and Norris, 1982; Grove et al., 1995). This situation might not apply to many working class youngsters in relation to their considering entering higher education (Capon and Burke, 1980).

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات