

DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF CHINESE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN CHOOSING STUDY DESTINATION OVERSEAS

Finland as Study Destination

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Abstract

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Abstract <p>Today's international education market was unprecedentedly large and is expected to grow in the future. Studies conducted on how international students make decisions on study destination were growing much slower than the growth rate of the market concern; not to mention the number of specified studies conducted on particular groups of students or on traditionally unpopular study destinations such as northern European countries. Furthermore, China is the largest source country of international students in the world, it is important to understand how Chinese students make decision when choosing a study place if the marketers from higher education institutions or education agencies wish to make a profit from this big cake. Though there are many studies aimed to formulate factors involved in the international students' decision-making process, merely did people adjust or update these theories that finished years ago, which may not provide accurate assumption and prediction on how Chinese students decide this matter.</p> <p>The theoretical framework of this thesis is based on two well-developed models and utilizes findings from up-to-date studies on Chinese students, coupled with freshly collected primary data, to generate a deeper insight into the decision-making process of Chinese students with concentration on undergraduate students and Finland as the study destination in order that higher education institutions in Finland and education agencies can gain better understandings on what really attract Chinese students and what affect their decisions.</p> <p>The thesis reveals that Chinese undergraduates decide study destination in both linear and mixed fashion rather than in a strict linear sequence. Chinese students who chose Finland as the destination put educational costs as the primary concern and also value factors such as recognition of degree, natural environment and others.</p>		
Keywords Decision-making process, Chinese students, Consumer behavior, Push-Pull factor		

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1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the readers a complete picture of this thesis. They can therefore recognize the thesis background, the research objective and questions, as well as the likely limitations. The theories utilized in the thesis will be demonstrated in the theoretical framework, followed by the explanation of research methodology and data collection processes. The structure of the thesis comes at last in this chapter.

1.1 Thesis Background

China is the largest market in providing international students. According to the statistics from 'Annual report on the development of Chinese students study abroad (2016)', published by Center for China and Globalization (CCG), more than 1.26 million Chinese students were studying and living in foreign countries by the year 2015, which accounted for 25% of the overall international students. This means that there was one Chinese student in every four international students (Wang & Miao 2016). The Ministry of Education in China further reported that in 2017 alone, 608,400 Chinese students left the country and sought higher education overseas, and a total of more than 5 million students have studied abroad over the past 40 years. These numbers are expected to grow in the foreseeable future (MOE 2018). According to a report from CCG, by 2015, China already became the largest international student provider in major English-speaking countries such as the US, the UK, Canada and Australia as well as in Asian countries, namely Japan, South Korea and Singapore. More specifically, Chinese students occupied over 30% of total international students in the US and Canada and even up to 62% of foreign students in South Korea came from China (Wang & Miao 2016). These figures signify the importance of Chinese market in exporting students to foreign education institutions.

When choosing study destinations, Chinese students demonstrated apparent preferences. The study from CCG shows that the Chinese students clearly favor Northern American and Western European Countries over the other, with Japan as an exception. By 2015, the US attracted more than 300 thousand Chinese students and the most popular European country, as far as Chinese students are concerned, the UK, saw nearly 100 thousand students coming from China (Wang & Miao 2016). Finland, however, has yet been a popular destination compared with the mentioned countries. Based on a report in 2018, published by Finnish National Agency for Education, only 1,609 Chinese students were enrolled at Finnish higher education institutions, although China placed the third largest nationality among foreign students in Finland (OPH 2018). This number is obviously less than those registered at other European countries with similar number of higher education

institutions (Netherlands saw 6.6 thousand Chinese students registered, Sweden with 4.4 thousand) (CCG 2016). The obviously differentiated preferences towards study destinations made most of education agencies put a much greater emphasis on advertising popular countries, say, English-speaking countries and other western European countries. Less popular destinations such as Finland has been given little attention in marketing by education agencies in China.

Although English-speaking countries are the most favorable to Chinese students as these countries are able to provide more educational opportunities, students' preferences have become more diverse. With the introduction of 'belt and road' initiative and other bilateral summits such as APEC, China has increasing connection with relevant countries, which resulted in higher popularity in choosing those nations as study destinations. Wang believed that the popularity of a study place is relevant to multilateral relationship among countries. Take China-CELAC Forum as an example, the cooperation between China and those countries significantly raise the demand for talents with bilingualism of Spanish and Chinese, which made Spain a more popular study place for Chinese students (Wang & Miao 2016). The close relationship between Finland and Russia also made Russia became the most common nationality among foreign students in Finland (OPH 2018), which indicate the same result as what Wang believed.

Looking at the numbers of foreign degree students in Finnish higher education institutions, the author found out that although Russia and Vietnam placed the first and the second most common nationalities among foreign students, most of students from these two countries are registered in Universities of applied sciences (67% of Russian students and 75% of the Vietnamese students are enrolled at universities of applied sciences). However, most Chinese students are registered at universities and only 32% study at UASs. The number of Chinese students studying at UASs was significantly outnumbered by that in Russia and Vietnam and slightly surpassed by that in Nepal, placed the fourth largest with 526 students in UASs (OPH 2018). This indicates the current meager popularity of UASs in the eyes of Chinese students and therefore shows a great potential as far as the author is concerned.

The varied inclinations towards study destinations, the macroscopic picture of Chinese market, as well as the unobvious popularity of Finnish higher education institution made the author believe that it is of necessity for Finnish tertiary education institutions, especially Finnish UASs, to have a clearer insight and understanding of the preferences and decision-making process of Chinese students in order that Finnish universities and UASs

can cease the opportunities in Chinese study abroad market by attracting more Chinese students to study in Finnish higher education institutions.

1.2 Thesis Objective, Questions and Limitations

This thesis aims to help higher education institutions in Finland to get a deeper understanding on the decision-making process of Chinese students when choosing study destinations abroad at bachelor's level. The focus will be put on how Chinese students make individual decisions from whether or not to study abroad to why study at a certain host country. Although the number of Chinese students studying overseas has constantly growing with a relatively large base quantity and a more diversified preferences, Finnish higher education institutions, both universities and universities and applied sciences, have not been able to attract parallelly increasing number of students but instead seen a declining number especially after the introduction of tuition fee to non-EEU students (OPH 2018). Thus, this thesis targets to provide information in helping Finnish universities and universities of applied sciences as well as education agencies in China to form a new marketing strategy and customer approach in order to attract more Chinese students to study in Finland.

Traditionally, there are three stages in the customer journey of Chinese students before applying a study place at a host country. The first step is to decide whether to study abroad or at home country. Secondly, students shall have thorough comparisons between study destinations and decide which country or area to study at. The final step is to decide which institutions to apply for and prepare application procedures accordingly (Lu & Tian 2014). This thesis will only focus on the first two stages in order to find out what may attract Chinese students to apply for a Finnish higher education institution.

Defining a well-confined research question in the beginning of a thesis is of a great importance as it is this question that brings the readers a boarder outlook of the nature of a thesis and the aim of the author (Morrell & Carroll 2010, 54). The main research question in this thesis is:

What factors contribute to Chinese students' decision-making process in deciding Finland as the study destination at bachelor's level?

There are several sub questions helping to organize the thesis process and provide a clearer thinking pattern to the readers. The sub questions of the thesis are displayed as following:

What factors make Chinese students willing to study at foreign higher education institutions rather than domestic universities at bachelor's level?

What attributes affect the target group in deciding which foreign country to study?

The main research question is to give a direct answer to the target readers what from Finland attract Chinese students to seek education there instead of other countries so that Finnish universities and universities of applied sciences as well as education agencies can put more emphasis on when marketing Finland as a study destination in Chinese market. The sub questions mentioned above are to help readers to understand how Chinese students make decisions at each step and how the author finally arrives at the terminus of the thesis—answering the main research question—through each stage, so that the institutions at the case country can effectively divert their limited resources on lightening their advantages as marketing elements.

Every study faces limitations and it is the author's obligation to inform the readers about these limitations, which are therefore important to describe (Nicholas 2011, 214).

Expected limitations of this thesis should be noticed before any readers proceeding to further chapters. This thesis is firstly based on the studies conducted among Chinese students and analyze their decision-making process; the involved elements are therefore adjusted based on Chinese philosophy. Any reference to the findings of this thesis should be drawn with a clear notice that the results may not be legitimate to elaborate on cultures of other philosophy. Secondly, the research is based on the case country Finland, the factors and aspects addressed in this thesis may not be suitable for other case countries unless necessary adjustments are added accordingly. Thirdly, the number of participants involved in the empirical research of the thesis is not large enough to make a comprehensive conclusion for all Chinese students but only sufficient to draw a referable structure of the subject matter. However, the findings from this thesis is enough to bring an objective and valid picture of the decision-making process of Chinese undergraduate students within the case country.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

In this thesis, the research will be based on the theories of consumer actions and buying process as well as the theories of student decision-making process, which will be connected to analyze the intended content. The theoretical framework consists of two chapters, which formulated the foundation of the thesis.

The first theory chapter discuss the consumer buying behaviors and decision-making process, which consists of three subchapters. The first subchapter discusses the consumer characteristics as an element of consumer behavior, which provides an insight of what may be the drive of customers behaviors in terms of personal backgrounds. The second subchapter introduces the consumer psychology theories, which indicate what may affect customers' buying decision in the psychological aspects. The third subchapter talks about the generic model of consumer behavior based on the two previous chapters, which formulates a complete buying process.

The second theory chapter talks about student decision-making process by using 'Push-Pull' factors model and its extension, which specifically explains what factors that influence international student destination choice.

1.4 Research Methodology and Data Collection

Firstly, it is important to define the research approach the thesis adopts before proceeding a research procedure. There are two different approaches: deductive reasoning and inductive reasoning.

A deductive approach is used when a researcher positions a clear theoretical stance where he or she intends to test through the collection of data, in which the project is theory driven. An inductive approach is adopted if a researcher wishes to explore a topic and develop a theoretical explanation by collecting and analyzing data, in which project will be data driven (Saunders & Lewis 2016, 51). The author will adopt a deductive approach in this thesis.

Secondly, the decision regarding a suitable research method has to be made as it concerns the ways of collecting, recording and analyzing data. There are two research methods to be considered: qualitative and quantitative.

Research conducted in quantitative research method will be based on numerical terms, where the focus is to use data to test theory. This method examines the correlation among variables that are measured numerically by using statistical techniques and is usually associated with deductive approach (Saunders & Lewis 2016, 166). Qualitative research method studies the expression made by participants, which uses various data collection and analytical techniques. Data collection of this method is not standardized and can be altered in accordance with the intention of the concerning researcher (Saunders & Lewis 2016, 168).

This thesis will use both quantitative and qualitative methods to reach the answer of the research questions. The quantitative method fits the thesis well as the research has to handle information provided by participants of a relatively large number in order to generate a more reliable result so that the research questions and the sub questions can be answered. The qualitative method has to be used since the research involves questions of profundity that cannot be easily interpreted by using quantitative method.

There are two approaches involved in the data collection process—survey and interview—which are the main sources of primary data. The survey is distributed online to a representative sample of the target group in order to formulate the fundamental source of data for generating answers to the research questions. Interviews with Chinese students who have studied in Finland form another important primary source of information, which are to complement the data generated from the survey. The secondary data of this thesis is collected from literatures, data bases, and internet-based sources.

Research approach	Deductive
Research Method	Quantitative & Qualitative
Data Collection	Primary & Secondary Data

FIGURE 1 Research Methods of the Thesis

In conclusion, this research is implemented by using deductive approach and both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Both primary and secondary data will be utilized to answer the research questions.

1.5 Thesis Structure

The figure below illustrates the thesis structure

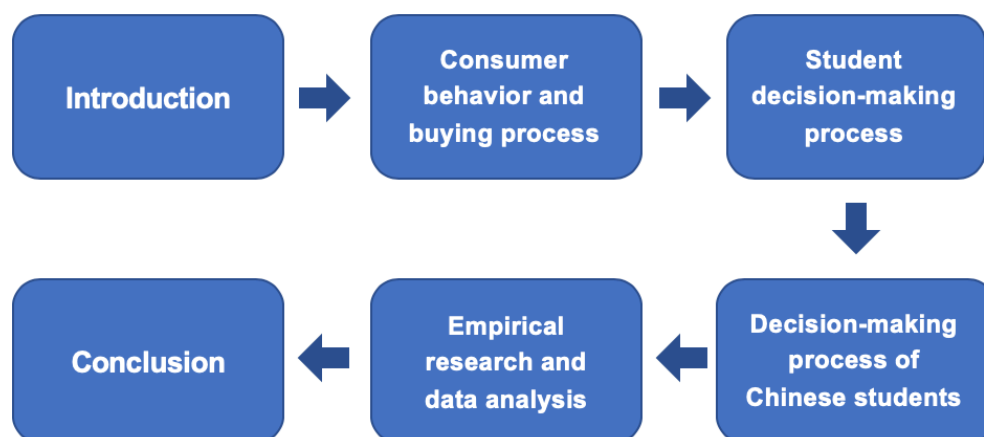


FIGURE 2 Thesis Structure

The thesis starts with the introduction chapter, the first part, in order to inform the readers why the thesis topic is worth to discuss. The introduction consists of background information, research objective, questions and limitations. The theories that the thesis utilizes, research methodology and data collection are also included in this chapter, followed by thesis structure as the end of this chapter.

The second part of the thesis is divided into two main sections: theoretical section and empirical section. The theoretical section discusses the fundamental theories that the thesis relies on and the empirical section presents collected data and its analysis. The theoretical section includes chapter two, three and four. Chapter five demonstrates the empirical findings.

Chapter two introduces consumer behavior and buying process, the first and second subchapter of Chapter two explain customer behaviors by introducing consumer characteristics and consumer psychology, the two components of internal factor of consumers. The third subchapter discusses the buying decision process and the fourth subchapter conglomerates the elements of the previous subchapters into the Generic model of consumer behavior in order to understand the integral customer buying process.

Chapter three focuses on student decision-making process. The first subchapter is to introduce the original Push-pull Factors of Influencing International Student Destination Choice. The second subchapter updates the original model to the extend push-pull factor model.

Chapter four ameliorate the previously mentioned theories into one combined model of decision-making process of international students. Its subchapters introduce the elements of the combined model and the interaction within the elements.

Chapter five gives empirical research part of the thesis, which breaks down into survey and interviews. The subchapters of Chapter five give the structure, design and the process of data collection. The final subchapter gives data analysis of the collected data.

Chapter six provides the conclusion of this thesis by answering the sub questions and the main research question. It also mentions the validity and reliability of the thesis findings and includes suggestions for future researches. The chapter six is the end of the thesis.

2 CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AND BUYING PROCESS

According to Simonson (2001), consumer behavior is the study of how individuals consume goods or services to satisfy their desires. When seeing educational programs as products offered by education institutions, students are considered as consumers of educational contents. It is crucial for marketing designers to understand consumer behaviors so that suitable products and services can be successfully and efficiently positioned to target consumers. The understanding of consumer behavior also helps the reader to understand why the questions in the interviews and surveys in the latter data collection process are designed in the way they are.

2.1 Dimensions of consumer characteristics

The study of consumer behavior can be divided into three dimensions: the study of culture, the study of social groups and the study of the individual. These dimensions can be analyzed separately but also share interdependencies and have mutual influence on each other (Kotler & Keller 2009, 224).

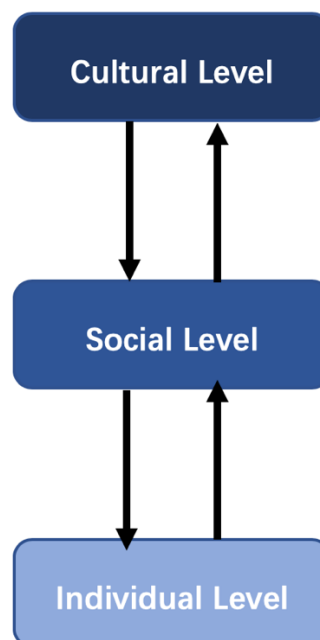


FIGURE 3 Dimensions of Consumer Characteristics

2.1.1 Cultural level

This broad aspect can be divided into three levels—culture, subculture and social class—all of which affect consumer buying behaviors as a large extent. The first level, culture, fundamentally determines a person's wants and behaviors. According to Peter, culture is the norms and meanings share and followed by a group of people and can be considered as the blueprint of human behavior (Peter & Olson 1999). Subcultures are the components of culture and provide more specific identification and demographic characteristics of people, which include nationalities, religions, racial groups, etc. Within subcultures, human in societies exhibit social stratifications, or social class, in which people share similar values, interests and behaviors. People in different social class show differentiated preferences towards brand and product so that one marketing tactics for a social class may not be effective to another. (Kotler & Keller 2009.)

Therefore, companies as well as higher education institutions need to introduce products and manage the marketing decisions according to different cultures, subcultures and more specifically social classes in order to more efficiently affect consumer behaviors.

2.1.2 Social level

Social factors include reference groups, family, and social roles and statuses, which affect consumer behaviors at different aspects.

Reference group is the term for all groups which have either direct or indirect influence on people's behavior. Groups that have direct influence are called membership groups, some of which are primary groups in which a person continuously and casually interacts with its group members such as family, friends and coworkers; some of which are secondary groups, such as religious, professional and trade union groups, in which a person has less constant interactions with its members. Kotler believes that reference groups influence people in at least three aspects: action, psychology and external pressure. More specifically, they form people's behaviors and lifestyles (action aspect), influence people's attitudes and self-concept (psychology aspect), and create pressure for conformity (external pressure aspect). For instance, a man inspired by his colleagues may purchase expensive but unnecessary product in order to be perceived as a financially successful man. (Kotler & Keller 2009.)

Jensen stated in his research that family is the most important buying organization and family members constitute the most influential primary reference group (Jensen 1991). Family's influence is seen significant although a consumer no longer interacts with his or

her family as it is the parents who largely influence their children's decisions in education, savings, socialization and so on. Moreover, men and women are likely to have different responses towards a same marketing message while children's personal tastes and wants also have an impact on their parents' decisions (Chura 2002).

A person participates in various groups such as family and organization, where each person has his or her roles and statuses within the groups, which can be an important piece of information to examine ones' behaviors and norms. A role is what a person is expected to perform, and each role carries a status. For example, a sales manager (a role) has more status than a salesperson. Different roles have different level of status and therefore have variant consumer behaviors. (Kotler & Keller 2009.)

Thus, it is important to know what reference group a consumer belongs, analyze the influence from family, and get familiar with what role and status he or she has during the buying procedures in order to comprehend a deeper insight in consumer decision-making journey.

2.1.3 Individual level

A consumer's buying decision is directly affected by his or her personal characteristics that can be divided into four aspects: buyer's age and stage in the life cycle, occupation and economic circumstances, personality and self-concept, and lifestyle and values (Kotler & Keller 2009, 230).

Tastes and preferences of people at different ages or stages may radically differ. Individuals' consumption is shaped by family life cycle, such as member, age and gender; as well as critical life events such as graduation and marriage. For instance, an adult may have a totally different aesthetic inclination compared with a teenager; a preference of a married person might be discrepant than that of an unmarried one (Du & Kamakura 2006).

Consumption is also influenced by one's occupation and financial situation. People with different occupations or income levels possess distinctive needs and desires towards the same product or service (Kotler & Keller 2009). In air travel, for instance, businesspeople and students are very likely travel at different hours; people of the same occupation but with different salaries may purchase different seat classes.

Everyone has his or her own personalities which determines his or her buying behaviors at some extent. According to Govers, personalities are the psychological features of human, which determine how people react to different environmental stimuli. These features include self-confidence, dominance, autocracy (Govers & Schoormans 2005). These are

the objective description of ones' personal characteristics. People also have their own self-concept that is people's own recognition of themselves. Aaker believes that people are inclined to purchase the products that fit their own personalities (Aaker 1997). However, it may be true to say that people make decisions based on their actual self-concept, in other words, based on how people perceive themselves, or even sometimes based on their ideal self-concept, which is how people prefer to perceive themselves, or their on other's self-concept, which is how people think others perceive themselves (Sirgy 1982). These concepts are important for salesperson to know before implementing sales tactics.

The last aspect of individual level is lifestyle and value. Lifestyle refers to people's living pattern that formulates how people interact with their surroundings. Lifestyles are determined by two constrains: money constrain and time constrain. Consumers with different constrains require different kinds of products: money-constrained consumers prefer products with lower prices while time-constrained customers may require multitasking or prefer to pay others to serve for them as they believe that time is more important than money (Kotler & Keller 2009). Value refers to consumers' beliefs that found their attitudes and behaviors. People are guided by their values and direct their behaviors in the way that fits their beliefs (Schwartz & Sagiv 1995).

Understanding individual background, characteristics and principals as factors mentioned above can help market designers to better comprehend what their customers want so that it can be easier for decision-makers to create a plan with more direct and effective stimuli and amplify product features that fit individuals' desires. As a result, companies or higher education institutions can position their products and services more successfully and achieve better performance.

2.1.4 The interaction between dimensions

The cultural dimension largely determines the social surroundings of an individual and therefore affects the perimeter of his or her preference groups and other aspects in the social dimension, which sequentially influences his or her individual characteristics. But people are not embedded with the values and norms from a culture. Instead, people learn these cultural elements as they grow. Moreover, people have their own feelings and thoughts, which interact with their surrounding environment and therefore affect backwards as individual force.

2.2 Consumer psychology

Not only consumer characteristics influence the consumer buying behaviors, the psychological process of consumers is also crucial in the decision-making procedures. The consumer characteristics together with consumer psychology formulate the subjective factors of individual consumers involved in the decision-making process. The consumer psychological process consists of four main elements: motivation, perception, learning and memory, which profoundly influence consumer actions (Kotler & Keller 2009).

2.2.1 Motivation

Motivation is derived from needs that everyone possesses. There are two kinds of needs: biogenic needs, such as hunger and thirst, and psychogenic needs, such as desires for esteem and belonging. Needs transform into motives when they surpass a certain level that require people to act in order to achieve the wanted goals (Kotler & Keller 2009).

There are two well-known motivations theories that have different meanings when studying consumer behaviors: Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Herzberg's two-factor theory.

Herzberg's two-factor theory: This theory constitutes two major elements that are opposite to each other. One element is satisfier, which causes satisfaction to consumers; the other one is dissatisfier, which brings dissatisfaction. A product not having dissatisfier will not necessarily cause the purchase decision, numbers of satisfiers must present to trigger final motive (Herzberg 1966). Therefore, products and services providers must try to identify the factors that bring satisfaction and dissatisfaction and amplify the satisfier while avoiding the dissatisfier.



FIGURE 4 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's hierarchy of needs: This is perhaps one of the most well-known theory in studying human motivation. Maslow believes that human needs can be distributed from the most to least pressing. The original needs pyramid has five levels from the bottom to the top: the first level is physiological needs, such as oxygen and food, which sustains a human being; the second level is safety needs, such as health and financial security; the third level is social needs, at which people require family and friendship; the fourth level is esteem needs such as self-confidence and recognition from others; and the fifth level is self-actualization, where people develop their full potentials and lead to realization (Maslow 1943). Maslow later extended the hierarchy by adding three more levels into the pyramid: cognitive needs, which related to knowledge, curiosity and desire for meaning; aesthetic needs, which is acknowledgement and pursue of beauty; and self-transcendence, which is the at the highest level, aspect that beyond individuals such as mystical or sexual experiences (McLeod 2017).

The core of this needs pyramid is that people will always try to fulfill their most significant needs first before they trying to satisfy less important needs. For example, a man who is not able to satisfy his physiological needs, such as needs for food, he will not try to reach

the needs beyond this level, say, social needs, such as making friends or seeking belonging. Only when he becomes capable of satisfying the most important needs, food on survival level, the second-most important needs, safety needs, can become his goal. However, this does not mean that people have to satisfy their prior needs at 100% before they start reaching the needs from the next level (Maslow 1954).

The implication of Maslow's theory is that people have particular needs at particular time and that people try to reach and develop their needs based on the needs fulfilled at the prior levels. However, it is worth noticing that Maslow's theory is based on western philosophy, which lack description of cultural distinctions. For example, people from eastern cultures value collectivistic concepts (social needs) more than individualistic concepts (self-actualization needs) (Senez 2011). This cultural difference changes people's needs and desires at a large extent. Thus, market designers should recognize this difference and shift the priorities of different needs according to the characteristics of different cultures.

2.2.2 Perception

People with sufficient motivation would be ready to take actions. The way people act is influenced by how people view the surroundings and confronted circumstances. In other words, it is people's perception, rather than the actual conditions, that affect people's behaviors. Perception is the process that people select, organize and interpret external information and transfer it to a meaningful image of a situation (Berelson 1964). It is important to notice that perception depends not only on the objective stimuli from outside world but also on the subjective outlooks from the people, which means that people can have completely different perception towards a same thing and therefore have different actions. There are three perceptual processes that cause different perceptions from people: selective attention, selective distortion and selective retention (Kotler & Keller 2009).

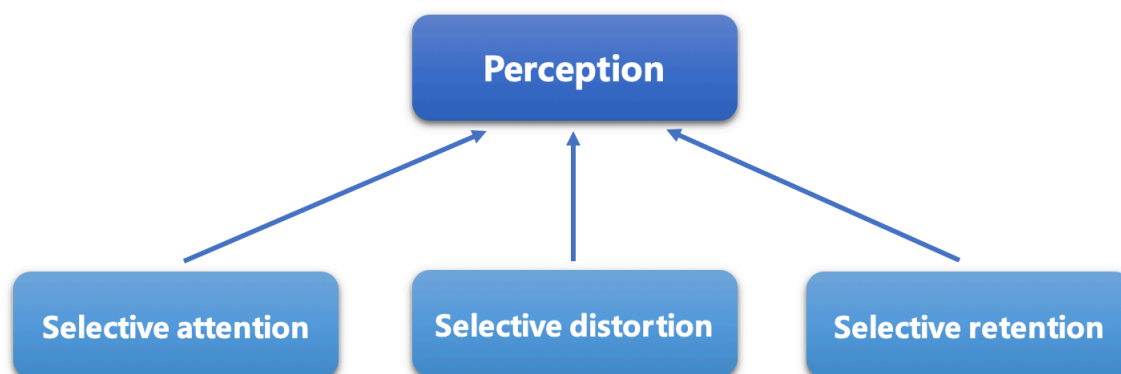


FIGURE 5 Perception

Selective attention: people are exposed to thousands of information a day but have limited mental capacity, so it is impossible to process every piece of information. Therefore, people screen most information out and pay attention to a few. This process is called selective attention. Kotler believes that people are likely to notice stimuli that related to current trend, stimuli that they anticipate, and stimuli whose deviations are large in relationship to the normal size of the stimuli. Marketing designers shall create content which is able to bypass selective attention filters (Kotler & Keller 2009).

Selective distortion: it is the tendency to interpret information of a product in the way that fits the preconception and expectation that people already hold (Russo 1998). Selective distortion can emerge when people lack sufficient information. People tend to have a more positive feedback towards a branded product than an unbranded product although both products are exactly the same. This is because people already have a more positive preconception towards the branded one so that they unconsciously distort the real nature of the products. Market designers with strong brands can use the advantage of selective distortion by exposing consumers to more information related to the brands in order to create a more positive image (Kotler & Keller 2009). If a company does not have a strong brand compared with others, it should establish a connection with positive preconceptions that consumers acquire previously in order to deliver a positive image despite through an ambiguous channel. For example, an unknown company can associate itself with a renowned parent firm, region or history in order to bring customers a positive preconception before it introduces a product to the customers.

Selective retention: it is natural that people forget most of information that they are exposed to, but people tend to remember information that fits their beliefs. This is called selective retention, meaning that people remember positive points about a preferred product and forget the good points about a competing product. Strong brands can utilize people's selective retention by introducing repetitive advertisement to make sure their information is not neglected by the target customers (Kotler & Keller 2009). Companies or universities with weak brand image can also utilize repetition in order to form a stronger first impression to target consumers.

2.2.3 Learning

Learning changes people's behavior by acquiring experiences and receiving stimuli from external environment. According to Kotler (2009), learning is produced through the combination of internal drives, external cues, and responses. People generalize their response to similar stimuli. For example, if a person receives a satisfactory experience by

consuming a product of a brand, then he or she would perceive other products of the same brand would also bring positive experience.

In this case, market designers can associate their brands to stronger drives and more motivating cues. A new market entrant can establish a link between its products and competitor's products by appealing to similar drives and simulating similar cues, which is a step to engender generalization in people's learning process, so that it is easier for the new entrant to position its products.

2.2.4 Memory

People store messages to and retrieve information from memory. Memory can be identified as short-term memory, which is temporary and transitory, and long-term memory, which is more permanent. Associative network memory model acknowledges long-term memory as a set of nodes and links. Information is stored in nodes that are connected by links. When people activate a node by encoding external information (memory process) or decoding internally stored information (retrieving), other nodes can also be activated if the link between these nodes are strong enough (Wyer & Srull 1989). Consumers' brand knowledge can be considered as a node in memory, which has various links associated with other nodes. The strength and organization of these links determine whether consumers can recall this brand. For example, when a marketer introduces a fresh new study program in a specific country, the receiver will unconsciously activate the nodes associated with this country when he or she is encoding or memorizing this new program. If the nodes of information connected to this new program are strong enough, the memorizing and recalling processes of the program will be more effective. Brand associations can be any information that related to the brand, such as thoughts, feelings, images, perceptions, attitudes and etc. (Kotler & Keller 2009).

Thus, it is important for markers, especially those with new brands, to associate their brands to strongly memorized nodes in minds of consumers. Knowing what memory or experience that target consumers have is crucial to establish a stronger link.

2.3 The buying decision process

Luce and Bettman at University of Chicago developed a five-stage model of consumer buying decision process. They believe that consumer passes through five stages when deciding to purchase a product: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and finally post-purchase behavior (Luce & Bettman 2001).

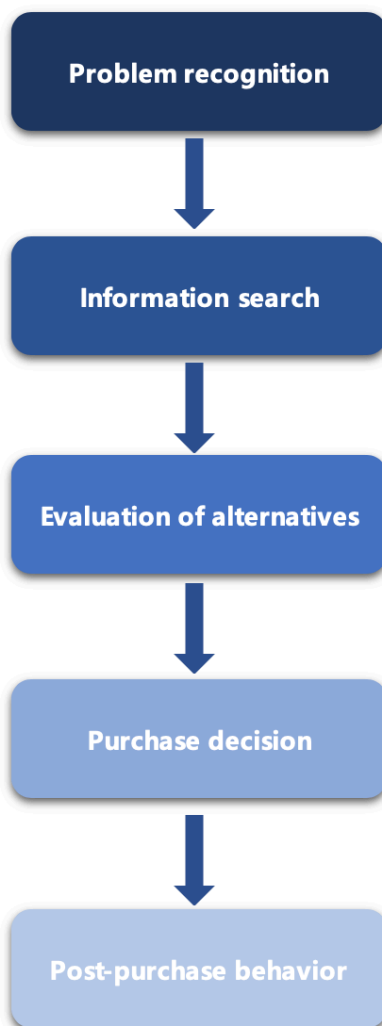


FIGURE 6 Buying Decision Process

An important indication of this model is that the buying process starts long before the actual purchase action and it is also worth noticing that consumers may skip or reverse some of these steps in the actual decision-making process (Luce & Bettman 2001).

2.3.1 Problem recognition

The buying decision process starts with problem recognition, in which consumers acknowledge a need or desire caused by either or both internal stimuli, such as hunger or sex, or/and external stimuli, which originates from surrounding environment. These stimuli make consumers to consider the possibility of purchase and then move to the next step (Luce & Bettman 2001).

Market designers need to find out what bring the thoughts of purchase or what generate a want or bring consumers a sense of need. The focus should first lie on what interest consumers.

2.3.2 Information search

After recognizing the problem, consumers move to the second step—information search. People spend different amounts of time searching information for different products. The time length on search information has a positive correlation with the importance of the product. For example, people may only spend a few seconds deciding which brands of toilet paper to buy in a supermarket while they may spend days or even months to decide which university to study at. This indicates two levels of involvement: heightened attention, which involves an insignificant amount of time, and active information search, in which consumers actively search for information relevant to a desired product. (Kotler & Keller 2009.)

People search information through different channels and four major information sources can be identified. First is personal group, it includes family, friends or colleagues. The second comes commercial source, which involves means of commercial advertisements such as television commercials and salespeople. The third source is public, this is usually accessed through internet nowadays, such as consumer-rating forum. The last one is experimental source, where consumers have tangible experiences such as actual use of a product. Each information source has different functions, for example, commercial sources usually play as an information provider while personal source may be involved in evaluation process. (Kotler & Keller 2009.)

Market designers should first make sure target consumers can be informed through marketing channel and need to know which source of information is the most effective way of informing target consumers while distinguishing the different functions of different sources so that suitable kinds of information can be placed at various channel and serve varied purposes.

2.3.3 Evaluation of Alternatives

Different consumers may have different ways of evaluating information and different products may also require different evaluation methods. Kotler believes that after the need is identified and information is gathered, consumers will start looking for benefits of each solution and compare them (Kotler & Keller 2009). The basic assumption of this benefits-

comparing action is that consumers have sufficient information and have rational thinking patterns.

Individuals' beliefs and attitudes can have a major role to play in the evaluation process at psychological level. Belief is a consistent thought that a person possesses about something and attitude is a person's feelings and action tendencies towards something (Krech & Crutchfield 1962). These two concepts are included in the concept of value, which is mentioned in the subchapter of consumer psychology.

After combing the information of concerned set of products collected by different sources and evaluating the benefits of each products based on personal characteristics and psychological features, consumers will prioritize preferences and generate a most preferred one among the several. This is the processes that consumers experience at the evaluation stage.

2.3.4 Purchase Decision

After the evaluation process, consumers may have a most preferred solution. But this does not lead to a direct purchase decision. Two factors might intervene people's purchase intention before the actual final purchase decision: attitudes of others and unanticipated situational factors (Farley & Howard 1974).

Attitudes of others: it refers to the responses from people in a consumer's social groups, such as family and relatives, friends, or colleagues. The attitudes from others may reduce or enhance our willingness to buy, which depend on two aspects: the first is the intensity of the negative opinion towards consumers' preferred products; the second aspect is the willingness to follow others' opinions (Farley & Howard 1974). What market designers can do at this aspect is to expose more objective evaluation of a product published by various means of media, such as consumer reports or consumer forum, in order to counterbalance the possible negative influence from people in consumers' social groups.

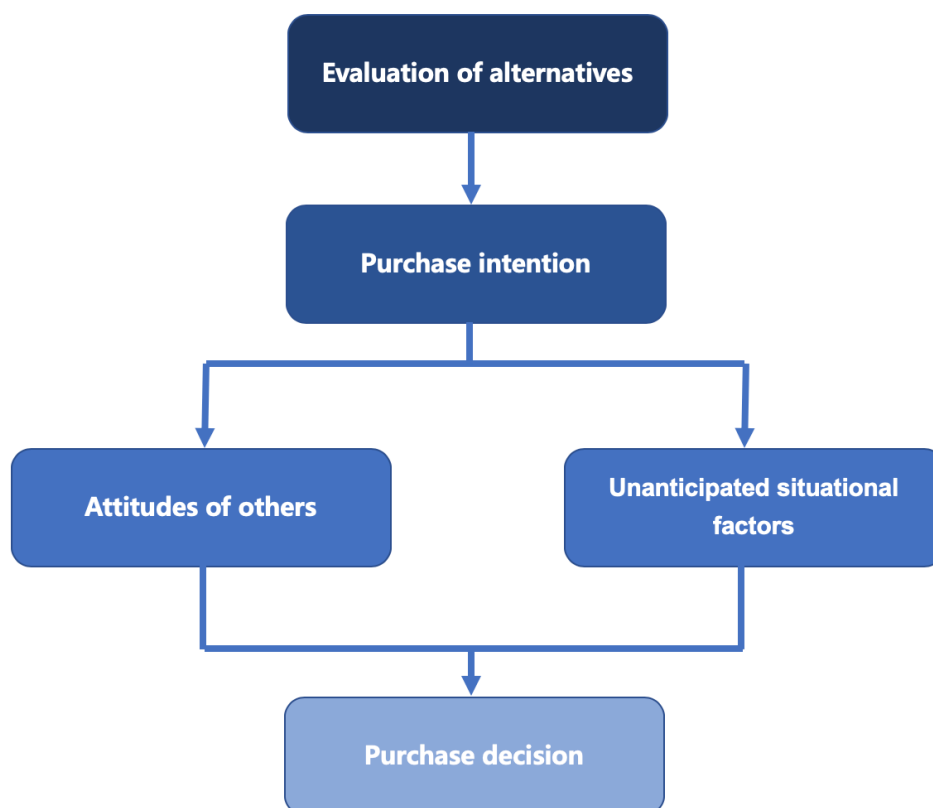


FIGURE 7 Events before Purchase Decision

Unanticipated situational factors: this refers to consumers' perceived risks that may heavily influence the purchase decision in a negative way. These factors are, for example, financial risk, which means that the consumers do not believe the product or service is worth the price to be paid; psychological risk, which means that the product does not meet the consumers' self-image; or even social risk, which means that the product may lead to embarrassment from others (Campbell & Goodstein 2001).

In this aspect, market designers should first understand that purchase intentions do not lead to the final purchase decision at a hundred percent. Although consumers may try to avoid these uncertainties once the purchase intention is made, the marketers need to understand what may result in negative feelings to consumers and try to avoid these risks by supporting more positive information.

2.3.5 Post-purchase Behavior

This is the last step of the five-step model and indicates that helping consumers to achieve final purchase decision is not the destination of marketers, consumers' experiences after the purchase need to be reinforced.

Consumers would feel satisfied if the products or services match their expectations. The level of satisfaction depends on how large the gap between the products' or services' actual performance and consumers' expectation. A large gap between products' performance and consumers' expectation will generate dissatisfaction or disappointment, which will result in consumers losing confidence or reducing loyalty with the brand. (Oliver 2006.)

In the case of this thesis, higher education institutions should pay attention on students' satisfactions towards faculties, courses and other educational products and services, and need to identify what bring satisfaction or perform as a satisfier to students, which institutions should maintain and amplify, and what bring dissatisfaction or work as dissatisfier, which education institutions should apply improvements on; because and opinions from registered students can heavily influence the potential students at several crucial stages in the decision-making processes. Thus, for the sake of long-term development, education marketers shall not stop their work once students enroll to their universities but instead continue their work by trying to narrow the gap between the actual experiences and students' expectations while enlarging the parts that students feel happy about.

2.4 Generic Model of Consumer Buying Behavior

By combining all the aforementioned aspects (consumer characteristics, consumer psychology and buying decision process) in consumer buying behaviors and objective factors of products and services, Kotler and Keller formed the generic model of consumer buying behavior as shown in figure 8.

This model demonstrates objective factors, which are derived from marketing stimuli and other external elements, and subjective factors, which concern consumers' characteristics and psychology, in the consumer buying behavior. Consumers respond to objective factors, both marketing stimuli and other stimuli, based on subjective traits, consumer characteristics and psychological features, and thereafter result in the buying decision process.

In the case of this thesis, the marketing stimuli concerns what educational program and choices Finnish higher education institutions can offer (**Products & services**); how much is the educational cost (**Price**); how universities and universities of applied sciences distribute their educational programs (**Distribution**); and how these institutions advertise their schools and programs and communicate with their potential students (**Communication**). The other stimuli are the external factors, which relate to the macroscopic environment of study destination that is, in this thesis, Finland. Factors such as economic and technological development (**Economic** and **Technological**), social stability (**Political**),

and cultural elements such as friendliness towards international students and cultural difference in terms of tradition, customs, etc. (**Cultural**) will be considered as other stimuli.

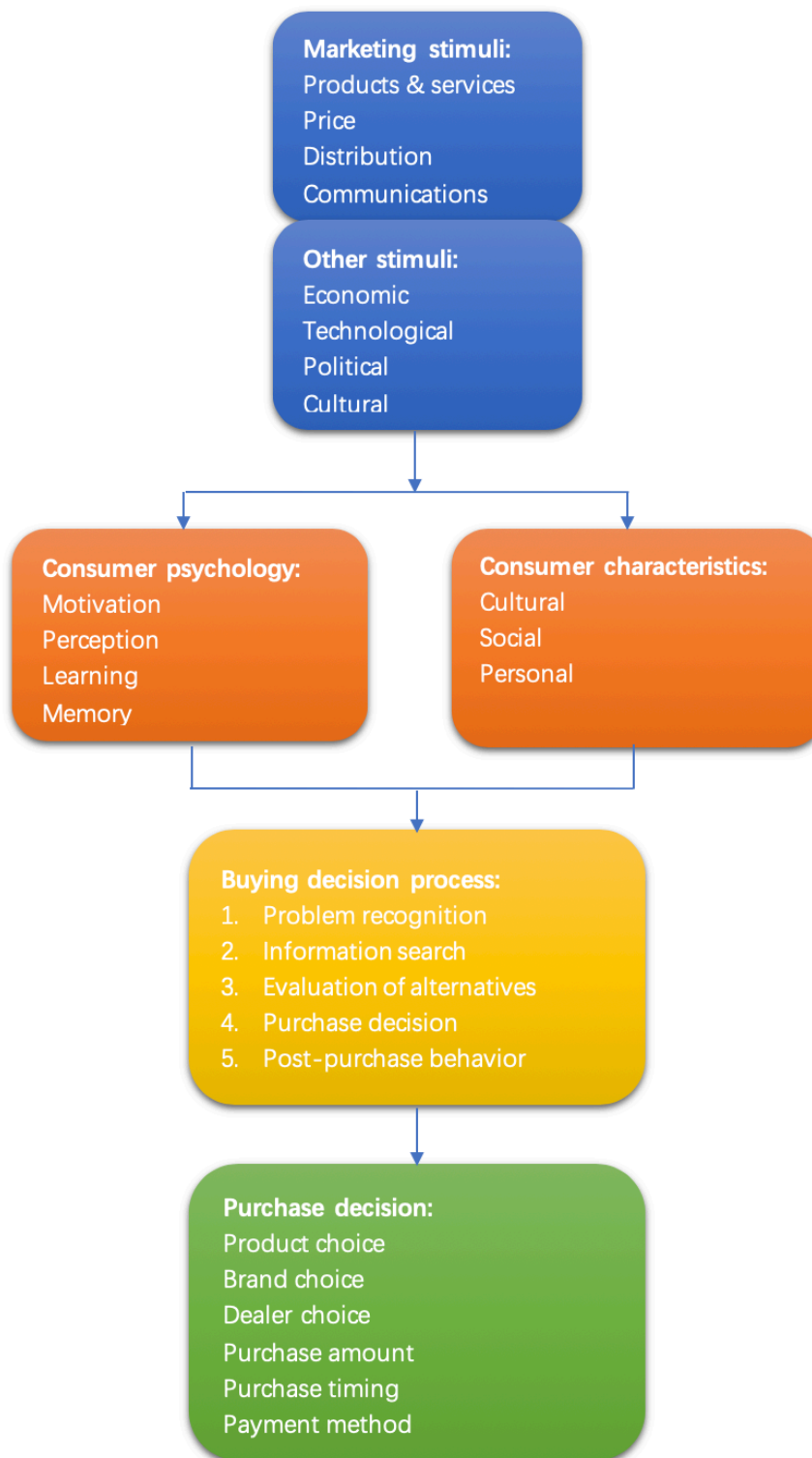


FIGURE 8 The Generic Model of Consumer Buying Behavior

In **cultural** level (macro term) among the consumer characteristics, in this case, cultural (micro term) and subcultural identities are the same, as this thesis only analyze consumer decision-making process of Chinese students. However, social class (the smallest level in the cultural level, see chapter 2.1.1) may differ among Chinese students who choose to study in Finland in bachelor's level. This information will therefore be collected in data collection procedure as different social classes may have differentiated preferences in choosing study destination. In **social** level, the second factor in the consumer characteristics, the information about students' reference groups will be collected, which concerns the involvement of family, friends, coworkers and other people that have influence on students' decision-making process. Questions like "Are parents/friends involved in choosing study destination and how did they influence students' opinion" will be added in the data collection step in order to collect information on social level. At **individual** level, information related to students' age, stage in the life cycle (whether have a college degree before enrollment and such), economic circumstances, self-concept and values will be collected in order to know more background of students who study at Finnish universities and universities of applied sciences.

All four factors of consumer psychology (motivation, perception, learning, memory) will be examined in order to depict the details of the actual decision-making process. In **motivation** aspect, this thesis will find out what may be considered satisfiers and dissatisfiers in choosing Finland as the study destination and what needs do Chinese seek to satisfy when studying in Finland. In **perception** level, the thesis will focus on what benefits of studying in Finland pass through students' selective attention filters in order to partly find an answer to the research question. In **learning** and **memory** aspects, information about past experience relevant to Finland or Finnish higher education institutions, such as travel or study experience in Finland, will be involved in the thesis. The author will try to find out what role such information can play in the decision-making process and whether students tend to generalize these experiences.

The students' needs and motivations will make them ready begin the buying decision process. The nature of a study program is unlike that of other products such as a mobile, studying abroad is a long-term decision and contributes to high level of involvement. In the first phase of buying decision process, **problem recognition**, this thesis will find out what problems Chinese students want to solve, or, in other words, what needs they want to satisfy, by studying in Finland, which start with the students' needs and motivation. At the second step, **information search**, the author will try to identify whose opinions or recommendations are entered in this phase when Chinese students deciding where to study abroad. Next comes **evaluation of alternatives**, this thesis will find out what benefits

Chinese students believe they can get from studying in Finland and what factors help Chinese students eliminate other study options but choose Finland in particular. The answer from this stage is crucial to identify what attributes make Finland better than other study destinations in the eyes of Chinese students. At the second last phase, **purchase decision**, this thesis also examines what external opinions and attitudes Chinese students receive and what unanticipated situational factors are involved after they make Finland as the study destination. This is to know what factors make these students certain about choosing Finland universities or universities of applied sciences and finally lead to the eventual purchase decision. In the last stage of the buying decision process, **post-purchase behaviors**, this thesis seeks to answer whether the real study experiences are as expected as far as Chinese students are concerned, the result of which will imply what areas Finnish education institutions can highlight or improve in order to fit the demand of Chinese students.

3 STUDENT DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

In this chapter, the author will discuss decision-making process of students in specific. The gist of this chapter is mainly based on the Push-Pull model which is designed to analyze the decision-making process of international students in choosing foreign study destination in particular. The factors that influence the process are largely equivalent to the concept of the generic model of consumer buying behavior mentioned in Chapter 2. This chapter will as well demonstrate the similarities and relevance between the Generic model and the Push-Pull model. The insight and the structure provided by this model will help the author the bring answers to the research questions.

3.1 Push-Pull Factors Influencing International Students Destination Choice

The Push-Pull factors were introduced by Mazzarol and Soutar at University of Western Australia to explain what factors would influence international students in choosing study destinations overseas. The concept was created when there was a constantly growing number of students choosing to study abroad, where Chinese study abroad market is showing the similar trend.

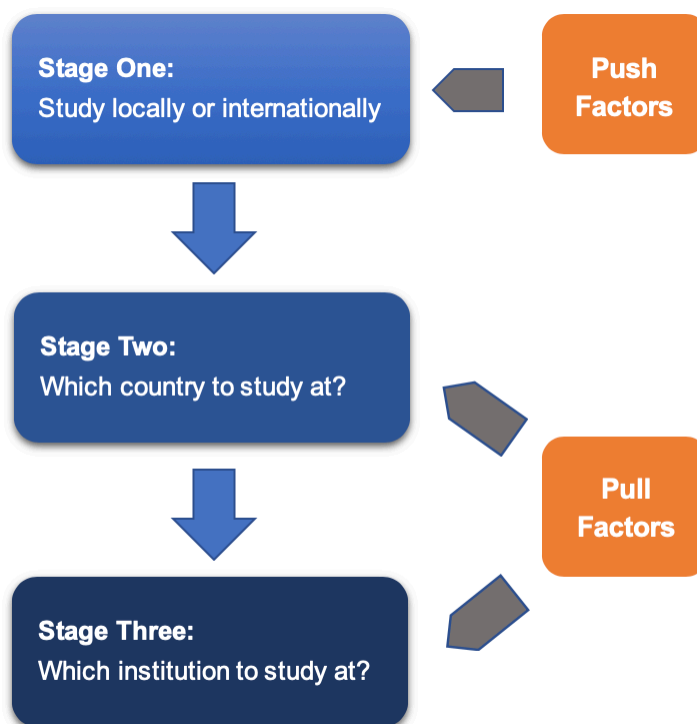


FIGURE 9 Original Push-Pull Factor Model

Mazzarol believed that there are three distinct stages in decision-making process of international students when choosing foreign study destinations. First, students must decide to study internationally rather than locally. Once the decision to study abroad is made, students go to the second stage, which is to select which country to study at. At the final stage, students compare study places within the chosen country at institutional level and make a final decision. Among the three steps, the factors affecting international students' decision-making process are divided into two categories: push factors and pull factors. Push factors originate from source countries, which initiate students' decision to study abroad and therefore operate at the first stage. Pull factors are found in host countries, which attract international students and thus affect the second and the third stages (Mazzarol 1998). The three stages and push and pull factors are shown in figure 9.

The factors affecting the stage three in the decision-making process of international students are not considered nor mentioned in this thesis as the focus of this thesis lies at why students choose study abroad and why in a particular country, instead of choices made upon selecting institutions.

3.1.1 Push Factors from Sending Country

A variety of push factors are discovered to initiate the first thought of students from sending country to study abroad and motivate them to take actions further. McMahon found that the outflow of students firstly depended on the level of economic wealth that have a negative correlation with the volume of student outflow, which means the wealthier the sending country is, the fewer students willing to go out. The second factor was the level of involvement of sending country in the world economy and the third factor was the level of emphasis put on education by the government of sending country. The fourth factor was the availability of educational opportunities in sending country. (McMahon 1992.)

According to the most recent study from Mazzarol, coupled with the research findings from previous studies of McMahon, the most important push factor is believed as the perception that the **quality of education** in foreign countries is better than the local ones. The second crucial factor is related to **students' abilities to gain entry** to local universities, which means that if students from sending countries believe that the programs they wish to get in cannot be available for them due to competitions, they will consider studying abroad. The third factor is the drive, or desire, to gain a **more comprehensive understanding of the western societies** and the fourth factor is the **intention of migrate** after graduation. These four factors are believed to form the initial consideration among international students to study in foreign countries and are categorised as push factors, all of which are originated from sending countries. (Mazzarol 1998.)

3.1.2 Pull Factors from Host Country

There are six pull factors found to influence students' decision in choosing a host country. The first factor was the **knowledge and awareness** of the host country in students' home country, which is relevant to the availability of information about the host country and its reputation for educational quality and recognition of qualifications that can be obtained in the host country. The second factor was the **personal recommendations**, which is related to how positive friends, family members and other people close to students would comment about the study destinations and whether they are willing to would recommend them. The third factor was **cost issue**, which include tuition fees, living expenditure, cost of travelling and commuting, as well as opportunity for part-time jobs. The fourth factor was **environment**, which concerns the climates of destinations, lifestyle and educational facilities. The fifth factor, **geographic proximity**, is related to the distance between students' home country and the host country. The last factor was **social links**, which concerns whether students' relatives or friends are or have been studying in the host country. These six full factors motivate students and influence students' decision-making process in choosing study destinations. (Mazzarol 1998.)

According to the recent studies conducted to study the subject matter, students' preferences on a particular study destination, the second step of the three-stage process, are mainly influenced by the reputation of a host country. This means that a better knowledge of a host country will form a stronger desire for international students to study there, which can explain the significantly higher popularity of the United States as the host country as there are a massive number of cultural products and information flows produced by the USA and create an overwhelmingly better understanding of the country compared with the understandings of other countries. The second most important factor is the personal recommendation and social links. The family involvement, especially at undergraduate stage, significantly influence the selection on study destination, which also includes whether the students have close relative living in the host country. Strong Alumni is also considered valuable source when connecting with the parental influence. The third most important factor is geographic proximity, which can explain strong flows of international students from Canada to the USA, from South Korea to Japan, and so on. Cost issue is placed fourth, where availability of part-time work is substantially more important than general costs such as tuition fees and travelling costs. However, the priority of this factor varies between countries. The environment of host country is the final factor to consider with other factors prior to it. (Mazzarol 2002.)

3.2 Extended Push-Pull Factors Model

Based on the original push and pull factors, Sun and Song from Soochow University developed an extended Push-Pull factors Model by adding both push and pull factors on both sending countries and host countries and considering personal drives as another determinants. The original three-step decision-making process of international students in choosing foreign study destinations, however, based its studies on a linear procedure and lies on the basic consumption that students need to decide to study internationally first before entering the second step and that only push factors from the sending countries drive the students at the first stage. Sun believes that both sending and hosting countries have their push and pull factors and students may conglomerate or mix all the three steps when deciding where exactly to study (Sun & Song 2017). The extended Push-Pull Factor Model is shown in figure 10.

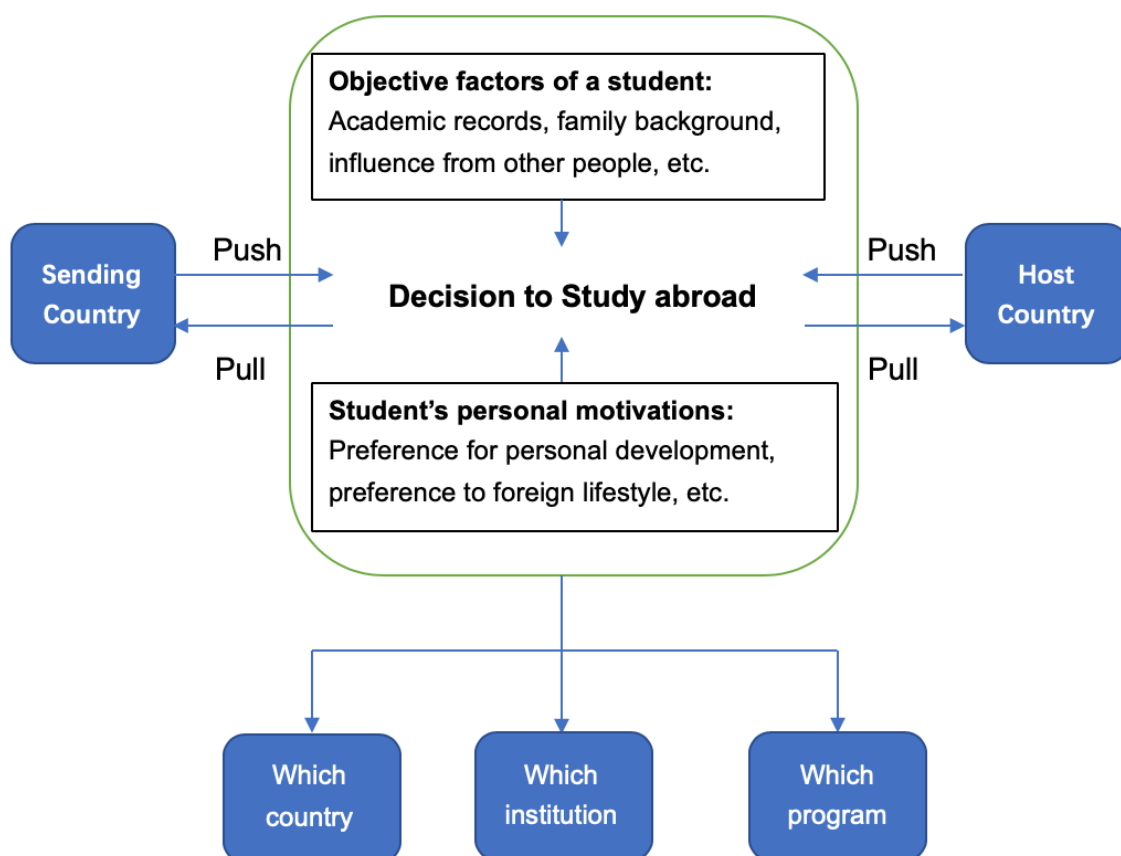


FIGURE 10 Extended Push-Pull Factor Model

3.2.1 Objective factors of a student

The objective factors of students include academic records, family background, influence from close relatives or friends.

A research conducted among students from different senior high schools in Suzhou, China revealed that students' academic backgrounds have an obvious influence on students' willingness to study abroad. According to Sun (2017), students with better overall academic performance have a greater tendency to study internationally. Language skill is also a matter affecting students' decisions that students with higher English proficiency showed a stronger desire to study at foreign universities. As for family background, a positive correlation between willingness to study abroad and level of education students' parents received was found in the research, which means the more educated students' parents are, the more their kids want to study abroad. Family income is also an important factor. Sun found that wealthier families displayed stronger desire towards international study than less wealthy families. When it comes to social influence received from family members, relatives and friends, study found that parental opinions matter significantly in students' decision. Students with positive opinions from their parents are more willing to study abroad than those with less positive or negative opinions from parents. Students who have classmates, friends or relatives studying or living overseas demonstrated more passion on studying abroad.

All in all, the aforementioned factors formulated the students' objective background, which initiate students' intention in deciding whether to study abroad or not. A better academic performance and foreign language proficiency, higher family income, well-educated family members and having acquaintances studying or living overseas can create more motivation for students to study internationally.

3.2.2 Students' Personal Motivations

Students' personal motivations can be categorised into three aspects: experience and excitement, personal development and improvement, and preference towards foreign education and lifestyle.

The first aspect involves students' desires or wants towards acquiring study or life experience by living and studying in a foreign country. Students who tend to study abroad believe that foreign study experience can broaden their horizons and are willing to spend time obtaining such experiences. Students wanting to study abroad based on this aspect of drives also tend to extend their social network by studying and living in foreign countries

and value the chances to socialize. This aspect indicates that foreign higher educational institutions that are able to provide multi-cultural and more international study environment can be more attractive to international students. (Sun & Song 2017.)

The second aspect is students' future plans on personal development, which includes wanting to improve language skills and communication skills and to become more independent and mature. The study found that a vast majority of students wish to improve their language skills by studying internationally. Students base their motivation on this aspect also believe that living and studying abroad can make them more independent and more mature. This is because the study was conducted on high school students whose ages are relatively young. However, factors such as intention to migrate or work overseas did not show a direct influence on students' decision in studying abroad. But the availability of work opportunities can still work as a pull factor from host country (Sun & Song 2017). Factors from this aspect indicate that if host countries and their educational institutions can provide a language environment or chances for students to improve and learn languages, the more likely they can attract more students.

The third aspect is personal preferences towards foreign education and lifestyle. Despite cultural differences, students who place their motivation on this aspect have inclination to perceive foreign lifestyles and teaching methods as a suitable option for them. The study shows that those who recognise foreign teaching methods, courses' structure, and way of life demonstrate more willingness to study overseas (Sun & Song 2017). This factor is hugely dependent on students' personal tastes and also largely relevant to their knowledge and awareness, which is explained in Chapter 3.1.2, towards the host countries. Students' personal preferences towards a particular country or a university are largely shaped by the information they receive and the knowledge they possess, which indicates that if universities can provide teaching methods that fit the tastes and attitudes of students of a reference group, it is easier for the universities to attract students from a particular group or social background. Nonetheless, it takes efforts for marketers to study the tastes and attitudes of target student groups before advertising their institutions.

3.2.3 Push Factors of External Environment

Push factors from external environment can be divided into push factors from sending country and those from host country. The push factors from sending country include quality of higher education, availability of local study place, pressure from national entrance exam and so on. The push factors from host countries include language barrier, policies toward international students, cultural differences, costs of studying and living, distance from home, potential discrimination and etc. These factors vary among comparisons

between different sending and host countries. For example, if a sending country has a rather less strict admission criteria for higher education compared to those in a host country, this factor can only be considered a push factor from the host country instead of from the sending country; moreover, if a student wants to study at a country that speaks the same language with the student's mother tongue, a Canadian student to the USA for example, the language barrier will not be considered as a push factor from the host countries but can be considered an advantage compared with other host countries spoken different languages. Since this thesis examines decision-making process of Chinese students, the elements that can be considered push or pull factors are adjusted for Chinese students.

Push factor from sending country: according to the research conducted by Sun to high school students in China, the most important push factor from China as the sending country is the intense competition to get entry at top local universities. Sun pointed out that because the insufficient high-quality educational resources (universities of '211' and '985' projects) in China, college entrance exam puts loads of pressure to students who do not want to study at mediocre universities in China and make them more motivated to seek education overseas. Another push factor from the sending country is the more theory-oriented teaching method (Sun & Song 2017). Students who believe this as a push factor tend to contend that foreign educational methods have a better balance between theory and practice. This factor can be seen as a mixture of students' personal tastes (personal motivation) and the external fact as there is no evidence to support that a theory-oriented teaching method from schools is a negative factor and push students away from the country. However, those who believe that foreign educational methods have a better balance between theory and practice instead of being too theory-oriented do have a clearer tendency to study abroad. Therefore, this can be considered as a pull factor from host country rather than a push factor from sending country.

Push factor from host country: the first factor is the policy towards international students, which include visa restriction and difficulty of finding jobs during the study and after graduation. This factor indicates that countries with more friendly policies towards international students such as providing employment guidance and possibility for immigration can better attract international students than the countries with less friendly policies. The second factor is language barrier. Students who believe that it is difficult to live and communicate in the host country due to this factor would not choose to study overseas. Language barrier can become an issue for countries where most of citizens do not speak English as it creates difficulties for international students to use English to communicate within the country and therefore makes it harder for international students to integrate into the local society. The third factor is cultural differences and potential discrimination towards

foreigners. This factor can be enlarged when different religious concepts are involved; however, since most Chinese students are non-religious, the research therefore excluded the religious factor. Study shows that students unintended to study abroad believe that it is difficult to adjust the environment of host country (Sun & Song 2017). This factor can be one of the determinants that demotivate international students if the ways of living in sending and host countries are too different that it seems difficult or even impossible for international students to fit in the environment. Therefore, helping international students to adjust local community is also essential to attract more newcomers.

3.2.4 Pull Factors of External Environment

Pull factors from external environment can also be divided into two types: pull factors from sending country and that from host country. It is important to notice that these factors vary in degree and can be reversed when comparing different sending and host countries as explained in the first paragraph of the Chapter 3.2.3. The factors discussed in this subchapter is also modified for the purpose of studying decision-making process of Chinese students.

Pull factors from host country: according to Sun (2017), the this most important factor is the perception that universities and colleges from host countries are well-equipped and better facilitated than those in sending countries. The better teaching resources and hardware can be an attraction for international students. The second most important factor is flexibility of course selection. Changing major or profession in China can be a difficult task as universities usually expect students to maintain a same subject throughout the entire study period and options for elective courses are rather limited. Wider range of elective courses can be a factor to attract Chinese students as well as other internationals to study overseas. The third factor is the economic status in host countries. A higher economic status and well-developed social security system can be an attractive factor that satisfy students' needs to live at a wealthier society. Higher education institutions should highlight these pull factors as marketing hints when drawing international students.

Pull factors from sending country: Sun described two pull factors in sending country. The first is the correspondence between the knowledge taught at universities and the reality in the country. Theories and concepts taught at foreign universities, especially those of social sciences, may not perfectly suit discrepant situations back to students' home country. For example, an organizational management concept may not applicable for a company in a country where values and philosophy are totally different. Universities in a sending country always have better access to comprehend the real situation of that country. The second factor is the availability of cooperate academic programs between local and

international institutions, which can provide similar learning experience compared with studying abroad (Sun & Song 2017). Factors such as lower education expenses, no language barrier and cultural differences can also be considered as pull factors from sending countries.

4 DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF CHINESE STUDENTS

This chapter discusses the decision-making process of Chinese students by combining the Generic Model of Consumer Behavior introduced in Chapter two and the Push-Pull Factor Model described in Chapter three and examines the possible factors that affect the process.

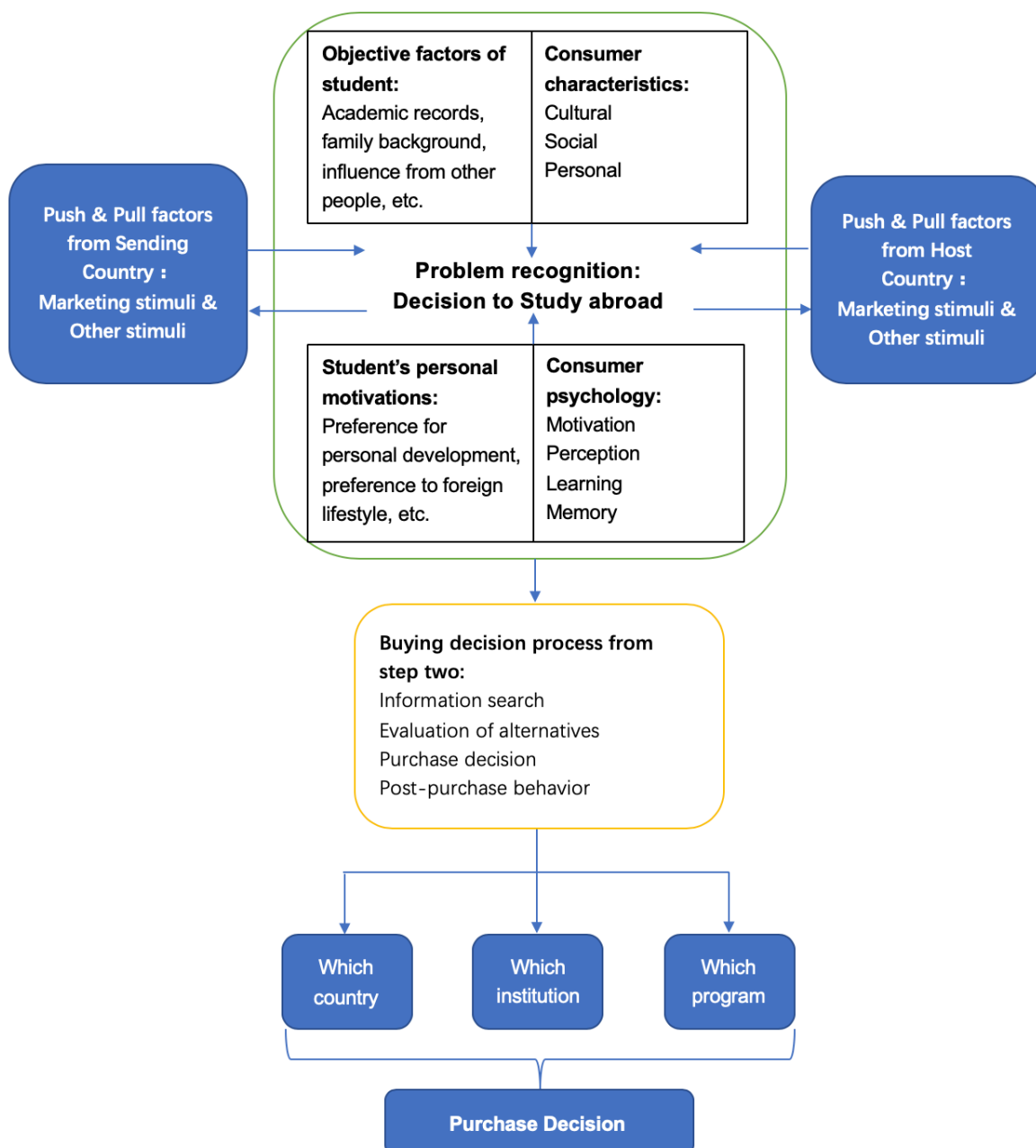


FIGURE 11 The Extended Model of Decision-Making Process of International Students

Both Generic Model of Consumer Behavior and the Push-Pull Factor Model are based on the basic consumption that external factors (marketing stimuli and other stimuli in the Generic model; factors from sending and host countries in the Push-Pull Factor model) coupled with people's personal characteristics and backgrounds (consumer characteristics and consumer psychology in the Generic model; objective factors of students and students' personal motivation in the Push-Pull Factor model) determine how people act in decision-making process. The Buying Decision Process described in the Generic Model can be used to explain students' behaviors in choosing educational product (which country, which institution, which program) since the students' decision in study destination is influenced by both personal backgrounds and external push and pull factors which are alike to the factors introduced in the Generic model. The final decisions on study destination, institution and education program (from Push-Pull Factor Model) are included in the Purchase Decision (from the Generic Model). The combined model is shown in figure 11.

4.1 Combined Factors of Push-Pull Factors and Marketing and Other Stimuli

This is to conclude the theories of Push-Pull factors by combining the works conducted by Mazzarol and Sun with adjustments in order to better demonstrates factors that influence the decision-making process of Chinese undergraduate students. Since this thesis bases Finland as the case country, the push and pull factors from the host country, Finland, will be modified according to the objective circumstances. The push and pull factors of host country mentioned in this subchapter will be matched with Marketing Stimuli and Other Stimuli in the Generic Model, all of which formed the External factors influencing the decision-making process.

Push and pull factors from sending country: In Mazzarol's work, there are four push factors found in sending country: disadvantaged quality of education, students' inabilities to gain entry to local universities, students' desire to gain more comprehensive understanding of western societies, and the intention to migrate. Sun included the first two factors, disadvantaged quality of education and students' inabilities to gain entry, into her model as well, but categorized the last two factors, gain knowledge of western societies and intention to migrate, into students' personal motivations. Meanwhile, she adjusted the first factor (disadvantaged quality of education, which matches the Products and Services in Marketing Stimuli) to insufficient high-quality educational resources and combined this factor with the second factor and term the factor as competition to gain entry at top local universities (matches the Distribution in Marketing Stimuli) in order to better fit the situation in China and added a second factor, dislike to the local teaching method (matches the Products and Services in Marketing Stimuli).

All in all, there are two push factors from sending country to consider when study decision-making process of Chinese students: **competition to gain entry at top local universities**, and **dislike to the local teaching method**.

However, Mazzarol did not mention any pull factor from sending country. It is Sun added these factors to the model: **correspondence between the knowledge taught at universities and the reality in the country** (matches the Products and Services in Marketing Stimuli), **availability of cooperate academic programs between local and international institutions** (matches the Distribution in Marketing Stimuli), **lower education expenses** (matches the Price in Marketing Stimuli), **no language barrier and cultural difference** (matches the Cultural in Other stimuli).

Push and pull factors from host country: Mazzarol introduced six pull factors from host country: knowledge and awareness, personal recommendation and social links, cost issue, environment, geographic proximity. Sun eliminated some factors while adding several more suitable factors into the model in order to better study the subject for Chinese students. The original first factor, knowledge and awareness, is broken down into two factors: foreign institutions better facilitated, and well-developed economy (these two factor fit the Communications in Marketing Stimuli, which is because the perception of a country is formulated through the communication between the receivers and host country, and the Economic factor in other stimuli in the Generic Model). Flexibility of course selection is added as another pull factor (this factor fits the Products and Services in Marketing Stimuli in the Generic Model). Geographic proximity will depend on the distance between China and host countries. In this thesis, geographic proximity is considered as a push factor from host country as distance between China and Finland is far greater than that between China and Japan for example. Environment factor can work as both push and pull factor as Finland's overall environment is favourable due to less pollution but the climate in Finland, especially winter times, is considered unfavourable. Cost issue is not considered as a factor in Sun's study as the result of her study was based on the research conducted on high school students in Suzhou, who have relatively wealthier family backgrounds (cost issue was ranked the least important in Sun's findings). However, cost issue can become either a push or pull factor depending on the study program, students' background, and comparison between study destination. In the case of Finland, cost issue can become a pull factor since Finland allows international students to work 25 hours per week (Finland University 2019) and the average tuition fees are much lower (5000-18000 EUR per year) than that in other countries despite an introduction of tuition fee for non-EEU students (Studyportals 2019). The cost issue is alike the Price factor in Marketing stimuli from the generic model.

To sum up, there are five pull factors when considering Finland as the host country: **foreign institutions better facilitated, well-developed economy, flexibility of course selection, environment (less pollution) and cost issue (tuition fee and work permit).**

Only did Sun introduce push factors in host country, these are: **visa restriction and difficulty of finding jobs, language barrier, cultural difference and potential discrimination** (this factor works as Cultural fact in Other Stimuli in the Generic Model). These factors also apply to Finland as the host country, but the degree of these factors may vary and will be found out in the data collection process.

4.2 Students' Subjective and Objective Factors

This is to conglomerate the subjective and objective factors of students from the extended Push-Pull Factor Model and the elements of Consumer Psychology and Consumer Characteristics in the Generic Model of Consumer Buying Behavior. All the mentioned factors are related to students and therefore belong to Internal Factors.

Students' subjective factors: As shown in the figure 11, Students' Personal Motivation, also known as students' subjective factor, is correspondent with student psychology, which is shown as Consumer Psychology. More specifically, students' own preferences for personal development are largely based on their psychological factors mentioned in Consumer Psychology (motivation, perception, learning and memory). Regarding the work done by Sun, there are three aspects that motivate students to study abroad, these are experience and excitement (this aspect fits the satisfier in Motivation in Consumer Psychology), personal development and improvement (this aspect fits the needs that Chinese students tend to satisfy and the benefits they can get by studying in Finland), preference towards foreign education and lifestyle (also satisfiers). In the motivation aspect, the first factor in Consumer Psychology, the satisfiers and dissatisfiers of studying in Finland for Chinese students can be drawn on from actual experience and will be found out during data collection process. In perception level, the benefits that students can get by studying in Finland also work as a motivation for student. In learning and memory aspects, students with any previous experience or knowledge related to life or education in Finland will increase the level of motivation for students.

In summary, the subjective factors can be distributed into three aspects: **Motivation**, which includes satisfier (going abroad is an exciting option) and personal preference (preference towards foreign educational method); **Perception**, which includes perceived benefits (benefits the students believe they can acquire by studying abroad or in Finland); and

Learning and Memory, which include positive experience related to selected study destination (in this case, Finland).

Students' objective factors: Objective factors of students are correspondent with Consumer Characteristics. In Cultural level, as explained in the previous chapter, cultural (micro term) and subcultural identities are the same (Chinese students as cultural and subcultural identities) and therefore will not be examined since there is no variable. Information related to social class is demonstrated as family background, such as family income, which will be collected in data collection process. In Social level, information related to students' reference groups, which concerns involvement of family and friends, is matched with the factor 'influence from other people' in Objective Factors of Students. In Individual level, in which academic records are involved (a factor in Objective factors of students in Push-Pull factor), information regarding students' age, previous degree, academic performance, economic status (self-funded or receive family support) will be collected in the data collection process.

To summarize, objective factors of students can be divided into three aspects: **Cultural level**, which involves information regarding social class that students belong to (such as family income); **Social level**, which includes influence from students' reference groups (parental and friends' involvement in the decision-making process); **Personal level**, which concerns students' age profile, academic records (what universities they are able to entry), previous degree (any previous degree acquired before studying abroad), and economic status (self-funded, family supported, or receive scholarship).

4.3 Outlook of Students' Decision-Making Process

As shown in the figure 11, the entire decision-making process starts from Problem Recognition—deciding whether to study abroad or not—with the mixture of external factors (Push and Pull Factors from sending and host countries) and internal factors (Subjective and objective factors of students). This step matches the step one in the Buying Decision Process in the Generic Model. Once the decision to study abroad is made, students will go to the second step, Information Search, where recommendations from family, friends, and other people within the reference group (an objective factor) enter the process and affect the decision-making process. Next comes Evaluation of Alternatives, this is a critical step that students will evaluate each option where push and pull factors (also Marketing stimuli and other stimuli) function as referencing information. Afterwards, students come to a purchase decision—which country, institution, and program to study at. Finally, Post-Purchase behaviors appear to accord students' real experiences.

5 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND DATE ANALYSIS

This chapter provides empirical research and its data analysis conducted for this thesis, which is based on the theories utilized in the previous chapters and aims to answer the research questions.

Since the goal of this thesis is to study the decision-making journey of Chinese undergraduates in Finland and find out what they value in the process, the entire empirical research is conducted among Chinese undergraduates who have studied in Finland. All the participants of the survey and the interview parts are students from China who have acquired or are about to acquire bachelor's degrees in Finland. All the surveys and interviews were conducted in a totally anonymous fashion in order to protect the privacy of the participants and generate more authentic data.

This chapter will firstly explain the data collection process and give the data analysis after that. The questions of the survey and interviews can be found in the Appendix of this thesis.

5.1 Design and Formulation of the Empirical Research

The theoretical framework of the entire thesis is built upon two main theories (which consisted of several sub-theories) that finally conglomerated into one model. The empirical research is used to generate results based on the theory and can also reversely test the theory and bring suggestive modifications for it.

The empirical research comprises two sections: survey and interview. The survey is designed to know, firstly, the backgrounds information and surrounding factors (internal factors) of students, which are a crucial element in the theory of students' decision-making process; and, secondly, the students' perception and inclination towards decision regarding studying abroad and reasons of choosing Finland as the study destination (external factors), which is also an indispensable component of the decision-making theory. The interview part aims to find out more detailed causes and factors relevant to the decision-making process while acting as a complementary to the survey.

As mentioned in the chapter one, both quantitative and qualitative research methods are used in the data collection process. In the survey part, quantitative method is used to know people's perceptions towards the level of importance of different elements involved in the decision-making process. Qualitative method is used in the survey as well so that participants can express their opinions in a more descriptive fashion. In the interview part,

only qualitative method is applied where data are collected through the answers of the participants.

There were total of 19 questions set for the survey, first 9 of which were designed to collect information regarding students' background and the rest 10 questions aimed to know the responses of the participants towards different elements that are believed to be involved or possibly involved in the decision-making process when choosing a study destination. Among the last 11 questions, 6 questions were designed in a quantitative form (scale) to know how participants value the importance of different elements, 4 questions in qualitative form to know other possible elements or opinions of participants, and 1 question in the form of multiple-choice to know participants' decision-making pattern. In the interview, there were total of 7 questions set and all of them are designed to know how and why they make decisions at different stages. The details and purposes of each question will be described in the data analysis chapter.

Since the formation of the theories of decision-making process among international students are based on secondary data collected by different predecessors of the relevant field of study, the data generated by the interview and the survey is the major primary source of data for this thesis.

The entire empirical research is based on the basic assumption that every participant answered the questions honestly and fully understood the questions provided in the survey and the interview. The survey and interviews are only conducted among Chinese undergraduates in Finland because it is this specific group of people made the final purchase decision to seek education in Finland and the entire decision-making process is completed. Thus, studying the elements involved in the decision-making process of these students instead of other students can better reveal the characteristics of the students and their process in the subject matter.

5.2 Data Collection

The entire data collection process started and finished by March 2020.

The survey was distributed in an electronic form via internet and was available for 5 days. The link to the survey was sent to We-chat groups, Facebook groups as well as other internet platforms where Chinese students in Finland usually visit. The survey was open for all Chinese undergraduate students studying in different universities and universities of applied sciences across Finland, despite different genders, ages and professions. Altogether, there were 51 respondents to the survey and all of which are valid for the survey.

The interviews were conducted via We-chat audio call and each interview last about 18 minutes. There were 4 interviews with one participant in each. In order to obtain more reliable answers and avoid errors caused by linguistic misunderstandings, all the 4 interviews were conducted in Chinese language so that participants can express their opinions more freely and naturally although all the participants are capable of speaking fluent English.

5.3 Data Analysis

This chapter consists of two subchapters, the first subchapter will present and analyze the data generated from the survey and the second subchapter will present and analyze the data gathered from the interviews. All the questions relevant in the survey and interviews will be presented along with the purpose of setting that question.

5.3.1 Data Analysis of the Survey

The survey aims to find out the pattern of interactions between background information of Chinese undergraduate students in Finland (internal factors) and Push-Pull factors related to sending country, China, and host country, Finland (external factors).

Internal Factors

The internal factors include students' age profiles, type of institutions they study at, the major they study, academic background (previous degree, academic performance), economic status (family income, the way they fund education), family information (whether have family living in Finland). The aforementioned factors are considered to have influence in the decision-making process based on the fundamental theories adopted by this thesis.

The first question of the survey concerns students' age. Age profile is an important element of students' background information since the level of self-determination varies in ages. It can be seen from the bar chart that the age of Chinese students who participated in the survey ranges from 18 to 32 years old. This age coverage is a good sign for the empirical research as it involves students who just graduated from high schools as well as students who have already acquired a college degree before study in Finland. Most Chinese undergraduates who study in Finland are from 18 to 21 years old when they start their study in Finland, only a small number of participants are older than 25 years old. This age profile indicates that most students may not be able to decide a study destination without parental involvement. This logical assumption will be substantiated by an analysis of latter element.

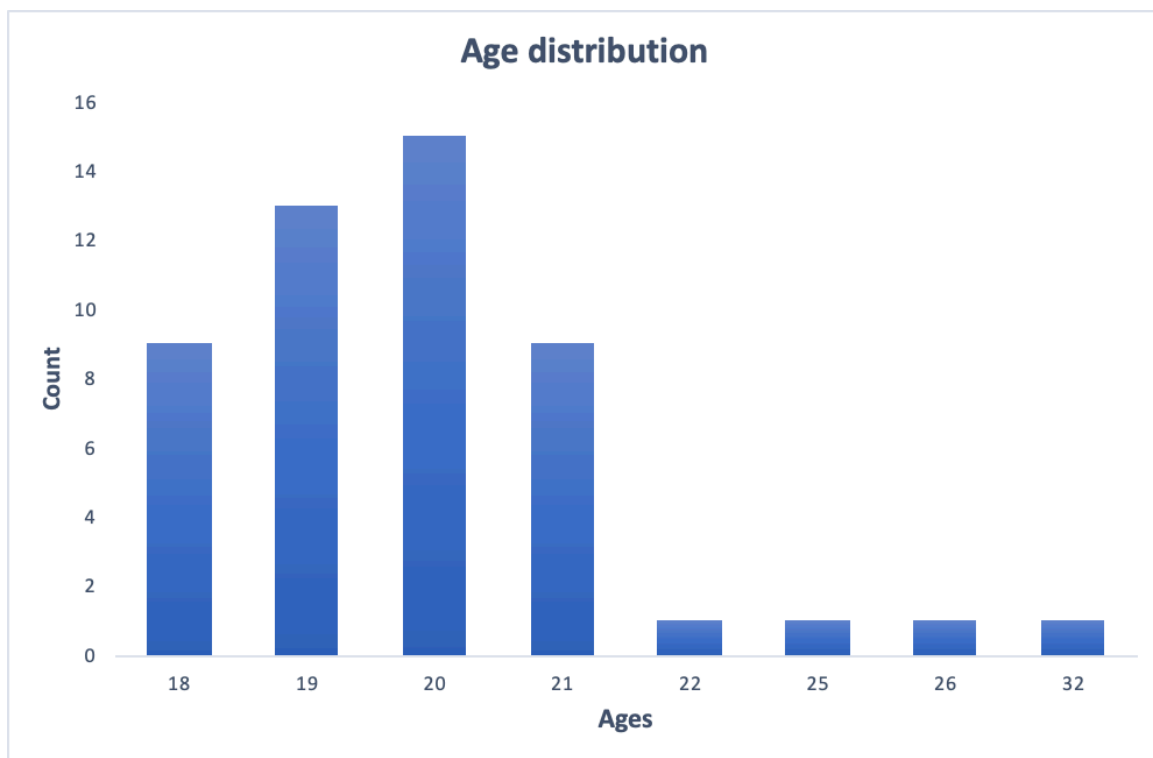


FIGURE 12 Age Profile of Participants

The second question is related to the type of institutions the students are studying or used to study at. This directly reflects the choice made upon the final purchase (which institution) by the participants. Among all the students participated in the survey, the vast majority have studied at universities of applied sciences in bachelor's level. This apparent distribution is largely due to the fact that only a few universities offer English-taught program in bachelor's level in Finland, most of which are offered by universities of applied sciences.

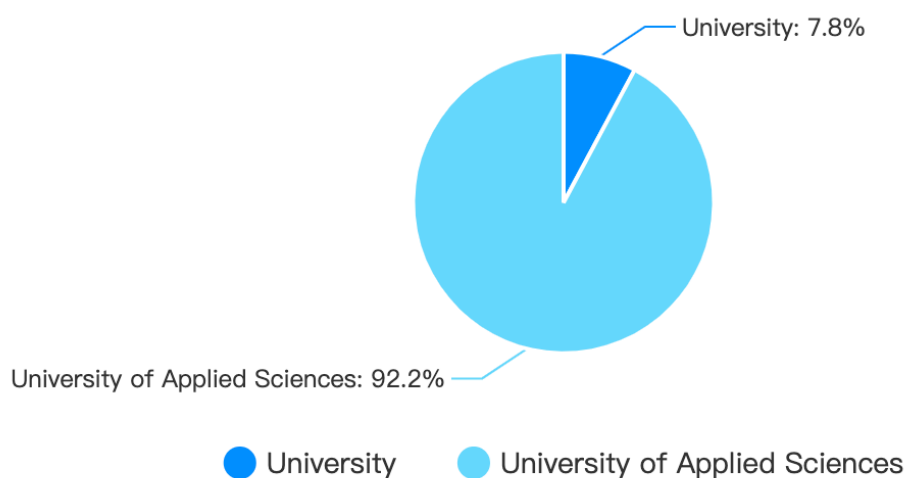


FIGURE 13 Type of Institutions

It is important to notice the fact that although China is the third largest sending country of international students with 1609 students studying at Finland by 2017, only one-third of students were enrolled in UASs, which is obviously the opposite compared with the cases in Russia, Vietnam and Nepal, the first, second and third largest source countries (the majority of students from these three countries were enrolled in UASs) (OPH. 2018). This interesting comparison implies apparently different inclinations of choices made upon selection of institution (purchase decision) between students from these countries, which is that Chinese students prefer to study at traditional universities instead of universities of applied sciences. This tendency will be responded by latter analysis of data as well.

The third question concerns the major the participants chose to study, which is related to final purchase decision as well (which program). Only four different professions are mentioned in the survey: International business, Business information technology, Nursing and Strategy. Most students chose International Business or Business Administration as the profession in the bachelor's degree program (70%). Business information technology comes second with 18%, followed by Nursing with 10%. Only one respondent answered Strategy in this question.

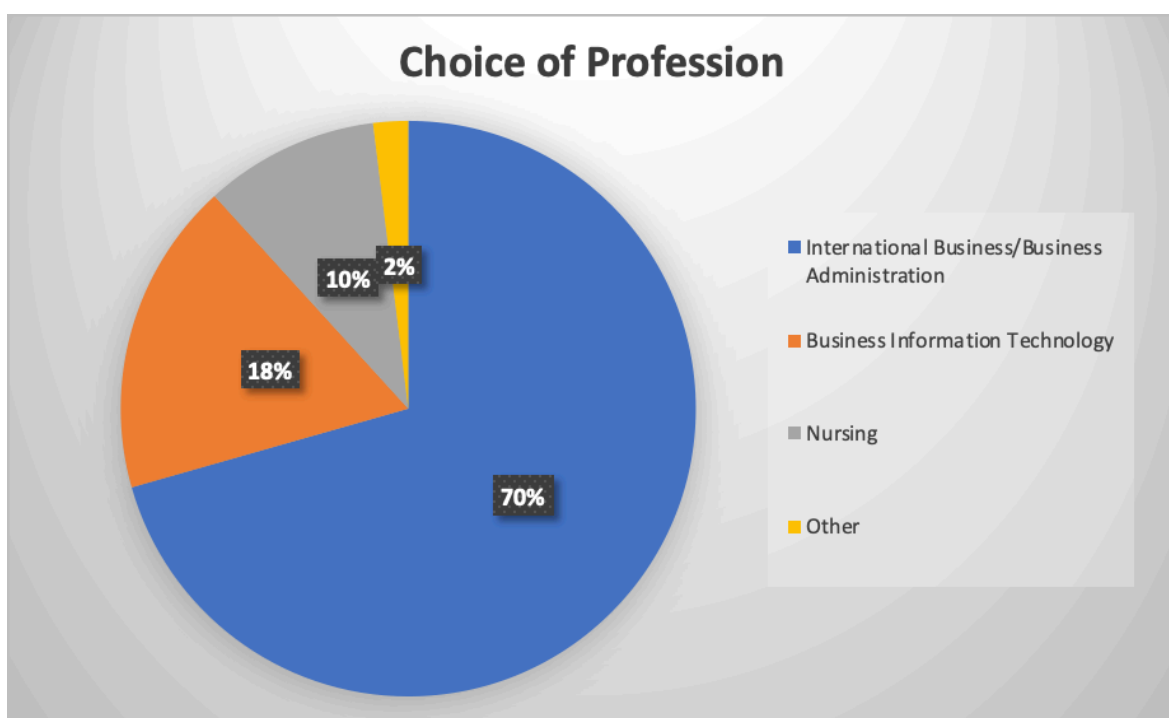


FIGURE 14 Choice of Profession

The fourth question concerns previous degree acquired by the students. The question was “Did you already acquire a bachelor's degree or above before study in Finland?” Whether having a previous bachelor’s degree implies different needs. Those who did not have a previous college degree have the need to acquire a degree as the priority, which is different from those who have already acquired a college degree as acquiring a second bachelor’s degree is not as necessary as acquiring a first (only) college degree. Those with a previous college degree may have different priorities when deciding to study abroad. This assumption will be responded by latter analysis of data from the interview. According to the result from survey, as shown in the figure 15, 84% of participants did not obtain a college before studied in Finland while 8 out of 51 answered “Yes”. This indicates that although the majority of Chinese undergraduates in Finland did not have a previous college degree, there are number of students willing to acquire a second college in Finland, with or without the purpose other than education. The latter analysis of data from the interview will reveal the other purposes.

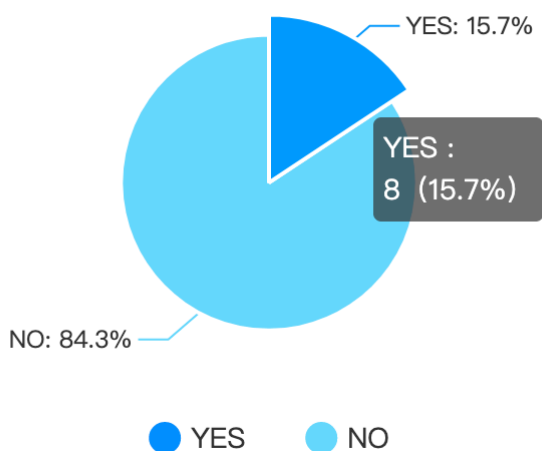


FIGURE 15 Question “Did you already acquire a bachelor's degree or above before study in Finland?”

The fifth question is related to how students fund their education. Three options were set in this question: 1. Mostly on your own; 2. Mostly supported by family; 3. Mostly supported by a scholarship. As the figure 16 shown, most of participants (94.1%) were financially supported by family and only 3 students out of 51, representing the rest 5.9%, were financially independent. No student in the survey was funded by a scholarship. It can be

concluded that, according to the result, most Chinese undergraduates in Finland financially rely on their family and only a small fragment is able to fund education by themselves or, if possible, receive scholarships since this survey did not cover a large sample of students.

The way that students fund their education can be an important element when considering parental involvement in the decision-making process. This assumption is related to Question 14 “Are family opinion important when deciding to study abroad”. The correlation between these two variables, whether or not receiving family support and parental involvement, will be examined in where the Question 14 is discussed.

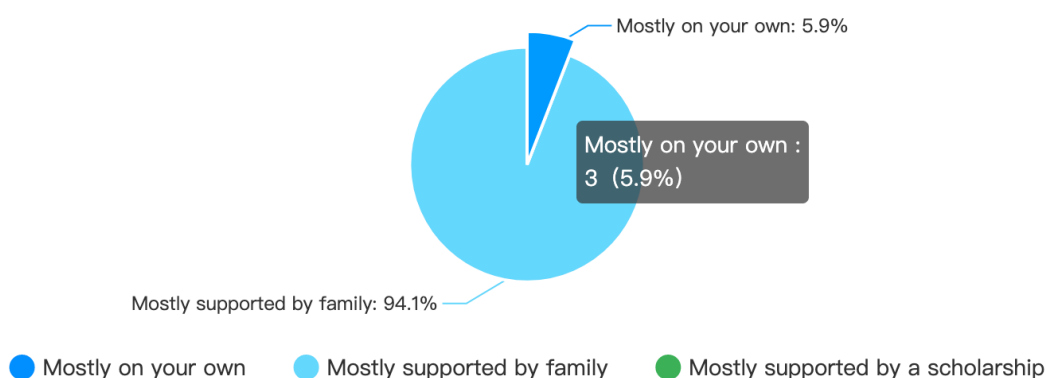


FIGURE 16 How do you fund your education in Finland?

The way that students fund their education can also determine their selection range. Not receiving financial support from family or scholarships can largely narrow the choices available for the students to select as students can only choose the institutions that they can afford to study. Although this is also largely affected by family income (which will be discussed in Question 6), students who do not receive financial support from family or other party and fund education by themselves may have more concerns on financial matters (which will be discussed in Question 7). Luckily, as mentioned in Chapter 4.1, Finnish higher education is more economy for international students than other countries, students who cannot receive financial support from family or other parties as well as those whose family have more financial difficulties can become more motivated to choose Finland as the study destination.

The sixth question concerns the family income which is a crucial element to stratify Social Class (Cultural in Consumer Characteristics). The question is set as non-compulsory that participants could answer voluntarily. In the end, 49 out of 51 participants answered the question. As shown in the figure 17, the result shows a close normal distribution where arithmetic average is valid. The average range of family income of Chinese students in Finland is from 120,000 to 200,000 RMB per year, which is from around 15,500 to around 25,900 EUR annually. 82% of participants have 80,000 to 300,000 RMB family annual income and therefore can be categorized as fairly well-off family at different levels. Only around 8% of participants can be categorized as medium or high income family by Chinese standard. This result depicts how wealthy Chinese undergraduates in Finland are at an extent.



FIGURE 17 What is your family annual income?

It is easy to understand that the wealthier students' family are the more choices they can have when deciding where to study. Only the wealthy families are able to afford expensive study programs in countries like the UK or the USA where tuition fee and living costs are much higher than those in Finland. This means that those who study bachelor's degree programs in Finland may not have much choices in deciding where to study internationally as most of participants in the survey do not possess financial capability to afford more expensive study choices and perceive studying in Finland as a burden (this will be reflected in Question 7). Lower family income can demotivate students to pursue expensive study

places and therefore more inclined to choose more economy destinations and programs. This assumption can be responded in Questions 19 to an extent.

Question 7 concerns the students' perception towards the level of difficulty of financially supporting their studies in Finland by their family. The question was set as "In your opinion, is financing your education in Finland considered a heavy burden for yourself or your family?".

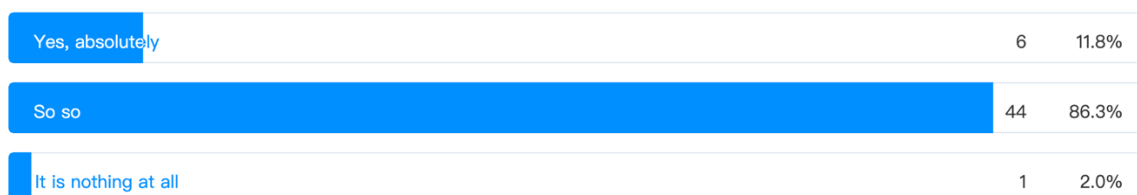


FIGURE 18 In your opinion, is financing your education in Finland considered a heavy burden for yourself or your family?

It can be seen from figure 18 that the vast majority claim that financing education in Finland is a burden with 11.8% participants strongly believe that it is absolutely a financial burden for them or their families. Only one participant answered "it is nothing at all", who is, obviously, the one with the highest family income (see figure 17).

This result corresponds the family income that most Chinese undergraduates in Finland are from medium or low income family and reasonably perceive financing their education in Finland as a burden. Therefore, pursuing high cost of education in other countries seems financially impossible and less attractive for most of Chinese students in Finland who already perceive a more economy solution provided by Finnish education system as a burden, unless scholarships are provided.

The 8th question is related to students' academic performances back to high school, an objective factor of students (internal factor). The question was set as it is an internal factor of students and is believed to have an interaction with another external push factor. The question was "How was your academic performance back to high school? What kind of university you were able to enter?" and five options were provided as the figure 19 shown (the excellence and ranking of university reduce from the top to the bottom. Universities in the 985 project is the best group of universities in China, followed by those in the 211 project, both kinds are first-tier universities and students able to enter these kinds are

considered well-performed in high school. However, below second-tier universities are the least excellent group of institutions).

Universities in 985 project	0	0%
Universities in 211 project	0	0%
Other First-tier universities (一本)	4	7.8%
Second-tier universities (二本)	39	76.5%
Below Second-tier universities (三本, 民办, 大专)	8	15.7%

FIGURE 19 Students' academic performances back to high school

It is clear that most Chinese undergraduates in Finland participated in the survey were clustered in second-tier or below and only 7.8% of participants were able to enter first-tier universities in China. No participant in the survey was able to enter reputable universities in the 985 or 211 projects. This indicates that most Chinese undergraduates in Finland performed quite unsatisfactorily compared to other Chinese students in terms of academic records, which can become an internal drive to seek education overseas. This result will also correspond with a sub question of Question 11 which indicates students' perception towards competition to gain entry to good university in China (an external factor: push factor from sending country). The interaction of students' academic background (internal objective factor) and competition to gain entry to Chinese universities (external push factor) will be explained with Question 11.

Question 9 concerns students' family background as well. The question was "Do you have family members or relatives living in Finland?". The question was set as having family living in the target study destination can act as a drive to motivate students to study at the same country, which is also an objective factor of students (internal factor).

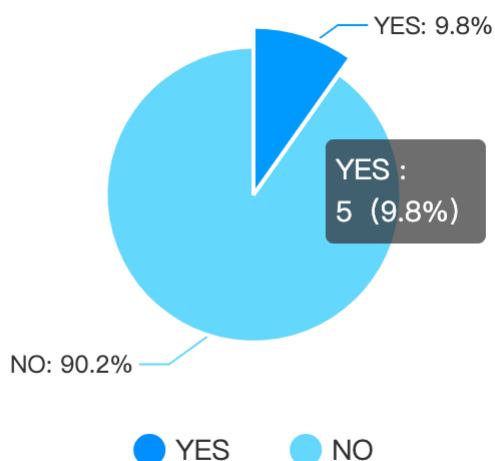


FIGURE 20 Do you have family members or relatives living in Finland?

The result demonstrates that most participants do not have family living in Finland. Only around 10% of students have family living in Finland. This means that there are other important factors acting as incentives to attract the other 90% of Chinese students choosing Finland as the host country. The level of attractiveness of having family living in the study destination in the decision-making process will be responded in the latter analysis of other question.

The 10th question is related to the students' intention to immigrate by the time they decide to study in Finland. Three options were set in this question: "Yes", "Maybe" and "No". The graph shows that more than 40% of participants showed intention of different levels to immigrate with 13.7% (7 out of 51) displayed a clear intention. Although the majority 58.8% of students did not have the inclination to move to Finland by the time they decide to the study destination, having a tendency to immigrate to a specific country definitely has an influence on the students' decision-making process as such intention can work as an internal drive of a person so that the relevant study destination can become more attractive than the other options.

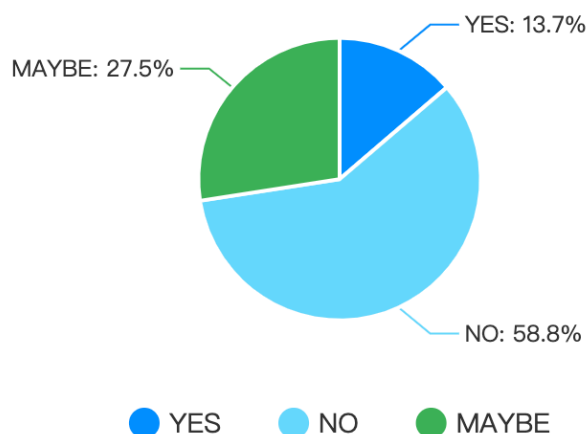


FIGURE 21 Did you have intention to immigrate when you decide to study in Finland?

It is worth noticing that those who have family living in Finland showed a clearer intention to immigrate than other students. More specifically, 100% of these students demonstrated intention to immigrate with 80% of whom answered “Yes” and 20% answered “Maybe”. This result responds to the statement that having intention to migrate has an influence on the decision-making process of students in choosing study destination.

Regarding students’ personal motivation, an internal factor, author set Question 12 “What are the most important factors that made you decide to study internationally?” in order to compensate the push and pull factors which will be examined later. This question was set as a free response question. As this question is to compensate the push factor examined in Question 11, most participants gave the answer “No” which means there is no factor other than the push factors (push factors will be examined in Question 11) that made them pursue education in other countries. The most frequent description among the given answers to this question was “want to experience foreign lifestyle and classroom environment”. Some participants also answered “want to improve language skills” and “preference to study abroad”. The author can therefore conclude that the students’ personal motivation that work without the interaction with push factors do exist as there are many responses stating the willingness to experience foreign environment (experience and excitement, see chapter 3.2.2), but it is the push factors (external factor) that work as a stronger stimuli to make students seeking education overseas as more participants gave “No” to the question.

Regarding another internal factor, Learning and Memory in Consumer Psychology, the author set Question 16 to study the importance of previous image of Finland in the mind of

students in the decision-making process. The question was in a quantitative fashion with 0-5 scale (0 means no experience, 1-5 means having experience with different level of importance). The results show that the vast majority (94%) did not have any previous experience (rate “0”) such as travelling or studying related to Finland; however, those who have experience related to Finland believe that such experience is an important factor with 33.3% of whom rate “4” and 66.6% rate “5”. Nonetheless, due to lack of data (only 3 participants have experiences relevant to the study destination), the importance of previous experience in the decision-making process requires further examination.

The last internal factor is the influence from others, which is categorized in the objective factors of students. Two questions were set to study this factor: Question 14 and 15.

Question 14 was “Are family opinions important when deciding to study abroad?” and the question was set in a quantitative fashion (1-5 scale) as shown in figure 22.

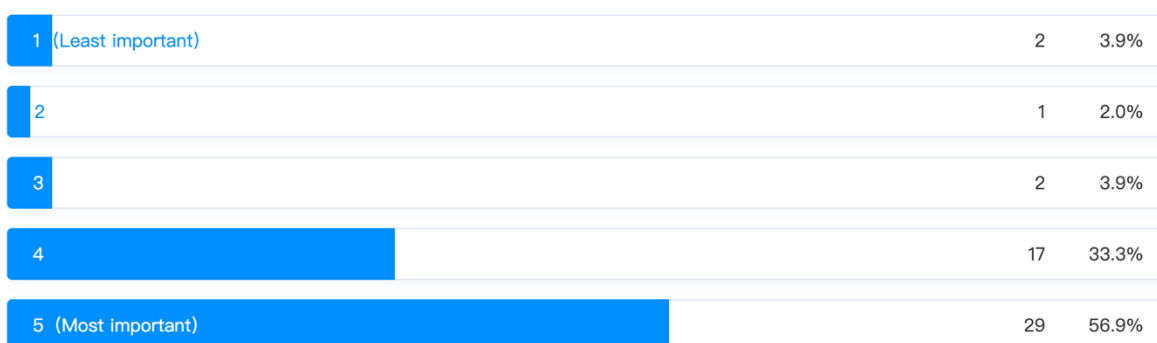


FIGURE 22 Are family opinions important when deciding to study abroad?

The result indicates that the vast majority sees family opinion as an important factor with more than 55% believe this is perhaps the most important factor. More specifically, the average scale of this question was 4.4 and the mean was 5, which confirms the importance of family opinion in the decision-making process of Chinese undergraduates.

However, the importance of family opinion may vary if taking students' age profile and the way of funding their education into consideration. This matter was mentioned in Question 5 “How do you fund your education in Finland”. Although the number of cases who fund their education on themselves was unfortunately not enough to calculate the correlation between the two variables, it can still lead to some conclusion that the importance of family opinion reduces as the level of students' financial independence increases. Those who do not receive financial support from their family see family opinion as less important

(66.6% answered “1” and 33.3% answered “3” in Question 14) compared to those who receive family support. This matter requires more data and further analysis to draw a more affirmative conclusion.

Question 15 relates to the importance of friends’ opinions in the decision-making process, which also used 1-5 scale question as shown in the figure 23.

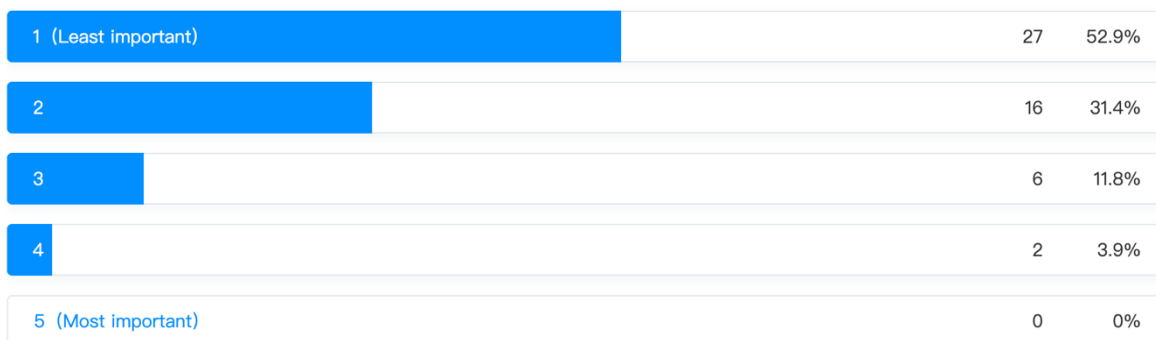


FIGURE 23 Are friends' opinions important when choosing a study destination?

The graph shows a very clear tendency that most people believe friends’ opinions are not important with the average of 1.7 and the mean of 1. However, although friends’ opinions are not as important as family opinions, it is still important for marketers to take this factor into consideration as friends’ feedbacks are an important information channel for students and more positive feedbacks from friends can make students, or customers, make a firmer purchase decision.

External factors

The external factors include push and pull factors from sending country and host country coupled with the students’ perceptions towards the importance of these factors. Based on findings generated by predecessors of this subject matter, the author set two push factors from sending country, eight pull factors and five push factors from host country in order to fit the case of this thesis better.

Question 11 is related to push factors from sending country, in this case, China, and students’ perception towards these factors. The question gives two push factors: competition to get entry to good Chinese universities and dislike to Chinese teaching method (this factor also relates to students’ personal tastes). The question is formed in a quantitative

fashion with 0-5 scale (0 means disagree with the factors; 1-5 means agree but the importance varies from least to most important).

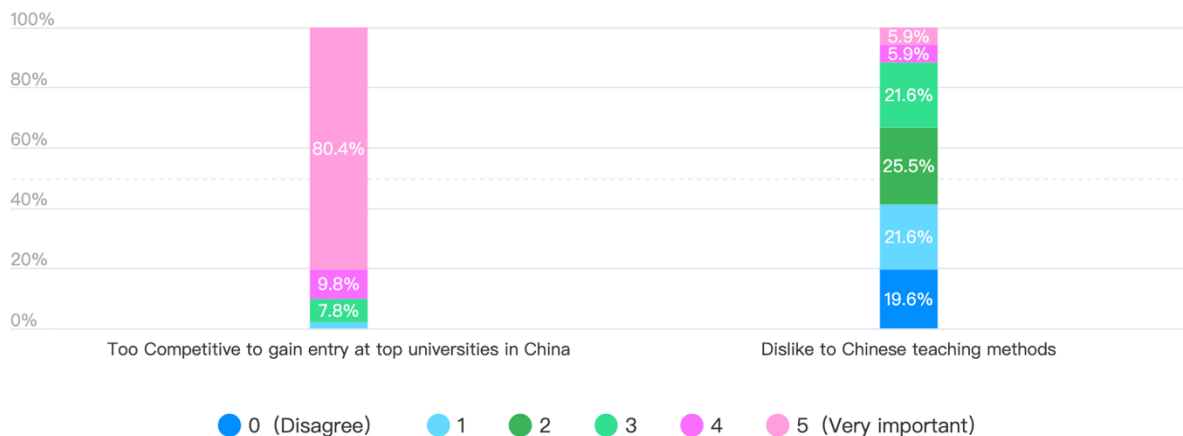


FIGURE 24 Which of the following factors related to education in China made you seeking education overseas

It can be seen from the graph that as for the first factor, competition to gain entry to top universities in China, all the participants agree that it is competitive to get into good universities in China (no participant answered “0”) and the great majority believe this is an important factor that push them to seek education overseas (80.4% believe this is the most important factor and only 2% believe this is the least important). This tremendous tendency indicates that competition to gain entry at top universities in China is definitely a crucial push factor. This result also responds to the fact that most participants were incapable of getting into first-tier or “985” “211” universities in China as mentioned in Question 8. Thus, the interaction of students’ academic performance (internal factor) and competition to gain entry at home country (external factor) is apparent and significant, which together engendered strong impetus to push students to seek alternative educational solutions in other countries.

As for the other sub question, dislike to Chinese teaching method, is a combination of both push factor and students’ personal tastes and preferences. The result shows that nearly 20% of participants disagree with this factor and the other 80% agree with this factor in different degrees. This means that, firstly, the traditional teaching method can work as a push factor for some of the Chinese students in Finland as 80% believe this is a matter to concern; however, secondly, this factor cannot determine a firm decision to study

abroad as only around 12% of students think that it is important by rating it “4” or “5”. This is a typical interaction between an internal factor of students and an external factor of environment. This interaction exists but cannot be seen as crucial.

Question 17 concerns the pull factors from host country, Finland, in this case, and 8 factors were given based on the findings of the predecessor in the subject matter and reasonable adjustments were made to better fit the case country of this thesis. The question was in a quantitative fashion of 0-6 scale (0 means disagree with the factors; 1-5 means agree but the importance varies from least to most important). The 8 pull factors are: “Finnish education institutions are well-equipped and better facilitated than that in China and other country”, “Finnish education offers more flexible course selection than China and other countries can offer”, “The reputation of education (overall education quality, institutions, programs/profession) in Finland is better than that in China and other countries”, “Finland has better developed economy and social welfare than China and other countries”, “The environment (less polluted) in Finland is better than China and other countries”, “Tuition fee and living costs in Finland is relatively lower”, “Finland provides work permit for international students”, “Finland is an exciting place with opportunity to gain fresh experiences”.

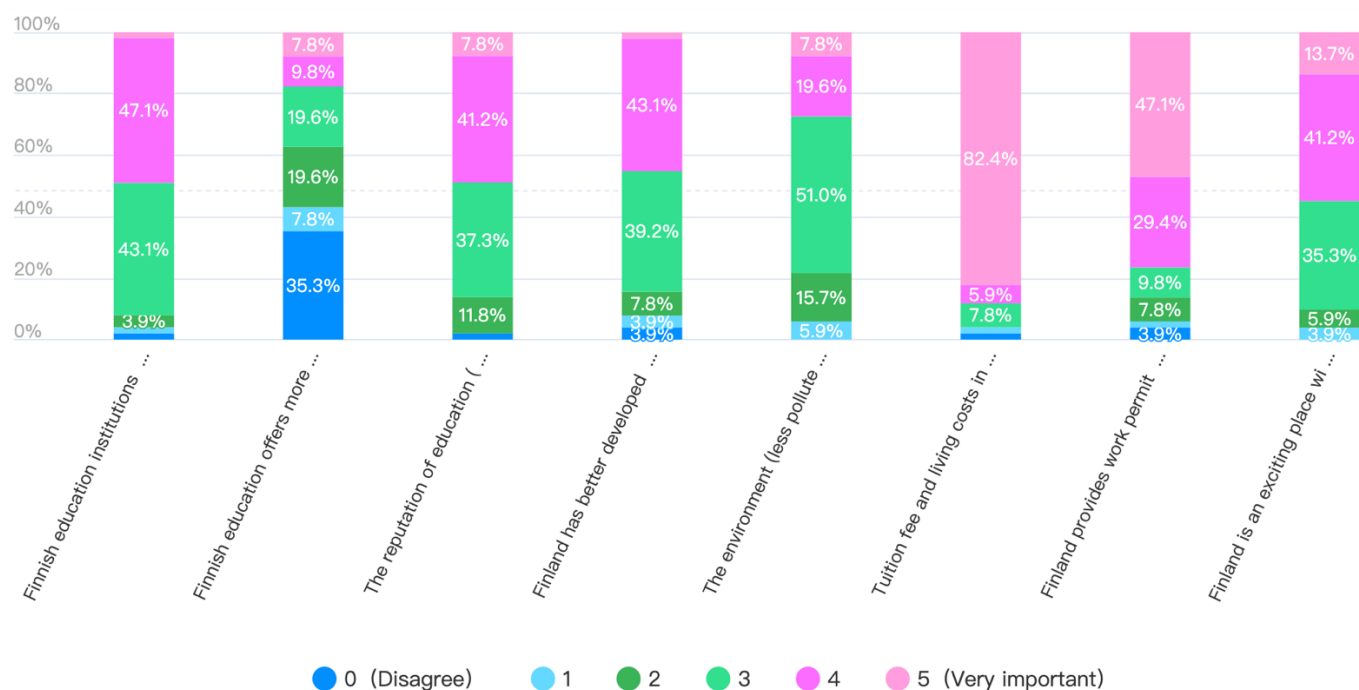


FIGURE 25 Pull factors of host country (Finland)

It can be seen very clearly from the graph that relatively lower tuition fee and living costs in Finland is seen as the most important for the majority of participants with 88% rated “4” or “5”, only a very small group of people rated “2” or below. Factors “Finnish institutions better equipped”, “Finland provides work permit to international students”, “good reputation of Finnish education”, “Finland has well-developed economy and social welfare”, “Finland has good natural environment” and “opportunity to gain fresh experience in Finland” are similarly important as most participants rated “3” or above. Within the previously mentioned factors, “Finland provides work permit” sees a higher rating than the others as nearly 77% participants rated “4” or above. However, opinions on the factor “Finnish education offers more flexible course selection” vary with 35.3% of participants disagree and the opinions of the rest differ in various degrees. This ambivalent distribution is mainly because Finnish higher education institutions offer a flexible range of course selection but the number of English-taught programs in bachelor’s level is rather limited. Those who disagree with this factor were influenced by the fact that only a very few of universities offer one or two English programs in bachelor’s level and that universities of applied sciences only offer three or four bachelor’s degree programs in English, although registering or changing courses within the programs is rather flexible.

The 18th question concerns the push factors from the host country. The question was also set in 0-6 scale (0 means disagree with the factors; 1-5 means agree but the importance/difficulty varies from least to most important). Based on previous studies and reasonable adjusts for the case country, 5 factors were given: difficulty in applying visa, difficulty in finding job, difficulty in communication (language barrier), difficulty in integrating into the society in terms of cultural difference and in terms of potential discrimination towards internationals. The results are shown in figure 26.

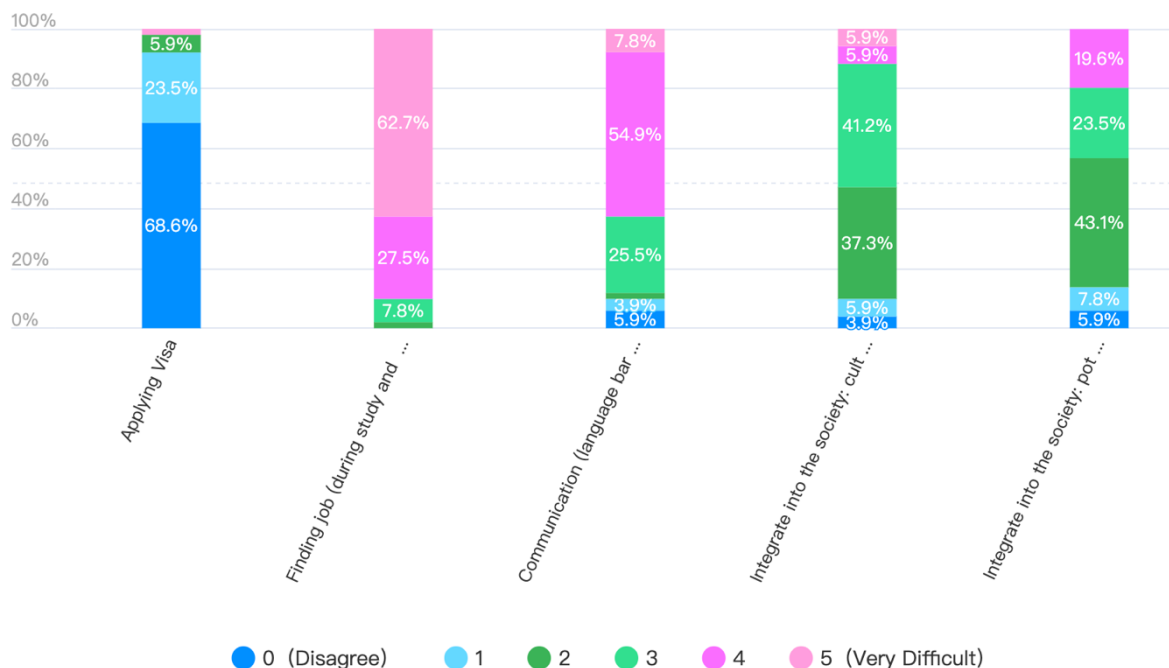


FIGURE 26 Push factors from host country, Finland

It is clear that most people disagree that applying visa is difficult and those who believe this is difficult do not think this is important as most people rated “1” or below. The two major push factors are difficulty in finding jobs during or after study (90% rated 4 or above) and difficulty in communication (88% rated 3 or above) as English is not the country’s official language and a lot of people (those who rated 4 or above) believe that Finnish language is hard to master. In terms of difficulty in integrating into the society, people hold ambiguous opinions about it as nearly half of the people rated below “3” or disagree with the ideas that difference between cultures and customs is a difficulty or is of importance as well as the idea that potential discrimination towards internationals is an issue in Finland. It can be therefore concluded that finding employment opportunities and language barrier are the major push factors as far as Chinese students are concerned and other factors such as difficulty in integrating into the local society does not seem as an important factor.

The last question is associated with the pull factor from host country as well but work as a complementary so that this question was set as a free respond with the question “What are the most important factors that made you come and study in Finland?”. The most frequent answers are “free tuition” (most frequent), “parents’ decision” (second most frequent), “chance to work abroad after graduation”. Answers such as “strong preference towards the country”, “quality education” also appeared despite in a less frequent basis. The

result perfectly responds to the findings of the previous analysis of this thesis, which is that affordable educational cost is a strong external stimulus and that family decision acts as a non-negligible factor.

The pattern of decision-making process

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the author based the combined theory of Push-Pull Factor Model and the Generic Model of Consumer Behavior on a mixed process rather than a strict linear process, so did Sun, who added push and pull factors to both sending and host countries and believe that students may not follow a strict linear process. In order to rectify and refine the pattern of the decision-making process, the author set Question 13 “How did you decide to study in Finland? (Your decision-making process)” into the survey as shown in figure 27.

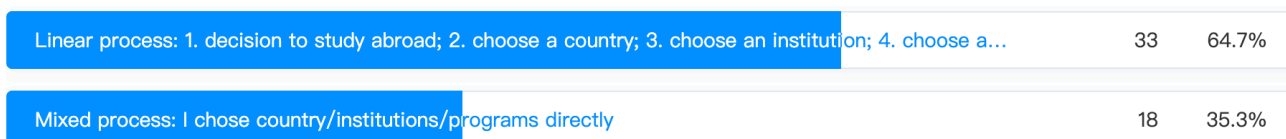


FIGURE 27 Pattern of decision-making process

The result shows that the majority of nearly 65% made their decision in a linear process, which means these participants firstly decide whether or not to study abroad, then sequentially decide which country, which institution, and, finally, which program to study. However, there are still 35.3% of people would rather mix their decision-making process, which means they may directly jump to decide which institution to study and may go back to decide whether to study abroad or not after they collect and evaluate the information regarding study options.

5.3.2 Data Analysis of the Interviews

The interview works as a complementary to the survey and is designed to give more detailed information in order to give better answers to the research questions. Seven questions were given to each interview and the total of 4 separate interviews were conducted with the interviewees selected randomly among Chinese undergraduates in Finland with willingness to participate and available contact information.

The first question was to find out why students decide to study internationally instead of domestically, which will provide some insight in answering one of the research questions.

Interviewee 1: *"Firstly, I was not able to get into a good university in China since the competition is so fierce. And I really wanted to have international experience. I could foresee that if I did not decide to study abroad at that stage, I may not have chance to experience a foreign education environment. And it is also because my English was really terrible back to high school, I believed this is a really good chance to force myself to improve my language by preparing exams and studying overseas."*

Interviewee 2: *"Studying internationally is like to provide another option, an alternative. My friends and parents advise me to study abroad as well."*

Interviewee 3: *"It is largely because of my parents' decision. And I also preferred to gain some foreign experiences. Plus, I was unable to get entry into a good university in China and my family have the financial strength to support my education."*

Interviewee 4: *"It is largely because I could not get into a good university in China and plus studying abroad is a really good chance to extend my outlooks."*

The answers from these four interviewees largely correspond to the findings from the survey. An important reason that has been said repetitively is the competition to gain entry to top universities in China. This push factor directly motivates students to seek education overseas. Other factors such as chance to explore foreign countries and broaden horizon are also making contribution to students' decision to study abroad. A new and interesting finding is that interviewee 2 said studying internationally is alternative, a backup plan in other words. This can reduce the risk of not getting admitted to higher education institutions.

The second question aimed to understand the pattern of decision-making process in details. This question complements the Question 13 in the survey. The question was "How do you make decisions regarding studying abroad? A linear process or a mixed process?"

Interviewee 1: *"Because I have to fund my education myself, so I can only choose universities that I can afford to go. Once I made decision to study abroad, I started to search information about tuition fee level in different countries. Once the country is chosen, I will choose institution, so it is a linear process in this stage. But I may also look for options offered by universities in other country. So, I would say it is also mixed as I go back to previous steps sometimes."*

Interviewee 2: *"For me it is a linear process because I decided Finland as my only study destination, no other country as option. Simply because the free tuition, it was really attractive."*

Interviewee 3: *"In the beginning, I decided to go to the UK, and then chose universities in the country, so at that time it was a linear process. But later on, there were some negative news related to the UK that year, my parents and friends also suggested northern European countries as an option. So, I went back to step two to choose which country to go to, and then which university. So, I would say it is like both mixed process and linear process."*

Interviewee 4: *"I made contract with an education agency, they provided me several options, like providing universities in different countries all together and I made decision among those options. So, it is a rather mixed process."*

Based on these answers, interviewees adopted either linear or mixed process or both, which correspond with the findings from the survey. This indicates that the logic and the basic assumption of the combined model are valid.

The third question was to find out the degree of influence from other people, which responds to the Questions 14 and 15 from the survey. The question was "whose opinions influenced your decision?"

Interviewee 1: *"My opinion is the most important. I think this matter depends on who financially supports you. If I am supported by my family, then opinions from my family can be very important. But since I did not receive any funding from my family, it is totally up to me at that time."*

Interviewee 2: *"My parents provided some advice, but finally it was up to me. So, it was like my parents decided 40% and I got the rest 60%."*

Interviewee 3: *"My parents' friend gave a very important suggestion, which is go to Finland. My parents somehow listened to this advice and they basically made the decision for me. My opinion is also important, I have a slight preference towards Finland as well, so, my personal preference was around 40% and my parents' decision around 60%."*

Interviewee 4: *"Education agency had the largest influence because I made contract with them and received information only from them. My parents trust the agency as well, so we didn't look for other information by ourselves."*

The interviewees answered this question very differently. When parents' opinions are involved, it is important to consider their suggestion and sometimes parents do make decision for their kids at the stage when they are about to or just become adult. This result corresponds to the findings from the survey. However, when parents' decision is not

involved, there must be other parties to influence the decision-making process. In this case, education agencies play a very important role as they are paid to provide information and suggestions and the information channel is direct and effective. In some cases, parents' friends or colleagues can play a role as well as they provide information directly to the parents who usually have a great influence in the decision-making process of Chinese undergraduates. Students' self-motivation and personal preference are also important as it is the students, rather than the parents, who confirm or accept the final decision at the last stage.

The fourth question concerns the factors that students have considered during the decision-making process, which responds to the push and pull factors from the host countries. The question was "what factors do you consider when deciding which country to study at?"

Interviewee 1: *"First is tuition fee and living costs because I fund my education on my own, then is the overall reputation of the education. And the country must be a developed country, which means a country with good economic status. The reputation of the institution is also important, perhaps the second most important after the costs."*

Interviewee 2: *"I didn't have much information related to other countries. That's why I chose Finland as the only destination. So, it is like I skipped this step and directly jump to choose universities."*

Interviewee 3: *"Safety is an important concern, countries like the USA wasn't on my list as there were too many criminal cases reported. And education agency has cooperation with Finnish institutions, and I didn't have much information related to northern European countries, so the education agency really had the authenticity as we believed they are professional. And education agency said Finnish education has good reputation, that's why I am here."*

Interviewee 4: *"Tuition fee was the primary concern, and my personal preference is also important. Education agency provided quite a lot of information related to Finland and they also said that there are many universities (of applied sciences) available and it was easier to get admitted."*

As the answers reveal, information channel is significant in the decision-making process as two interviewees addressed the important influence of education agencies. Two interviewees mentioned that education cost is an important factor to consider, which responds to the findings in the survey. Other factors include reputation of education, social stability,

economic development, the ease to get admitted by the institutions, and cooperation between two the institutions in sending and host countries, all of which can be considered as pull factors of the host country (external factor).

The fifth question concerns the specific reasons that attracted the students to Finland. This works as a complementary to the pull factors but more concentrated on Finland as the destination. The question was “When you were deciding where to study, what factors brought you to Finland in particular instead of other countries? What in Finland attracted you?”

Interviewee 1: *“Lower tuition fee and living costs, it is the most important factor. And the university here is recognized by ministry of education back to China, this is also important.”*

Interviewee 2: *“Tuition fee is much lower, and I trusted Finnish education system; plus, Finland welcomes internationals as they are more friendly towards international students compared with other countries.”*

Interviewee 3: *“Finland is more mysterious than other countries, more unknown than popular countries like other western European countries, which stimulated my interest.”*

Interviewee 4: *“Lower tuition fee and there were more institutions provided as choices; plus, it is much easier to get a study place.”*

The repetitively mentioned factor is the economy of education and life in Finland, which is the most attractive feature of Finland as the study destination. Other specified reasons are friendliness towards internationals, recognized degree, ease to get a study place, and, interestingly, the mysteriousness, which drives the curiousness of students and makes a distinctive stimulus in the decision-making process. This means that students may not value this stimulus when making a decision, but this factor can work as an extra credit of a country for some students to some extent, especially for students who have the internal motivation to explore more and gain foreign experience.

The sixth question regards to students' previous experience related to Finland. This question works as a complementary to Question 16 and aims to confirm the findings in the survey, which is that having previous experience regarding a country can have an important influence on the decision-making process. The question was “Do you have any previous experience related to Finland before you came to study?”

Interviewee 1: *“No, not at all.”*

Interviewee 2: *“No, but I have friends in Finland, they provided me a lot of information related to Finland and gave me quite a lot of help in applying the university.”*

Interviewee 3: *“No, I didn’t have any experience related to Finland. I have seen many Finnish products such as clothing brand or designer brand, but I wasn’t aware that they are from Finland.”*

Interviewee 4: *“Yes, I have travelled to Finland with my parents when I was still a student from high school. This experience brought me the very first impression of Finland. And I think this has formed my preference towards this country somehow.”*

The answers respond to the findings from the survey, which is that most of Chinese students did not possess experience related to Finland, but those who had the experience with Finland showed a positive inclination and formed preference towards the country, which strengthen their intention to study in Finland. This result also indicates that Finnish marketers may wish to emphasize more on their cultural and commercial products when they advertise study opportunities in Finland in order to deliberately form and position a positive first image of the country and the school to the students and eventually draw more internationals to choose the country as the study destination.

The seventh question concerns the satisfiers and dissatisfiers of studying and living in Finland in the minds of students, which are crucial components of Motivation in Consumer Psychology. The question aims to confirm and complement the push and pull factors of host country Finland found in the survey. The question was “What factors made you satisfied about the study experience in Finland and what made you dissatisfied?”

Interviewee 1: *“The quality of education in UAS was under my expectation, it was quite disappointing. The thing that satisfied me is firstly the living costs and free tuition, so far it is still a cost-effective investment; the second is a friendly environment towards internationals.”*

Interviewee 2: *“Quality of education is satisfactory, also the friendliness towards internationals, it is actually not hard to make friends in Finland, I think Finnish people can easily be good friends. And the whole natural environment is really suitable for study, it’s really tranquil. The dissatisfied parts definitely include weather especially winter times; and Finnish language is difficult to learn, somehow demotivates my passion to learn the local language.”*

Interviewee 3: *“The natural environment is really good, no pollution; good material life; people are friendly and honest, and they don’t discriminate foreigners. All these provide a friendly environment towards international students. The dissatisfactory*

part would be too less populated, as sometimes it is way too boring, I was even close to get depression because Chinese people are used to populated urban areas. The styles and patterns of life are really different. Plus, Finnish people work too slowly, for example, banks services, shopping malls and hospitals are not as convenient as in China, most of them only open for a few hours a day and close very early.”

Interviewee 4: “The natural environment is really satisfactory, no pollution. People are well-educated and friendly. And I think it is more comfortable to live in Finland than in other European countries, it is cleaner, safer, more tranquil than many other European countries. Educational facilities are great, teachers are friendly as well. But too many groupworks kind of drive me crazy sometimes. Some students especially local students are quite passive towards study, they only want to pass the courses instead of thinking about getting a good grade. Only a few international students are active. And a very important point is the educational method, I don’t feel I can learn a lot of things from lectures, attending courses cannot make a great difference on the grade, hard work for couple of days for a course review can still give me a good grade. The study is basically self-learning instead of learning from teachers.”

Based on the answers from the question, it can be concluded that natural environment, friendliness of people and teaching staffs, better facilitated education, friendliness towards internationals can be satisfiers and work on the positive side in consumer psychology, which are responded by and reversely confirm some of the pull factors of the host country. However, some of the dissatisfiers are found other than the traditional push factors that were assumed and tested by the previous studies conducted by the researchers earlier and by the findings in this thesis. These dissatisfiers are weather during winters, difficulty of learning local language, dullness of the lifestyle, inconvenient work schedule of public services, disproportionate workloads of self-study and classroom-study, inactive attitude of classmates. Some of these dissatisfiers are uncontrollable factors such as weather or are caused by discrepancies between different lifestyles and norms among countries; however, those dissatisfiers still require attention from marketers as they can demotivate students in the very early phase of the decision-making process.

6 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter is to conclude the thesis through gathering the findings generated from the empirical research. The answers to the research questions will be given in the first subchapter. The second subchapter will focus on the validity and reliability of the study. The final subchapter will give suggestions for further research on the relevant field.

6.1 Answers to Research Questions

This thesis is to study the decision-making process of Chinese undergraduate students in choosing foreign study destinations. The main question will be answered by answering the sub-questions paved before it. The readers will find a sequential logic between the sub-questions and the main research question.

Sub-question:

What factors make Chinese students willing to study at foreign higher education institutions rather than domestic universities at bachelor's level?

Based on the combined model and the findings from the empirical research, there are both internal and external factors making and sustaining Chinese students to seek education overseas at bachelor's level.

Internal factors include objective and subjective factors of students. In the objective aspect, uncompetitive academic performance and parents' inclination to send their kids abroad are the main factors that make Chinese students seeking undergraduate education overseas; adequate family income is the base to sustain students' education; opinions from friends or parents' friends can make but a rather limited contribution to motivate students to study abroad. In the subjective aspect, dislike to Chinese teaching method, willingness to experience foreign lifestyle and education and willingness to improve language skills can make students more motivated but at a limited degree.

External factors are the push and pull factors from sending country. In the case of this thesis, only push factors are involved. The most influential push factor is the fierce competition to gain entry to top Chinese universities. Conventional Chinese teaching method interacting with personal dislike make a second factor to push Chinese students to seek foreign education.

What attributes affect the target group in deciding which foreign country to study?

The attributes in this stage can be categorized as internal factors and external factors as well. As for internal factors, a positive experience related to a particular country (Learning

and Memory from Consumer Psychology) such as travel or study experience can largely motivate students to choose the relevant country as the future study destination. Family opinions especially parental decisions can make a great difference in students' selection. Having relatives or family living abroad can also draw students to choose this particular country. Students' preference towards a particular country works as a strong personal drive in the decision-making process. Moreover, students' subjective intention to immigrate to a specific country interacting with the ease of immigration in that country (external factor) can also affect students' choice in the study destination. The way students fund their education together with their financial strength is also an important determinant when they evaluate their choice set. Additionally, suggestions and opinions from education agencies play a special but important role in the decision-making process as the agencies are paid to construct an effective information channel and to provide suggestions to students.

The external factors are mainly the push and pull factors from host countries. The pull factors include reputation of the education system in the country, range of program or course selection, quality of educational facilities and equipment, economic development and natural environment. Push factors include difficulty of applying visa, difficulty of finding jobs, communication barrier, and difficulty to integrate into the society. Furthermore, the costs of education, including tuition fee and living expenses, together with the opportunities for jobs during or after study are also important or sometimes vital depending on the students' financial strength. In addition to the push and pull factors, firstly, safety or social stability of the country is also a non-negligible concern for Chinese students. Secondly, the general ease of getting admitted by the institutions in the country can be a factor to consider for some students. Thirdly, the excitement and interest of a country also wave students' opinions in choosing the study destination.

Main research question:

What factors contribute to Chinese students' decision-making process in deciding Finland as the study destination at bachelor's level?

Bringing together the fundamentals of the answers of the previous sub-questions and the additional findings from the survey, we can finally respond to the main research question.

The factors that contribute to the decision to study in Finland, as far as the Chinese students are concerned, are firstly the relative economy of living and studying in Finland, which is of paramount importance and directly motivates most students to pursue education there. Other external factors from environment include well-facilitated educational equipment, flexible course selection within a program, a positive overall reputation of the

country's education system, well-developed economy and social welfare, clean and tranquil natural environment, allowance for work to international students, good safety record and social stability, the ease to get admitted by institutions, a range of available institutions at bachelor's level, friendliness towards internationals.

Internal factors from students are equally important. Intention to immigrate coupled with friendly policy in immigration also make a direct reason for some Chinese students to choose Finland. Having family members or relatives living in Finland is another family factor that contributes to the decision-making process.

However, there are factors that may act negatively as dissatisfiers in the decision-making process such as limited choices of English-taught programs at bachelors' level, dullness of lifestyle, as well as other uncontrollable factors including extreme climate in winters. These factors may not be as effective as those mentioned in the previous paragraphs as they did not eventually change the decisions made by the students, but it is still worth to mention.

6.2 Validity and reliability

The fundamental purpose of the thesis is to generate answers to the research questions while providing a developed model to study decision-making process of international students in choosing study destination. The basic structure of this thesis is founded upon testified theories and assumption. The information and data used in this thesis are from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data was collected through the survey and interviews. The survey and interviews were distributed to and conducted with Chinese students who have studied in Finland at bachelor's level in a totally anonymous fashion in order that participants can respond to the questions without a second thought so that more honest answers can be generated. The participants of the survey are from different regions and social classes in China and have studied at different majors in different institutions in Finland and were selected randomly for the survey so that the representativeness of the participants can be ensured. The survey was conducted in English language and the interviews were conducted in Chinese language. All participants fully understood the language and description used in the questions from the survey and the interviews. Every question of the survey and interviews was distributed directly to the participants so that no interruption or noise could intervene the data collection process. The results of the survey and interviews are thus consistent. 51 valid responses were recorded and stored online, and the 4 interviews were recorded and stored in hand of the author. The number of valid responses is sufficient to draw some conclusion in this case. The secondary sources are from literatures such as official books, peer-reviewed articles, original theses, and official

statistics conducted by authorities. Moreover, the author explained the research methodology and data collection process very thoroughly in this thesis. The research is therefore considered valid and reliable.

6.3 Suggestion for Further Research

The purpose of this thesis is to discover the elements involved in the decision-making process of Chinese students and is based on the case country Finland. Further researches can be conducted on a broader basis. The elements from the combined model in this thesis can be extended or narrowed to adjust different needs, they are therefore not constant or maintain stasis. The model can be used for studies based on other study destinations such as Denmark and Sweden in order to make marketers to understand why students choose unpopular countries to study rather than choosing popular destinations such as the USA or the UK. Instead of focusing on the consumer behavior of Chinese students, researches can use the same model to analyze the behavior of students of other nationalities when choosing a study destination.

This study is a component of a large objective that aims to activate traditionally unpopular international study destinations in Chinese education market and make the educational products related to these destinations profitable for education agencies. The currently existing studies related to the decision-making process of international students in choosing these study places are short in numbers. The followers of this subject matter can further analyze the attractiveness of the unpopular destinations in order to fulfill this domain; or analyze the price factor in the decision-making process of international students.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Survey

1.First, please tell me how old you were WHEN YOU STARTED STUDYING IN FINLAND *

2.What kind of institutions are/were you studying at? *

- University
- University of Applied Sciences

3.What major did/do you study? *

4.Did you already acquire a bachelor's degree or above before study in Finland? *

- YES
- NO

5.How do you fund your education in Finland? *

- Mostly on your own
- Mostly supported by family
- Mostly supported by a scholarship

6. What is your family annual income

This is a very important factor in the research, really hope you can answer it; however, you don't have to answer it if you don't want to

- Below 30k RMB
- 30k RMB–80k RMB
- 80k RMB–120k RMB
- 120k RMB–200k RMB
- 200k RMB–300k RMB
- 300k RMB–500k RMB
- 500k RMB–1,000k RMB
- Above 1 million RMB

7. In your opinion, is financing your education in Finland considered a heavy burden for yourself or your family? *

- Yes, absolutely
- So so
- It is nothing at all

8. How was your academic performance back to high school? What kind of university you were able to enter? *

- Universities in 985 project
- Universities in 211 project
- Other First-tier universities (一本)
- Second-tier universities (二本)
- Below Second-tier universities (三本, 民办, 大专)

9. Do you have family members or relatives living in Finland? *

YES

NO

10. Did you have intention to immigrate WHEN YOU DECIDED TO STUDY IN FINLAND *

Intention to live in Finland after graduation

YES

NO

MAYBE

11. Which of the following factors related to education in China made you seeking education overseas? *

	Disagree		Very important			
Too Competitive to gain entry at top universities in China	<input type="radio"/> 0	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
Dislike to Chinese teaching methods	<input type="radio"/> 0	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5

12. What are the most important factors that made you decide to study internationally? *

Factors other than the mentioned ones. If no, please write 'no' 'nothing' etc.

13. How did you decide to study in Finland? *

Your decision-making process

- Linear process: 1. decision to study abroad; 2. choose a country; 3. choose an institution; 4. choose a study program
- Mixed process: I chose country/institutions/programs directly

14. Are family opinions important when deciding to study abroad? *

Least important 1 2 3 4 5 Most important

15. Are friends' opinions important when choosing a study destination? *

Least important 1 2 3 4 5 Most important

16. Did you have any previous experiences (travel, study) related to Finland? Was it an important factor when you decided coming to Finland? *

If you did not have any experience when you decided to study in Finland, please choose 0

No experience 0 1 2 3 4 5 Very important

17. Which of the followings influenced you to decide to study in Finland instead of China and other countries? And how important are they? *

0 means disagree; 1–5 means agree, but the level of importance varies

	Disagree					Very important
Finnish education institutions are well-equipped and better facilitated than that in China and other country	<input type="radio"/> 0	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
Finnish education offers more flexible course selection than China and other countries can offer	<input type="radio"/> 0	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
The reputation of education (overall education quality, institutions, programs/profession) in Finland is better than that in China and other countries	<input type="radio"/> 0	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
Finland has better developed economy and social welfare than China and other countries	<input type="radio"/> 0	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
The environment (less polluted) in Finland is better than China and other countries	<input type="radio"/> 0	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
Tuition fee and living costs in Finland is relatively lower	<input type="radio"/> 0	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
Finland provides work permit for international students	<input type="radio"/> 0	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
Finland is an exciting place with opportunity to gain fresh experiences	<input type="radio"/> 0	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5

18. Which of these following may be considered difficulties in choosing Finland as the study destination? *

0 means disagree; 1–5 means agree but the level of importance/difficulty varies

	Disagree					Very Difficult
Applying Visa	<input type="radio"/> 0	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
Finding job (during study and after graduation)	<input type="radio"/> 0	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
Communication (language barrier)	<input type="radio"/> 0	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
Integrate into the society: cultural difference (different ways of living, tradition, value, customs)	<input type="radio"/> 0	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
Integrate into the society: potential discrimination towards internationals or Asian people	<input type="radio"/> 0	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5

19. What are the most important factors that made you come and study in Finland? *

Strong personal preference towards this country/an institution; intention to immigrate; parent's decision; family members living in Finland; etc.

Appendix 2 Interview questions

1. Why did you decide not to study domestically but internationally?
2. How do you make decisions regarding studying abroad? A liner process or a mixed process?
3. Whose opinions influenced your decision.
4. What factors do you consider when deciding which country to study at?
5. When you were deciding where to study, what factors brought you to Finland in particular instead of other countries? What in Finland attracted you.
6. Do you have any previous experience related to Finland before you came to study?

7. What factors made you satisfied about the study experience in Finland and what made you dissatisfied?