

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT MARKETING EFFORTS  
DIRECTED AT INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN  
STILLWATER, OKLAHOMA

By

SURESH JOSEPH

Master of Arts

Madras School of Social Work

Madras, India

1987

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate College of the  
Oklahoma State University  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for  
the Degree of  
MASTER OF SCIENCE  
May, 1996

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT MARKETING EFFORTS  
DIRECTED AT INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN  
STILLWATER, OKLAHOMA

Thesis Approved:

Maurice J. Nemceck  
Thesis Adviser

Robert J. Melchers

Charles J. Hennes

Thomas C. Collins  
Dean of the Graduate College

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to my thesis adviser, Dr. Maureen Nemecek, for her guidance and advice throughout this study. I also wish to thank my graduate adviser, Dr. Charles A. Fleming, for his advice throughout the program, and Dr. Steven Smethers, for serving on my committee.

I am thankful to the international students at the Oklahoma State University, for without their co-operation and participation, this study would not have been possible.

I am indebted to my parents for their support and understanding, without which my aspirations would have no basis.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	11
III. METHODOLOGY.....	21
IV. FINDINGS.....	31
V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS .....	44
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	54
APPENDICES.....	57
TRANSCRIBED SCRIPT .....	58

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The number of international students in the United States has swelled from practically nothing in the academic year 1954 - 55, to almost half-a-million in 1995.<sup>1</sup> This forty year trend of an increasing number of foreign students is likely to continue, at least in the near future.

These culturally diverse students come together in various universities around the United States. Each student having spent nearly 15 to 20 years in his/her home country is now exposed to a completely new set of customs, culture, system and practices. While the international student's ability to cope academically may be of primary importance, other non-academic issues such as their social, psychological and personal adjustments also draw a lot of attention. It is on these platforms that the students build their academic success.

Among their personal adjustments the international students are faced with new options and choices as consumers. This is a communication study that attempts to examine the students' reactions to some of the practices they had to get accustomed to while interacting with the business community. The study also examines the strategy of local managers trying to deal with foreign students as consumers.

#### **Background**

The United States is multicultural and is increasingly becoming so. Nearly one of every four Americans claim African, Asian, Hispanic, or American Indian ancestry in 1990, compared to only one in five in the 1980 census.<sup>2</sup>

This trend is also evident among the U.S. universities. While “domestic enrollments are falling,”<sup>3</sup> the number of international students attending American universities has “increased steadily.”<sup>4</sup> The “economic recession coupled with the shortage of college-age Americans” has forced the colleges to “look overseas for students.”<sup>5</sup> This is understandable because, according to a study by the Institute of International Education, only 19.6% of the foreign students depend on funds from sources within the United States, either from the government or the universities.<sup>6</sup> The result of this is valuable foreign exchange for the American economy. Therefore, these factors are steadily transforming the universities into small multicultural societies.

While “globalization” is the rage among the American colleges, the international students in turn “enrich the intellectual life of a campus.”<sup>7</sup> However, for the local business community this cultural and ethnic diversity represents a set of customers with “unique needs, negotiation styles, and expectations.”<sup>8</sup> For the students, functioning in a culture different from their own is “tiring and exasperating.”<sup>9</sup> There is obvious discomfort here for both parties. While the foreigner tends to “blame the culture that is being experienced,” people in the United States “often lack sympathy for and patience with those who do not” speak English.<sup>10</sup>

Oklahoma State University in Stillwater is located 50 miles northeast of Oklahoma City. With a population of 40,000, this town's activities depend on the university. Nearly half this population consists of students. The number of international students enrolled during fall '95 were 1,866.<sup>11</sup> This figure has increased by 10.4 percent<sup>12</sup> over the last couple of years.

The local businesses in Stillwater are also experiencing the national trend of trying to communicate across cultures. This university town, with the increasing enrollment of foreign students,<sup>13</sup> is steadily becoming a multicultural society. In this setting, the marketing communicator or the local business manager, may consider adopting a "special sensitivity towards [each and every] group for whom the [marketing] message is intended,"<sup>14</sup> or, since the "consumer is an adaptive system"<sup>15</sup> hope that over time they would adapt and learn a common message. A possible outcome of this is the "distrust of advertising"<sup>16</sup> and make the systems, which are for the convenience of the most dominant class, seem "depersonalizing."<sup>17</sup>

At Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, the International Students Office conducts orientation programs for new students arriving every semester. According to the co-ordinator, the dominant focus of this orientation is academic, however, familiarizing the foreign students to the local businesses is limited to a visit to some stores and banks. Discussions about some of the locally accepted systems and practices and also ways to effectively interact with the local business community have thus far not been considered.<sup>18</sup>

## Theoretical Framework

The Stillwater community consists of various social groups. The international students would form a distinct group due to their unfamiliarity with the local culture and language patterns.

The local media needs to recognize this group while disseminating information. However, due to their larger number compared to international students, the media will be more inclined towards the interest of the dominant group. Therefore, the resulting messages would be less relevant to the international students.

The theory of selectivity based on social category states that the effects of media are neither uniform, powerful, nor direct, but are selective and limited by social category influences.<sup>19</sup> There will be more attention to what is close, familiar, and equal and avoidance of that which is of reverse characteristics.<sup>20</sup>

The study will examine the international students opinion and attitude towards the local media advertising. A negative feedback from the students will prove the relevance of selectivity based on social categories.

The local media should reflect the local needs and interests to avoid any negative feedback. However, the international student's needs and interests may be different from that of the local Americans. Therefore, the foreign students may be more selective when choosing media that satisfy their interests. The uses and gratification theory states that the nature and origins of people's needs lead them to different patterns of media exposure.<sup>21</sup> The lack of attention to and interest in the local media advertising would support the above theory.



In the above instances, it is assumed that the international students would respond similarly about the local media and its messages. However, if there are varying opinions among the foreign students, then individual differences within such groups must be considered. The selectivity theory of individual difference points out that other intervening variables such as social relationships,<sup>22</sup> may prevail, which may influence the individual's response.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the highly competitive environment of academics, providing adequate support facilities for the students enables them to perform better. While the students' primary concern is their program of study, a smooth transition into a new system aids easier adaptation. As consumers, the international students may have noticed differences while shopping in their home country as well as in the host country. These differences could hinder their ability to adjust. Therefore, there is a need to understand the kind of experience the foreign students have while trying to adjust to a new consumer environment.

This study seeks to examine the international students' reactions to the marketing efforts adopted by the local business community. This study also cross-examines what the managers of some local business establishments have done or propose to do to serve this particular student body.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The research problem for this thesis suggests that there are some differences that the foreign student has to get accustomed to in a university town in the United States.

With the help of focus group sessions with the students and indepth-interviews with the managers in the business community, the study attempts to examine the areas of concern for either of the above mentioned parties.

Transcripts of focus groups and interviews will be analyzed to draw attention to areas which pose some obstacles for both the buyer [students] and the seller in the conduct of better business.

### **Methodology**

Marketing managers and media executives from the local business community were interviewed. This was followed by focus group sessions with international students from different countries to represent five major regions of the world. Each region was represented by 6 - 8 participants.<sup>23</sup> These interviews and focus group sessions were tape-recorded and later transcribed.

### **Research Objectives**

This study attempts to find out what the international students like/dislike about life as a consumer in Stillwater. Similarly, the study also brings to light what specific efforts the managers make to serve the foreign students here. These efforts could range from providing international products and service to mass media activities specifically for this audience.

### **Significance of the Study**

First and foremost, this study can provide some direction for future research, especially in those areas that present a problem for the international student's process of adapting to life as a consumer in the United States.

Without any prior or ongoing dialogue to help sort out issues causing concern, the international students and the local managers may be unaware of the kind of pressure to which the other side is being subjected. This study draws the attention of each parties to some issues that need to be dealt with differently, and also, it is hoped, initiate some kind of productive interaction.

In general, the study also demonstrates a need for specific orientation lectures for incoming international students on how to interact with the local business community. These lectures conducted by the university could help the students circumvent these problems even before they are encountered.

### **Scope and Limitations**

This study will be limited to the international student at the Oklahoma State University and the managers/executives of businesses in Stillwater.

The number of focus groups sessions were limited to only five regions representing South Asia, Africa, Latin America, East Asia and Eastern Europe. With 6 - 8 participants per group, the study was restricted to approximately 35 international students. The duration of each group session was approximately 1 hour.<sup>24</sup> The sessions were conducted during the first 3 weeks of the spring semester to ensure student participation.

Focus groups produce "chaotic data" with "little comparability from group to group."<sup>25</sup> However, the researcher ensured uniform coverage of topics across all the groups so that some comparability among groups is possible.

Another limitation of focus groups is the need to "maintain homogeneity in order to foster discussion."<sup>26</sup> However, the researcher grouped the participants

according to regions to ensure homogeneity of background. For example, students from Africa were grouped together. This helped to limit disparity and provide some common ground.

The study also includes interviews with local managers and media executives. The total number of interviews was limited to 13 managers of local businesses, who are responsible for marketing and advertising to the students.

This study has been conducted with a limited sample. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized.

### **Organization of the Study**

Chapter II reviews research literature specific to international students as consumers. Chapter III details the research methodology utilized in this study. Chapter IV discusses the findings from the focus group sessions with the international students, and the depth-interviews with the managers of business firms in Stillwater. And finally, Chapter V presents the conclusions derived from this study and provides recommendations for further research.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>Alice Dembner. "Help Exists for Foreign Students," The Boston Globe, May 31, 1995, p. 24.
- <sup>2</sup>Marlene L. Rossman. Multicultural Marketing. New York, NY: AMACOM, 1994: 3.
- <sup>3</sup>L. C. Solomon, and B. J. Young. The Foreign Student Factor. New York, NY: Institute of International Education, 1987:93.
- <sup>4</sup>N. E. Mncadi. (Dissertation): International Graduate Students Problems and Coping Strategies. Stillwater, Oklahoma State University. 1993: 1.
- <sup>5</sup>L. S. Walters. "International Student Enrollment Is Growing," Christian Science Monitor. Oct 2, 1991: 11.
- <sup>6</sup>John Haskins. "Foreign Students: Who Are They?," New York Times. Jan 4, 1995: A-17.
- <sup>7</sup>Stephanie Zimmermann. "Perceptions of Intercultural Communication Competence and International Student Adaptation to an American Campus," Communication Education. Oct 1995: 325.
- <sup>8</sup>Sondra Thiederman. Profiting in America's Multicultural Marketplace. New York, NY: Lexington Books, 1991: 1.
- <sup>9</sup>M. W. Lustig, and J. Koester. Intercultural Competence. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993: 180.
- <sup>10</sup>Ibid., 181.
- <sup>11</sup>International Students Newsletter, Fall 1995.
- <sup>12</sup>Ibid., 7.
- <sup>13</sup>Ibid., 7.
- <sup>14</sup>Tom Griffin. International Marketing Communication. Oxford, GB: Butterworth Heinemann Ltd., 1993: 85.
- <sup>15</sup>Erdener Kaynak. The Global Business. Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Press, Inc., 1993: 20.

- <sup>16</sup>J. C. Andrews, S. Lysonski, and S. Durvasula. "Understanding Cross-Cultural Student Perceptions of Advertising in General," Journal of Advertising. Jun 1991: 17.
- <sup>17</sup>N. T. Kelly, and S. H. M. Reekie. "Culture Shock," JOPERD. Nov-Dec 1987: 43.
- <sup>18</sup>Co-ordinator, International Students Office, interview by author, Telephone conversation, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 29, Mar 1996.
- <sup>19</sup>L. Lowery, and M. L. DeFleur. Milestones in Mass Communication Research. New York, NY: Longman Inc., 1983: 26.
- <sup>20</sup>D. McQuail. Mass Communication Theory. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications, 1983: 168.
- <sup>21</sup>L. Lowery, and M. L. DeFleur. Milestones in Mass Communication Research. New York, NY: Longman Inc., 1983: 374.
- <sup>22</sup>Ibid., 174.
- <sup>23</sup>D. L. Morgan. Focus Groups As Qualitative Research. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1988: 43.
- <sup>24</sup>Ibid., 42.
- <sup>25</sup>Ibid., 18.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid., 46.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **Overview**

This chapter covers multicultural marketing in the United States, marketing studies using the students as consumers at the universities and, finally, discusses relevant marketing studies using international students as subjects.

#### **Multicultural Marketing**

Culture gives identity and the code of conduct that one lives by. It is learned, shared, and passed on from one generation to the next, by families, by religious institutions, by schools and governments. "Culture is learned behavior that distinguishes members of a society and includes what the group thinks, says, and does."<sup>1</sup> Cateora defines culture as

"the human made part of the human environment - the sum total of knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, customs, and many other capabilities and habits acquired by humans as members of society".<sup>2</sup>

This 'learned behavior', especially among migrating adults, is not shed the moment they set foot in a different country with a new culture.

The U.S. domestic market is increasingly made up of foreign-born consumers. These are immigrants from diverse cultures -- one unlike the other. Immigration in the 1990s has been greater than in the 1980s. By the year 2010, Rossman, a market research professional, predicts there will be nearly 35 million

foreign-born people in the United States.<sup>3</sup> The trend indicates greater diversity in the years to come. Marketers are realizing that such culturally distinct segments cannot all be successfully targeted with the same goods and services via the same marketing and advertising strategies that succeeded prior to 1990 when the United States was 75 percent<sup>4</sup> white Americans. While the mainstream U.S. culture stresses the importance of the individual, other cultures may be rooted in totally opposite beliefs and behaviors. In addition, recessionary conditions in the economy and the spending power exercised by such segments has made it worthwhile to consider tailor-made marketing strategies for such groups.

This brings up the concept of segmentation. In the past millions were expended on marketing to some "average" or a "typical" target consumer. However, as the "land of immigrants" gets even more culturally diverse the opposite is employed. Marketing strategists emphasize that nearly all businesses serve a multitude of market segments, and future market share gains will be realized by companies that target emerging market segments and win them. Dr. Robert Buzzell, professor of business administration at Harvard University, said that most businesses achieving major share gains did so by focusing their efforts on selected segments, often ones that were relatively small at first.<sup>5</sup>

Many of the foreign born have adopted the culture of mainstream American society,<sup>6</sup> and in the process blur the distinction between the various segments. However, the need to communicate across cultures is as always important. The adoption of the American culture does not obliterate the immigrants affiliation to the culture native to their own country. Cognizance of



such diverse cultures and their values becomes necessary, while communicating.

Cross--cultural consumer research first emerged in the 1970s, when studies compared U.S. data with those of other cultural settings.<sup>7</sup> Subsequent studies examined how Blacks and Hispanics responded to differing marketing tactics,<sup>8</sup> thus setting a stage for cross-cultural studies of people within the United States. In the mid and late eighties the studies often dealt with the process of consumer acculturation.<sup>9</sup>

The international students acculturation to life in the American university has attracted considerable attention in academic circles. However, there is a lack of studies specifically addressing the international students acculturation as a consumer.

### **The International Student as a Consumer**

Just as America is fast becoming a melting pot of cultures, its universities and school are also following the same trend. For our purpose we will limit this discussion to the universities. The reason is that the adult is bound to have a stronger bonding to his past culture than a kid from school. Therefore, marketing to adults requires that we understand a lot more about them before venturing out to communicate. In a recent study researchers attempted to find a common construct or model of consumer behavior that can be applied across cultures and nations.<sup>10</sup> Using three procedures--a national - level analysis, a multigroup analysis, and a pooled - data analysis, the study found variations in opinions about advertising among the cultures.

Each year a significant number of students from different parts of the world come to the United States in search of higher education. In the year 1992 there were 457,627 nonresident alien students, enrolled in US colleges and universities.<sup>11</sup> This inflow of students from other countries, each with their own distinct culture, has replicated the national scenario of multicultural consumers on a local level -- the university. Andrews, Lysonski, and Durvasula<sup>12</sup> studied cross-cultural student perceptions of advertising. Students from the United States alongwith those from New Zealand, Greece, Denmark, and India were sampled for their thoughts about advertising in general and found significant differences across these countries.

The segmented approach to marketing being adopted at the national level has thus far not filtered down to smaller communities. The studies at the university level have broached a much more general topic. Stivers<sup>13</sup> analyzed the clothing buying practices of 170 male undergraduate students. A questionnaire method was used to obtain data pertaining to the purchase of specific clothing items. While the students at The University of Kentucky paid more for their sports coats and shopped more frequently in department store, the students at The University of Tennessee patronized speciality stores.

Darby<sup>14</sup> conducted a marketing and readership analysis of students. The study surveyed the reading, shopping, dining habits of the student community. The end result was to provide a clearer description of the student body for the college newspaper. This description then enabled the newspaper to present a more accurate picture of its reading audience to the clients.

In another study, Willis<sup>15</sup> explored the extent to which consumers were aware of being influenced by interpersonal contact and mass advertising in the purchase of consumer products. This study was administered to a larger audience, namely the residents of a university town, and was not confined to students. The findings indicate that interpersonal relations do influence the purchase of products.

More specifically, studies on international students in the U.S. universities have concentrated on, for example changes in attitudes. Loomis and Schuler<sup>16</sup> examined Latin American students' attitudes on a variety of issues such as fair play, punctuality, divorce, and dignity of labor, and compared their attitude on the same issues after a one year stay in the United States. The results of this study mention that the respondents tended to vary in their attitudes after their stay in the U.S. Those who came to the country left preferring the situation in the U.S. as compared to their own countries.

Wilson<sup>17</sup> studied the extent of social relationships of international students attending Oklahoma State University. The study was to determine if the extent and type of social relationships are related to the attitudes of these international students toward the university. Individual characteristics and environmental factors influenced the attitudes and involvement of international students towards the university.

Another study examined the adaptation of international students to the various aspects of the American culture. Utilizing multiple sources of information, Kibede<sup>18</sup> studied the social interaction and language problems of 400

international students at Oklahoma State University. The study found that the international students who consider themselves as temporary sojourners in a given society, are more likely to commit themselves to their own culture rather than participate in the life activities of the new cultural setting. Also language competence increased both adjustment and social interaction among the international students.

Meloni<sup>19</sup> surveyed the adjustment problems of international students attending U.S. colleges and universities. Problems such as homesickness, finances, housing, food, language proficiency and making friends were listed as most common.

In a study published by the National Association for Foreign Student Affairs, Lee<sup>20</sup> conducted the research to determine the met and unmet needs of foreign students from developing nations at U.S. universities. Practical experience or internships were identified as the least met needs of international students who participated in this study.

Zimmermann<sup>21</sup> examined perceptions of intercultural communication competence and adaptation in international students studying on an American campus. According to this study, talking with American students was the single most important factor in perceptions of communication competency and adjusting to American life.

A study by Moftakar<sup>22</sup> looked at problems encountered by students from a specific country. This descriptive study examined the problems faced by the Iranian students attending Oklahoma State University. Adjusting to a new

environment and English language proficiency were identified as the major problems for the students in this study.

It is evident from the above review that the bulk of the studies concerning international students addressed issues that are academic, social and personal in nature. However, there are a few studies that looked at the international student as a consumer of goods and services.

Andrews, Lysonski and Durvasula<sup>23</sup> studied international students' perception of advertising in general. A total of 553 undergraduate students from the United States, New Zealand, Denmark, Greece, and India were sampled for their thoughts about advertising. The results indicate significant differences across countries on advertising functions, and practices, the industry, and users of advertising. It must be noted that this study was conducted across students residing in different countries and not international students in a host country.

A doctoral dissertation study on international students, this time by Punjavat,<sup>24</sup> at Oregon State University, dealt with the usage of credit cards and the satisfaction levels. The findings showed a general lack of knowledge about credit cards and pre--U.S. experience limited. However their attitude towards credit cards were favorable.

### **Summary and Implications**

This study is built on the overall framework of the international students as a consumer of goods and services on a U.S. university campus. Coming from a different cultures, the international students are accustomed to certain systems and practices as consumers, acceptable in their respective countries. These may

not be likewise in the United States. Therefore the international students, in the process of consuming, is exposed to a new system or practice of dealing with the business community. The resulting adjustment may or may not present a problem.

Prior studies have dealt with the international students' adjustment problems in academics, language, and social interactions. However, their interaction with the business community has received very little attention. It is evident from the literature review that the international students have problems adjusting to life here in America. While the bulk of the studies are limited to understanding how the student is coping academically, problems encountered as a consumer have yet to receive considerable attention.

It is hoped that this study will provide some insights into how the international student has managed as a consumer. What are the differences in the system that they have to understand? What differences come as a welcome relief, and with what others do they have difficulties? How can communication bridge this gap and ease their entry into U.S. life? Overall, the study will attempt to give directions for further research into specific areas where the international student needs help as a consumer.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>Marlene L. Rossman. Multicultural Marketing. New York, NY: AMACOM, 1994: 32.
- <sup>2</sup>Tom Griffin. International Marketing Communication. Jordan Hill, Oxford, GB: Butterworth - Heinemann Ltd, 1993:85.
- <sup>3</sup>Marlene L. Rossman. Multicultural Marketing. New York, NY: AMACOM, 1994: 9.
- <sup>4</sup>Ibid., 4.
- <sup>5</sup>Chester A. Swenson. "How to Sell to a Segmented Market," The Journal Of Business Strategy, January/February 1988: 18.
- <sup>6</sup>Sondra Thiederman. Profiting in America's Multicultural Marketplace. New York, NY: Lexington Books, 1991: 15.
- <sup>7</sup>Janeen A. Costa., and Gary J. Bamossy. Marketing in a Multicultural World. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1995: 17.
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid., 18.
- <sup>9</sup>Ibid., 18.
- <sup>10</sup>S. Durvasula., J. C. Andrews., S. Lysonski., and R. G. Netemeyer. "Assessing the Cross-national Applicability of Consumer Behavior Models: A Model of Attitude Towards Advertising in General," Journal of Consumer Research. Mar 1993.
- <sup>11</sup>Digest of Education Statistics. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Aug 1994: 211.
- <sup>12</sup>J. C. Andrews., S. Lysonski., and S. Durvasula. "Understanding Cross-cultural Student Perceptions of Advertising in General: Implications for Advertising Educators and Practitioners," Journal of Advertising. Jun 1991.
- <sup>13</sup>Susan Faye Stivers. (Master's Thesis): Clothing Buying Practices of Undergraduate Men At The University of Kentucky. The University Of Tennessee, 1974.
- <sup>14</sup>Patricia Dawn Darby. (Master's Thesis): A Marketing And Readership Analysis Of The Oklahoma State University Community. Stillwater, 1994.

- <sup>15</sup>Jack Delano Willis. (Master's Thesis): A Comparison Of Personal Influence And Mass Media Advertising As Perceived Determinants Of Decisions To Purchase Three Consumer Products. Oklahoma State University, Stillwater. 1968.
- <sup>16</sup>C. P. Loomis., and E. A. Schuler. "Acculturation Of Foreign Students In The United States," Applied Anthropology. Spring 1948.
- <sup>17</sup>W. D. Wilson. (Master's Thesis). Social Relationships Of International Students Attending Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, 1975.
- <sup>18</sup>Alemseghed Kebede. (Master's Thesis): International Student Adjustment To Life At Oklahoma State University. Stillwater, 1994.
- <sup>19</sup>Christine F. Meloni. "Adjustment Problems Of Foreign Students In US Colleges and Universities." ERIC Clearinghouse on Language and Linguistics, Washington, DC.
- <sup>20</sup>Motoko Y. Lee. "Needs of Foreign Students from Developing Nations at US Colleges and Universities." National Association for Foreign Students Affairs, Washington, DC, April 1981.
- <sup>21</sup>Stephanie Zimmermann. "Perceptions of Intercultural Communication Competence and International Student Adaptation to an American Campus." Communication Education, Oct 1995.
- <sup>22</sup>Hossein Moftakar.(Master's Thesis): "A Descriptive Study of Some of the Problems of Iranian Students Attending Oklahoma State University." Stillwater 1974.
- <sup>23</sup>J. Craig Andrews, Steven Lysonski, and Srinivas Durvasula. "Understanding Cross-Cultural Student Perceptions of Advertising in General: Implications for Advertising Educators and Practitioners," Journal Of Advertising. June 1991.
- <sup>24</sup>Tapin Punjvat. (Dissertation): "Credit Cards: Understanding International Graduate Student Consumers." Oregon State University, 1992.



## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Overview**

This chapter describes the research methodology utilized in this study, research design, research questions, research objectives, selection of subjects, data collection, analysis of the data and limitations of the methodology.

#### **Research Methodology**

This study utilized a combination of focus group discussions and indepth interview methods for gathering data. The first method for the international students and the second for the business managers.

The focus group is a method of study that has been used in exploratory research. Krueger, in his *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, says that: "a focus group can be defined as a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment."<sup>1</sup>

The earliest published work using the above method of study was in the 1957, when the researchers examined the persuasiveness of wartime efforts.<sup>2</sup> Today focus groups are the predominant form of qualitative research in marketing.<sup>3</sup>

This study employs the focus group method to examine the differences in the perceptions of international students while shopping in Stillwater, Oklahoma,

compared to their own country. The study also explores student feedback on marketing efforts by the local business establishments.

The purpose for using focus group is to discover “emotional and psychological desires that drive buying behavior”<sup>4</sup> among the international students, which is otherwise difficult to obtain by structured questionnaire. Focus group discussions give the respondents a “chance to talk freely” and also enable the “interaction to be multiplicative,” each respondent becoming a richer source of information than he or she would be alone.<sup>5</sup>

The drawbacks of this method that the researcher has to contend with are “small sample size,” “limited ability to explore each person’s experience extensively,” “limited time,” “difficulties in covering topics systematically,” and the dependency on the “composition of each group to produce a good discussion.”<sup>6</sup>

The interview method, used for “descriptive and analytical purposes,”<sup>7</sup> was utilized while surveying the business managers. Direct probing techniques such as, “elaboration,” “clarification,” “silence,” and “neutral phrases”<sup>8</sup> were used to elicit better responses. However, factors such as “scarcity of time and concern for privacy”<sup>9</sup> may have hindered the data gathering process.

From the earlier review of the literature it is evident that studies on the international student as a consumer are very limited. Therefore, in the absence of background information to aid a more focused study, the group session was used to “produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group.”<sup>10</sup>

## **Research Design**

This study examines the international students' experiences as a consumer in Stillwater. In a series of focus group sessions, using students from different regions of the world, data were collected. This information was compared across the regions for a representative feedback of the international student body in Stillwater.

The topics addressed in these sessions are significant differences in the system, the experience of shopping in Stillwater, Oklahoma, compared with their home country, felt deficiencies in the local environment and relevance of local advertising. These are the broad areas of probable concern that the researcher deemed worth examining. With the help of focus groups it is hoped that issues within these broad areas would develop, warranting individualized study utilizing narrow parameters.

## **Research Questions**

This study addressed the following topics for the focus group discussion:

- Differences in shopping here compared to their own country.
- Likes/dislikes about their shopping experiences here in Stillwater.
- Customer service extended at the local stores.
- Sources of information they rely on before making a purchase decision?
- Level of comprehension of local advertising.(Show examples)
- If they were a local entrepreneur what are some of the changes they would make to better serve the international students?

- Are there any services lacking in Stillwater that they find necessary?

The following were the topics for the indepth interviews with the local business managers:

- Specific efforts taken to inform the international community in Stillwater about the services being offered?
- Any new system within the store to make the international students shopping experience more enjoyable (e.g., wider variety of products, customized sales talks by the counter sales people, displays within the store, etc.)?
- Has your firm considered/considering any particular strategies to attract this consumer segment?(Have examples ready for discussion)
- Have you thought about future plans to attract this segment?
- Do you think the needs of the international are different from those of the local Americans (relating specifically to your business)?
- Have you thought about a need to understand diverse cultures therefore helping your business?
- What are some of the problems you encounter while serving the international students?

The following were the topics for the indepth interviews with the advertising managers of local media:

- Have there been any studies on international students done by your media organization?
- What information, about the international students, do your sales people use while making their client presentations?

- How do the international students fit into your overall marketing/advertising strategy?

### **Research Objectives**

The primary objective of this study is to serve as an exploratory research to find probable areas that warrant further scrutiny.

Second, what according to the international students are some of the difficulties that they face as consumers here in Stillwater.

### **Selection of Subjects**

The participants for the indepth interviews were selected from an available sample<sup>11</sup> of local business managers.

The international students at the Oklahoma State University represent 104 countries<sup>12</sup> from around the world. Forming one group per country was not possible due to time constraint and the non-availability of adequate numbers in some to form a group of 6 to 8 participants. Therefore the countries were grouped in terms of cultural similarities and proximity with each other into five regions: South Asia, East Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe. Grouping countries enabled the researcher to "maintain homogeneity in order to foster discussion."<sup>13</sup>

Students in each group were selected out of a volunteer sample.<sup>14</sup> Care was taken to ensure a cross section of students. The groups constituted a non-random selection of graduates / under-graduates, married / single and across different majors. Each group consisted of 6 to 8 members.<sup>15</sup>

The participants were solicited via acquaintances and requested to volunteer.

### **Data Collection**

In-depth interviews of managers of local business establishments, were conducted to examine their service extended to the international students here in Stillwater.

The focus group sessions with the students were scheduled at 5:00 p.m. to facilitate participation. After brief introductions the conduct and the role of the participants and moderators were explained. The moderator then introduced the topics for discussion. The entire session was tape recorded and later transcribed.

### **Data Analysis**

The transcribed information was scanned for salient issues which were then categorized. For example, the issue of customer service, product choice, advertising comprehension, etc., form the codes under which the participants responses are listed.

### **Limitations of the Methodology**

The responses generally favored by the participants tended to be strengthened by group interaction. This is referred to as "group polarization." <sup>16</sup> For example, if a negative attitude about customer service was being harbored by all the participants prior to the discussion, such an attitude was further enhanced during the discussion.

Some regions afforded a small subject population from which the final list of participants were selected. This increased the chances of 'friends' on the panel, who could have influenced the discussion.

While the groups were homogeneous with respect to which world region the members came from, at the same time the distribution of countries within these groups proved they were not. With the exception of the South Asians, the other groups consisted of participants who were not very familiar with the others within the same region. This resulted in a general climate of respect for the other person's opinion and the relative lack of counter arguments.

Another limitation to the study was the moderator's nationality. While the the moderator was 'accepted' by the group of same nationality, which enabled free flow of conversation, this was not so with the other groups.

The discussions at these focus group sessions were in English. Certain groups displayed lack of fluency with this language which inhibited their ideas and opinions.

The discussions were only tape recorded. The lack of time and money prohibited the use of video tape through one way mirror. This would have enabled a much detailed analysis of the participants' responses. It also might have inhibited their response because of its obstrusiveness.

The sample selection was not a random process.

The data gathering was done by an inexperienced moderator and interviewer. Also the fact that the interviewer was a foreign national may have

hindered the free flow of opinions and feelings from the local managers. This is a definite limitation of the study.



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>Richard A. Krueger. Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1988: 18.
- <sup>2</sup>David L. Morgan. Focus Groups As Qualitative Research. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1988: 11.
- <sup>3</sup>Ibid., 10.
- <sup>4</sup>Robin Andersen. "Emotional Ties That Bind: Focus Groups, Psychoanalysis, and Consumer Culture," Consumer Culture & TV Programming. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995: 74.
- <sup>5</sup>C.W. Downs., G.P. Smeyak., and E. Martin. Professional Interviewing. New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1980: 395-6.
- <sup>6</sup>Ibid., 397-8.
- <sup>7</sup>Grant McCracken. The Long Interview. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 1988: 9.
- <sup>8</sup>C.W. Downs., G.P. Smeyak., and E. Martin. Professional Interviewing. New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1980: 88.
- <sup>9</sup>Grant McCracken. The Long Interview. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 1988: 11.
- <sup>10</sup>M. Agar., and J. MacDonald. "Focus Groups and Ethnography," Human Organization, Spring 1995:78.
- <sup>11</sup>Roger D. Wimmer., and Joseph R. Dominick. Mass Media Research. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1987: 71.
- <sup>12</sup>International Students Newsletter. Fall 1995.
- <sup>13</sup>David L. Morgan. Focus Groups As Qualitative Research. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1988: 46.
- <sup>14</sup>Roger D. Wimmer., and Joseph R. Dominick. Mass Media Research. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1987: 72.
- <sup>15</sup>David L. Morgan. Focus Groups As Qualitative Research. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1988: 43.

<sup>16</sup>D. G. Myers., and H. Lamm. "The Polarizing Effect of Group Discussion." American Scientist, May - June, 1975: 137.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Overview**

This chapter discusses the findings under various topic headings such as shopping practices, customer service, variety of products, price and local advertising. Woven into this discussion are the findings from the interviews with the local business managers.

For this purpose students from five different world regions were selected. Each region was represented by 6 to 8 students. Focus group sessions were held, one for each region, wherein the participants discussed various topics. These sessions were tape recorded.

First, the managers of local business establishments were interviewed. The businesses represented a cross-section of those providing service to international students. The concerns included groceries, video rentals, restaurants, real estate agents, automobile dealers, clothing stores and the local media.

The following are the findings categorized under appropriate headings.

#### **Service**

##### Student

The customer service in the business establishments here in Stillwater have been credited as being "fast" and "efficient" but "impersonal." A female

veterinary medicine graduate student from India, South Asia, said that, “at home you can go to the shop give them a list and the shopkeeper will actually take it [products] off a shelf and give it to you.” The service is personal to the extent that you develop a friendly “relationship” with the shopkeeper. “In WalMart you see one person [salesperson] now and a different person tomorrow”, said a female business major from Sri Lanka, South Asia.

When asked what practice from back home they would like to see implemented here, a female agricultural economics major from Ecuador, Latin America, said, “the personal service... you don’t know [information] about a product; there is no one to help unless you ask for [it].” Shoppers, it seems, are to fend for themselves. “The Americans are individual[istic]” according to a male industrial engineering student from Sri Lanka, and therefore would probably prefer being left alone while shopping.

Therefore while the service was fast and efficient, the international students felt that the system of self help was contributing to the overall feeling of an ‘impersonalized’ shopping atmosphere.

## **Method of Payment**

### Student

When asked what differences they noticed while shopping in Stillwater, the method of payment was cited as an important point for discussion. “You get credit here,” said a participant from Malaysia, East Asia. This choice of “cash, credit card or check” stood out against the “strictly cash” in most other countries.

### Manager

A marketing executive from a local automobile dealer described the international students as being "prompt" with their payments. The payments problems with internationals are "no different" from those of local residents, said another marketing executive with a real estate agency.

While the students appreciated the choice in the method of payment, the local managers credited the international students as being responsible when meeting their payment obligations.

### **Shopping Centers**

#### Student

"Supermarkets are not available [in my country], but in the city we have big markets, but it is hardly a supermarket," according to a male mass communication student from Poland, Eastern Europe. This was true among the other regions too. The regions, such as East and South Asia, which do reflect some economic prosperity indicate the existence of big markets, where they do their "once a week" shopping, and for unforeseen requirements they go to the "small shops" that are located on every street. A similar arrangement can be found in Stillwater also. There are the "big stores like Walmart" for the once-a-week shopping and "when you are in hurry there are the other convenience stores around," according to a male architecture student from Bangladesh, South Asia.

"Stores are much larger and fewer here," observed one male electrical engineering student from SriLanka. According to a male computer science

student from India, they are large enough that “you can go to one shop and build a house.” The concept of one-stop shopping and the fact that they are open for 24 hours was found to be “big advantage, because we are all students,” indicated one respondent.

Another difference that the students mentioned was the presence of calculators and checkout machines at the store. “It is very fast,” said a participant from Latin America. While the participants wanted to see more “personalized customer service,” typical in their country adopted here; in turn, they wanted to see the above technology in stores back home.

While the participants spoke approvingly of the size, the facilities and the technology at the supercenters, at the same time the lack of human contact concerned them. The impersonalized atmosphere at the superstores tended to make the experience of shopping less pleasant.

## **Products**

### Student

WalMart was an unanimous choice for the store that has made a discernible effort to provide international products. “Earlier we never used to have mint, tofu and rice, but now it is available,” said a female veterinary medicine student from India. However, the participants said that this ‘effort’ was limited to the “food section” only and not any other products. “Sometimes in Anthony’s [stores selling clothes] you find crushed cotton made in India or Sri Lanka, but these are not targeted at internationals but Americans,” according to this student from India. The reason why they think so is because, according to

one student, "if you compare the price here and for what you could get it at home you don't even bother." The students indicated that these products were priced too high to interest them.

Another issue of concern is product freshness. This is especially so with vegetables. According to one student from Africa, vegetables that are available only during seasons back at home are available all year long here in Stillwater. "You know [the vegetables have] been there for almost ten days," said a female agricultural education student from Namibia, Africa. According to a male mass communication student from Poland, "back at home farmers sell vegetables everyday and you can be sure it is fresh and does not have chemicals."

The student's next concern was about how some of these products taste. "Here it is fat-free and tasteless," said a female mass communication student from Kazakhstan, former Soviet Union, "you don't have the feeling of having eaten" a wholesome meal. For example, the corn flour that one gets in WalMart is "enriched and salted," said one participant from Africa. "It doesn't appeal to me and it is a big adjustment."

A third issue is about availability of certain specific products. "You don't get sour milk," said a female mass communication student from Kazakhstan; "I miss just simple [bakery] bread," said another, and "the Americans don't drink hot tea, they have iced tea [instead]."

All the participants were impressed with the variety of products that are available in the superstores. So varied is the choice that, according to a male electrical engineering student from Sri Lanka, it gets "confusing" at times and

that “before you buy [a product] you have to research.” So therefore though “it can be advantageous, it can also be time consuming” said a female veterinary student from India.

### Manager

According to a marketing executive from Walmart, “we provided them [foreign students] with a complete line extension of new products.” However this was limited to the food section. It appeared that in all other departments the idea was to provide what the majority would prefer.

“We do not carry any specific styles for the internationals [students],” according to a local retailer for garments. The international students were required to compromise in other areas too. “They sometimes ask us if more than four [residents] can stay in an apartment,” according to local a real estate agent.

With the exception of the food section in WalMart, the other stores generally provided the same products for all the local residents. The need to provide country specific products and services was not relevant.

Therefore while the international students felt that the vegetables lacked freshness and the fat free food tasteless, the managers, with the exception of WalMart, seemed to provide the same variety of products for all the local Stillwater residents.

### **Prices**

#### Student

“In my country the prices always go up,” said one student from the African continent, and the season for festivals bring higher prices in South Asian



countries. "Here the prices are set," said a male industrial engineering student from Sri Lanka. While fixed prices was the general opinion among the groups, the absence of bargaining in Stillwater was missed. "I miss bargaining in my country" said a Latin American. "You go to the open market and bargain with the farmers. It is fun," agrees a female mass communication student from Kazakhstan. Despite the accepted practice of bargaining in the automobile trade in Stillwater the students did not mention this feature. It does appear that the students were relating this lack of bargaining in the market place specifically to groceries and clothes and not to automobiles.

In addition to the fixed prices the fact that one could return products that do not measure up to one's satisfaction, was mentioned with spontaneity by all. "In my country, the bills [receipt] state that goods once sold will not be taken back," remarked a female veterinary medicine student from India. This rules out securing exchanges for inferior products also. The buyer ought to be careful, otherwise, "there are 90% chances of being cheated for a low quality product," said a male architecture student from Bangladesh, South Asia.

While the 'fixed prices' and the 'return policies' were appreciated, the cost of international products sold here in Stillwater was felt to be on the expensive side. "You look at the price and compare for what you can get at home you don't bother to buy it," according to a student from South Asia.

#### Manager

"Even the Americans love to haggle over prices" says a local automobile dealer. However this is limited to the above business. Managers of other

businesses did not experience the need to bargain over prices with the local residents as well as the international students.

The convenience of bargaining here in Stillwater is limited to the automobile trade and possibly a few other businesses such as furniture stores. However, it is the grocery and the garment stores that the international student frequents the most. The lack of bargaining at these outlets made the chore of shopping less enjoyable.

### **Ambiance**

#### Student

Through all the discussions it was evident that the countries in the participating regions have open air markets in addition to indoor shopping centers or malls. While the malls sell all kinds of products, the open markets were limited to vegetables and fruits or artifacts from the local community. These open markets serve as a central meeting place for the farmers or craftsman to gather and sell their produce. These markets not only sell fresh produce but also allow bargaining according to one student from Africa. "Towards the evening they [farmers] sell it cheaper," apparently to dispose and to start with fresh stock the next day.

Not only do these open air markets sell fresh produce and allow bargaining, they also offer an avenue to engage in routine, everyday conversation. "You have a lot of human contact in the open market," said a female mass communication student from Kazakhstan. "You discuss prices with them [shopkeeper], the weather, and everything else."

The international students mentioned the lack of open air markets here in Stillwater. These markets, according to them, afforded a lot of human contact and made shopping fun.

## **Communication**

### Student

“Most of the time I can understand what they [customer service personnel] are saying but they can’t,” says one student from Africa. “I think they are making fun of us.” Offering a different variation of the above problem, “I think it is our accent,” said a male electrical engineering student from Sri Lanka. Qualifying the point the participant added that the international students tend to speak fast in comparison to the local Americans. “When I tried to speak very slowly and pronounce all the words I found they are able to understand.” Suggesting a probable solution to this, a female agricultural education student from Namibia, indicates that the phrase “What did you say,” can be substituted with “Can you spell it out for me” in the local customer service parlance. “Then we know it is the difference in the accent.”

The international students’ inability to make themselves understood does inhibit the students’ ability to make an informed choice while shopping. “You cannot communicate [effectively] when you want to buy some specific product. General stuff[products] it is easy,” according to one participant from East Asia. In a similar situation, “you go to a restaurant and when asked to choose from a variety of side dishes you go for the first one.” “You don’t know what it

means," says a participant from Africa, and do not ask to avoid embarrassment, and "at the end of the day you don't like what you had."

Yet others get an impression that the local businesses harbor some preconceived notions about internationals that are negative. "They judge you even before you have spoken" said a female veterinary medicine student from India. While the students from South Asia and Africa mentioned possible discrimination the East Asians, Latin Americans and the Eastern Europeans did not encounter any unpleasantness. "It is the nature of the average American to be suspicious of the black man," said an African, and the South Asians also mentioned that they were subjected to some "suspicion" by the people in the local stores.

#### Manager

The local businesses do have their own problems communicating with foreign students. "We speak slowly and ask them to repeat what they said if we didn't get it the first time," remarked a local automobile dealer. "We are willing to work with them, because we want their business too." "We do not discriminate, we provide them with the same kind of service that we provide everyone else with," countered a real estate agent.

Overall, the international students thought communication problems did exist while interacting with the local business community. This problem was also associated with possible discrimination by the Africans and South Asians. The managers also felt that there is a problem when trying to communicate with the international student, but denied there being any discrimination on their part.

## **Advertising**

### Student

The advertising on the local media has been described by the participants as amateurish, too much, repetitive, of low quality and aggressive. The students also treat the advertisements with a certain element of suspicion. "The shops say 50% off [in their advertisements] it is not really so," says a student from Africa. "I get suspicious of the literature here. It is the people who put in the information and they are very impersonal, but back at home the culture is more personal," said a participant from Africa. It appears that the overall 'impersonal' business community also earns the international student's distrust towards the advertising, by the community. Therefore before buying a product, particularly an expensive one, the internationals consult other friends who have the product. This, in general, was the opinion expressed across the regions participating in the study.

The newspapers present a medium for looking up "roommates," "sale," "free stuff," thus limiting the international student's interest primarily to the classified section. With regard to the advertising for local businesses, the international students indicated their awareness that these are designed with the "large population" in mind.

### Manager

According to an Advertising Manager at a local newspaper, "the international students represent a financially lucrative audience." However the need to advertise specifically to them is "beyond most local budgets." Most of the local small businesses "just try to get by," and do not spend too much time and

effort trying to customize their advertising to each and every group within the audience. This was true of all the businesses interviewed for the study.

The media also do not present any specific data about the international students to their clients. The media use the general information, about internationals, available from the Chamber of Commerce. "Our presentations to clients are not very formal," says the advertising manager of a local radio station, to warrant any "specific data about international students." The fact that none of the interviewed media had done any research to understand the international student may be because this is not a priority.

The immediate future also does not reveal any specific effort or strategy for the internationals from the local businesses as well as the media. However there is a need to "appeal to a narrower audience", according to a media executive, "the wider your audience... it[advertising] gets boring and has no effect at all."

The international students indicated a general disregard for the local advertising. This indifference seems to flow from the fact that the local managers advertising is focused to attract the local residents, and hence does not make any sense to the internationals.

### **Other Findings**

When asked what other service the international students would like to see in Stillwater more ethnic restaurants was the unanimous choice. A restaurant with international cuisine catering to the larger groups within the student body was the suggestion.

The participants said the local businesses should try to interact more closely with the international students. This they said can be done with the help of newsletters or other forms of communication, informing the internationals about their services and how they can take advantage of them. It is important that this be done early in the first semester. "It makes us feel welcome," said one participant from Africa. According to a male industrial engineering student from Sri Lanka, "when we are made to feel special we in turn go there [for our requirements], and also recommend it to our friends." Also company "sponsorship" of international activities will help promote the business with this student body. For example, an event such as the International Cultural Night would be ideal to promote the company's name among the students.

Another suggestion is for the local businesses to "understand how shopping is done in other countries" and "implement" some of those foreign systems and practices here in Stillwater. This makes the international students "feel at home."

## **CHAPTER V**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The concluding chapter of the study will briefly summarize the methodology and the findings from the earlier chapters. The study will then attempt to draw some conclusions and, finally, make a few recommendations.

#### **Summary**

The international students, on arrival here in the United States, undergo a variety of adjustments. (These could range from the changes in weather to customs such as opening doors for others.) A number of studies have dealt with the students' social and psychological problems, but very few relating to their needs as consumers.

International students from various countries around the world were grouped to find out what their reactions were to some of the systems and practices they had to become accustomed to as consumers in Stillwater, Oklahoma. The managers of local community businesses were also interviewed for their side of the picture.

The university has international students from a 104 countries. These countries were grouped into five regions, namely, Africa, South Asia, East Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe. Students were then selected from these countries to comprise a group of 6 to 8 members for each region. The groups were then assembled on different days for a focus group discussion that was



tape-recorded. In addition, the study includes interviews with managers of local business establishments. These are stores that offer service to the students of the university. These interviews were again tape-recorded and later transcribed.

The data obtained were categorized under separate topics.

### Service

The internationals, who represent approximately 10% of the student body at Oklahoma State University, said the service extended by the local retail stores was fast and efficient, but rather impersonal. They desired more interaction with the store personnel. This would help make their shopping experience more enjoyable, and it would then be closer to what they were used to back home.

The foreign students were accustomed to being attended to personally while shopping in their own country. In direct contrast to this in Stillwater there is nobody to help unless the customer goes looking for one. For example, the students from South Asia mentioned that they were used to being attended to on an individual basis, and that one could give a list to the shopkeeper and come back later to pick up the products. There was no need to search for the products and they in turn saved a lot of time. Also, they developed a close relationship with the shopkeeper over a period of time. This they found to be beneficial. However, in Stillwater, the attendant was always a different person and thus contributed to the overall feeling that shopping here is "very impersonal." The students indicated that personalized service was the single most enjoyable feature of shopping back in their own countries, that they would like to see implemented here in Stillwater.

The local managers, however, assume that the international shoppers like the freedom, as Americans do, and would prefer to shop unattended.

The research also indicated that the local businesses do not have any specific plan for serving the international clientele, using instead one common service that is extended to all the residents of this university town.

### Payment

The method of payment was appreciated by all the participants. While it was more or less strictly cash in their own countries, here they had the freedom to choose between cash, credit cards or checks.

The international students were no different than the local Americans when it comes to paying their monthly bills. The managers said that the internationals made their payments on time, and that they found them to be responsible when it comes to meeting their financial commitments.

### One-stop-shopping

Foreign students remarked that the stores were fewer but larger. In their countries the shopper had to go to different stores for different products, etc. The fact that one could shop for everything under one roof came as a pleasant experience for all.

The students also enjoyed the convenience of 24 hour shopping. The students found this beneficial since they could choose to shop when they had the time.

### Technology

Another finding was that the checkout machines and the cash registers available here in all the stores did not exist in countries elsewhere. The technology contributed to the efficiency and speeded up the process of shopping.

While the internationals wanted more personalized service akin to their own country implemented here, on the other hand, the above american technology is what they would like to see in their own country.

### International Products

Walmart was the unanimous choice among all the groups as the only store here in Stillwater that has made the effort to provide products specifically for the internationals. This is the reason why they patronize Walmart more than any other store in Stillwater. Also, the students indicate that this would be the store they would recommend to their in-coming friends.

Among the other stores, the students cite Anthony's. However, they felt that the clothes at this store, some of which were apparently from their own country, were being targeted at the local Americans. This was evident from the fact that the clothes were priced high. The students indicated that similar products could be purchased for much less in their own country.

It was found that the variety of products here was large and that it was confusing for the student at times. The choice of products here required some measure of research before purchase for the internationals. However, this was also found to be time consuming. The choice back at home was found to be simpler and less time consuming.

### Quality of Products

The products were found to be lacking in freshness and taste. The fact that customers could get vegetables out of season communicated to the students a lack of freshness. Also the fat free variety of products here were described as tasteless and did not satisfy. The open air markets back at home, where farmers came everyday to sell their produce, enabled them to buy fresh products on daily basis.

### Prices

The international students experienced fluctuating prices back in their own countries, and therefore the fixed prices of products here was comforting. However, their inability to bargain due to fixed prices was indicated as being too rigid. The facility of bargaining made the experience of shopping more enjoyable. However, bargaining does exist in Stillwater to a certain degree and only in selected firms. The automobile dealership is one.

While bargaining is prevalent over a wider variety of stores in other countries, here it is limited to certain kinds of businesses only.

### Ambiance

Shopping in the open air markets was an enjoyable aspect back at home, according to the students. These markets, which afforded a lot of human contact, made the experience of shopping more pleasant.

### Communication

While the international students were able to understand the customer service personnel, the same was not true vice versa. The constant "what did you

say's" was described as being made fun of by all the groups and termed "discriminatory" by the Africans. Qualifying the above point, the Africans mentioned that discrimination was due to differences in accent and also color. The study indicated that a phrase such as "could you spell that out for me please" was preferred by the students.

This communication problem inhibits the students ability to make an informed choice while shopping. This was especially so while buying a complicated product such as a computer. The students were not able to get the required information because of their inability to engage in a productive conversation with the shop personnel.

The local managers mentioned the fact that communication was a problem with the international students in Stillwater. However, in the interest of doing business the managers were willing to work this problem out. According to the managers, slowing the pace of the conversation and requesting the students to repeat what they just said helped solve this communication problem.

### Advertising

The advertising over the local media was confusing, of low quality and looked at with a certain degree of suspicion. The international students conferred with friends from their own country, rather than trust the local advertising before making an expensive purchase.

The local managers indicate the absence of any specific marketing strategy for the international students in Stillwater. The advertising was designed with the larger audience in mind. However, they felt the need for a more focused

advertising strategy. The local media also indicated the non-availability of specific studies to help understand the demographics and psychographics of the international student population. The general data they require for client presentations comes from materials at the Chamber of Commerce in Stillwater.

The general distrust and indifference towards the local media and their advertising does prove the theory of selectivity based on social categories. These mass media messages were more applicable to the dominant class of customers in Stillwater. Therefore, the internationals who constitute only 10 percent of the student body tend to ignore these messages and lay more emphasis on advice from people of their own country.

#### Other Services

The international students expressed a desire for some ethnic restaurants with an international cuisine, in Stillwater.

They also suggested that the local stores could interact better by sending out newsletters informing the students about their services. Also the stores could sponsor events staged by the international students at the university. Such interactions help foster loyalty among the international students with the local business.

#### **Conclusions**

Familiarity aids the students transition into a new system. The personalized customer service that they have been accustomed to back at home is not possible here in small town U.S. American shoppers love to be left alone to make their own choice.

Outdoor shopping prevalent in other countries may not be possible, at least here in Stillwater, due to the extreme range in weather conditions. While there is an outdoor vegetable market in summer, some of the practices the internationals have to accept as it is.

Products for the international student have increased in number and variety during the last couple of years. The local business community seems to be somewhat aware of the need to provide country specific products for the students. By doing so the resulting benefit is mutual. While the community is rewarded financially, the students get a wider choice of products. As the international student population increases the retail stores will also increase their variety and number of products and services for the students.

With the United States becoming increasingly multicultural advertisers are targeting specific audiences for better cost effectiveness of their budget. Niche--marketing will most likely be the trend in university towns over the next few years. Advertising would then be tailored to appeal to all the segments in the audience.

Communication has always been a problem for the international student in the United States. While this gains significance in a university town dominated by a homogenous group of people, it may not be the case in cities where in more cultures are represented.

The managers have thus far managed by focusing their attention on the local American population. However, as Stillwater gets increasingly multicultural

the need to concentrate on the internationals as well will become necessary in the future.

The focus group discussions and the indepth interviews did not produce results as expected. Moderator and interviewer from the same region or country would faccilitate a more fruitful discussion or conversation.

### **Recommendations**

The university could make more of an effort to orient the new students about how to interact with the local business community. According to a spokesperson from the International Students Office the orientation is limited to matters pertaining to the university. The only interaction the incoming students have with the business community is a visit to the local stores and information on how to open a bank account.

The stores could also train their customer service personnel, so that they are aware of other cultures from around the world. Informing the new students during orientation about their store and what they have to offer would aid the students in making a better choice. The foreign students will also feel that they have been taken care off.

### **Further Research**

This study was constrained due to time and resources. Ideally, the focus group should have been followed by a survey. The survey could be used to scrutinize more closely the problems brought up by the students and managers during the focus groups and interviews.



A more focused study is required on the effects of unintended advertising on international students and their choice of products. Credibility of local advertising and alternative sources of information among the international students may also offer a possible area for research.

Prior studies have looked at how the students cope with social and academic deficiencies in universities around the United States. Research on how the international students cope with forced changes in already established consumption patterns and its effects should also be studied.

Future studies can also look at how communication problems experienced by the student with the store personnel affect their purchase or their intention to purchase.

Payment options and the quantity of purchase, especially for students from countries with cash transactions only, is a possible area for additional research.

There is a definite need for a closer look at the international student and their interaction with the business community in a university town. However, it is hoped that this study will at least draw attention of the parties involved to the existence of a problem of this nature.

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agar, M., and MacDonald, J. "Focus Groups and Ethnography," Human Organization, Spring 1995.
- Andersen, R. "Emotional Ties That Bind: Focus Groups, Psychoanalysis and Consumer Culture", Consumer Culture & TV Programming. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995.
- Andrews, J.C., Lysonski, S., and Durvasula, S. "Understanding Cross-Cultural Student Perceptions of Advertising in General", Journal of Advertising. Jun 1991.
- Co-ordinator, International Students Office, interview by author, Telephone conversation, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 29, Mar 1996.
- Costa, J. A., and Bamossy, G. J. Marketing in a Multicultural World. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1995.
- Darby, P.D. (Master's Thesis): A Marketing And Readership Analysis Of The Oklahoma State University Community. Stillwater, 1994.
- Dembner, A. "Help Exists for Foreign Students," The Boston Globe, May 31, 1995.
- Digest of Education Statistics. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Aug 1994.
- Downs, C.W., Smeyak, G.P., and Martin. E. Professional Interviewing. New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1980.
- Durvasula, S., Andrews, J. C., Lysonski, S., and Netemeyer, R. G. "Assessing the Cross-national Applicability of Consumer Behavior Models: A Model of Attitude Towards Advertising in General," Journal of Consumer Research. Mar 1993.
- Griffin, T. International Marketing Communication. Oxford, GB: Butterworth Heinemann Ltd., 1993.
- Haskins, J. "Foreign Students: Who Are They?", New York Times. Jan 4, 1995.

International Students Newsletter, Fall 1995.

Kaynak, E. The Global Business. Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Press, Inc., 1993.

Kebede, A. (Master's Thesis): International Student Adjustment To Life At Oklahoma State University. Stillwater, 1994.

Kelly, N.T., and Reekie, S.H.M. "Culture Shock", JOPERD. Nov-Dec 1987.

Krueger, R.A. Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1988.

Lee, M.Y. "Needs of Foreign Students from Developing Nations at U.S. Colleges and Universities." National Association for Foreign Students Affairs, Washington, D.C., April 1981.

Loomis, C.P., and Schuler, E.A. "Acculturation Of Foreign Students In The United States", Applied Anthropology. Spring 1948.

Lowery, S., and DeFleur, M. L. Milestones in Mass Communication Research. New York, NY: Longman Inc., 1983.

Lustig, M.W., and Koester, J. Intercultural Competence. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993.

McCracken. G. The Long Interview. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 1988.

McQuail, D. Mass Communication Theory. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications, 1983.

Meloni, C.F. "Adjustment Problems Of Foreign Students In U.S. Colleges and Universities." ERIC Clearinghouse on Language and Linguistics, Washington, D.C.

Mncadi, N.E.(Dissertation): International Graduate Students Problems and Coping Strategies. Stillwater, Oklahoma State University. 1993.

Moftakar, H. (Master's Thesis): "A Descriptive Study of Some of the Problems of Iranian Students Attending Oklahoma State University." Stillwater 1974.

Morgan, D.L. Focus Groups As Qualitative Research.

Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1988

Myers, D.G., and Lamm, H. "The Polarizing Effect of Group Discussion." American Scientist, May - June, 1975.

Punjavat, T. (Dissertation): "Credit Cards: Understanding International Graduate Student Consumers." Oregon State University, 1992.

Rossman, M.L. Multicultural Marketing. New York, NY: AMACOM, 1994.

Solomon, L.C., and Young, B.J. The Foreign Student Factor. New York, NY: Institute of International Education, 1987.

Stivers, S.F. (Master's Thesis): Clothing Buying Practices of Undergraduate Men At The University of Kentucky. The University Of Tennessee, 1974.

Swenson, C.A. "How to Sell to a Segmented Market", The Journal Of Business Strategy, January/February 1988.

Thiederman, S. Profiting in America's Multicultural Marketplace. New York, NY: Lexington Books, 1991.

Walters, L.S. "International Student Enrollment Is Growing", Christian Science Monitor. Oct 2, 1991.

Willis, J.D. (Master's Thesis): A Comparison Of Personal Influence And Mass Media Advertising As Perceived Determinants Of Decisions To Purchase Three Consumer Products. Oklahoma State University, Stillwater. 1968.

Wilson, W.D. (Master's Thesis). Social Relationships Of International Students Attending Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, 1975.

Wimmer, R.D., and Dominick, J.R. Mass Media Research. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1987.

Zimmermann, S. "Perceptions of Intercultural Communication Competence and International Student Adaptation to an American Campus", Communication Education. Oct 1995.

## APPENDICES

## TRANSCRIBED SCRIPT

*(In-depth Interviews)*

### UNIVERSITY HONDA

we have about 10% of our customers.... who are intl...they are coming..... yes...there is a increase.... we have more intl now .... than before....and I think this figure will increase over the years...

they represent an economically profitable group of customers.... good customers to deal with....and cash rich....no problems with payments.... just the usual if at all any... that I have noticed...

no new efforts other than the usual.... we regularly advertise in the newspapers....no we do not have any specific plan or strategy... we use the same...

they are not any different ... needs are the same.... they see advertising .... and demand what they see... we have a variety of colors to suit different customers...

it is common.. even the Americans haggle over prices... it is found in every category...we cut them a deal.... and they want better... I guess it is the same with every one....

we have problems with communication... it does not represent a problem.. we try to slow down.... request them to repeat what they just said... we work at it... their business is as good as anybody else...

### AREA PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

I don't know.... well I guess a third of them are intl... one of every three who walks in the door.... I think decreased over the years....

we do not discriminate .... we provide possible effort... no specific effort for the intl....

don't know specific trouble shooting.... the occasional delayed checks.... that all..

we do not have any particular apts for the intl... some time they ask if 6 or 7 residents can stay in one apt.... these are not built to take in that kind of number..... politely tell them that 4 or 2 as the case may be....

### O'COLLEGIAN

we have done some general marketing survey ... not specifically for intl...even though we try to find out the behavioral patterns of all the students..like the info from PR and registrar ... we are quite aware of the percentage of intl.... seeing that OSU has a larger percentage of intl students than other schools...

we have the info from the registrar and the PIO... now we can get that not as a census but as a survey.... they can tell us the percentages...reading habits.... we do not have anything to that.... the last two surveys have been limited to the graduate school...we haven't had total control over the design...the grad students were doing the survey.... I had a few questions that I had... the other same questions that newspapers have.... the answers are no use at all... people lie.... the only thing that is useful is the changes in the answers...they will tell you trends... we do study for the whole region... students are not a big deal... the whole population... is important... the local small store have not ... may be Joe's will.. but other small stores do not have specific plan.... nothing is quite that ... it is not written down..

my executive do not present that many figures however they go in try to get to know them... what they are going to advt... if you look at it as a formal process... most of the retailers...are busy you try to catch their eye as they are talking... you get them fro a moment.. for 10 seconds... and you tell them we have this going and you need to get in on that... they say I do call me tomorrow...i don't even have time to think about it.. they seldom know their last names.... it is not that formal..with the local accounts...

well we have been very concerned about intl... it is a small town...in advertising we try to make business... we hire intl students...i am not even aware of what we need to do..

expresso coffee downtown gets a lot of intl students... I guess they get a lot of intl.. thats who they appeal to ... people from the east...

probably not always.. advertising can still be good.. people look at and read partly to learn... ads that appeal to everybody are usually very boring.....what you want to do is to zero in ... advertising is better to be narrow.. far from discouraging people from using slang I would encourage them is

to do some of that and not worry about that... one think that I want them to do is to go after intl students... even though they very little in common... there is a great variety... and there is some that would appeal to them...

most people look at the pizza ads and what bands are playing.. one think is they want to experience American and what is American while they are there...one thing that I did was to put in student notices for a dollar a piece.. far less than the hidden cost.. I was told by the intl office that the intls read them...

yes appealing to individual segments is the goal but they are not very good at it...they need to get narrower with their ads... I will buy mags from other country just to see them.. some are usable... the future is to have narrow ads..

most of our small accounts just do some to get by.. most of the small accounts have to do accounting , managing, everything...

in 1983 we have 23000 now it is dropping... you see cimarron plaza.. most of the businesses have closed.... I am surprised that a national chain such as appleby's is opening up shop here... local people are going out of business and the chain stores are coming in...

#### KSPI

no not really... just what we get from the census... nothing particular...

I am sure the local business do give intls some thought... but we are not necessarily there... if they want to buy from us they ...intls are not one of our strategies to try and attract more business...

no we use just one plan for all the residents....

#### WALMART

what we are doing is a lot of promotional work at the college... we advertise at the football field and at the programs... we sponsor the study day at the library ...we have expanded our intl foods and in the produce department...and the grocery department... they carry a lot of intl varieties... targeted at the intl student... the expansion of variety is... the ads are strictly name recognition... we cant discuss the percentage of our business...we havnt done any thing specific over the last few months to get intl students in to the store...future strategies I cant discuss that either..

#### STILLWATER NEWS PRESS

no new surveys... we have other sources.... we get a lot of data from the chamber... and the town census... we try to put these together for analysis...and for planning..

we do present some facts about intls... I am sure the local businesses do consider the intls in their overall marketing strategy... but nothing too ..... much in detail.. most of the local stores keep it to the minimum.. in terms of ads.... and communicate their specialities....

I think they form a good segment to market to... I am sure the local businesses too realize that...

#### FOOD OUTLET

no we do the usual ads ... nothing specifically for the intls in stillwater... we are pretty much doing what we have to do without getting too specific...

we are increasing our variety.. to appeal to everyone... and also to the intls .... new products... we will see a lot more in the next few months...

no we have not done anything particularly to get the intl students in to the store... we do the regular ads over the local media... communicate to everyone....

#### ALBERTSONS

our advertising is designed to appeal to everyone.... no we do not have any ads specifically worked out for the intl students... our advertising is product driven and not relating to any particular customer segments...

we have a whole new variety of intl foods and grocery items to choose from... intl spices and other products are being included in our list of new products... we keep updating according to customer demands...

we keep it simple and not too specific.... I guess the needs are pretty much what is available when we are talking about fresh vegetables... and other products.... we will try to include new intl products as they become available... and find out if they are in demand from the local consumers

....

we will definitely work things around to include every segment of this town... nothing right now on the line that I can discuss for sure...

## HASTINGS

no our advertising is pretty much focused not specifically to the intl but to what the music lovers need.... we do have some popular intl music and films in our collection... but the majority is purely what is out in terms of new films and music... new releases.. that are in demand.. thats our priority...

no we do not have any particular strategies worked out for the intl... but is more general...

## COOPERS

we do very limited advertising... our business has a good percentage of local customers who buy their bicycles from us... our collection is also large ... if it is something that we do not have they go to the city... because in stillwater we are pretty much it... intl are also a good percentage of our customers... the used bikes are popular among this segment ... we have a lot of intl coming in to buy on a regular basis...

it depends on the growth trends.... if a certain segment shows promise we may think about providing an larger selection.. for them... intl will certainly be considered... no nothing ...future plans ..

## J C PENNY

we have been regularly advertising our new collection... and also advertise our sales .... and price reduction and discounts.... no ... we do not design different ads for the intl... the ads are common and are so to appeal to everyone...

we have increased our collection of clothes new wear, design, and what is in vogue.. we have intl material and garments made in other countries.. these are preferred by the intl ... I guess the intl like to buy what we have to offer .... the American jeans... are good among the intl...

our strategy is to get the general customers in to our store..... specifically the strategies are not limited... in the sense...

new intl variety will definitely be among the new additions....

## ANTHONY'S

we advertise regularly... to the local customers... particularly to the intl... no we try to communicate to the general audience...

the fabrics are intl .. a good number.... we have designs from other countries on display...

we try to focus are our ads to what we have... new collections and sales get advertised often....

no we try to keep our strategy common... we might end up turning away the others..

*(Focus Groups)*

## AFRICA

it is the means of purchasing the goods..you go to the grocery store nobody talks to you you pick up the items and you come to the check out counter... and you can choose to pay in currency itself, credit cards or cheque ... now in my country I went to a grocery store I could ..there are very few big store and pick up the items myself with people talking to you and come to the check out counter..and there because of the poor level of ....it is strictly cash...

in my country... availability of the products... even inthe non season ,, you can get the products...

in home there are no difference you can use can use credit cards....the vegetables are available even in non season...i am not about freshness but availability...

customer service...it is totally different... they don't respect in my country..i don't know it is the system they don't treat the customer politely...and in my country when you buy a product and are not happy with it you can not return it... even with an receipt...but here you can return...

products...you will find more here... as a consumer you have more power here to bargain...in my country may be small things you can bargain...also here prices are fixed...in my country prices are not fixed and you can bargain.. possibly the person selling at a lower price will get the customer...

in my country you have big stores catering to a particular group of customers..here it is not necessarily like that the prices allow all to go to a particular store...at home you have the public sector shops that sell to the masses...and you have the other shops .... that is sufficient if you cant get the products from this shop you go to the bigger shop...

except to say that when I was leaving my country we were going thro some economic

difficulties....and here I find it very different prices wld go down.. in my country it is prices always up...



you cant bargain... most of the shops in the united states the prices are fixed...  
 in my country you have what is called .... where man made arts and crafts are sold and products  
 that say something ... those are some of the things that you miss...and the outdoor shopping were  
 you can bargain...  
 and back home you are accustomed to eating a particular kind of food...and those ones are  
 always available..even in rainy season... in the US sometimes you go to the grocery store and  
 want to buy 'casava' a root crop...and you see and you know it is been there almost for ten days...  
 were as back home you get freshness...here u have no choice...farmers grow them and bring it to  
 the market back home..and towards the evening they sell it cheaper...and every thing is fresh...  
 changes...cold weather... food..staple food we make porridge from cornflour that is thick...you put  
 veg...here very difficult to find out where you can find that corn flour...so if u are cooking on your  
 own u have to eat rice rice rice..... everyday...and I don't like the corn flour that is available in  
 walmart..it is enriched and salted...so everyday it is rice and Irish potatoes which u call French  
 fries.... beef and rice...no variety...and pizza doesn't appeal to me...it big adjustment...  
 it is rice or spaghetti or macaroni.... sometime I go to cowboy and have sandwich...i go to a  
 restaurant and spend...some time u don't know what to order because we don't understand what  
 they mean... the items on the menu...and sometimes u assume u know and we u order they ask  
 with this are u going to have pepper, or this, or this sauce.. and u go an order the first thing they  
 say... and at the end of the day u don't like what u had....  
 when u talk about American food it is pizza, hamburger, lobster...we don't get lobster in my  
 country.... yes by the coastline... but not in my country...  
 we get fresh fish by the roadside shops..... for me it is millet...it almost the same but it is not  
 really... the same...French fries here and at home it is thicker and soft... and fresh fish..  
 treatment.....most of the time I can understand what they are saying but they cant....so sometimes  
 when I say something they say what did u say...what say it again... I feel they are making fun...  
 some of them ... it is general...  
 I had a problem with identification... osu ids.. when u use.. checks they say u need a picture id...  
 and in Anthony's they refused to sell to my friend because he did not have a photo id... he was  
 trying to put money in the bank and it was a Saturday and he couldnt...and even after producing  
 the passport they wanted to check the balance in the bank...to add to that in the beginning the ask  
 for osu id but now the don't ask for even that...why... in walmart initially they asked for osu id and  
 passport....and now when u produce they say they don't need it... what happened...why they cld  
 do it in the beginning...it is not continuous,...  
 u are standing in a line and the person in front of u they don't ask when they sign a check but u  
 they ask... I think it is the nature of the average American to be suspicious of the black man...that  
 is really very distrustful...u don't have this in newyork that is the melting point...here it is more the  
 element of suspicion...but it shldnt be like that they shld be more used to getting students from  
 other countries...i am not saying we are against their policy...if they ask for your id let them  
 continue to ask everytime...these times I don't even now where my ids is... why did they stop... if  
 is a general policy they shld continue...  
 if this happens in the beginning of the semester... how do they identify who is the new  
 student...we shld ask the international students from white countries like Europe and see if they  
 experienced the same thing.... may be they do for just everybody..  
 I found a strange...in most of the superstores managed by these people there seems to be some  
 rigidity... before u do this u must do A,B,C... even if u miss b or c u are sure not to get that  
 product... when u go on Monday and they ask did u do abcd and u say u missed c then they say  
 no my friend u go back and do c ....I found that strange.. like at hasting u have to produce  
 passport, dr license and osu id....i found it surprising they require your passport and your drivers  
 license..some people stay here and don't get their drivers license...especially if the transport  
 authorities allow u to drive with your international dr license and your osu id...  
 provide intl products?  
 walmart ... food and cloths...mostof the cloths are the same in our country...and food outlet...and  
 most of the electronic items are 110 volt...so we cant use our items..  
 ads?

too much...very attractive.... seen and bought... bathing soap... zest... toothpaste....u use something and after 2 weeks a new product comes out...very effective, persuasive.. in our country not much of ads....

expensive products?

u go to specific dept... and they give something to read and play and then buy.... the 1800 # are good... ads are also confusing and persuade the people to buy something in my country...also the same thing... we are very suspicious of ads...the shops say 50% off it is not really...in this country TV is a means of communication...people they go for the TV rather than friends.. in my country before buying something u go and ask some who has the product...

computer?

I my case I ask friends... since I don't have exposure to computers... I get suspicious of literature here.. it is the people who put in the info...u know it is the culture back home it is very personal here it is very impersonal

ocolly?

it don't carry info about the whole thing the product that I want to buy.. hi-fi... they wont tell u the e details so u can get the quality...

process of marketing is very different... it is very impersonal..

communicate to intl's?

send out newsletter at the start of the semester intro. the business...to new students.. highlight the problems of new students... contact somebody y for data...make them feel welcome...don't say ehh what did u say... instead say can u say that again...can you spell it for me.. then we know it is the difference in accent....

what business?

food... even food supplier... intl food... casava... millet... that students can not get here...

EASTASIA

it is easy to get credit here... credit cards... it is hard to get credit in my country...it is expensive... I shop more here than at home...in china I don't buy food because I live with my parents... here I do it the style the products ...but the grocery store is different from china...we have for veg we have flea market for fresh veg... I went to open market for fresh food... but here we have to buy a lot... back at home we go every day and buy fresh food...here twice a week or once a week....

price.... more expensive at home the American products... u compare.to home they are expensive ... own country products is cheaper...at home.... country jeans are not good..the brands are not popular...in my country they produce their own jeans it much cheaper but the teenager don't want to buy...

variety... it is the same... major diff is the price... system...i like the system here.... but I like the grocery in china you don't wrap the veg....service is good... u can return... It is difficult at home... u can change but van not get money back..

u can bargain in the free market not in the store in my country...

u cannot communicate when u want to buy.... some specific products... general stuff yes it is easy but when u want a detail product it is difficult...hey give u the wrong thing and u say u don't want to buy...onetime I bought bad beef.... no discrimination... they laugh a lot...they don't smile... they cant understand intl students... service is much better here...

intl products?

walmart... not much...

communicate?

ads... to intl's... list of names and products... friends go to okc.... they shld ask them what they want... do mail order... for ... depends on business.... CDs like Malaysian CDs... u ask what u want and I can get from Malaysia.. in 3 weeks what ever u want...

ads?

they have more national ads... less of local ads... local ads low quality..

radio I listen for big sale and go for it....

ocolly?last page.. classified... sale.. Eskimo Joe's... AT&T and credit cards... movie ads...look for credit card and free t shirt...

plan for intl's? no... they look for the large population... although u are intl's u are separated in to different countries.. if I want to buy cloths I go to city they have more choice... I don't go to jcpenny here .... or go to factory store.... intl's cloths will be expensive here... but I like American .. but food I still like my country food.. they is macdonald at home too so I eat American and my country food .. but clothing it is same... here and home it is same products...this time when I went back home I bought lots of stuff it is cheaper there like sweater....food I hardly go out here I cook at home business?

restaurant... a Thai restaurant.... grocery...spicy food restaurant... the cowboy store is very small... and expensive.....

expensive products?

ask my friends.... computer ask friends first.... or look around....

#### EAST EUROPE

supermarkets are not available and but in the city we have a big market but it is hardly a super market...and in a way it is similar were we buy once a week for the whole week...here to I buy once a week at walmart or sometimes at albertsons...

in my country there are supermarkets but only for the last five years not before that..during the communist time..only the small shops... in Poland u can just make one main shopping for one or two weeks and if u need something u go to the small shop and buy...and another thing is open markets for veg..type is very different indoor and d outdoor... farmers sell in these markets... when u buy from the farmers u can be sure it is fresh and does not have chemicals...

in my country u have small and big shops state and private...some are very expensive... here I was surprised to see supermarkets with many choices which products to buy... the state or Gov. owned shop sell everything... in my country u can buy silk or wool natural but here it is very difficult.. natural silk.. here it is fat free and tasteless.. no taste... u did not have the feeling that u have eaten anything...and also some goods are not available ... milk that is sour here u don't have it... I buy 1% milk...

open market and u deal with farmers u can bargain.... it is fun.. but in Poland it does not work unless u buy in large quantity... I miss just simple bread... here the bread is so soft when u squeeze it there is nothing.. I miss the real bread... bread is basic food in our country like rice is in your country... we have it with everything...also the American don't drink hot tea.. if they have they have iced tea..

I miss Iranian and Turkish shop and bazaars...open market...

I like here the it is more efficient.. and thatway I miss human contact.. there in kazakistan..in the open market u have a lot of human contact..and with people around u discuss prices with them..weather... but here it is very efficient u go to one place and buy everything...and forget about it...

the products choice is huge here and sometimes it is confusing and u spent a lot of time deciding which product is better...here it is very quick since it is computerized...spend more time in my country... because we discuss not only shopping but everything else...u spend a lot of time going to shops ... but here u find everything in one place....

pleasant experience.... mail shopping is very upsetting.. because in the picture it is nice but when u get it is not...i don't have any bad experience as long as u have money...

service... is great.. they care about customers.. they are very efficient... in my country it doesn't work so good..

communication with people.. it is very efficient.. they are so concerned about customer whether it is banks, or everything... very helpful... no discrimination... try sometimes ask what no car?.... they are really shocked when I told him I have in car... another experience.. in our country u can exist without a car... u take a cab.. and shops are near by... u have public transport... here u cant exist without a car...

communicate with intl's?... as far u speak English u have no problems... stores with products from all over the world... but it will not work because there is little from this country and little from there... but u can always find something.. to manage if u don't find something...

products for intl's? no nothing,...

plan? no they don't it is one we don't differentiate... no separate plan... they don't differentiate... they are efficient and they operate with little human contact.. they are concerned about people.. they do their job quickly very efficiently...they smile...but it doesn't matter to them u are a customer...

a separate plan will be discrimination...

ads? very tiring,.. too much .. aggressive.... repeat over time....but very well done..lot of time and effort.. but very frustrating when u want to watch a movie.. but u can see the difference between the national and local ads the national is much more professional.. the local is very amateur...e.g.. furniture , drug store...

what really stands for me u can make a negative ad comparing another product it is not done in my country..it is not allowed ... it is stupid...

I bought Quaker oat meal because of the commercial... it is really good stuff..

but I don't I look at it with open mind.. another thing is that they advertise drugs.. so much ... is it is done in my country but not so much make u think they must be a sick society...

advice?sources?i guess read the info from brochures... I will compare it with other info... I go first for the info to get an idea and then to someone who has used the product....

I don't look at ads they are too much and u cant digest it...

in my country it is much simpler the variety is very limited.. here u have enormous amount of choices and before u buy u have to research ...

everything is the matter of money... but it is not a serious problem...but choices are not... but we have a lot of choices but not enough and beside they might have a new Mercedes and tomorrow they don't it is problem with liberation...

it is matter of money they can provide whatever car u want... they can get a car from states and give u....so it is money...

in my country several years ago.... every body ...

business?public relations... no real need get everything here... cafe... not fast food... for me as long as I ma in an intl community I mix why have a polish community or Russian community why are we here....

shop with food... small super market.... we survive... very close to the university apts... many people don't have car... or no time to shop... so a shop close by will work...

ocolly? not a good paper... classified... horoscope...for Americans undergraduate students... not for intl...

LATIN AMERICA(1/22/96)

faster..they use the machines.. is very fast... we don't have that...calculator... is very fast here... here expensive... we have many choices and can buy very good products very cheap...compared to here in stw... in corvalus...only one shopping place but you know how many choices..and you have markets and there are people who you can ask questions... but in walmart it is not possible....

depends on the products if you are in the high school the kind of dress or food I go for what I am used... I don't buy what they say...I am not influenced by what they say... it is the same as it here..i am trying to buy the products that I am used to there...I go by my self... they offer a healthy choice or whatever I wont buy...

people is very nice... they care for you...both here and at home.. but also their are people who look at you and ask what are you saying.....

where ?

everywhere...there is no difference..

why are people like that in your country because you are one of them?

because people work and are comfortable and like what they are doing...every where you find good people and bad people..

as a foreigner how is the treatment here?

depends on where you are... in my English class in Oregon the people are so nice...but in n.carolina it is the opposite..nobody friendly...

best experience?

here you have set price.. depends where you are.. in Los Angeles you have a market where you can bargain....I miss bargaining in my country...

I shop most in walmart... sometimes jcp...

intl products being provided here?

no I don't know.. but in walmart they have intl food..clothes we have the same brands in my country...

ads?

I don't watch TV... I remember healthy choice... a food that is already cooked... local ads...no...

newspapers...ocoly.... no ... I look for roommate ads... what is going on here... free dogs or

something....classified... regular ads.. Eskimo Joe's...Mexico Joe's.. I read that..

my friends go to okc... they don't find everything... I find every thing here....

local ads?

too much...ads for pleasures... but for simple stuff.. like I have been here one year and a half and

didn't know where to go for breakfast...and I ask my friend and she said dairy

queen..dennys...because most of what they have here is tumbleweed.. ask Joe's..... the ladies

night... something ... I am not used to eat hamburgers ... I am used to eat a full meal... a salad...

soup....but not fast food...

advice?

labels... ask somebody... some friends...who know about computer... I look for ads.. but I am not

comfortable... they ask for credit number... I don't dot that... by mail I don't do that...

own business?

restaurant ...business were I get food products from different countries...

unpleasant?

sales in walmart...banana... I bought... they were not good.. it was garbage... I dint know where to

complain.. I threw it away..i stopped to buy from sales..anymore...

only the machines..the PCs I like to take to my country.... from there I like the personal service..

here we take but ..you don't know about a product you can ask the person.. if it is good...here no

body to help unless you ask for...

### **SOUTH ASIA (1/19/96)**

Stores were much larger...fewer places...customer service in walmart ..you can buy something

and later you decide I am not going to keep this ..still you can return it and the way they accept it

they never say unnecessary things....that really impressed me...in our country when you buy

something the owner says you can return it but they really don't like to take it back, because there

are chances for abuse..people can use ...wear a shirt and return it.

have you noticed in the bills they say goods once sold cannot be taken back.. here you can goto

one shop and build a house.. each and every material you can buy probably not in stw but when I

went to other states you go to one shop you can buy everything

The biggest diff I noticed here is the use of coupons. ..previously I had no idea people like to

collect coupons..some people buy newspapers only to collect coupons..if you want to buy one

drink it will be 50cents and two drinks will be 80 cents..but back home it will be 50 x 2 or 50 x 3..

so here they want to attract customers by reducing the price... and actually in our country you go

to a prestigious shop and want to bargain it is not prestigious for the shop or the buyer... but here

the more you buy the less you pay.. and secondly we have also got the habit of collecting

coupons....

so you mean you can bargain here...

not actually see of I am going to buy one drink I will buy 3 drinks .. so I am buying more than what

I need .. remember in the exam week when we have drinks for 25 cents we drink twice as much..

in a way that is good for us.. not here.. I mean the shop we usually go for the bigger size.

what are some pleasant experiences that you had?

the thing that I like here is that if you are in a hurry you need not go to big store like walmart...

there are convenience store around here... they are expensive... but depending on the time

factor.. you don't care how much you pay but you are in hurry. .. back in our country you don't

have the difference... if you are in hurry...or you take time to shop.. but here you can go for quality

and if you want a cheaper product you go to walmart.. in the place where I came from there are 90% chance of being cheated for a low quality product for a higher price... another thing is that I understand you have access to all these places but at home in India you can go to shop give them a lost and the shopkeeper will actually take off a shelf and give it to you. that way you are saving a lot more time.. you don't have to do all the searching what about grocery shops?back in your country?

I kinda enjoy roadside shopping. I had lot of fun bargaining with those people. it is really luck sometimes you think you had bargained really well but there are chances that you have been fooled

here every product has a tag for it. you know it is worth it. but in our country whatever you spend.. the next day someone will tell they bought it for so much lesser amount

but that happens here also...I don't think any of the products have a price on it..like a coke tin at home..it wont be the same can...but it will have the price on it....it will have the exact price and it is the tax that varies from shop to shop. over here you don't find the price on the product.

one of my experiences we wanted to buy a stapler..

where?

walmart and in the same shelf at 2 places just above the other one is with paper clips and staples and the top one is \$4 the stapler and the other thing with some additional thing is \$3. we really have to search when we go there. in our country we can ask how much is that.. how much is that ... okay give the cheaper one. over here we really have to search. I almost bought the other one... then I saw the other one with the package with the staples.

one thing that I like here is that shops are open 24 hrs because we are students it is a big advantage...

when you look at cosmetics the consumer preferences may be more. for e.g. if you wanted to buy a cold cream there are cold creams for so many situation.. for dry skin.. with fragrance.. without fragrance... the choice is so much. it can be advantageous but it can also be time consuming.. it is just a basic thing that you want to buy

we were talking about bargaining .. back at home I always bargain ..it was important to me I go to a shop and it was a pleasure to bargain.. over here it was a pleasure to know that I don't have to bargain for anything... and last fall break I went to San Antonio and I went to the market place and there were a lot of hispanicsand they were selling some CDs and they were asking for 20 bucks and I was not sure and then he said 18 bucks... and wait if you can bargain I can also bargain... and it was suddenly a changing experience and I started bargainingand I bought 2 CDs for 10 bucks so this was the first thing that I was missing.. and back homewhen you have a religious festivalthe price of things goes up... like when you want to buy a sari the price goes up.. when I gave here I found the same thing here they say 60 percent off some time of the year they don't give that off.. so they do the same here but in a smarter way..last December I wanted to go home and it is about 1000 bucks all year round but in DEC it is 500 bucks... so it is the same thing..

what about service? customer service?

back at home if I want to return something they argue with me as if there is something wrong with me and not with his product... so this is a big advantage here... and secondly they want to take personal care of you back at home... you develop an intimate relationship.. but here you go to walmart you see one person now and a different person tomorrow...

service to int'l how do they treat you?

depends on you is treating you.. if someone is speaking better English... they say pardon me... making us feel bad...this is personal and it is not with every one...

where ?

walmart..generally.. because we go there forallof our shopping..

I am not able to distinguish whether it is discrimination.. we are not able to decide if they want to make fun of us or they are notable or listen to our wording..

when I came here that is what I thought ... because of our accent... and we speak fast.. and also then I tried to speak very slowly and pronounce all the words and then I found they are able to understand...sometime here and there I found this.. but I think it is individual behavior... and not with every body..if he is arrogant with us then he is with everybody....so....

then again sometimes they judge you even before you have spoken.. and that is what is most irritating..because they haven't even heard you speak and already they have a negative opinion... this is very unpleasant...me and my friends went to walmart to shop for a radio... and the person who manning the place he was a little suspicious...we felt insulted...

now I want you to tell me if any local businesses have taken any extra effort to provide products for intl'?

walmart... we never used to have mint.. but now it is available ... and tofu... and now they also have rice... and they have raised the price... the Americans do not buy rice... it is only intl's..... any other shops?

its a pity some time we have to go outside stw to buy something's....

sometime they sell crazy things ... they don't say from where they got it... sometime in Anthony's you find crush cotton made in India.. srilanka.. but these are not targeted at intl's but at Americans because they want to buy crazy stuff... if you view some thing new you go for it they are collecting things from every other country...

and the other thing is that you look at the price and compare for what you can get at home you don't even bother to buy it...

how would you go about attracting intl's?

get in touch with intl's during orientation and give them info of what is available for them in stw.. they can sponsor some of the activities..... they can ask us to fill up a slip ... what we need and they can make it available....

American here do not have much knowledge about intl's as much as we know... they shld get an understanding of how shopping goes on in other countries and implement it here and make them feel at home..

how?

find the country that has the max. representation and see how it is done in that country and do it here.... send some manager there and train them....also they can advertise specifically on TV and radio so that we are made to feel special and we go there... that all they need to do...we feel like going to them and ask them... it is not as if it is not available it is elsewhere.. they can always get it....

another thing the shop shld provide us info about our country... in the bulletin board.. it makes you feel important... make you feel wanted...it will make us go to that place...

even the telephone service ... why cant they offer the cheap prices that the others offer outside.. we have to go to other friends houses to make a call.. the osu campus can also offer the same price..

why do you think it is costly?

I think they want to make some money that way.. they say they go to the cheapest carrier... like AT&T or some thing...also I think they get a commission from them but we are loosing out in the process..

if you want to start a business?

restaurant...catering to several diff countries and slowly the Americans will also like it..

what are the ads u have noticed?

pizza ad 27000 ... just the number.. it is very striking... pizza hut delivery...

Hunan.. Eskimo Joe's.... tanman...

is it a product that u use?

I don't.. but they use a funny looking man....

jcpenny.. they have used a lot of Hispanics..

ocolly?

look for coupons...sale....work at home ads...the leaflet from hardys... very colorful..

so we look for free stuff?

yes ...coupons...

advice?

friends from country... we trust our countrymen better than the info here... those who have used the product...

clothes?

we don't go thro catalogs.. we go for sale....we go feel the material and buy the product..  
it depends on the price of the product.... generally we go to our friends.... but the American trust  
there own shopmen and ask them.... the trust them.. but we go to countrymen..  
is it the same in your country?

we wld go to the shop itself... we trust the shop keeper...

we have a good network and we trust them.. the American are individual...we are not made to feel  
secure..

walmart is so popular because they satisfy intls.. and another intls come they wld recommend it to  
them... also walmart is very big and not much competition....if there is competition it will be  
different....



VITA

Suresh Joseph

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: PERCEPTIONS ABOUT MARKETING EFFORTS  
DIRECTED AT INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS  
IN STILLWATER

Major Field: Mass Communications

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Madras, India, son of K.O. Joseph and Alice Joseph.

Education: Graduated high school from Madras Christian College School, Madras, India, in May 1982; received Bachelor of Commerce degree from Loyola College, Madras, India, in May 1985; received Master of Arts degree in Personnel Management from Madras School of Social Work, Madras, India, in May 1987; completed requirements for the Master of Science degree at Oklahoma State University in May, 1996.

Experience: Employed as an Account Executive for Ogilvy & Mather Advertising. Duration of experience - 4 years.

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW

Date: 11-15-95

IRB#: AS-96-026

**Proposal Title:** PERCEPTIONS ABOUT MARKETING EFFORTS DIRECTED AT  
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN STILLWATER

**Principal Investigator(s):** Maureen Nemecek, Suresh Joseph

**Reviewed and Processed as:** Exempt

**Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s):** Approved

ALL APPROVALS MAY BE SUBJECT TO REVIEW BY FULL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
AT NEXT MEETING.

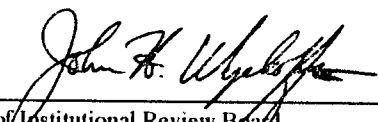
APPROVAL STATUS PERIOD VALID FOR ONE CALENDAR YEAR AFTER WHICH A  
CONTINUATION OR RENEWAL REQUEST IS REQUIRED TO BE SUBMITTED FOR BOARD  
APPROVAL.

ANY MODIFICATIONS TO APPROVED PROJECT MUST ALSO BE SUBMITTED FOR  
APPROVAL.

---

Comments, Modifications/Conditions for Approval or Reasons for Deferral or Disapproval  
are as follows:

Signature:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Chair of Institutional Review Board

Date: November 20, 1995