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Like father like son: the role of similar-education parents in their children's university choice

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ABSTRACT

This study draws attention to the role of similarly educated parents in their children's university choice. We conceptualise, develop, and empirically test a model that links university choice with parents' intention to recommend the university and university brand preference that stems from their own experiences during the university evaluation stage. Data from 339 parents of prospective university students were collected and analysed using structural equation modelling. The findings reveal that parents' experience with university staff, perception of other parents, and quality of university facilities affect parents' satisfaction. The results suggest that parents satisfied with a university are more likely to recommend that university to their children and prefer the university brand. These two constructs were found to influence university choice for those parents with non-similar education to a university programme. For parents with similar education to a university programme, only parents' university brand preference influences university choice.

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Introduction

Like father, like son. How unusual is it for a father and son to both be president? In the United States alone, two presidents and their sons held office (i.e. the Adamses and Bushes), and there are hundreds of similar presidential examples worldwide. Similarly, parent–child status reproduction is abundant in many fields such as celebrities, artists, athletes, engineers, doctors, etc. Even on the biological level (Liu, 2007), the inheritance of the parents' characteristics is well documented in the literature. Education is universally agreed to be a vehicle by which status transference occurs between parents and children (Ganzeboom et al., 1991). Some parents may assume untheorised roles concerning university choice to ensure continuity of family heritage and reproduction of social status. Not surprisingly, social reproduction between parent and child has been studied in sociology. Similarly, higher education literature has sufficient work on university choice. However, the role of parents in general and similar education parents specifically is a

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gap that exists in the literature; furthermore, there have been no previous attempts to extend current models empirically to integrate these two separate veins in the literature.

The reasons for investigating parents' roles in the emerging countries context are threefold. First, parents' influence and dominance differ significantly according to the country's culture. Emerging markets are characterised by hierarchical and autocratic social structures (Burgess & Steenkamp, 2006). Parents' dominance is, therefore, more significant in emerging markets than in high-income countries. Students in emerging markets are more financially dependent on their parents due to the nonexistence of student work-study programmes, the absence of student loans as a social norm, and the comparatively small number of scholarships and government grants. Therefore, it is plausible that some parents in emerging countries assume unique roles previously overlooked in the literature on emerging countries. Second, it seems obvious that universities will find it lucrative to manage students and parents' experiences separately during the critical university evaluation stage, as universities are one of the most challenging entities to market (Elsharnouby, 2015). Double intangibility (Edvardsson et al., 2005) is a characteristic that showcases the challenges of pure services such as education, where education cannot be physically touched nor mentally grasped. Higher education institutions (HEIs) are complex entities fragmented into schools and subprograms; thus, they interact with a diverse base of stakeholders (students, parents, staff, etc.) and are difficult to evaluate prior to enrolment (Eldegwy et al., 2019). Third, most previous research on pre-university enrolment has primarily depended on responses from questionnaires or interviews with either high school students or their parents (Adamba, 2020; Holdsworth & Nind, 2006; Le et al., 2019; Whitehead et al., 2006). Both parties report subjective data based on their perceptions. Intentions in terms of future actual behaviour may not always be accurate. The attitude behavioural gap is a term used to represent discrepancy between planned and actual behaviour (Claudy et al., 2013). Decisions based on actual actions are more generally reliable than those based on intended circumstances. As such, the majority of what we know is derived from reported intentions, which may not predict behaviours. The current research aims to fill this gap by explaining actual university choice by linking survey data with university records (i.e. actual fee payment).

This study examines the influences of parents' experience with university staff, perceptions of other parents, and quality of university facilities on parents' satisfaction with the university. We also investigate the role of parents' satisfaction in parents' intention to recommend the university and parents' university brand preference, with the latter two constructs on university choice being moderated by parents' similar education. The study examines parents' perspectives after participating in campus events during the university evaluation stage.

Conceptual framework and hypothesis development

The study model (see Figure 1) is based on social reproduction theory (Sputa & Paulson, 1995) and the model developed by Navarro et al. (2005). The premises for parents' involvement in their children's educational choices may be found in social reproduction theory, which suggests that parents involve themselves in their children's life choices, as they reproduce their values and skills with their children so as to allow them to reproduce their own social status (Sputa & Paulson, 1995). Transference occurs as parents

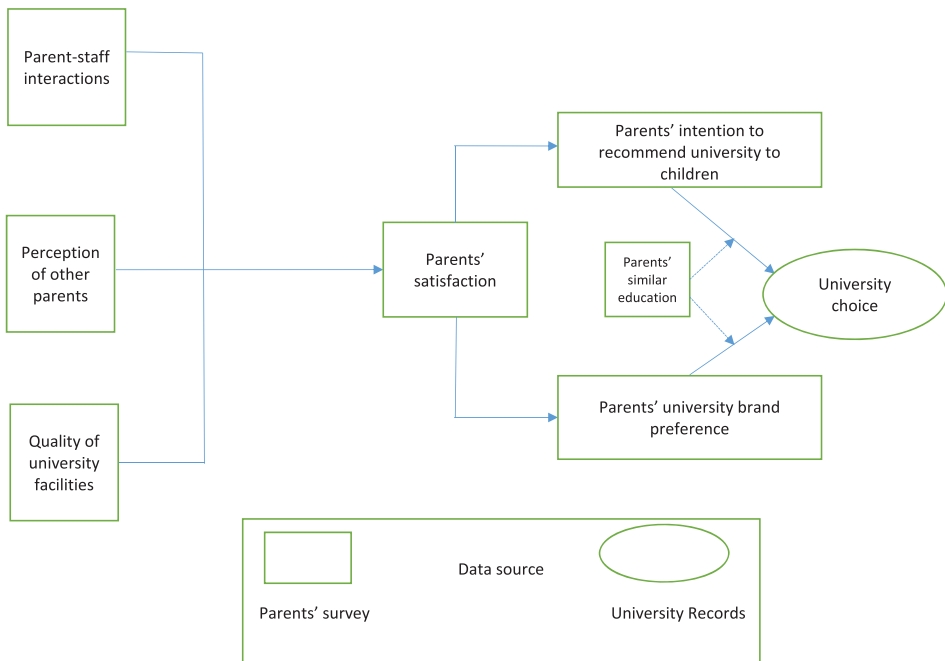


Figure 1. Hypothesised model.

transfer their social status to their children (Holmstrom et al., 2011). Parents influence their children’s choice of programmes, which leads to careers with which parents are familiar. Familiar choices are perceived by parents as being safer and more secure. According to Sørensen (2007), children’s frequent exposure to their parents’ life experiences and memorable formulations usually result in social closure, which makes children more familiar with certain choices and expectations. Additional support for social reproduction is provided by Lentz (1985), who stated that parents are their children’s role models. During the process of socialisation, children acquire knowledge and values; in doing so, parents may actively influence their children’s choices, as reflected in their life choices. The discussion leads us to suggest that there is a basis for extending social reproduction theory to revisit parents’ role during university evaluation.

The proposed conceptual framework is also built on the work of Navarro et al. (2005), who conceptualised human interaction elements within a programme’s physical infrastructure to determine programme attendees’ satisfaction. This model also analysed the relationship between the satisfaction experienced by the programme attendees and their behavioural response to the university offering the programme. The model captured the elusive construct of satisfaction with education experience by identifying items for assessing service quality attributes (Gibson, 2010; Parahoo et al., 2013). The fundamental principle adopted in this study is that parents’ direct experience with high-quality service attributes will lead them to believe that their children will have good educational experiences, and therefore parents will be satisfied. In a similar context studying satisfaction with university experience, Parahoo et al. (2013) suggested the key antecedents of academic staff interaction and other consumers/students’ interactions. Therefore, the drivers of parents’ satisfaction are adopted for this study to explore parents’ experiences

during university site visits, namely parents' experience with university staff, perception of other parents, and quality of university facilities. The study also examines how this satisfaction can lead to behavioural output of parents' recommendation to their children and attitudinal output of parents' university brand preference, and ultimately the impact of the latter two variables on university choice. The study takes the conceptual model one step further by examining the moderating role of parents' similar education in the relationships between both parents' recommendation and university brand preference and university choice.

Human experiences in higher education

Human elements are paramount in the service experience. The inseparability between production and consumption of services indicates that consumers and service providers closely interact in a dynamic process (Edvardsson et al., 2005). These close human interactions overlap in time and space to allow for the co-consumption and co-production of services (Edvardsson et al., 2005). The extant literature agrees that personal experiences between customers and service providers are crucial for successful service delivery (Ennew & Binks, 1999). Some researchers have even claimed that in some contexts, close interactions between employees and consumers and how the service is being delivered are comparable in importance to core services (Sierra & McQuitty, 2005).

Parent–university staff interactions

Within the higher-education setting, Lovelock (1981) stated that HEIs are people-processing services where the HEI is engaged with personal contacts and personal interaction. Positive interaction with staff is identified as a key factor in students' interaction that eventually influences satisfaction (Parahoo et al., 2013). Gibson (2010) noted factors of centeredness/responsiveness, which were reviewed as antecedents to satisfaction (Browne et al., 1998; Elliot, 2003; Leblanc, 1997; Sadiq Sohail & Shaikh, 2004; Thomas & Galambos, 2004). Interaction with staff in terms of students' educational experience was found to be a strong determinant of satisfaction (Tsarenko & Mavondo, 1996). Consumer involvement is linked with positive effects that generate pleasant emotions (Sujan et al., 1993). Thus, we hypothesise that planned and well-managed interactions between university staff and parents during university visits will generate positive emotions, including satisfaction:

H1. Parents' satisfaction is positively related to parent–university staff interaction during university site visits.

Perceptions of other parents

Other parents present at the university during new student orientation affect a parent's evaluation of the university. In some contexts, other consumers' perceptions are the most important evaluative criterion, of even higher importance than service provider and physical facilities (Lehtinen & Lehtinen, 1991). The perceptions of other consumers are based on physical appearances and observed behaviours (Brocato et al., 2012; Maher & Elsharnouby, 2020). Some consumers have reported that they evaluate the quality of service of an institution prior to consumption through their perception of the

physical appearance of the crowd on site; if the crowd looks nice, then the consumer assumes that the service will be good (Brocato et al., 2012). Moore and Moore (2005) suggested that customer-to-customer interaction has a positive impact on the positive emotional and evaluative status of consumers in a service setting. This reasoning is supported by social identity theory, which suggests that consumers prefer to surround themselves with others who have similar characteristics and belong to the same social group (Brocato et al., 2012). As parents perceive other parents to be similar to themselves during university visits, they will positively interact and thereby enhance their overall experience. Therefore, the following hypothesis is set forth:

H2: Parents' satisfaction is positively related to the positive evaluation of other parents during university visits.

Quality of university facilities

Service providers are advised to address the challenging characteristics of the pure service industry, being dominated by credence and experience, through investing in quality physical facilities or 'Tangibilizers' (Edvardsson et al., 2005); among the purest of service offerings is education. Providing customers with evidence of quality enables service exchange and creates memorable customer experiences within the service setting. In the higher education context, the relationship between university physical facilities and satisfaction has been reported in the literature. Previous studies observed that student satisfaction is affected by university features such as IT facilities (Mai, 2005), technological facilities (Mavondo et al., 2000), modern equipment on campus (Mostafa, 2006), classroom facilities (Thomas & Galambos, 2004), lecture hall facilities (Clemes et al., 2001; Oldfield & Baron, 2000), spaces for group and individual study (Borden, 1995), a safe and secure campus (Elliot, 2003), and health centre facilities (Ogunnaike & Ibadunni, 2017). Physical settings fall within parents' top five important factors for university choice (Broekemier & Seshadri, 2000). The campus tour of quality university facilities is referred to as 'the golden walk' or 'the golden mile' (Secore, 2018, p. 152) due to its importance. Additional support occurs in the consumption context in which education as a service is sampled, influences the emotional experience, and possibly produces satisfaction as elicited by educational service consumption (Richins, 1997). The extensive evidence on the relationship between physical facilities and student satisfaction can be extended to parents' satisfaction. Quality facilities are components of educational quality; when parents evaluate facilities to be of high quality, they are more likely to believe that their children will have good educational experiences, resulting in their satisfaction. Thus, the following hypothesis is set forth:

H3: Parents' satisfaction is positively related to the quality of university facilities.

Parents' satisfaction outcomes

Informational and social theories may explain the parents' needs in relation to the university. The theory of informational conformity suggests that individuals have a human desire to be correct. The key product of social-psychological interactions is socially mediated cognition, which allows interactions to have shared social meaning (Turner &

Oakes, 1986). Therefore, parents attempt to make sense of the service offering while having an innate need to be right when gathering clues about quality. They confirm the information delivered to them, hoping to evaluate correctly the intangible educational offerings of the university. The information they receive is offered through social interactions with university staff and other parents, which they are expected to appreciate and even be satisfied with, as these experiences decrease their likelihood of being wrong.

Parents' intention to recommend university to children

Meeting parents' expectations in terms of their overall evaluative judgment (Westbrook, 1987) of their experiences during university site visits are expected to lead to parents' satisfaction. Satisfied parents, just like satisfied consumers, are expected to exhibit valued behaviours such as advocacy (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Additional support was presented in Browne et al. (1998) who posited that interactions with university personnel have a significant direct positive relationship with recommendation behaviour. Children are within their parents' closest circle of influence as a result of social interactions in daily life. Not surprisingly, parents are reported to be among the top influencers on their children with regard to university decisions (Kallio, 1995). Therefore, positive behavioural outputs toward university, including recommendations, are expected to have an impact on parents' closest circle. The extant literature provides much evidence of the relationship between satisfaction and recommendation behaviour. Satisfaction is highly valued by universities, as satisfaction leads to positive word-of-mouth (Mavondo et al., 2000). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4 There is a positive relationship between parents' satisfaction with the university and parents' recommendation behaviour towards their children.

Parents' university brand preference

Brand preference is regarded as 'a consumer's predisposition toward a brand that varies depending on the salient beliefs that are activated at a given point in time' (D'Souza & Rao, 1995, p. 33). This preference is established from a biased position toward a certain brand, which is demonstrated by certain responses, including affective response (e.g. likeness), cognitive response (e.g. perceived value), and behavioural response (e.g. buying behaviour; Ebrahim, 2013). Brand preference is highly relevant in the highly competitive higher-education context. The complex university realm (Whisman, 2009) is difficult to navigate for parents. They may appreciate sampling university attributes during site visits such as buildings, labs, lecture halls, and sports facilities in order to learn about the service offerings, thereby developing opinions of a university's perceived value, which is in line with previous work (Price et al., 2003). We assume that as parents learn about service attributes during university visits, their knowledge level increases, making them more comfortable with assessing a university's perceived value.

University staff may act as brand ambassadors, and their interactions are crucial for effectively involving parents. Previous research on brand personality has recommended the association of human traits with the brand and evoking feelings of a brand personality, suggesting that brands not only can be described using human personality traits, but

also evoke positive feelings from the consumers (Biel, 1993). Adding a human personality dimension to brands stimulates consumers to form strong relationships with the brand (Swaminathan et al., 2008). Therefore, the human traits of university staff and other similar parents can be expected to extend to the university brand, thereby building brand personality associations such as likeness; this affective response is an antecedent to brand preference. Sánchez (2014) suggested that sources of direct experiences are the most important for creating university preference for students when choosing their university programmes. Based on this discussion, satisfying experiences lead to positive affective and cognitive effects on parents – namely, brand preference. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is developed:

H5. There is a positive relationship between parents' satisfaction and university brand preference.

University choice

University choice is the decision to enrol or attend one specific university over another. This term has received a lot of attention due to students' tuition being a major source of funding for universities (Brookes, 2003). This decision is hypothesised in this study to be shaped by two factors: i.e. parents' intention to recommend the university, and university brand preference. According to Oliver et al. (1997), consumers can become avid promoters of a brand and actively refer that brand to others. Harris and Uncles (2000) reported that recommendation has a positive effect on future repurchase intention. Recommendation behaviour is a particularly important dimension of this research, as such behaviour is expected to affect children's university choice. Recommendation will most likely be the most felt by the closest circles of influence, which include the children's parents. Parents have been found to be among the strongest influencers on their children by Kallio (1995), so their recommendation of the university will affect their children's university choice. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6. University choice is positively related to parents' intention to recommend the university.

Brand preference includes affective, cognitive, and behavioural outputs that affect buying behaviour (Ebrahim, 2013). The relationship between brand preference and university choice is an under-researched topic in higher education marketing. Among the few studies that have discussed brand preference in higher education was that of Gul et al. (2020), who concluded that preference, relationships, and brand meaning were determinants of university brand equity. Students' experiences were observed as being of high importance to develop preference and determine intended behaviours of enrolment in public versus private universities (Sánchez, 2014). Parents are described as co-consumers who have veto checkbook power (Reynolds, 1980), as they are the ones paying for tuition, especially in emerging countries. The rationale here is that parents who have had satisfying direct experiences with service providers during university visits will develop a liking for the university and will appreciate its proposed value. They will thus prefer the university and purchase the university service by enrolling their children – in other words, making the university choice. Based on this discussion, we hypothesise:

H7. University choice is positively related to university brand preference.

Parents' similar education connection to programme choice

Parents who hold similar academic degrees to the programme of study to which their children are applying are referred to as similar-education parents. Some parents aim to reproduce their education, and some children aim to inherit their parents' occupations through seeking a similar path of education, especially in cases where there is transfer of proprietorship through inheritance. The intergenerational occupational mobility theory states that children's education is an important mechanism for transferring status advantages from one generation to another in the forum of reproduction of a parent's occupation (Ganzeboom et al., 1991). Jacobs et al. (2017) offered an example of the occupation reproduction theory of nearly one million first-year students, for whom the probability of choosing their future career to be similar to that of a parent (e.g. engineer) was almost 27 times more likely than for non-engineering parent students.

The theory of intergenerational educational reproduction identifies children's tendencies to study the same programmes as their parents (Sputa & Paulson, 1995). Lentz (1985) stated that children who work in the same field as their parents earn more money than those who work in different fields. Students may find it prudent to follow in their parents' footsteps for monetary gain, as this motive has been identified in recent works as the primary goal of university education as an economic return brought by future career prospects (Balloo et al., 2017). Furthermore, educational reproduction can occur as a result of similar educational aspirations between parents and children – i.e. like their parents, some children will have high educational aspirations. For example, Siegfried and Getz (2003) reported that children of university faculty were much more likely to obtain PhDs than non-faculty children.

The discussion leads us to hypothesise that there are motives to reproduce a parent's education. Therefore, we hypothesise that satisfied parents aiming to reproduce their education will recommend and prefer a university that allows for this educational reproduction than non-similar-education parents. Accordingly, we propose the following hypotheses:

H8. Parents' similar education moderates the positive relationship between parents' recommendation behaviour toward their children and university choice, such that the relationship is stronger for similar-education parents than for non-similar-education parents.

H9. Parents' similar education moderates the positive relationship between parents' university brand preference and university choice, such that the relationship is stronger for similar-education parents than for non-similar-education parents.

Methods

Data collection instrument

The scales of measurement utilised to measure the model constructs were obtained from previously validated scales in the literature. In some cases, a few previous scales were adjusted to operationalise the measures to be appropriate for the higher-education setting. All constructs were measured with 5-point Likert-type scales (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Based on their direct experiences with university staff during the site visit events, parents rated the extent to which they believed that the university

staff provided reliable information, offered good support, and acted in a timely manner. The scale from Eldegwy et al. (2018) was originally used by Mai (2005). The items for other parents’ perceptions scale were based on items from Brocato et al. (2012). Based on their perceptions of and interactions with other parents during site visits, parents rated the extent to which they believed other parents were similar to them and behaved pleasantly and appropriately. Having directly experienced university facilities during site tours, parents rated the extent to which they believed university facilities are impressive, up-to-date, and comfortable. These scales were adopted from Gaski and Etzel (1986) and Dabholkar et al. (1996). A scale was also adopted from Voss et al. (1998) to measure parents’ overall satisfaction with site visit events. We assessed parents’ university preference using scales developed by Ebrahim (2013), which rate the extent to which parents prefer a university to another university and consider it to be their first choice. We captured parents’ intention to recommend the university using a scale adopted from Brügggen et al. (2011) and Eldegwy et al. (2018). University choice used a 2-point scale obtained from the university’s Oracle system based on the actual payment of tuition fees. Finally, parents’ similarity of education to the choice programme used a 2-point scale obtained from the university application form based on the parents’ stated education qualifications. All of the scale items are included in Table 1.

Data collection and sample

The collection instrument was developed through a multistep approach. First, a literature review and exploratory study were carried out to produce the survey’s initial form. Second, this initial survey was presented to two marketing professors and 10 parents

Table 1. Constructs and findings of confirmatory factor analysis.

Constructs	Items	λ	T
Parent-staff interactions	The staff members at the university supported me in a timely manner	.904	–
	The staff members provided me with excellent and reliable information	.961	32.086
	The staff members at the university provided me with good support	.953	31.376
Perception of other parents	I could relate to the other parents	.769	–
	I am similar to the other parents	.795	19.940
	I feel that there is a social similarity between me and other parents	.834	16.461
	I fit right in with the other parents	.841	16.660
	The behaviour of the other parents was appropriate	.888	17.806
Quality of university facilities	The other parents’ behaviour was pleasant	.894	17.928
	I found that the other parents acted pleasantly	.881	17.638
	The university’s facilities are impressive	.771	–
	The university’s facilities are up to date	.933	17.592
Parents’ satisfaction with university	The university’s outdoor public areas are admirable	.846	16.584
	This university has met my expectations	.876	–
	This university fulfilled my needs	.866	23.504
Parents’ recommendation behaviour toward their children	I am satisfied with this university	.894	22.549
	I will talk positively about this university to my son/daughter	.802	–
	I will encourage my son/daughter to apply to this university	.894	18.260
Parent’s university brand preference	I will recommend this university to my son/daughter	.833	17.127
	I prefer this university over all other universities	.849	–
	I like this university more than any other university	.901	21.981
	This university is my first choice over other universities	.889	21.357

to establish clarity and validity. The final format of the questionnaire included 27 questions, all of which were answered using a Likert-type scale. In addition, the twenty-eighth question concerning university choice was attained from the Oracle system post-enrolment. Demographic data were also solicited from the respondents.

This research is conducted in an emerging country, where consumers are likely to exhibit a unique set of characteristics pertinent to their available resources and unique cultural values (Burgess & Steenkamp, 2006; Marzouk, 2019; Marzouk & Mahrous, 2020). Egypt is characterised by a young population: 55% of its people are younger than 20 years old (El Khouli, 2015). The number of private HE universities in Egypt has grown from four universities in 1996–26 in 2019 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2019). Parents in Egypt, similar to their Western counterparts, commonly shop around for universities with their children (Haywood & Scullion, 2018), and students apply to an average of four universities (Galotti & Mark, 1994). Once on campus, parents are assisted by staff from the same academic programme of choice who provide them with necessary information. In small groups, staff accompany the parents to the presentations. Finally, current older students guide parents on a tour of the university facilities.

The population for this study is parents of high-school students applying to high-fee private universities in Egypt. The study focuses on high-fee private universities because these universities are expected to adopt marketing practices that involve parents in their student recruitment activities more so than lower-fee private universities. High-fee universities in Egypt are categorised as universities whose annual fees for all programmes are above 75,000 LE (\$5000). One of these five universities was selected because of the access granted to researchers to the university database to obtain actual enrolment data.

The data collection process took place from mid-August to mid-September 2020, following COVID-19 campus shutdown in Egypt from March to July 2020. All parents who participated in this study attended university site visits. After the completion of the site visit, parents were invited to complete an application form with a questionnaire by clicking on an electronic link; 542 questionnaires were stored on the Oracle system at the end of the admission period in September 2020. Only questionnaires linked to applicants who had received an offer of admission to the university were included in the study to ensure that university choice was not affected by academic eligibility. A qualifying question indicating the number of universities applied to was included. Those who indicated fewer than two were also excluded from the study. The inclusion of these dimensions yielded 348 applications. Nine additional responses were excluded due to missing data, resulting in a 339 final usable surveys.

After completing the data analysis, we conducted twelve in-depth interviews with parents of students to explore specific research enquiries that our quantitative data analysis could not address (Ateş et al., 2020). Parents of students applying to three programmes (i.e. engineering, management, and pharmacy) were chosen to explore further how the university choice decision is made and who participate in this decision-making process. Three were of similar education, and nine were of non-similar-education parents.

Results

Structural equation modelling was adopted with the aid of AMOS 20. The authors assessed the psychometric properties of the measuring scales using the reliability and

validity of the model constructs. Composite reliability indices ranged between 0.88 and 0.93 for all constructs, indicating a satisfactory level of internal consistency. The average variance extracted (AVE) for all model constructs surpassed the suggested threshold of 0.50 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994) (Table 2).

According to the CFA results, all variables had standardised factor loadings greater than 0.50, demonstrating sufficient convergent validity. Finally, all model fit indices were satisfactory. The measurement model's goodness-of-fit measures were as follows: $\chi^2 = 769.9$; $df = 315$; $p < 0.001$; $\chi^2/df = 2.44$; IFI = 0.957; TLI = 0.948; CFI = 0.957; and RMSEA = 0.065. The path model exhibited an adequate fit ($\chi^2 = 33.671$; $df = 11$; $p < 0.001$; $\chi^2/df = 3.061$; GFI = 0.975; IFI = 0.98; TLI = 0.96; CFI = 0.98; RMSEA = .078), suggesting that the proposed structural model fits the data well.

Therefore, we proceeded to examine the hypotheses. As indicated in Table 3, the results show that the three antecedents are statistically significant predictors in terms of affecting parents' satisfaction with the university. Parent-staff interactions had a significant impact on parents' satisfaction ($\beta = 0.14$; $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. The results also supported H2. Perceptions of other parents showed a significant impact on parents' satisfaction ($\beta = 0.24$; $p < 0.001$). University physical facilities had a significant effect on parents' satisfaction ($\beta = 0.38$; $p < 0.001$), supporting H3. The three predictors explained 57% of the variation in parents' satisfaction. The results also showed a significant positive relationship between satisfaction and parents' intention to recommend the university to children ($\beta = 0.81$; $p < 0.001$), thereby supporting H4. Parents' satisfaction explained 21% of the variation in parents' intention to recommend the university. The results also indicated that university preference was positively related to parents' satisfaction ($\beta = 0.94$; $p < 0.001$), thereby supporting H5. Furthermore, 14% of the variance in university preference can be explained by parents' satisfaction. H6 was also supported, as university choice was positively related to parents' intention to recommend the university ($\beta = 0.11$; $p < 0.05$). H7 was supported, as university choice was positively related to university preference ($\beta = 0.54$; $p < 0.001$). Both drivers explained 36% of the variation in university choice.

Moderation effect of parents' similar education

We run a moderation analysis using the process module provided by Hayes (2018) to examine whether parents' similar education moderates the relationship between both parents' recommendation behaviour toward their children and university brand preference, and university choice. We find that parents' similar education moderates the relationship between parents' recommendation behaviour toward their children and university choice ($\beta = 0.24$, $t = 2.36$, LL = 0.04, UL = 0.44), offering support to H8 (see Table 4). Furthermore, the authors examined the strength of the moderating effect. The results show that the interaction effect of parents' similar education with parents' recommendation behaviour toward their children significantly increased the effect by 0.24, resulting in a sufficient effect size.

We further find that parents' similar education moderates the relationship between university brand preference and university choice ($\beta = 0.18$, $t = 1.96$, LL = 0.001, UL = 0.36), offering support to H9 (see Table 4). Further, the authors examined the strength

Table 2. Composite reliability, correlation matrix, and average variance extracted scores for all the constructs.

Constructs	Composite reliability	AVE	Parent-staff interaction	Other parents' perception	Quality of physical facilities	Parents' satisfaction	Parents' intention to recommend university to children	Parent's university brand preference	University choice
Parent-staff interaction	0.96	0.88	1						
Other parents' perception	0.95	0.71	0.56	1					
Quality of physical facilities	0.89	0.73	0.60	0.59	1				
Parents' satisfaction with university	0.94	0.78	0.61	0.65	0.67	1			
Parents' intention to recommend university to children	0.88	0.71	0.49	0.51	0.62	0.56	1		
Parents' university brand preference	0.91	0.77	0.52	0.54	0.65	0.54	0.48	1	
University choice	na	na	0.46	0.43	0.47	0.41	0.37	0.59	1

Note: AVE, average variance extracted.

Table 3. Structural model results.

Hypothesised paths	Group name	Beta	t-value	Hypothesis result
H1: Parent-staff interactions → Parents' satisfaction	All	0.14***	4.22	Supported
	SEP	0.18***	2.80	
	Non SEP	0.29***	3.00	
H2: Perception of other parents → Parents' satisfaction	All	0.24***	7.17	Supported
	SEP	0.24***	3.10	
	Non SEP	0.23***	2.90	
H3: Quality of university facilities → Parents' satisfaction	All	0.38***	10.13	Supported
	SEP	0.44***	5.70	
	Non SEP	0.35***	3.80	
H4: Parents' satisfaction → Intention to recommend to children	All	0.81***	13.77	Supported
	SEP	0.52***	5.79	
	Non SEP	0.45***	3.48	
H5: Parents' satisfaction → University brand preference	All	0.94***	13.86	Supported
	SEP	0.89***	6.43	
	Non SEP	0.86***	6.21	
H6: Parents' intention to recommend to children → University choice	All	0.11*	2.17	Supported
	SEP	0.13	1.46	
	Non SEP	0.38***	4.0	
H7: University brand preference → University choice	All	0.54***	10.88	Supported
	SEP	0.50***	5.55	
	Non SEP	0.37***	3.95	
R ² Parents' satisfaction	All	0.57		
	SEP	0.54		
	Non SEP	0.58		
Parents' intention to recommend to children	All	0.21		
	SEP	0.26		
	Non SEP	0.20		
Parents' university brand preference	All	0.14		
	SEP	0.03		
	Non SEP	0.19		
University choice	All	0.36		
	SEP	0.30		
	Non SEP	0.35		

Note: Sig. at *** $P < .001$, * $P < .05$.
SEP: Similar-Education Parents.

Table 4. Results of moderator test.

A. Moderator test for parents' similar education between parents' recommendation behaviour toward their children and university choice

	Moderator effect	SE	Lower limit	Upper limit
Parents' recommendation behaviour	0.26***	0.07	0.12	0.41
Parents' similar education	0.97*	0.43	0.13	1.82
Parents' similar education x parents' recommendation behaviour	0.24*	0.10	0.04	0.44

B. Moderator test for parents' similar education between university brand preference and university choice

University brand preference	0.48***	0.07	0.35	0.60
Parents' similar education	0.65	0.38	0.10	1.40
Parents' similar education x university brand preference	0.18*	0.09	0.001	0.36

Note: Sig. at *** $P < .001$, * $P < .05$.

of the moderating effect. The results show that the interaction effect of parents' similar education with university brand preference significantly increased the effect by 0.18, resulting in a sufficient effect size.

Discussion and implications

This study provides empirical evidence that similar- and non-similar-education parents assign different significance levels to the proposed drivers of satisfaction. Results show that non-similar-education parents assign more importance to people (e.g. interactions with others), whereas similar-education parents assign more importance to things (e.g. facilities). The findings illustrate that quality of physical facilities is more important for similar-education parents' satisfaction than non-similar-education, whereas staff-to-parent interaction is more important for non-similar education than similar education. Similar-education parents seem to have objective criteria that drive their perception of university satisfaction. On the other hand, non-similar-education parents seem to depend on social criteria. Recent work has indicated that gender differences explain men's preference to work with things in contrast to women's preference to work with people (Su et al., 2009). In our study, gender difference does not explain the results, since 52% of parents are fathers and 48% are mothers. A possible explanation is that similar-education parents perceive themselves as subject matter experts capable of carrying out realistic evaluation of things such as quality of university physical facilities due to their similar education and possibly professional experience. On the other hand, non-similar-education parents might assign higher importance to social factors (people) such as interactions with university staff, since they lack the experience that enables them to make a realistic evaluation. This people's preference displayed by non-similar-education parents is in line with the service literature, which attests to the importance of social (Eldegwy & Elsharnouby, 2019) and personal interaction in service settings having a significant impact on consumer satisfaction (Sierra & McQuitty, 2005).

The results indicate that three proposed antecedents account for a higher degree of variance in university satisfaction in non-similar-education parents (58%) than similar-education parents (54%). This implies that similar-education parents may be considered experts who identify other important antecedents to university satisfaction that have not been included in the model. The high level of knowledge of the university programme associated with similar-education parents may render satisfying them more challenging than non-similar-education parents. East (1992) argued that a high level of product/service consumer knowledge leads to lower levels of loyalty because knowledge allows consumers to use more attributes to compare competitive offerings. Conversely, non-similar-education parents are considered novice consumers with lower programme-related knowledge levels who will therefore find it more difficult to make comparisons, and this difficulty will increase their perceived risk of wrong decision-making and thus make them more inclined to university satisfaction. This explanation may offer a possible reason for the difference in variance in university satisfaction between the two groups.

Similar-education parents' intention to recommend a university to their children had an insignificant effect on university choice. For them, the key and only significant driver for university choice is parents' university brand preference. Additionally, the results show that the interaction effect of parents' similar education with university brand preference significantly increased the effect by 0.18, resulting in a sufficient effect size. One possible explanation is that some similar-education parents in patriarchal emerging markets seem to dominate university selection decision-making instead of their children. Similar-education parents identify the dominant control they possess over university

choice and recognise that their own preferences are the main drivers of university choice. This dominance may stem from two causes. First, similar-education parents are more likely to regard education as a vehicle that facilitates the transfer of property ownership of assets during inheritance of positions and therefore achieve social reproduction. For example, a pharmacist who owns his pharmacy prepares for the eventuality of transfer of pharmacy ownership through inheritance by actively assuming university choice to ensure their child attends the desired programme, thus achieving educational reproduction. Second, in COVID times, power may be shifting away from students and favour of similar-education parents. Cost-related university selection criteria such as a return on investment from university learning has increased in importance during COVID times (Nanath et al., 2021). Therefore, some students may be willing to fully hand over university selection power to their parents in their efforts to follow in their parents' footsteps, since those who work in the same field as the their parents are reported to earn more money than their counterparts (Lentz, 1985).

We attempted to explore this phenomenon further by conducting in-depth interviews with parents. Twelve interviews were conducted with parents with students applying to three programmes (engineering, management, and pharmacy). Parents were asked to identify the primary decision-maker for the family concerning university choice. The following quotes present examples of property asset transference through inheritance and educational reproduction. Some similar-education parents exhibit a strong sense of control over their children's university choice and their belief accordingly that no consultation with their children is needed:

"What does he (the student) know? I have been an engineer for 30 years and know what's best for him, and I will make the choice for him" (Parent 1, Engineer, male, 58 years).

"He (the student) came to me and said I am interested in computer science; he is actually good with computers ... but I said no, it's a pharmacy program at X university. I know many computer science graduates who can't find work ... He will own his own pharmacy when he graduates and have a steady income ... He objected, but I am looking out for what's best for him" (Parent 2, Pharmacist, male, 66 years).

Results also attest to the importance of the role of non-similar-education parents. University brand preference and intention to recommend a university to children are key drivers of university choice. The role of parents as influencers on their children's university selection is well documented in the literature (Eldegwy et al., 2021). Non-similar-education parents are engaged in group decision-making in which parents' intention to recommend a university to children and parents' university brand preference drive university choice. This finding is in line with the generally accepted notion in the literature that theorises university choice as a family decision in which parents are major influencers (Sørensen, 2007).

Managerial implications

The importance of higher education for economic prosperity is uncontested. The sector contributes to a country's economy through graduate employability and its advances through scientific knowledge. Therefore, managerial contributions to higher education may be considered valuable, as it is an old and yet still contemporary highly relevant

topic. This study offers guidance to university marketers in their quests to increase enrolment numbers in today's highly competitive marketplace. We propose redefining the marketing landscape of universities through revisiting what we know about parents' roles in emerging countries. The findings of this research suggest that similar-education parents are decision-makers with regard to university choice. This argument seems plausible in the context of Eastern emerging countries where a hierarchical power structure still exists, with parents retaining most of the power within the family unit.

We recommend that universities create pleasant experiences between friendly university staff and parents from similar backgrounds at carefully selected quality facilities during site visits, allowing for the satisfaction of parents. Universities should recognise the importance of physical facilities for similar-education parents and should expend all efforts to manage those social experiences and maintain a pleasing physical setting in which they occur. This could be accomplished by selecting and training university staff and inviting socially similar parents on prescheduled site visits organised at modern and appealing facilities. Universities can match staff and parents from similar backgrounds during the virtual or real campus visit. Universities are also advised to recognise the importance of similar-education parents and create opportunities for those parents to co-create value through participation in community outreach programmes and the development of university-industry networks.

Universities may find it prudent to utilise target marketing to attract similar-education parents to apply to the same programme choice. For example, engineering schools can advertise at engineering professional conferences and syndicates. Every effort should be made to attract similar-education parents, not only due to their evident impact on university choice, but also due to their ability to support their children academically and professionally as future brand ambassadors for the university.

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