

Marketing bank services to youth in China

CHAN, Kara K W; TSANG, Lennon L L; Chen, Jie

Published in:
Young Consumers

DOI:
[10.1108/YC-03-2017-00672](https://doi.org/10.1108/YC-03-2017-00672)

Published: 01/01/2017

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
CHAN, K. K. W., TSANG, L. L. L., & Chen, J. (2017). Marketing bank services to youth in China. *Young Consumers*, 18(3), 278-289. <https://doi.org/10.1108/YC-03-2017-00672>

General rights

Copyright and intellectual property rights for the publications made accessible in HKBU Scholars are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners. In addition to the restrictions prescribed by the Copyright Ordinance of Hong Kong, all users and readers must also observe the following terms of use:

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from HKBU Scholars for the purpose of private study or research
- Users cannot further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- To share publications in HKBU Scholars with others, users are welcome to freely distribute the permanent publication URLs

Marketing bank services to youth in China
Kara Chan*
Professor, Department of Communication Studies
Hong Kong Baptist University
karachan@hkbu.edu.hk
852 3411 7836

Mr. Lennon Tsang, Lecturer
School of Communication
Hong Kong Baptist University
lennon@hkbu.edu.hk
852 3411 3152

Ms. Jie Chen
PhD student
School of Economics
University of New South Wales
chenj2013@lzu.edu.cn

To cite: Chan, K., Tsang, L., and Chen, J. (2017) Marketing bank services to youth in China, *Young Consumers*, 18(3), 278-289.

Acknowledgement: This study was supported by a research funding from the David C. Lam Institutes for East-West Studies, Hong Kong Baptist University.
September 6, 2017

*corresponding author

Marketing bank services to youth in China

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the banking experiences and awareness of marketing efforts of banks among youth in mainland China.

Design/methodology/approach – Four focus-group interviews were conducted. A convenience sample of 26 participants aged 17 to 20 was recruited in Laiwu, Shandong, a medium-sized city in China. They were asked to report experiences that could illustrate good and bad banking services. They were also asked to recall bank marketing promotions.

Findings – Participants' perceived service quality of banks were determined by staff attitude, service delivery, physical environment, and comparison of user experience. The marketing communication activities they recalled most frequently included product placements, advertising slogans, entertaining commercials, and co-branding with online games.

Research limitations/implications – The findings were based on a non-probability sample. The study also did not differentiate between personal experience or indirect experience with family and friends. Similar studies can be conducted in large cities or in rural China to compare banking experiences in different social economic settings. Further studies can be designed using quantitative methodology to measure the importance of various factors in influencing perceptions of service quality. Online banking experience can also be studied in the future.

Practical implications – Banks in China can enhance their competitiveness and brand reputation through raising the professionalism of their front-line staff, improving efficiency and transparency, and streamlining the service process. Banks can make contacts with youth through offline and online promotional activities, such as co-branding with popular online games.

Originality/value – This is the first study on banking services among youth conducted in a medium-sized city in China.

Keywords – consumer perceptions; service quality; marketing promotions; brand reputation;
qualitative method

Paper type – Research paper

Marketing bank services to youth in China

Introduction

With rapid economic growth, increased household income, and exposure to international consumer culture, consumers in modern China are moving from saving to spending (Gan et al., 2016). Despite the recent economic slowdown, China's private consumption of cars, consumer electronics, e-commerce, and overseas travel registered two-digit growth in the past few years (*The Economist*, 2016). The number of credit cards issued by Chinese banks has increased from 140 million in 2008 to 455 million in 2014 (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/450048/total-number-of-credit-cards-in-china/>).

China has nearly seven million students graduating from colleges every year (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2016). When students enter the job market, their income increases significantly. In subsequent decades they require various banking services, including bank accounts for receiving salaries, credit cards for local and overseas consumption, home mortgages, personal loans for purchasing expensive items, and investment products. Thus college students and young people represent a promising target market of the banking industry (Almossawi, 2001). This youth market segment tends to be creative, adventurous, and curious to try out new things (Gan et al., 2016). Young consumers in China are paying increasing attention to material possessions, engaging in social comparison of possessions, and valuing possessions as being essential for personal success (Chan and Zhang, 2007). Therefore, economic socialization plays an increasingly important role in young people's lives.

Banks have the potential to develop a long relationship with young customers. The One Child Policy in China, introduced in 1979 and abolished in 2015. This policy caused a decrease in the population of people aged under 21, as well as a lower percentage of the

youth population (Curtis et al., 2015). However, the youth is an untapped market largely ignored by financial marketers in China. The youth and, in particular, college graduates, have a high chance of getting good jobs and becoming profitable customers (Colgate et al., 1996). Are banks in China reaching out to this young and affluent-to-be market segment? What is their current banking experience? What do they expect from banking services? How to reach them effectively using different marketing communication strategies?

Marketers of financial services face many challenges. First, financial products are often complicated and consumers may not be able to fully understand them. Second, the quality of financial services is difficult to evaluate. Third, financial products are often unexciting and uninvolved. Their attributes are not easy to communicate visually (Estelami, 2007). The homogeneous nature of banking products has led to marketing communication becoming a major tool in brand building and differentiation (Gupta, 2013). A number of studies were conducted in Western countries, Africa, and Asia about marketing banking services to the youth segment (e.g. Almosawi, 2001; Blankson et al., 2009; Gerrard and Cunningham, 2001). However, we are not aware of any study on youth and banking services in China. To fill this research gap, an exploratory study was conducted with the objectives of examining young consumers' banking experiences and identifying effective marketing tools to establish contacts with them. The results will provide marketing insights for national and regional banks to communicate with the targeted young segment. As far as we know, this is the first study on youth and banking services in China.

Literature review

The banking industry in China

China' financial system has undergone a series of evolutions since 1978. Firstly, four state-owned banks, namely Bank of China (BOC), China Construction Bank (CCB), Agricultural

Bank of China (ABC), and Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICAC) (also known as the “Big Four”) were established to take over the commercial banking businesses of the People’s Bank of China. The “Big Four” were commercialized and listed to enhance their profitability. The restrictions on lending interest rates were lifted. The deposit insurance system was introduced. In 2014, five private banks, 13 privately-controlled financial companies, and 162 village and township banks were licensed (Zhou et al., 2015). The state-owned “Big Four” have been criticized for being policy-oriented, rather than market-oriented. The financial sector was considered as inefficient and uncompetitive. The rural population and non-state firms have insufficient access to financial services (Zhou et al., 2015). E-banking, mobile banking, and e-payment have provided new channels of financial management and payments. In the first half of 2016, online payment and online banking users in China increased by 9 percent and 12 percent, respectively (CNNIC, 2016). Personal and business internet banking transactions replaced more than half of over-the-counter transactions in China in 2012 (Tang et al., 2014). Innovative digital financial services such as Alipay and AliFinance launched by Alibaba have become popular means for online payments and online loans (Zhou et al., 2015).

Advertising spending in the finance industry is low. In 2012, it ranked number 16 among all industries in terms of advertising expenditure (Incitez China, 2013). In September 2014, the total online advertising spending of banking service brands was RMB88 million (Cecilia, 2014). The top spending brands were China Construction Bank, China Industrial and Commercial Bank, Bank of Communication, VISA International, HSBC, and China UnionPay.

Chinese banks market through various channels including television, newspapers, direct mail, radio, magazines, outdoor media and online media. During the past decade, Chinese advertising has seen many historical opportunities, such as the 2008 Olympic Games and the

2010 Shanghai World EXPO. The total advertising spending in 2008 increased by 9 percent over that of 2007, reaching RMB112 billion (Parry, 2010). For example, Bank of China sponsored the Olympic Games and secured the rights to sell Olympic tickets. It also partnered with Visa to issue a special Olympic credit card (International Olympic Committee, n.d.).

How do the youth select banks?

There have been several studies on bank selection criteria of young consumers. Gerrard and Cunningham (2001) examined different bank selection dimensions among Singapore undergraduates. Almassawi (2001) examined the bank selection criteria employed by Bahrain college students. Blankson et al. (2009) compared how university students in the US and Ghana selected a retail bank. The findings of these studies are similar: young consumers usually consider bank image and reputation, friendliness of bank personnel, location of ATMs, interest rate, and third-person influence when they select a retail bank (Almassawi, 2001; Gerrard and Cunningham, 2001). Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, Narteh and Owusu-Frimpong (2011) found that students valued core service delivery and technology-related factors of a bank. The most important factor in choosing a bank was affected by the overall economic environment. In the wake of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, young respondents in Singapore chose banks that made them “feel secure” (Gerrard and Cunningham, 2001). On the other hand, Bahraini students emphasized the availability of parking space near a bank, which is very likely to differ from the criteria used in a place with a good public transport system. Furthermore, young female respondents placed most value on the reputation of a bank, while young male respondents were more concerned with convenience and availability (Almassawi, 2001). Similar studies on youth and banking in China have not been found. However, a qualitative study on Chinese youth and retail services found that interviewees considered physical environment of the shops as well as the friendliness of the shop assistants important in finding the services likable (Yip et al., 2012).

To summarize, bank image, friendly services, convenience, and security were the main criteria in selecting banking services among young consumers. There is a lack of research studies on the banking experiences of the youth in China. This study attempts to fill the gap.

The research objectives of this study are

1. to explore the banking experience of young consumers and their perceptions of good and bad banking services; and
2. to identify how banks can communicate with youth effectively through various marketing promotional efforts.

Methodology

As the objective of this study is to explore young consumers' banking experiences in detail and their interaction with different marketing promotions, a qualitative interpretive approach was adopted to provide an in-depth analysis. To this end, in July 2015 focus-group methodology was applied to a group of young participants in Laiwu, a medium-sized city in Shandong province.

Geographical and market backgrounds

Cities in China are divided into five categories: Super Cities, Mega Cities, Big Cities, Medium-sized Cities, and Small Cities (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2014). Medium-sized cities are those with a permanent urban population of 0.5 to 1 million. The four largest domestic banks compete with regional and local banks in medium-sized cities. We studied a medium-sized city because small and medium-sized cities will be a strong driving force for future economic development in China (Wong and Lin, 2015).

Shandong is one of the most developed coastal provinces in China. The urban population of Laiwu is 0.62 million (http://news.xinhuanet.com/local/2016-09/07/c_129272745.htm). In 2015, the per capita disposable income of Laiwu urban residents was RMB30,219 (People's Government of Laiwu City, 2016), similar to the national average disposable income of RMB31,195 (National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China, 2016). When the study was carried out, the four largest Chinese banks had 59 branches in Laiwu. Laishang Bank, the local bank, had 27 branches. Due to licensing restrictions, international banks have limited branches in Chinese cities. For example, HSBC have only five branches in the whole Shandong province, and none of them are in Laiwu (<http://hsbc.banklocationmaps.com/china>). No international bank had a branch in Laiwu.

The participants

Altogether 26 participants aged 17 to 20 were recruited through personal networks and the QQ online discussion platform. Among these, 14 were high school students and 12 were college students. The numbers of male and female participants were equal. One participant did not take part in a focus group discussion but was interviewed face-to-face beforehand to try out the list of the questions. Altogether four focus group discussion sessions were conducted in a city park. Two groups consisted of six male participants. One group consisted of six female participants. The remaining group consisted of seven female participants.

Procedure

Before the study, an information sheet explaining its purpose, procedure, expected duration, and participant compensation was distributed to participants. Written parental consent was obtained for the one participant who was 17 years old. The discussion sessions lasted from 48 to 64 minutes. One of the authors served as the moderator. As a warm-up exercise, the participants were asked to (1) write down the names of three banks, (2) identify six banks

whose full-color logos were shown to them, and (3) indicate their familiarity with nine banking services on a three-point scale of “never heard of”, “heard of but unfamiliar with”, and “heard of and familiar with”. This part took about five minutes. After that, the moderator began to ask the open-ended questions listed in Appendix 1. The participants took turns to answer the questions. They might also elaborate on ideas presented by other participants during the interview. The focus group sessions were audio-taped.

Data analysis

The author who moderated the sessions transcribed the audio records into word documents in Chinese. She familiarized herself with the transcripts by reading them several times. The constant comparative method was used to analyze the data and generate meaningful categories for systematic exploration and investigation (Strauss, 1987). Based on the answers to the research questions, topic codes were created. The coder stopped the coding when new codes stopped appearing (Charmaz, 2006). Another author went through the same process and coded the transcripts independently. No software was used for coding. The two coders went through the two sets of coding. They reconciled any discrepancies through discussion. The process was meant to minimize the subjectivity in research analysis (Weber, 2004). Typical quotes were selected by one of the authors and translated into English.

Findings

The unaided recall of bank names generated nine banks. Recognition of the logos of the “Big Four” banks was high. Altogether 19 participants were able to identify both the logos of ICBC and ABC. Altogether 16 participants were able to identify CCB and 14 participants were able to identify BOC. Five participants identified the logo of the local bank, Laishang Bank. None of the participants were able to identify the logo of HSBC. Banking services that they were most familiar with were ATM, online banking, mobile banking, and fixed deposit

saving accounts. They were least familiar with foreign exchange accounts, personal credit accounts, and financial management accounts.

Banking experiences

All participants were able to report the name of the bank they or their families were using. ICBC, ABC, and Laishang Bank were the three most frequently patronized banks. All except one participant had their own bank accounts. Most of their accounts were opened when they were either in high school or in college. One account was opened in middle school. The two most reported reasons for opening a bank account were to shop online and to get promotional items. Referral by family members or friends was another reason that was often reported.

Twenty-four of the 25 participants had visited a bank within the past year. A majority of them had a positive experience with their banks. They reported that the service was good, and the facilities were convenient and easy to use. However, six participants reported that their experience with banks was not good. They felt that the atmosphere was unfriendly, the waiting time was too long, or the physical environment was not pleasant.

What good and bad banking services are like

When participants were asked about factors contributing to good or bad banking services, they often recalled real-life experiences rather than the factors in general terms. Some of them used comparative terms, contrasting their good and bad experiences with two different banks. The coding developed for good and bad banking services shared many similarities. They were often opposite aspects of the same attribute. For example, fast service was considered good while long queuing time was considered bad. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the participants' ideas of good and bad banking services. The three most important dimensions in

assessing service quality were staff attitude, service delivery, and physical environment. Fee structure played a relatively insignificant role in determining service quality.

The participants considered being friendly, courteous, caring, gentle, and patient as attributes of good staff attitude. They considered a cold attitude, wearing a long face, being indifferent, rude, or impatient as attributes of bad staff attitude. Behaviors such as chatting with colleagues during work and favoritism toward certain customers were also mentioned. Three groups of employees were most often brought up when participants talked about staff attitude: floor managers, security guards, and tellers. Here are a few typical quotes regarding staff attitude.

“The staff needs to be approachable. For example, the floor manager can take a service ticket for you, and ask you what kind of business you came for. But in reality, floor managers often stay inside their offices. Instead, a security guard takes a ticket for you. ” (male)

“Some employees are bad-tempered and rude. I met one. He had a loud voice and was unfriendly to customers. His colleagues said he was usually like that. ” (female)

“The bank staff treats you according to how much money you have. This makes me angry.” (male)

“It should be my turn to be served at the counter, but a friend of a front-line staff member came and went ahead of me. I felt that I was not respected.” (female)

In terms of service delivery, personalized service and short queuing time were considered good. A long queuing time, tedious or unclear procedures, interrupted service, and misleading information were considered bad. The participants complained about having to fill in too many forms. They complained that the bank did not explain how their personal information is to be used. One participant perceived that a bank would coerce its customers to buy

investment products. Another participant reported that his personal information was being used to contact him in promotional activities. Here are some representative quotes for bad service delivery:

“The most annoying thing is the long queuing time. All types of transaction are lumped into the same queue. Sometimes it takes almost an hour to finish something. The next customer has to wait all this time. It is driving me mad.” (male)

“I am tired of those tedious forms. You need to sign many forms and they don’t give you copies of the forms that you signed.” (male)

“There may be two service counters working. Without any notice, a service clerk may put up a “no service” sign and walk away. You don’t know where he or she has gone, and the person may not be back for a while.” (male)

“Suppose you wanted to make a fixed deposit of 20,000 yuan. Eventually you are coerced to put the money in a fund. You only find it out when you try to get the money back. Even if you find it out the next day and want to get your money back, the bank will not give it to you.” (male)

When participants talked about bad banking services, they used words expressing strong emotions, such as “troublesome” and “disgusted”, indicating their high level of frustration.

Regarding physical environment and facilities, participants expected banks to be clean, air-conditioned, and have sufficient seats for waiting customers. Three male students expected banks to offer free charging stations for mobile phones and free wi-fi. A female student found that the electronic display board in her bank was often turned off. Another female student remarked that a bank should be kept in an orderly manner.

When participants discussed service quality, they often made comparisons, not only between banks but also between banks and other businesses. One participant compared the service provided by a bank with the service provided by a calling center. Here are two quotes:

“The floor managers of Agricultural Bank of China and China Construction Bank provide better service. They are enthusiastic. The floor managers of other banks just ignore you.”

(male)

“If a customer needs to wait for service, the bank staff should say ‘please wait a moment’ or something like that. When you call 10086 or 10010 (*two well-known customer service numbers in China*), the call center attendant will say ‘We are going to check it out for you. Please wait a moment’. They will repeat this if they have to make you wait a while longer.”

(male)

[Insert Table 1 and Table 2 about here]

Memorable banking experiences

Altogether 29 memorable banking experiences were reported. All those reported by male participants were negative. Most of them were related to long waiting time, tedious banking procedures, and having to visit a bank many times to get something done. All positive experiences reported were about bank staff being warm and caring. As nearly all the factors reported were similar to those summarized in Table 1 and Table 2, details are not spelled out here.

Recalling bank advertisements

Participants were asked to recall a bank advertisement from any media and a reason for remembering it. Altogether the advertisements of 11 banks were recalled, including those of the four biggest banks. The recalled advertisements came from a variety of media, including

TV, product placement in movies, mini-movies, websites, out-of-home media, and a WeChat mobile app. Very often they reported advertising content and storylines but were unable to recall the name of the advertiser. Product placement in movies and advertisements on popular online game sites were appealing to male participants. Two male participants found the Bank of China credit card co-branded with the online game League of Legend attractive. Three banks' product placement advertisements in Feng Xiaogang's movie *Big Shot's Funeral* and Xu Zheng's movie *Lost in Thailand* were reported in detail by two male participants. In these product placements, the banking services were mentioned in the script, in addition to the visual display of the bank names and logos. A typical quote is given below.

“In *Lost in Thailand*, a character got stuck in Thailand. In a close-up shot he took out a credit card and found there was no money in his account. It was an ICBC credit card. He called his girlfriend and said ‘please transfer money to me right away. I got stuck’.” (male)

Male participants also recalled bank advertisements that used animation or animated figures. For example, a commercial with the Monkey King (a popular character in a Chinese classical novel) and a commercial with terracotta soldiers were reported. Female participants, on the other hand, paid much attention to the storyline of broadcast advertisements. For example, two female participants recalled in detail two advertisements. Here is what they said.

“A man posted many sticky notes on a piece of glass. It seemed that he had to take care of a lot of banking matters. Then a wind blew and a voice-over said, ‘You don’t need all these notes. It should not be so complicated. Go to China Everbright Bank and you can settle them easily and promptly.’ This ad is creative. It is dramatic and likable. It looks good.” (female)

“In the bank commercial, there was a big banner. Red threads made the shape of a heart. I can’t remember which bank it was. I always want to figure out how to make the shape. I tried many times but couldn’t do it.” (female)

The participants were most likely to recall the slogans in advertisements. Among the five slogans recalled, three were from advertisements for “Big Four” banks ICBC, ABC, and CCB. They said that they could remember the slogans because they appeared everywhere and could be seen every day. The slogan of the local Laishang Bank was brought up twice. One participant reported that it incorporates the meaning of the place and the concept of profit. He also commented that a good slogan could enhance memory of the brand name. Here is what he said:

“The slogan of the bank is crucial to help you remember the bank. Some slogans are great. You can remember them easily. For example, Laishang Bank’s ‘誠者成 贏共盈’ (An honest person will succeed, win and make profits). The second half of the slogan is a pun for ‘All people in Laiwu will make a profit’. I like it a lot and remembered it immediately.” (male)

Discussion

Judging from the recall of brand names and identification of bank logos, the “Big Four” banks were able to register their presence among the participants. Participants’ unfamiliarity with personal credit, foreign exchange and financial management accounts shows that Chinese banks have not moved away from traditional banking services as Western banks have done, at least not to the same extent. `

The top three factors in determining good and bad banking services among the participants were staff attitudes, core service delivery, and physical environment of the banks. Lack of security was brought up only once by a female respondent. She commented that non-state-owned banks were unreliable and could go bankrupt easily. Security was less frequently mentioned by Chinese participants and can be attributed to the fact that the four largest banks in China are all state-owned and huge by any standard, thus the chance of bankruptcy was perceived to be low. Since bank bankruptcy is rare in China, people don’t pay much attention

to bank security. Furthermore, China's bank deposit insurance policy was launched in May 2015 (CNBC, 2015) and may mitigate people's concerns about bank security.

The participants attached high importance to staff attitudes as a determinant of good and bad banking services. This indicates that they paid much attention to their transactional experiences with front-line staff. It may also indicate how participants want to be treated as customers. This finding is in line with Lovelock and Wirtz's (2004) argument that consumers' expectations of services tend to be influenced by their personal experience with a particular service provider or with a competitor. Since the participants were young, their banking experiences were most likely non-personal transactions with non-specific junior staff at the front line (Farquhar and Meidan, 2010). As a result, staff attitudes of helpfulness, courtesy, and empathy play an important role in influencing bank experience. Staff of Chinese banks have been criticized for a poor service attitude (Zhou, 2014). Zhou (2014) attributed this to insufficient customer service training, unfamiliarity with new bank products, lack of accountability, and poor interpersonal skills.

Participants were sensitive to discrimination or favoritism in banking services. Even though there is a need for bank staff to look after their key customers, they should keep it low profile. Our study found that some bank staff members as well as bank management were not aware of the importance of good service. Lympelopoulos et al. (2006) proposed that staff conduct in terms of responsiveness and civilized conduct could influence bank selection. The demonstration of preferential treatment will hurt the feeling of the currently less important customers. Young participants often have limited financial resources or experience. There is a tendency for bank staff to overlook their potential for a long-term banking relationship, which may drive young customers away to banks which treat customers fairly.

Long waiting times, complicated procedures, and interrupted services were brought up frequently as indicators of poor services. Together these three factors generated the impression of inefficiency. Long queuing time has been identified as a persistent problem plaguing Chinese banks (Qin et al., 2011; Zhou, 2014). Qin et al. (2011) attributed the low efficiency to insufficient manpower and banking capacity to meet the demands generated by fast economic growth, the heavy involvement in taking care of non-banking business, such as handling payments for utilities and social security, and the low adoption of electronic banking facilities. Our study found that the participants were not satisfied with the core service delivered by banks. Most of their bad banking experiences were related to low efficiency. Bad front desk service may drive the participants to online financial solutions. Banks therefore need to develop user-friendly impersonal services to meet the needs of customers.

Unlike in previous studies, a convenient location did not play an important role in deciding service quality. This may be due to the fact that young participants are able to get banking access to impersonal services easily. As a result, their dependence on location-based services is reduced.

Contrasting the findings in this study and the studies in other countries reveals some similarities and differences. Core service quality and friendly personnel remain as major factors in choosing a bank. However, bank reputation, convenience, and security—important factors in other studies—were not influential among the participants in this study. The marketing implication is that banks should consider enhancing the service attitudes and competence of their front-line staff as well as introducing innovative retail space design to attract young consumers.

The participants did not seem to be interested in financial services advertisements. However, they were aware of the promotional activities of banks. Our findings suggested that they were

most receptive to catchy slogans, product placements, and interesting storylines. The importance of catchy slogans and interesting storylines in appealing to young consumers was similar to that found among adolescents with regard to food and beverage marketing (Chan et al., 2016). Male participants in the study found the co-branding of a credit card with animated characters in internet videogames appealing. Banks can continue to explore such opportunities to establish brand identification and to attract young consumers. Banks can also establish contacts with the youth through social media platforms. For example, a credit card brand in Singapore established its youth content marketing strategy to engage its target audience through lifestyle stories posted in the social media landscape (Ismail, 2015).

Based on the research findings, a theoretical framework for how youth perceive quality services is proposed in Figure 1. Perceived service quality is related to four factors, including staff attitude, service delivery, physical environment, and comparison of user experience.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Limitations and future research direction

Because of the exploratory nature of this study, the sample size was small, comprising a non-probability sample drawn for convenience from a medium-sized city, and is thus limited in its representation of other cities in China. However, it can serve as a base for comparing and contrasting the behaviors and attitudes of the youth in other cities of China in future studies.

When prompted for banking experiences, some of the participants shared the banking experiences of family members that they had observed or heard of. This study did not ask about online banking experiences, a phenomenon that is becoming more popular now. As most participants were unaware of international banks and their promotional activities, this study was not able to compare service quality perceptions of local and international banks.

Future studies can employ quantitative survey methodology to compare the relative

importance of factors identified in this study in selecting a bank among youth of different age, sex, and socio-economic background. Future studies can also profitably test our proposed model for predicting perceived service quality of banks among youths as shown in Figure 1.

Conclusion

To conclude, the present study contributes to the existing literature that examines banking experience among Chinese youth by using qualitative methodology. The study identifies staff attitude, service delivery, and physical environment as the major factors in motivating choice of a bank. They also compared their banking experience between branches, banks, and other service industries. The study identifies that product placements, advertising slogans, entertaining commercials, and co-branding activities with online games are effective promotional tools for marketing bank services to Chinese youth.

References

- Almossawi, M. (2001), "Bank selection criteria employed by college students in Bahrain: an empirical analysis", *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, Vol. 19 No. 3, pp. 115-125.
- Blankson, C., Omar, O.E. and Cheng J.M. (2009), "Retail bank selection in developed and developing countries: A cross-national study of students' bank-selection criteria", *Thunderbird International Business Review*, Vol. 51 No. 2, pp. 183-198.
- Cecilia (2014), "China top 10 banking service brands by online ad spend in Sep 2014", available at: <https://www.chinainternetwatch.com/10496/top-10-banking-service-brands-by-online-ad-spend-sep-2014/> (accessed March 7, 2017).
- Chan, K. and Zhang, C. (2007), "Living in a celebrity-mediated social world: The Chinese experience", *Young Consumers*, Vol. 8 No. 2, pp.139-152.
- Chan, K., Tse, T., Tam, D. and Huang, A. (2016), "Perception of healthy and unhealthy food among Chinese adolescents", *Young Consumers*, Vol. 17 No. 1, pp. 32-45.
- Charmaz, K. (2006), *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*, London: Sage.
- CNBC (2015), "China bank deposit insurance could tilt competitive landscape", available at <http://www.cnbc.com/2015/04/01/china-bank-deposit-insurance-could-tilt-competitive-landscape.html> (accessed March 27, 2017).
- CNNIC (2016), "Statistical report on internet development in China", available at: <https://cnnic.com.cn/IDR/ReportDownloads/201611/P020161114573409551742.pdf> (accessed March 7, 2017).
- Colgate, M., Stewart, K. and Kinsella, R. (1996), "Customer defection: a study of the student market in Ireland", *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, Vol. 14 No. 3, pp. 23-29.
- Curtis, C.C., Lugauer, S. and Mark, N.C. (2015), "Demographic patterns and household saving in China", *American Economic Journal: Macroeconomics*, Vol. 7 No. 2, pp. 58-94.
- Estelami, H. (2007), "Advertising", in *Marketing Financial Services*, Indianapolis, IN: Dog Ear Publishing, pp. 121-150.
- Farquhar, J.D. and Meidan, A. (2010), "Financial services in China – a case study of the credit card", in *Marketing Financial Services* (2nd ed.), Hampshire, England: Palgrave MacMillan, pp. 56-63.
- Gan, C.E.C., Cohen, K.A., Hu, B., Tran, M.C., Dong, W. and Wang, A. (2016), "The relationship between credit card attributes and the demographic characteristics of card users in China", *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, Vol. 34 No. 7, pp. 966-984.

Gerrard, P. and Cunningham, J.B. (2001), "Singapore's undergraduates: how they choose which bank to patronise", *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, Vol. 19 No. 3, pp. 104-114.

Gupta, R. (2013), "Study of effectiveness of advertising strategies of HSBC Bank", *International Journal of Research in Management & Social Science*, Vol. 1 No. 2, pp. 90-103.

Incitez China (2013), "China advertising 2012", available at: www.chinainternetwatch.com/1904/china-advertising-2012 (accessed March 7, 2017).

International Olympic Committee (n.d.), "Marketing Report-Beijing 2008", available at: http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Reports/EN/en_report_1428.pdf (accessed March 7, 2017).

Ismail, N. (2015), "OCBC on its youth content marketing strategy", available at: <http://www.marketing-interactive.com/understanding-buyer-persona-key-content-marketing/> (accessed May 4, 2017).

Lovelock, C. and Wirtz, J. (2004), *Service Marketing: People, Technology and Strategy, 5th international edition*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.

Lymperopoulos, C., Chaniotakis, I.E. and Soureli, M. (2006), "The importance of service quality in bank selection for mortgage loan", *Managing Service Quality*, Vol. 16 No. 4, pp. 365-379.

Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (2016), "Number of students in higher education institutions", available at: http://en.moe.gov.cn/Resources/Statistics/edu_stat_2015/2015_en01/201610/t20161012_284510.html (accessed March 7, 2017).

National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China (2016), "2015 Statistical report on national economy and social development", available at: http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/201602/t20160229_1323991.html (accessed March 27, 2017). [in Chinese]

Narteh, B. and Owusu-Frimpong, N. (2011), "An analysis of students' knowledge and choice criteria in retail bank selection in sub-Saharan Africa: The case of Ghana", *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, Vol. 29 No. 5, pp. 373-397.

Parry, D. (2010), *Asia Pacific Market & MediaFact*, ZenithOptimedia, London.

People's Government of Laiwu City (2016), "2015 Statistical report on national economy and social development of Laiwi city", available at: http://www.laiwu.gov.cn/xxgk/jcms_files/jcms1/web26/site/art/2016/10/9/art_1799_9446.html (accessed March 27, 2017). [in Chinese]

Qin, K., Shen, G., and Feng, T. (2011), “A report on a survey of banking service in Hebei province”, available at <http://mall.cnki.net/magazine/Article/JRJY201103007.htm> (accessed March 7, 2017). [in Chinese]

State Council of the People’s Republic of China (2014), “Notice of the State Council on adjusting the Standards for Categorizing City Sizes”, available at: http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2014-11/20/content_9225.htm (accessed March 7, 2017). [in Chinese]

Strauss, A.L. (1987), *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*, Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Tang, T., Zhang, Y. and He, D. (2014), “The rise of digital finance in China: New drivers, new game, new strategy”, Boston Consulting Group, October, available at: http://www.bcg.com.cn/export/sites/default/en/files/publications/reports_pdf/BCG_The_Rise_of_Digital_Finance_in_China_Oct_2014.pdf (accessed May 4, 2017).

The Economist (2016), “China’s consumers still kicking. Despite China’s economic slowdown, consumption is resilient”, available at: <http://www.economist.com/news/business-and-finance/21697597-free-spending-consumers-provide-comfort-troubled-economy-consumption-china-resilient> (accessed March 7, 2017).

Weber, R. (2004), “The rhetoric of positivism versus interpretivism: A personal view”, *MIS Quarterly*, Vol. 28 No. 1, pp. 429-449.

Yip, T., Chan, K. and Poon, E. (2012), “Attributes of young consumers’ favorite retail shops: A qualitative study”, *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol 29 No. 7, pp. 545-552.

Wong, P. and Lin, M.C.Y. (2015), “Best-performing cities China 2015”, available at: <http://www.best-cities-china.org/best-performing-cities-china-2015.pdf> (accessed March 7, 2017).

Zhou, W., Arner, D.W. and Buckley R.P. (2015), Regulation of digital financial services in China: Last mover advantages? *Tsinghua China Law Review*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 25-62.

Zhou, Y. (2014), “Service and management problems of commercial banks and their solutions”, *Knowledge Economy(Zhishi Jingji)*, Vol. 6, pp. 103-104. [in Chinese]

Appendix 1 English translation of the questions

1. Do you know which bank(s) your family is patronizing?
2. Do you have any bank account (including accounts shared with parents, opened in the name of the parents)? If yes, which bank? When and why did you open the account?
3. In the past year, did you go to any bank? What was your impression of the banking service?
4. Please tell me what do you think are good banking services and why.
5. Please tell me what do you think are bad banking services and why.
6. Please tell me a memorable experience related to banks (it may come from you, your family or your friends). Please describe it in detail and explain why it is memorable.
7. Have you come across any promotion activities to promote a bank?
8. Please recall a bank advertisement. Why does it get your attention?

Table 1 Attributes of good banking service

Attribute	Number of times mentioned
<i>Staff attitude</i>	
Friendly, courteous, caring front-line staff	19
Competent staff	1
<i>Physical environment</i>	
Pleasant, comfortable, air-conditioned, clean, orderly venue	7
Technical facilities such as wifi and charging stations for mobile phones	4
Seats	2
<i>Service delivery</i>	
Personalized service	4
Fast service, short queuing time	3
Quality service	1
<i>Fees</i>	
Free service or low fees	2
Total	43

Table 2 Attributes of bad banking service

Attribute	Number of times mentioned
<i>Staff attitude</i>	
Indifferent, rude, impatient front-line staff	10
Favoritism	6
Unprofessional staff	2
<i>Service delivery</i>	
Long queuing time	6
Troublesome or unclear procedures	5
Interrupted service	3
Misleading or incomplete information	3
Coercion to use certain products	1
Personal information leaked	1
<i>Physical environment</i>	
Too cold	1
Under-used facilities	1
<i>Fees</i>	
Obscure fee structure	1
Total	40

Figure 1 A proposed theoretical model to predict perceived service quality of banks among youths

