

Discursive representations of Chilean universities and their future students in advertising

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Abstract

This article presents an exploration of the discursive representations of Chilean universities, based on the analysis of ad executions published in social media for their 2017 admission to undergraduate courses campaigns. Based on branding theory (Aaker), the analysis of value propositions shows that both state and private universities share a focus on infrastructure and quality, although the latter also promise a public character and grants. Then, an analysis of enunciation (Benveniste) was carried out to the ads of the institutions whose value proposition is based on self-expressive benefits. These universities are presented as agents of transformation for their students who are invited to be socially responsible, supportive and to change the world. Finally, recommendations are offered for the strategic management of university branding in Chile.

Keywords: higher education, branding, representation, discourse analysis, social media.

0. Introduction

In the last decade, the Chilean higher education system has faced various controversies and political tensions, particularly regarding its financing structure and the marketization of the sector (Somma 2012; Cabalín and Bellei 2013). Although this situation is not unique (see Molesworth et al. 2009 for the case of the UK), among other reasons there is a consensus that the country has a commercialized neoliberal tertiary educational system (Vejar 2013), as until 2016 there was no free university offer, not even in state institutions, unlike what happens in other countries in the region (Espinoza and González 2016).

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In the light of the above, the exploration of higher education institutions' advertising is a subject that has been scarcely studied by local scholars (e.g., Simbürger 2013; Espinal and Rodríguez-Pastene 2015; Matus 2015). In what ways is university education 'sold'? What attributes do institutions highlight in their ads? How do universities represent their future students—their interests and expectations regarding higher education—in advertising? These questions can be answered using a mixed approach, through branding and semiotics.

Since brands are fundamental assets for positioning in highly competitive markets (Gilligan and Wilson 2003), and their symbolic contribution to products or services (its equity) is built on the basis of a brand identity (Aaker 1996), the value proposition—the benefits for the customer—is a key element for recognizing the organization itself and its purpose regarding their clients, what advertisers call 'the promise' of an ad (Brierly 1995: 168).

In parallel, following the theory of enunciation (Benveniste 1974), it may be argued that the subjects of discourse—speaker (enunciator) and listener (enunciatee)—are represented in the text, both in their identity and in their expectations towards each other. This is what Benveniste (1966) calls 'subjectivity' in language: the capacity of the speaker to establish himself as a subject—an agent with a purpose and a worldview—and, in that same act, to recognize and to elaborate a depiction of his/her listener. Because discourse is a communicative event that involves the performance of subjects in a specific situation (Van Dijk 1999: 246), the analysis of enunciation allows for a description of the relationship between the speaker and the listener, as well as their mutually binding context (Filinich 2004).

This paper reports part of the results of a broader study on the discursive representation of universities in Chile in their advertising campaigns during periods of admission to undergraduate courses. In particular, the objective of this article is to describe the value propositions of Chilean universities and to identify the representation of their future students and their expectations regarding higher education. To this end, ad executions published during 2016 were collected from the universities' social media accounts, and were analyzed from the point of view of their value propositions and their enunciative structure.

In the following section we explain the relevance of branding for universities, the concepts of brand equity and value proposition, and the main aspects of enunciation theory. Then, we detail the methodological framework and report on the findings. Finally, we discuss the findings in the context of the Chilean university market.

1. Conceptual framework

1.1. Universities, marketing, and branding

The Chilean higher education system has been accused of excessive marketization, that is of having developed according to market principles (Somma 2012: 298). This is technically true, since the creation of new private universities was allowed since the 1980s. It was established that these institutions would be free to create and offer careers, that those that enrolled the best students¹⁷ would obtain greater fiscal contributions, and that their main source of financing would be the payment of fees by students (Olavarría and Allende 2013: 92).

From an economic point of view this means that the university system operates as a market: a set of current and potential buyers of goods offered in a competitive environment (Kotler et al. 1999: 14). That is why some speak of the commercialization of Chilean higher education which among other things has stimulated investment in marketing (Espinoza 2005: 51).

Given the diversity of higher education offers in Chile (160 institutions comprising universities, professional centers, and technical-training centers¹⁸), and the large number of undergraduate students (6.69% of the total population: Consejo Nacional de Educación 2017), the sector can be considered as being highly competitive. In this context, in 2016 the government established a policy of free education for students of higher education who belong to the poorest 60% of the population, provided that their institutions have joined the initiative¹⁹.

In markets sharing these characteristics, the brand is a key tool for achieving a competitive advantage (Gilligan and Wilson 2003: 503). This concept does not refer only to the name of a product or service, but also to the set of attributes (images, values, emotions, etc.) that the consumer can recognize and appreciate about the offered good, which makes the brand an asset for organizations (Blackett 2003; Kotler and Keller 2006: 275-276).

Viewed in this way, the brand is a key element for positioning—the definition of a space and a hierarchy in the mind of the consumer (Ries and Trout 2001: 5-7)—and for integrated

¹⁷ According to the results of the PSU (Prueba de Selección Universitaria; in english, University Selection Test) standardized selection test organized by the Universidad de Chile, the main state-owned higher education institution.

¹⁸ Universities are the only entities that can grant academic degrees and provide some careers that, according to the legislation, require a certain complexity, such as Law, Architecture, and Medicine. The professional centers, meanwhile, can grant professional and technical degrees but not academic degrees. The technical-training centers are institutions that can only offer technical programs whose average duration is two years (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and World Bank 2009: 26-36).

¹⁹ The benefit is based on a reference fee, although it relieves the student of any co-payment. By right, state universities are part of the policy; private institutions can join if they meet certain quality conditions. More information at <http://www.gratuidad.cl/>.

marketing communications (Percy 2008: 35-40). Consequently, the creation and development of brands (branding) aids in increasing consumer preference (Kapferer 2008: 9-13).

It is not surprising that, globally, branding has become a relevant topic for universities. Although the effectiveness of undertaking strategic branding initiatives in higher education institutions is questionable, especially when compared to other industries (Colin 2006; Bunzel 2007; Chapleo 2011), several studies suggest a positive effect on the recruitment and satisfaction of students (e.g., Bennett and Ali-Choudhury 2009; Iqbal et al. 2012; Joseph et al. 2012; Casidy 2013), which is key to the marketized Chilean reality.

1.2. Brand equity and value proposition

The purpose of branding is the development of brand equity, the value that the brand brings to products or services (Kapferer 2008: 15-17; Percy 2008: 42-44; Lane et al. 2011: 83). In concrete terms, it corresponds to a set of attributes linked to the name of the product (e.g., recognition, quality, loyalty, etc.) and that enrich its offer, whose effect is seen in the opinions and preferences of consumers as well as in its market share and profitability (Kotler and Keller 2006: 276).

According to Aaker (1996: 68) the key to brand equity is the management of brand identity, mainly because it provides the basis for the associations that the consumer will make about the product or service with other products and experiences. Thus, brand identity is something that is intentionally created from four dimensions (pp. 78-85): attributes of the product (e.g., quality), attributes of the producing or offering organization (e.g., innovation), attributes of personality, as if the brand was a person (e.g., creativity), and symbolic attributes (e.g., the logo).

Precisely because it is built from attributes, brand identity implies a value proposition for the client, that is, a manifestation of benefits that guide the relationship with the consumer and, ideally, their purchase decision (Aaker 1996: 95). According to this model, the value proposition is based on functional, emotional or self-expressive benefits (pp. 96-101). While the former corresponds to product characteristics (e.g., in a car: having many airbags) and the second, to the feeling that is generated in the consumer when using or consuming the product (e.g., feeling safe when driving), the latter are those that help to build and maintain the identity and image of the consumer (e.g., to be a safe and reliable person).

The self-expressive benefits usually imply a more intimate and permanent relationship with the consumer, so they are considered as being superior to the functional ones, which are

more easily imitated (Aaker 1996: 96), and the emotional ones, which in a certain way are ephemeral (p. 101).

In this study, the concept of benefit is very important, as at the same time it defines the key element of the structure of the advertising message (Lane et al. 2011: 484). In this framework, the benefit is manifested as a 'promise', an explicit or implicit appeal of the main offering of the product or service, which in turn is based on its attributes (pp. 485-486). The advertising promise is, consequently, a discursive manifestation of the value proposition.

1.3. Discourse and enunciation

From the previous section it can be extrapolated that the concept of brand identity implies the construction and representation of a personality with certain values, in the axiological sense. One way to analyze the representation of identity in discourse, from a semiotic perspective, is through enunciation.

The study of enunciation arose from the recognition and evaluation of discourse as a key aspect of social experience (Filinich 1998: 12). Its development is attributed to Benveniste (1966, 1974), especially with regard to his study of the representation of subjectivity in discourse. According to Benveniste, subjectivity in language is the capacity of the speaker to establish himself as a subject—an agent with a purpose and a worldview—and, in that same act, to identify and to elaborate a portrayal of his/her listener.

Benveniste (1974: 80) argues that enunciation is an individual act of language use, which is distinguished from the Saussurian *parole* by its performative nature. The enunciation is an event of appropriation of a language by a speaker (Greimas and Courtés 1991: 79), as the very act of speaking involves establishing oneself as an entity in the world (e.g. “I think ...”, “We want ...”). That is why Benveniste (1974: 82) says that enunciation introduces the speaker into his speech. But this is not just a textual phenomenon. For Benveniste (1966: 259), the establishment of the subject within his speech implies the possibility of founding a reality which is tantamount to subjectivity.

A key premise of Benveniste's enunciation theory (1966: 260) is that the awareness that a person can have of himself is only experienced by contrast with other individuals. That is, subjectivity in language is not a matter of individuality, but of recognition and relationship: it would not make sense to use the expression 'I' were it not for distinguishing myself from someone else or for addressing someone.

Consequently, as soon as the speaker establishes himself in his speech —as enunciator— he explicitly or implicitly also establishes an allocutary, a representation of the one whom the speaker addresses (Ducrot 1984: 136-137). By extension, the enunciation also supposes a reference to the world, which is also constructed discursively by the speaker (Benveniste 1974: 82).

Methodologically, the analysis of enunciation consists in the description of the elements of the 'enunciative framework' (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1980: 30-31): who is the speaker and how does he represent himself before the listener? What are his interests and his needs? Who is the addressee and how is he represented in the statement? What characterizes the world (the setting, the context) in which both speaker and addressee coexist? And what are the general conditions of production and reception of the message (e.g. the discursive genre and the diffusion channel)?

2. Methodology

The purpose of this article is to describe the value propositions of Chilean universities, based on their audiovisual advertisements for the 2017 admission campaign, and to identify the representation of their future students and their expectations regarding higher education. According to the theoretical framework, this implies analyzing the advertising promises of the universities—the benefits that support their value propositions, and the attributes on which, in turn, these benefits are based, as the enunciative structure of the advertisements. We have decided to emphasize the analysis of the enunciation of those universities whose value proposition is based on self-expressive benefits, given the conceptual prominence of this category.

The research questions are the following: (Q1) What promises do Chilean universities make to their potential students? (Q2) What promises make up the self-expressive benefits category? (Q3) What universities tend to postulate self-expressive benefits? (Q4) How are the speakers who most frequently postulate self-expressive benefits represented? (Q5) How are the addressees represented in those ads?

The analysis of the advertising promises of the universities was geared towards the identification of references, intertextualities and figurativizations. Reference is the relation that is established between expressions and entities, properties or situations of the external world (Lyons 1984: 145), such as when naming someone or showing their image. Intertextuality is the relation of co-presence between two or more texts, such as that manifested in the quotation or the allusion (Genette 1989: 10). Figurativization is the representation of abstract aspects of

reality through concrete objects (Greimas and Courtés 1991: 176-177), as when the image of a judge symbolizes the notion of power.

As can be inferred, reference and intertextuality may serve the figurativization of abstract ideas. For example, an aerial shot of a campus or a building—a reference—can be interpreted as a figurativization of the promise of ‘infrastructure’. If the phrase “For a free, high-quality public education” is later exhibited, an intertextual relationship with the main slogan of the 2011 student movement is established, as well as a promise of ‘public character’.

This method involves both denotative and connotative readings. While the former corresponds to literal interpretations, attached to a natural language, the latter entail an extended meaning based on cultural references (Barthes 1964: 130).

In order to collect advertisements from as many institutions as possible, we decided to analyze audiovisual spots published during 2016 in the social media accounts (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Vimeo, Flickr and Google+) of the 61 Chilean universities. The underlying assumption was that since these platforms are free, there would be fewer entry barriers for institutions with fewer resources. However, we only found spots from 44 universities: some did not have videos in the observed period and others did not have spots as such—brief ads in which a promotional objective was noticed. This means that any video that did not belong to the advertising genre—e.g., news, or testimonies of newly enrolled students—was discarded from the sample.

The final sample consisted of 119 pieces: 57 from state universities, 12 from ‘traditional’ ones (private institutions created before 1980) and 50 from the so-called ‘private universities’ (those created after 1980).

3.1. Advertising promises

The analysis of the ad executions was geared towards the identification of the advertising promises of each university. The number of promises per ad varied according to its argumentative complexity. Therefore, although three and even four promises were identified in the majority of cases, in some cases only one was noticed. Using a full 30-second spot to emphasize the same promise can be as successful and effective as raising four promises in 15 seconds; depending on the advertising strategy. Regarding Q1, Table 1 shows the advertising promises made in the spots of state universities. In this group, the frequencies of the promises of ‘infrastructure’, ‘quality’ and ‘regional identity’ stand out. The last two are explained by a discourse that appeals to tradition, since many of these institutions (except the Universidad de Santiago and the Universidad Tecnológica Metropolitana) are heirs of the old provincial

headquarters of the Universidad de Chile, the oldest and most reputed higher education institution in the country. Faced with the rise of private institutions, professional centers and technical-training centers, these universities appeal to their brand heritage.

Table 1
Advertising promises in of state universities' ads

Institution	Ads	Promises
Universidad Arturo Prat	1	Quality; Financial aids; Postgraduate courses offer; Regional headquarters
Universidad de Antofagasta	1	Regional identity; Infrastructure
Universidad de Aysén	1	Quality; Public character; Regional identity; Sustainability
Universidad de La Frontera	1	Quality of teachers; Infrastructure; Undergraduate courses offer; Vocation
Universidad de La Serena	1	Quality; Public character; Regional identity; Infrastructure
Universidad de Playa Ancha de Ciencias de la Educación	1	Public character; Infrastructure; Pluralism
Universidad de Santiago de Chile	1	Diversity; Integral education (e.g., knowledge and values); Infrastructure
Universidad de Talca	1	Arts; Infrastructure; Undergraduate courses offer; Postgraduate courses offer
Universidad de Tarapacá	1	Quality; Public character; Regional identity; Infrastructure
Universidad del Bío-Bío	20	Support for students (19); Arts (4); Financial aids (2); Benefits for students (11); Quality (1); Sports (8); Regional identity (2); Infrastructure (5); Innovation (1); Academic exchange (1); Interculturality (1); Research (2); Political participation (7); Internships abroad (1); Professional practices (2); Labor insertion (1)
Universidad Metropolitana de Ciencias de la Educación	21	Diversity (21); Infrastructure (21); Undergraduate courses offer (21)
Universidad Tecnológica Metropolitana	7	Quality (5); Public character (7); Development of the country (1); Research (1); Undergraduate courses offer (5); Political participation (2); Sustainability (7)

Note: The promises are in alphabetical order and do not represent the frequency of their mentions in the ads. However, in those cases with more than one ads, the numbers in parentheses indicate the number of ads in which the promise was identified.

Institutions from which no ads were found: Universidad de Atacama, Universidad de Chile, Universidad de Los Lagos, Universidad de Magallanes, Universidad de O'Higgins, Universidad de Valparaíso.

Table (1) lends further credence to our earlier argument, namely that the variety of promises only allows for inferring the complexity of the advertising strategies, but not necessarily their effectiveness. For example, whereas in the 20 spots of the Universidad del Bío Bío we may

identify 16 promises, in the 21 pieces of the Universidad Metropolitana de Ciencias de la Educación they are only three. Although in the first case there is a greater diversity of issues, which may involve a communicational proposal aimed at young people with multiple interests (e.g., a quality education, but also a series of extracurricular activities), the second case involves a branding approach based on the consistency of one promise.

Table 2 displays the promises of private universities that were aired before 1980, the so-called ‘traditional’ ones, members of the G9 (Network of Public Non-State Universities). These ads are marked by a prevalence of the notions of ‘infrastructure’, ‘quality’ and ‘public character’. The latter has since become the main argument of the sector which seeks to defend its relevance in the political debate on reforms to the higher education system (see Red de Universidades Públicas no Estatales 2016): they are privately owned institutions, but not the same as ‘private universities’—those founded after 1980— since they are older and more complex²⁰, like the state-owned ones. That is, they are also ‘public’ universities.

Table 2
Advertising promises in ads of non-state universities pre-1980 ('traditional')

Institution	Ads	Promises
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso	1	Quality; Public character; Diversity; Prestige
Universidad Austral de Chile	1	Quality; Public character; Regional identity; Infrastructure
Universidad Católica de la Santísima Concepción	1	Financial aids; Applicant's fair; Regional identity; Internships abroad
Universidad Católica de Temuco	1	Arts; Public character; Regional identity; Humanist values
Universidad Católica del Maule	4	Quality (4); Public character (1); Regional identity (4); Infrastructure (4); Undergraduate courses offer (3)
Universidad Católica del Norte	2	Quality (2); Regional identity (1); Infrastructure (1); Research (1); Undergraduate courses offer (1); Tradition (2)
Universidad de Concepción	1	Public character; Regional identity; Infrastructure; Tradition
Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María	1	Quality; Infrastructure; Regional headquarters

Note: The promises are in alphabetical order and do not represent the frequency of their mentions in the ads. However, in those cases with more than one ads, the numbers in parentheses indicate the number of ads in which the promise was identified.

Institutions from which no spots were found: Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile.

²⁰ The qualification of ‘complete’ or ‘complex’ universities has been used for a few years to characterize those institutions where not only teaching activities are carried out, but also high-level research (see e.g., Brunner 1995; Parada 2010).

This apparent equivalence between what is public and what is state-owned is justified in common parlance: the specialized literature, as well as academics and the media use both terms without distinction when referring to the educational system provided by the government (e.g., Reese 2005; Paredes and Pinto 2009; Vivaldi 2014; Ramírez 2017).

Table 3 presents the promises made in ads from private universities, among which 'infrastructure', 'quality' and 'financial aid' (grants) stand out.

Table 3
Advertising promises in ads of non-state universities post-1980 ('private')

Institution	Ads	Promises
Universidad Academia de Humanismo Cristiano	1	Arts; Public character; Political participation; Pluralism
Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez	3	Quality (2); Infrastructure (3); Innovation (1); Academic exchange (1); Regional headquarters (1); Undergraduate courses offer (2); Postgraduate courses offer (1)
Universidad Adventista de Chile	1	Infrastructure
Universidad Alberto Hurtado	1	Quality; Intellectuality; Undergraduate courses offer
Universidad Andrés Bello	1	Financial aids; Quality; Infrastructure; Research
Universidad Autónoma de Chile	5	Support for students (2); Quality (4); Academic requirement (1); Infrastructure (2); Research (1); Vocation (1)
Universidad Bolivariana	1	University community; Infrastructure; Undergraduate courses offer
Universidad Católica Cardenal Raúl Silva Henríquez	1	Quality; Public character; Sports; Infrastructure
Universidad Central de Chile	1	Quality; Infrastructure; Vocation
Universidad Chileno Británica de Cultura	1	Quality; Internships abroad; Undergraduate courses offer
Universidad de Arts, Ciencias y Comunicación (UNIACC)	1	Arts; Creativity; Diversity
Universidad de Las Américas	2	Financial aids (2); Quality of teachers (1); Diversity (1); Infrastructure (2); Regional headquarters (1)
Universidad de Los Andes	1	Students with high PSU score; Quality; Infrastructure
Universidad de Viña del Mar	1	Financial aids; Quality; Infrastructure; Undergraduate courses offer
Universidad del Pacífico	1	Financial aids; Creativity
Universidad Diego Portales	6	Students with high PSU score (1); Quality of teachers (1); Double degree (1); Employability (1); Research (1); Postgraduate courses offer (1); Internships abroad (1); Visiting professors (1); Student satisfaction (1); Extension (1)

Universidad Finis Terrae	1	Students with social commitment; Contribution to society; Humanist values
Universidad Gabriela Mistral	1	Financial aids; Undergraduate courses offer; Alumni network; Tradition
Universidad Mayor	1	Students with social commitment; Infrastructure; University life
Universidad Pedro de Valdivia	2	Be a college student (2); Flexible admission (2); Financial aids (2); Diversity (2)
Universidad San Sebastián	1	Quality; Financial aids; Infrastructure; Research
Universidad Santo Tomás	4	Students with social commitment (4); Contribution to society (1); Quality of teachers (4); Diversity (1); Research (1); Internships abroad (1); Regional headquarters (1)
Universidad SEK	1	Infrastructure; Sports; University life
Universidad Tecnológica de Chile, INACAP	11	Practical learning (9); Financial aids (2); Quality (9); Continuity of studies (to graduate courses) (2); Employability (7); Infrastructure (7); Undergraduate courses offer (1); Internships abroad (1); Labor insertion (3)

Note: The promises are in alphabetical order and do not represent the frequency of their mention in the ads. However, in those cases with more than one ad, the numbers in parentheses indicate the number of ads in which the promise was identified.

Institutions from which no spots were found: Universidad Bernardo O'Higgins, Universidad de Aconcagua, Universidad de Arte y Ciencias Sociales (ARCIS), Universidad del Desarrollo, Universidad del Mar, Universidad Iberoamericana de Ciencias y Tecnología, Universidad La República, Universidad Los Leones, Universidad Miguel de Cervantes y Universidad UCINF.

Upon a preliminary inspection, it is surprising that these institutions, as well as state-owned and traditional ones build their offer in the same way: it seems that the entire sector shapes discursively its service, education, as something inseparable from the materiality of a broad campus, with large green areas and well-equipped laboratories.

The incidence of 'quality' as a common promise can be explained by the scenario facing the industry: this is an issue that has been discussed since 2011, when the student movements began to demand greater control over universities—especially private ones, although the state-owned ones have not been free from criticism too—by the government.

Finally, the frequent recurrence of 'financial aid' is interesting because, as remarked in the extant literature (e.g. Matus, 2015), one of the main claims raised in the advertising discourse of these institutions is information on scholarship opportunities and discounts on fees.

Considering that only those private universities that meet certain conditions (being accredited for at least four years and demonstrating that they are not for profit organizations) could be added to the policy of gratuity which has had a negative economic impact (since the institutions must subsidize the difference between their fees and the amount that the State finally

transfers to them), it is not surprising that most of them actually do not abide by this policy. Therefore, the offer of financial aids to new students is relevant.

Precisely because of these conditions, gratuity is not part of the promises made by any of the above universities. Not even state-owned institutions talk about it, although in their case there is not a serious financial problem, as the gap between their fees and the reference fees is lower, while the State also subsidizes them in other respects (the so-called ‘basal contributions’).

With respect to Q2, Table 4 allows us to identify the promises that partake of the category of self-expressive benefits. As per the relevant literature, these promises have the most long-lasting effect as they build a value proposition from elements of identity configuration and support.

Table 4
Analysis of value propositions, according to benefits and promises in the ads

Type of benefit	Promise	Ads	Description
Functional (It offers me something clear and concrete)	Flexible admission	2	<i>It's easy to enroll</i>
	Support for students	21	<i>It offers extracurricular activities</i>
	Financial aids	15	<i>I can pay less fees</i>
	Benefits for students	11	<i>I can have resources for my projects</i>
	Continuity of studies	2	<i>I can continue studying</i>
	Double degree	1	<i>I can be more competitive in the market</i>
	Applicant's fair	1	<i>It's easy to enroll</i>
	Infrastructure	64	<i>Better university experience</i>
	Academic exchange	2	<i>Better university experience</i>
	Undergraduate courses offer	39	<i>There are several options to study</i>
	Postgraduate courses offer	3	<i>I can continue studying</i>
	Internships abroad	6	<i>I can be more competitive in the market</i>
	Professional practices	2	<i>It's easier to find a job</i>
	Regional headquarters	5	<i>There are headquarters near my house</i>
	Labor insertion	4	<i>It's easier to find a job</i>
Emotional (It makes me feel...)	Practical learning	9	<i>...confident about my learning</i>
	Arts	7	<i>...integrated into a community</i>
	University community	1	<i>...integrated into a community</i>
	Sports	10	<i>...integrated into a community</i>
	Employability	8	<i>...confident about my learning</i>
	Integral education	1	<i>...confident about my learning</i>
	Political participation	10	<i>...like a real college student</i>
	Visiting professors	1	<i>...confident about my learning</i>
	Alumni network	1	<i>...integrated into a community</i>
	Student satisfaction	1	<i>...confident about my learning</i>
Self-expressive (It configures my)	University life	2	<i>...like a real college student</i>
	Extension	1	<i>...confident about my learning</i>
	Be a college student	2	<i>I am / will be a college student</i>
	Students with social commitment	6	<i>I am / will be socially committed</i>

<i>identity)</i>	Students with high PSU score	2	<i>I am / will be a high-quality professional</i>
	Quality	42	<i>I am / will be a high-quality professional</i>
	Quality of teachers	7	<i>I am / will be a high-quality professional</i>
	Public character	18	<i>I am / will be socially committed</i>
	Creativity	2	<i>I am / will be a high-quality professional</i>
	Development of the country	3	<i>I am / will be socially committed</i>
	Diversity	28	<i>I am / will be socially committed</i>
	Academic requirement	1	<i>I am / will be a high-quality professional</i>
	Regional identity	15	<i>I belong to a region</i>
	Innovation	2	<i>I am / will be a high-quality professional</i>
	Intellectuality	1	<i>I am / will be a high-quality professional</i>
	Interculturality	1	<i>I am / will be socially committed</i>
	Research	9	<i>I am / will be a high-quality professional</i>
	Pluralism	2	<i>I am / will be socially committed</i>
	Prestige	1	<i>I am / will be a high-quality professional</i>
	Sustainability	8	<i>I am / will be socially committed</i>
	Tradition	4	<i>I am / will be a high-quality professional</i>
	Humanist values	2	<i>I am / will be socially committed</i>
	Vocation	3	<i>I am / will be socially committed</i>

In this case, for example, the promises of ‘students with high PSU scores’, ‘quality of teachers’ and ‘research’ constitute a value proposition based on the quality of the educational offer. In other words: if there are good students, good professors and research is done in the university, the proposition that you may become a high-quality professional is validated. Likewise, the promises of ‘public character’, ‘(contribution to) the development of the country’ and ‘diversity’ allow us to identify a value proposition based on social commitment. That is to say, if the university has a public vocation, is interested in the future, and is inclusive, then not only it dialogues with one’s own values, but also promises that you will become a conscious and committed citizen. Table 5 categorizes the value propositions based on self-expressive benefits, to facilitate the analysis.

Table 5
Categorization of value propositions based on self-expressive benefits

Categories	Spots	Promises
Social commitment	71	Students with social commitment Public character Development of the country Diversity Interculturality Pluralism Sustainability

		Humanist values
		Vocation
Quality education	71	Students with high PSU score
		Quality
		Quality of teachers
		Creativity
		Academic requirement
		Innovation
		Intellectuality
		Research
		Prestige
		Tradition
Maintenance of local identity	15	Regional identity
Being a college student	2	Be a college student

As can be seen, self-expressive benefits tend to be associated with rather soft or immaterial promises, while functional benefits are linked to those of a material and immediate nature, such as ‘financial aid’ (e.g., scholarships), ‘infrastructure’ (e.g. size of campus) and ‘academic offer’ (e.g. to which careers it is possible to apply).

Identifying universities with a tendency to postulate self-expressive benefits (Q3) was more difficult than expected since it is common for ads to thematize appeals simultaneously on different dimensions. For example, the Universidad de la Frontera has one ad (see Table 1) that combines the promises of ‘infrastructure’ and ‘academic offer’, which have been interpreted as belonging to functional benefits, with those of ‘teacher quality’ and ‘vocation’, which have been linked to self-expression (see Table 4). Consequently, it would not be fair to say that this institution has a clear promise structure²¹.

To disambiguate this overlap, a frequency of promises corresponding to self-expressive benefits equal to or greater than 70% was established as a cut-off point (minimum threshold value). For example, the Universidad de La Serena (state-owned) combines four promises in one ad. Three of them are identified with self-expressive benefits, which facilitates the ascription of a clear and distinct value proposition. In the same manner, Universidad Santo Tomás (private) has four ads. Five of the seven promises made therein correspond to self-expressive benefits.

This analysis was based on the categories of value propositions associated with self-expression (see Table 5). Considering that two of them (‘maintenance of local identity’ and ‘being a university student’) comprised only one promise (which makes it impossible to identify

²¹ A different scenario might have emerged if a content analysis had been conducted, for example, on the duration allotted to each promise.

frequencies in ads where they did not exceed four), it was decided to draw a sharper distinction between 'social commitment' and 'quality education'.

From this exercise (see Table 6) it was possible to discern that the 12 universities that tend to postulate self-expressive benefits comprise state, traditional and private ones. This suggests that branding strategies and value propositions are not differentiated by ownership of the institutions.

Table 6
Universities whose value proposition is based on self-expressive benefits

Type	Institution	Focus on a category
State	Universidad de Aysén	Social commitment
	Universidad de La Serena	Both
	Universidad de Tarapacá	Both
	Universidad Tecnológica Metropolitana	Social commitment
Traditionals (pre-1980)	Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso	Both
	Universidad Austral de Chile	Both
	Universidad Católica de Temuco	Social commitment
	Universidad Católica del Norte	Quality education
	Universidad de Concepción	Both
Private (post-1980)	Universidad Autónoma de Chile	Quality education
	Universidad Finis Terrae	Social commitment
	Universidad Santo Tomás	Both

3.2. Enunciation

From the conceptual framework it is possible to infer that the identification and characterization of the speaker/enunciator and the listener/enunciatee can be approached via a 'mirror method': if the speaker represents a conservative ideology, the addressee must represent a position relative to this stance (favorable, uncertain or unfavorable). Therefore, in this section the analysis of the enunciators (Q4) and enunciatees (Q5) will be presented jointly.

As can be gauged from Table 6, the branding strategies of Chilean universities whose value proposition is based on self-expressive benefits do not manifest differences based on the ownership of the institutions. This also holds in terms of utterances.

A commonly adopted strategy by these universities consists in the construction of their speakers based on values such as seriousness (or solemnity) and certainty (as self-confidence). We can surmise that these values are common to all institutions of higher education, but in the

case of those who build their offer from self-expressive benefits they are particularly important: if the value proposition consists of the transmission or transfer of an identity, in a way of a being or a must-be, laying explicit stress is vital. This explains why their modalities of enunciation (Benveniste 1974: 84) tend to be assertive: universities show themselves as expert agents, confident of themselves and having a worldview. Consequently, their addressees are represented from an expectant position, as they need such self-assurance.

For example, the ad of the Universidad de La Serena (see Figure 1) portrays a young woman accessing a virtual platform from her laptop that presents the institution and its amenities. The informative and assertive nature of the statements allow us to infer that these texts correspond to the ‘voice’ of the university, even though the images show students engaging in different activities. The contrast between linguistic and iconic messages operates as a parallel montage: when the text speaks of regional identity and contribution to local development, the image exhibits cultural activities; when the text alludes to the institution’s membership in the Council of Rectors (which includes both state-owned and ‘traditional’ universities), the image shows the campus. Despite this, the speech conveys a clear and distinct identity.

Figure 1
Universidad de La Serena (state-owned)



Text: “Local and oriented to development.”



Text: “Part of the Council of Rectors.”

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zl-jkNJgpYI>.

In the case of Universidad de Concepción (see Figure 2) the ad shows a sequence of aerial shots of the main campus and its most emblematic buildings (e.g., the Bell Tower and the entrance arch, in a characteristic freeze-frame), interspersed with scenes of students walking around the place, talking and laughing. Some, in fact, pose at the camera. Then, images of other campuses are shown, including one that has the aesthetics of a quiet suburb. The final

sequence shows the front of the university, while a voice-over (adult male) pronounces the name and slogan of the institution: “Public in essence and in spirit”. This way of representing seriousness and solemnity is different because it is based on the recognition that is expected of the addressee who must know the Universidad de Concepción to the degree of identifying its emblematic places. But the assertive character remains, especially at the end of the ad where it seeks to reinforce one of the main strengths of the brand: being a unique institution with the stamp of the state.

Figure 2
Universidad de Concepción (traditional)



Image: El Campanil (The Bell Tower).

Text: “Public in essence and in spirit.”

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oz3qYwTwOWE>.

The Universidad Autónoma (see Figure 3), unlike the previous ones, draws on heteroglossic polyphony (Bakhtin 1993) to represent itself and its addressee: the voices of its potential and current students, and even those of its professors, are contrasted with linguistic messages that make up the voice of the institution, highlighting key concepts. This is the composition of the five ads that make up the campaign and that allow for identifying the life cycle of the student: the positions of the future students (that is, the applicants), current and graduates are exposed. But also, by referring to the reality of academics and their research, the rest of the academic community is represented, adding them to its identity representation.

Figure 3
Universidad Autónoma (private)



Plot: A student is running in a park, thinking about her higher education experience and recognizing the support of the university. In text: "Vocation."

Plot: Remembering his class, a teacher thinks about the relevance of scientific research and the support of the university. In text: "Solutions."

Sources: Left, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abs67r59sOg>. Right, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUBqrVoE5sw>.

Another common aspect in the enunciation of universities whose value propositions are based on self-expressive benefits is that they present themselves as transforming agents and facilitators regarding the infusion or defence of values that are necessary for social change. Following the classification of Bellenger (1992: 55-56), it may be argued that these institutions tend to promote commitment-oriented values, those that appeal to a possible and delimited experience, normally associated with rights and social welfare (e.g., justice, responsibility), rather than universal abstract values (e.g., beauty, purity) or concrete values (e.g., effectiveness, discipline).

For example, the Universidad Tecnológica Metropolitana developed a campaign of speeches (seven ads) based on the recognition of and commitment to solving contemporary social problems (Figure 4). In five of them the speeches are delivered by professors, both on behalf of their faculties, as well as their institution. The main message in these cases is sustainability, both environmental and social, as approached by science and technology schools, as well as by communication and humanities departments. In the other two ads the main characters are students who utter the slogan of the campaign: "With your talent, you build new realities."

Figure 4
Universidad Tecnológica Metropolitana (state-owned)



Plot: Several teachers speak about sustainable development as a keystone in the university’s educative model. In text: “New materials. Energy efficiency. Environmental sustainability. Risk analysis.”

Testimony: “To urbanize, to integrate rural areas and to connect cities. That’s the change I want to generate in society. With your talent, build new realities.” In text: “Student of Civil Engineering in Civil Works.”

Sources: Left, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s87BE97gRnk>. Right, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-XDnZp0f_o.

The Universidad Católica de Temuco (Figure 5) defines its mission in a contingent but idealistic way: in a world that poses new challenges, its commitment is to work for equal opportunities, to educate new generations with solid values, taking care of the environment and providing a global perspective from a local identity, bringing knowledge and culture closer to people. That is, the speaker accounts for his belief system and presents it as an object of value, as something logically desired by the addressee.

Figure 5
Universidad Católica de Temuco (traditional)



Image: When the voice-over mentions equal

In text: “Public and local commitment.”

opportunities, the camera shows a rural primary school where a teacher (graduate from the university) works with first grade mapuche boys . The student's book title alludes to *mapuzugun*, the mapuche language.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1KnLk4s6UA>.

In the case of Universidad Santo Tomás (Figure 6), the four ads of the campaign talk about humanistic values, social mobility and solidarity, especially from the point of view of the role that professionals may perform with regard to their communities. A major difference from other institutions is that two of the pieces tell stories about students (not graduates) who, during curricular or extracurricular activities, have developed social service projects. This implies that even in the midst of vocational training it is already possible to live the valuable experience delivered by the university. But it also means that students choose the university because of its values, which resonate with their individual beliefs. In addition, the case of Santo Tomás presents a slight variation with regard to the other institutions' ads, as alongside the promotion and defence of abstract values, in the tagline of its ad stand out the academic requirements and the support to the students. This approach identifies the social commitment of students with an activity that is validated by academics.

Figure 6
Universidad Santo Tomás (private)



Plot: Two students of Kinesiology tell the story of how they built a pediatric baby-walker for a patient with special needs, with the support of their teachers.



Plot: A Veterinary Medicine graduate tells the story of how she did the research for her thesis on environmental impact in Antarctica. In text: "Recognize. Demand. Support."

Sources: Left, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONjjAxNmL_s. Right, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NaLxqGFGD2w>.

While it is true that these universities are committed to furthering societal goals, in reality they do not establish parameters or indicators of this commitment, as they speak from themselves, from their logic and interests. In this manner, it may be questioned why they do not mention other types of initiatives that would also account for this vocation, such as the existence of economic support for students. In the same way, a certain ingenuity on their part can be questioned when proposing specific and delimited activities, such as solidarity-building activities for students or the scientific research itself, as proof of their social commitment.

Finally, we may identify another pattern in the statements: while the regional universities tend to base their identity on local belonging, on the cultural link with a specific area (Figure 7), those of Santiago not only do not allude to the city, but in fact they seem to exist in an indeterminate space, in a non-place.

Figure 7
Regional universities



Universidad de Tarapacá. Image: The sculptural set 'Presencias tutelares' ('The guardians'), in the desert near the city of Arica, which represents the ancient prehispanic cultures. In text: "Our North."



Universidad de Aysén. Plot: Teachers and students talk about the experience at the university; in every transition they share the *mate*, a traditional South American caffeine-rich infused drink, very popular in the austral zone.

Sources: Left, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gd54_WCWPog. Right, <https://www.facebook.com/udeaysen/videos/vb.1736709696578254/1779190798996810/?type=2&theater>.

In the case of regional institutions, this membership is figurativized through verbal and visual reference to geography, as in the case of the Universidad de Tarapacá, or through cultural practices, such as *mate*, as does the Universidad de Aysén. This shows that enunciative localization is not necessarily a spatial issue.

4. Conclusions

This article described the discursive representations of Chilean universities and their future undergraduate students based on their ads for the 2017 admission campaign. This involved the analysis of an ad corpus to identify the benefits—or advertising promises—on which the value propositions of the institutions are based, and to characterize the speakers and addressees.

The analysis of advertising promises showed that those concerning 'infrastructure' and 'quality' are the most recurrent across state-owned, traditional and private universities. The former is explained by the tendency of the sector to value its educational service (and represent it) largely because of the breadth of its campus and the availability of technological resources, while the latter is justified by the social judgment that all higher education faces in Chile regarding the quality of offer, especially since 2011.

In the case of non-state owned universities, two dominant directions were identified which could be considered as being counterfactual. For traditional universities (those created before 1980), this is seen in the recurrence of the promise of a 'public character', based on the premise that because they are older and more complex, they are equivalent to state institutions. For private universities (those created after 1980) the promise of 'financial aids' stands out, which seems to be a contradiction considering that their fees tend to be higher than those of other institutions, and many of them are reprimanded for being profit-driven.

As per the relevant branding theory that suggests that self-expressive benefits are most effective in achieving a value proposition, in this study it was decided to dwell principally on this type. In the advertising of Chilean universities, the benefits of self-expression tend to be associated with intangible promises such as 'quality', 'public character', '(contribution to) the development of the country' and 'diversity'. This implies that young applicants value these attributes, which then helps to characterize the Chilean university market.

The analysis of enunciation showed that universities whose value propositions are based on self-expressive benefits construct themselves as enunciators based on values such as seriousness, solemnity and certainty. This construal is performed mainly in an assertive modality, since it seeks to account for self-assertiveness. Their enunciatees are characterized by the valuation of these attributes and the expectation of a complex university experience, which implies opportunities for individual development as well as support from the institution.

Moreover, the enunciators were found to be providing figures of meaning, while acting as transforming agents in students' lives. To this end, universities use values oriented to commitment, such as sustainability, social development and solidarity. Again, the theory of enunciation allows us to infer that these projected values cohere with the belief systems of the

enunciatees (the applicants), who are presumed to have a higher expectation of university life: they want to be converted into professionals who will bring about positive changes in society.

This is a particularly interesting finding as other studies (e.g. Matus 2015) suggest that certain segments of the market (e.g., elite careers—Business Administration, Law—in private universities) search for students who more motivated by individual and financial success. However, such a discourse would probably have been classified in this research as a value proposition based on functional benefits which explains why this perspective is not represented in this analysis.

In the context of the marketized system of higher education in Chile, the preceding analysis points to the existence of a diverse ecosystem: the brand positioning of the universities is anchored neither in their property-status (state or private), nor in their heritage, but in a reading of the interests and expectations of their potential and current students. This resonates with a peculiar characteristic of the sector: universities with the most transcendent value proposition invite their future students to build a conscious, responsible and solidary identity which implies trading off in some respects their independence and satisfaction. The ideal student of these universities, therefore, has an autonomous but heterorreferential or utilitarian morale: doing good is acting in favor of the welfare of others. The system may have a neoliberal inspiration, but the image that institutions have of young people is not always aligned with that stereotype.

While it is true that this study allows us to appreciate the current state (2016-2017) of branding strategies of universities in Chile, it is necessary to recognize certain limitations. First, that by working only with web-TV ads, the range of messages susceptible to be analyzed was limited (e.g., advertising in newspapers and magazines were not analyzed). Second, that the two main institutions of the country (the Universidad de Chile and the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile) are not represented in the sample, precisely because we did not find any TV ads (there were other videos, but not of this advertising genre). Finally, this study spans a specific time-period, so its findings cannot be extrapolated to the past or present.

Future research may investigate the origin and evolution of these trends, as well as contrast the ads' main messages with other types of ads and even other kinds of communication pieces that are typical of Chilean university marketing communications (e.g. flyers and merchandising).

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