

POSTGRADUATE STUDIES I

SPECIAL | SPH CONTENT LAB

Uniquely Asian

NTU's Master of Science in marketing and consumer insight programme focuses on the consumer market in this part of the world

HAZEL TAN

IF YOU think juggling work and studies is admirable, try doing what Madam Celyn Huang Shuhui did.

The 34-year-old mother aced her postgraduate studies while caring for a toddler and carrying another baby to term.

Now a senior brand manager for Nestlé Singapore, Madam Huang graduated in 2015 with a Master of Science (MSc) in marketing and consumer insight from the Nanyang Business School at Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

Half-way through the programme, Madam Huang discovered she was pregnant with her second child.

Like her pregnancy, the NTU programme was a serendipitous discovery.

"Planning to do a Master in Business Administration (MBA), I was doing research on local MBAs and browsing NTU's website, when I came across the MSc programme instead. The course caught my eye because it met all my needs, both in terms of curriculum and programme structure."

Effective learning

Offered at NTU in collaboration with Nanyang Business School and the Institute on Asian Consumer Insight (ACI), the programme is designed for professionals who are exploring career opportunities in marketing. It focuses on developing the skills required to analyse, evaluate and appreciate the unique needs of Asian consumers.

For Madam Huang, one of the key selling points of the programme was its focus on the Asian market. Apart from developing a deeper understanding of

marketing-related theories, she learnt important lessons on how consumers here and in the region think and behave.

The practical curriculum includes modules that offer tools and techniques in real-world business settings, and comprises electives such as business analytics, digital marketing, and ethnography.

"After working for nearly nine years, I wanted to return to school to keep myself updated on the industry, stay relevant and remain competitive," says Madam Huang, who adds that she would have taken all the electives on offer if she had the chance.

"The programme was designed such that it did not take up my evenings, which are precious family time. The structured modular approach allowed me to juggle my studies, work and family commitments well. Working and studying at the same time gave me the opportunity to apply whatever I learnt at work. This made the learning experience even more effective and meaningful," she says.

Madam Huang's favourite modules included Asian consumer insight; retailing in Asia, and creativity and design.

"Retailing in Asia was fascinating. Our lecturer shared her vast experience in the retail industry and I learnt a lot from her. As part of this module, we had to do case studies and present our work to real clients such as DFS and ION Orchard," she recalls.

As an added appeal, the module on Asian consumer insight provided an in-depth look at the similarities and differences among consumers in Asia including China, India and Indonesia.

Applied knowledge

Perhaps the greatest value of the

MSc programme was its applicability. In Madam Huang's case, the knowledge that she acquired was directly transferable to her work.

As senior brand manager, she leads the marketing area for milk formula brands under Nestlé Singapore's infant nutrition business.

"The module on creativity and design introduced me to the basics of product design, including issues such as product form and function, and also aesthetics," she says.

Working and studying at the same time gave me the opportunity to apply whatever I learnt at work. This made the learning experience even more effective and meaningful.

MADAM CELYN HUANG SHUHUI
senior brand manager
Nestlé Singapore

"The modules on qualitative and quantitative research provided me with a deeper understanding of my consumers, especially the non-Singaporean parents. I am able to work with the research agencies better, and provide better briefs on our research needs," she says, adding that she was able to propose innovative ways to execute promotional campaigns that are unique for her industry.

Madam Huang's advice to those considering further studies is to do their homework before embarking on a similar journey. It is also important to get the support of one's employer.

"The biggest challenges were allocating annual leave for this programme, and spending several weekends at school," says Madam Huang, who had to forgo overseas vacations and precious family time.

"My bosses and colleagues were very supportive and understand-



Madam Huang says the knowledge she acquired from the course was directly transferable to her work.

PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

ing. For example, I was able to take examination leave for some modules and some meetings were rescheduled so that I could attend school," she adds.

She encourages those in the marketing industry to give serious

thought to upgrading their skills, believing that education should be a lifelong pursuit.

"The programme's curriculum is very relevant and up-to-date and the structure is highly flexible. If you are able to afford

this investment, go for it," says Madam Huang, who hopes to eventually move into a regional role where she can work on different challenges and consumers from diverse cultures and backgrounds.