

## **Consumer Orientation in Cypriot Higher Education: The Case of Private Universities**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the Consumer Orientation of Cypriot Higher Education since the Cyprus's higher education system is in transition and the role of the private higher education sector is under review. These internal changes are intended to market Cyprus's educational system more competitively. This study contributes to the limited empirical evidence about Marketing of Higher Education in Cyprus. Data was collected through 20 in-depth interviews directed to 20 undergraduate students attending Marketing Courses and three focus group interviews with university administrator's involved in student recruitment. The results demonstrated that universities are using a "sales" rather than "customer" approach, and that the promotional tools used are ineffective as demonstrated by the student in depth interviews.

Our argument is presented in three stages; an initial exploration of the tertiary education market of Cyprus and the relevant literature available, then an exploratory analysis of students' perception of promotional tools used by universities, and finally an examination of the Marketing Strategies used by the three Private Universities in Cyprus. We will not be making the case for private versus public institutions in this paper but we follow Zumeta assessment that nonprofit higher education "is a valuable to the nation" (1992:363) when referring to the USA.

### **KEY WORDS**

Promotion, Advertising, Communication, Higher Education

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The operationalisation of marketing in Cyprus's private tertiary education system as 'increasing student numbers' is problematic from both an educationalist's and a marketer's perspective. Although the USA has embraced a specific professional stance as 'enrollment management' and the UK has taken a broader marketing orientation that clearly embraces recruitment neither has adopted a crude sales orientation approach which we detect in Cyprus. These different perspectives lead to differences in implementation for both domestic and international recruitment.

Cyprus's private higher education sector—influenced by both of these international traditions – is facing new challenges in terms of domestic demand, the need to increase international student recruitment, pressure of EU harmonization and the realization of the potential growth due to its geo-political location. This paper uses these insights on the readiness of private higher educational institutions to exploit national and regional markets as Cyprus seeks to become a regional centre of educational excellence. We find the sales orientation is unlikely to build a sustainable future but that it is maintained by short-term institutional goals and inappropriate government policies if growth is their objective.

Our argument is presented in three stages; an initial exploration of the tertiary education market of Cyprus and the relevant literature available, then an exploratory analysis of students' perception of promotional tools used by universities, and finally an examination of the Marketing Strategies used by the three Private Universities in Cyprus. We will not be making the case for private versus public institutions in this paper but we follow Zumeta assessment that nonprofit higher education "is a valuable to the nation" (1992:363) when referring to the USA.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. THE CYPRUS SITUATION**

The demand for higher education has risen considerably over the last 20 years and at present over 60% of all secondary school leavers continue in post-secondary education (Department of Statistics and Research, 2007/08). This figure is based on a 65% increase in student numbers in tertiary education from 2000/01 to 2007/08. This demand has led to the development of an effective private sector which, since the 1970s has had more students than the public sector, mainly in vocational provision (Koyzis, 1989). This has led to special measures introduced in 1987 to accredit private institutions, which has produced the recognition of higher education programs by the government of Cyprus which eventually led to the . The number of places offered by the University of Cyprus and the Public Tertiary Education Institutions of Cyprus and the Technological Education Institutes of Greece has increased in line with qualified demand maintaining an access of supply.

The trend in distribution of students in Cypriot institutions compared to overseas has changed with rapid domestic growth (53%) between 2000/01 and 2007/08 with corresponding numbers dropping in foreign universities and a reversal in this trend since 1996/1997; where the drop seems particularly dramatic is in the number going to Greek and American universities there is an increase towards UK and Bulgarian institutions. The main beneficiary of Cypriots studying abroad is Greece and then the UK. The most popular discipline is business administration with engineering, medicine and social studies the next most popular.

The Greek Cypriot desire for higher education seems to be as much driven by intrinsic desires for higher studies as well as an instrumentality of employability (Menon, 1997). This has led to a mismatch of graduate skills with labor needs, resulting in an oversupply of graduates. This in itself raises the central issue of educational planning of the marketing of alternative routes to employment other than higher education. This demand management of the Cypriot educational market is too complex to be considered here.

The current structure of higher education is summarized in the Government booklet, 'Higher Education in Cyprus'. The central role is given to the Department of Higher and Tertiary Education within the Ministry of Education and Culture. This Department covers registration, supervision and accreditation of all the private institutions and certain aspects of the University of Cyprus and in association with appropriate other ministries the seven public institutions of non-university higher education. As Koyzis (1997) indicates, European accession and the inevitable harmonization within the European *aquis communautaire* will mean that the higher education sector will have to examine these realities, which may result in repositioning the roles of the public and the private providers. Already two new public universities, a technical and an open university, have been approved by the government and started operations together with three private ones.

## 2.2. MARKETING EDUCATION

Educational institutions are rapidly identifying themselves, conceptually and in their discourse, as agents of national and international markets. This is indicative of a general shift from public social policy for higher education as a 'public good' to one where it is viewed as an extension of self-interested economic policy. This market narrative is the context for marketing where consumptive models hold sway.

Most educational institutions now recognize that they do need to 'market' themselves under market conditions, and to help them a substantial literature of the transfer of the practices and concepts of marketing from other sectors to Higher Education has appeared. A quick trawl of the recent educational literature produces plenty of advice on: market attractiveness (Bainbridge, 1997); competitive advantage (Mazzarol & Soutar, 1999); market mapping (Gumport, 1997); student needs (Lin, 1997; Soutar and Turner, 2002); capitalizing on tangible assets (Coats, 1998); advertising (Berger and Wallington, 1996; Jugenheimer, 1995); image management (Ivy, 2001; Koku, 1997; Symes, 1998); tangibility (Yost and Tucker, 1995); products (Chan and Imrie, 1995; Hesketh and Knight, 1999); ITC (Selwyn, 1999); market expansion (Mazzarol and Hosie, 1996; Shinn, et al., 1999; Anttonazzi, 1998); market research (Quirke, 1995); strategic planning (Conway, Mackay and Yorke, 1994) and pricing (Roberst, 1999). In addition, there are the proceedings of the American Marketing Association's Symposia on the Marketing of Higher Education, the annual Higher Education External Relations Association conference plus Kotler and Fox's (1995) (general) and Ryans and Shanklin's (1986) (higher) education texts on strategic planning and marketing.

This impressive list has, as its core, the transfer to education of technical notions of consumption but what it mainly lacks is critical analysis of whether the notions that underpin consumption models in other sector transfer to an understanding of what is involved in education. Initial success does some overlap, particularly if education is viewed as acquisition, ownership or consumption. However, education ought to be more than consumption (see for instance Lyotard, 1963). This is an important statement if our efforts are not to be misdirected by the market metaphor into educational management practices of a "philosophy of doing business" (Lafferty & Hult, 2000). Foskett and Hesketh (1997), Fosket (1998) and Foskett (1999) have written extensively on the marketing of education and in particular the notion of marketing orientation. For clarification a marketing-oriented organization is one in which the customer is central to its operation, and its emphasis is on satisfying customer requirement.

In his essay, "Cap, Gown, Mouse," Curry (2003) reports that, "The number of people seeking higher education worldwide has grown exponentially in recent years, rising from 13 million in 1960 to 65 million in 1991. It's projected to hit 130 million by 2010. The developing world is no exception. China, for instance, currently sends 6 percent of its students to tertiary education and hopes to increase that figure to 15 percent by 2010" (p. 102). In fact, the demand for tertiary educational services is increasing more rapidly than developing nations can respond by building universities (Curry, 2003). In response, "Almost all countries have displayed a vigorous expansion in tertiary level education over recent decades. "Almost everywhere this expansion of the tertiary level of education is connected with institutional reforms for the selection, management, and channeling of growing masses of students" (Muller & Gangl, 2003, p. 32). Not surprisingly, many tertiary educational institutions are experiencing a number of other challenges today, including identifying how best to accommodate the

increasing number of students, mobilize staff and resources, develop relevant curricula and teaching procedures, as well as remaining competitive during a period of skyrocketing costs (Nevin, 2003). According to Wagner, learners at the tertiary level are “. . . more diverse in terms of their backgrounds, interests and career paths. The new challenge is how to adapt program to student demand, rather than the traditional approach of plugging students into programs” (p.14-15). Not only are the students themselves becoming more diverse in their educational needs, there remains a fundamental lack of access to tertiary educational facilities throughout the developing world today (Nevin, 2003).

In this environment, a superior approach to the promotion of traditional delivery of tertiary educational services would be to find a place for everyone who wanted higher education as means of enhancing skills and knowledge, improving life-chances and addressing the enormous waste generated by social exclusion (Wagner, 1998). In fact, as Ramcharan (2004) emphasizes, “No country has achieved sustained economic development without substantial investment in human capital” (p. 309). Likewise, as Andersson and Gunnarsson (2003) point out, “The expansion of education not only helps generate technical and professional labor for industrial upgrading, but also enhances opportunities for upward social mobility, including skills enhancement and higher remuneration” (p. 113). This point is also made by Barr and Crawford (2005) who report, “Education and training have a number of characteristics that make them unusual. Though partly enjoyed for its own sake education is, to a large extent, undertaken because it increases an individual's future earning capacity. *It has all the characteristics of a personal investment*” (emphasis added) (p. 121).

Because it is such an enormous investment of individual time, resources, and effort, the promotion of a tertiary education should focus on identifying what higher education students want and need to learn today. In this regard, Wagner suggests that, “One possible way of doing this is to work more closely with schools as part of the drive to improve their flexibility and understanding of how students want to learn” (p. 16). This approach is congruent with numerous studies that have shown time and again the inextricable association between higher education and expanded employment opportunities (Langouet, 2002).

There are some important constraints and considerations that must be taken into account in developing appropriate promotional plans for tertiary educational institutions in order to ensure their effectiveness, though. For instance, depending on the geographic setting, a promotional plan for a tertiary educational institution could highlight the additional and more lucrative employment opportunities afforded to graduates. For instance, Shavit, Muller and Tame (1998) maintain that the linking of educational qualifications and occupational achievement is the weakest in less stratified and standardized social systems. According to these authors, “In Ireland -- a weakly stratified system -- employers rely on success in school because this is tested according to nationally standardized procedures, and thus workers' credentials represent their respective rank in the job queue” (p. 7). The geographic setting also affects student access to tertiary educational institutions, and while distance learning programs have afforded some relief, much more remains to be done, especially for rural areas. For instance, Moore and Anderson (2003) report that, “Today, most if not all universities engage in some form of distance education, particularly using information technology to deliver online curriculum and support” (p. 379). According to Alston and Kent (2003), “Declining rural access to tertiary education exacerbates power differentials resulting from globalization and restrains access to the opportunities of globalization and hinders rural revitalization. For many rural young people, restricted access to tertiary education is a significant barrier to the development of a skilled knowledge-focused workforce in rural and remote regions” (p. 5). Moreover, many minorities and indigenous populations remain severely underrepresented in tertiary educational institutions around the world. Therefore, any promotional plan designed to improve access to these students would require reformation of existing policies,

appropriate levels of funding, involvement in decision making, and reevaluation of the curriculum (Gair, Miles & Thomson, 2005). For this purpose, one analyst recommends that, “The capacities of these institutions need to be enhanced so that they could respond to society's changing needs in the context of an increasingly globalized world economy” (Ruben, 2007, p. 37).

It is reported in the work of Kim-Shyan and Thomas (2000) entitled: “Marketing Education: A Guide to Better Targeting of Malaysian Students” that as funding decreases for tertiary education, tertiary educational institutions in New Zealand “have been forced to fund existing services via other means.” (Kim-Shyan and Thomas, 2008). Specifically it is suggested that the tertiary institutions in New Zealand have experienced particular success in marketing their product to students in Malaysia. This segment appears to be experiencing a faster growth internationally than in New Zealand.

In a report by the ‘National Agency for European Education Programs, Czech Republic’ it is stated that the promotion of higher education is an emerging issues in the Czech Republic.” (Babkova, 2008) There is stated to be a lack of a national strategy in the Czech Republic as well as a lack in framework conditions necessary for promoting higher education abroad.

Included in the National Agency for European Educational Program responsibilities and which characterize responsibilities at all national levels are those as follows: (1) building the brand ‘Study in the Czech Republic’; (2) participated in higher education fairs abroad; (3) issuing and disseminating information materials; (4) mediating contacts between higher education institutions; (5) giving presentations for foreign students; and (6) involvement in European promotional activities within the Erasmus Mundus programme.” (Babkova, 2008)

Responsibilities at the level of higher education insofar as promotional tools and marketing strategy include those stated as follows: (1) participating at higher education fairs abroad; (2) issuing and disseminating information materials; (3) offering degree programmes in foreign languages, (4) providing scholarships for foreign students; (5) the regional promotion of universities from one city; and (6) making use of agents to recruit foreign students. (Babkova, 2008)

Babkova (2008) reports additionally that market abroad “begins at home” therefore a “...review of promotional activities and materials used by the NAEP in the framework of its initiative ‘Study in the Czech Republic’ should be carried out. A proper plan for next year is needed in this field in order to focus on effective activities, useful materials and information sources. The whole initiative should get a better public image and some thought should go into its realization”.

Secondly, Babkova (2008) states that the “involvement of higher education institutions in marketing and promotion issues is needed. There are no seminars focused on international marketing in higher education being organized in the Czech Republic. Nor are there any initiatives aimed at recognizing the priorities and needs of higher education institutions in this field” (2008). Finally, Babkova states that there should be consideration given for “possible new channels for cooperation. (2008)

The work of Larsen and Vincent-Lancrin entitled: “The Impact of ICT on Tertiary Education: Advances and Promises” state that the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Directorate for Education and Center for Educational Research and Innovation reports as follows: “The promises of e-learning for transforming tertiary education and thereby advancing the knowledge economy have rested on three arguments: E-learning could expand and widen access to tertiary education and training; improve the quality of education; and reduce its cost” (2005). This

includes the marketing strategy and tools utilized by tertiary institutions in attracting student to pursue their education in those institutions.

Alam and Khalifa (2009) state in the work entitled: “The Impact of Introducing a Business marketing Approach to Education: A Study on Private HE in Bangladesh” states that the market concept in terms of marketing practice in education are classified as the approach of either:

- product;
- category; and
- brand marketing.

Alam and Kahlifa (2009) assert that state and donor agencies are those most “heavily involved in the marketing of education as a product...” while those most often involved in product marketing are religious groups. In addition, the same authors’ state that education is rapidly introduced and expanded through the provisions of the private sector effectively “opens up the marketing horizon of ‘geographic segmentation in education in order to service the targeted elite groups.’” (2009)

Alam and Khalifa (2009), state that marketing in education is not a new concept. The state, partners for development, controlling agencies and providers (schools, colleges, universities, public and private provision) involve themselves in the marketing of education long ago. The state and partners are committed to ensuring that the beam of education enters every household and, to make education popular, different types of education marketing have already been put into place (Alam and Khalifa, 2009).

### **2.3. EDUCATIONAL MARKETING IN CYPRUS**

The history of marketing by private institutions is catalogued, albeit in a rather colourful terms, by Koyzis (1987), who claims that the institutions spend a great deal of money and time on advertising (unsubstantiated) and will “go to any and all lengths to attract new students” (Koyzi, 1987:17). In a rather more reliable observation the article lists the marketing activities to include; advertising – print, radio, and television – and college catalogues. They also share a common platform of seeking legitimacy from overt connections to UK and USA colleges and universities, a wide a range of programmes and a focus on the founder of the College. Three universities were established after 1974 in the occupied territories in north Cyprus (Athaniades 1998), which meant that the Republic of Cyprus was required to confirm its own legitimacy. In the academic year 1998-1999 the number of universities in the north increased to six and the number of students to 19, 185 (Athaniades, 1998). So has the marketing of tertiary education that, according to Koyzis was lacking in veracity changed in Cyprus form this position?

What is still missing is coherence in vision and this together with the ‘peculiarity’ of the Cyprus political structure, shows a lack of cohesion within the Cypriot higher education provision. The policy toward higher education seems to be a hybrid of market intervention in terms of quality control and accreditation plus positive support to public institutions in the market. This leaves the private universities to fight for market share in a biased market where support from the government confers status on an institution. The lack of cohesive offering to domestic and foreign students runs contrary to the developments in France, UK, Germany and many other EU member states who have recognized the importance of competitive positioning of their national education systems. Indeed Haug and Tauch

(2001) have noted, “the issue of competitiveness is seen as an important priority for an amazing high number of countries” (p.11).

The drivers of competition in this market for students have been identified as: attracting foreign students, increasing attractiveness in a European Union context and thirdly making the national system more attractive. It is against this background of national competitiveness that Cyprus needs to market its education to its own and to foreign students. For instance attracting more foreign students is seen to be a priority for higher education in the following countries: France, Germany, Sweden, UK, Norway, Austria, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands as well as Malta, Hungary and Latvia (p.11). What is to be done?

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research is a systematic enquiry which is reported in a form which allows the research methods (*quantitative* and *qualitative*) and the outcomes to be accessible to others. It is not possible to do research without having a problem which needs to be solved or a question which needs to be answered. This problem or question represents the research topic (Phellas, 2006).

Quantitative research generates numerical data or data that can be converted into numbers (Bandolier, 2007). It can range from simple counts such as the frequency of occurrences to more complex data such as test scores or prices. To be useful these data needs to be analyzed and interpreted and quantitative analysis techniques assist these process. These could range from creating simple tables or diagrams that show the frequency of occurrence through establishing statistical relationships between variables to complex statistical modeling (Saunders *et al.*, 2003: 327).

Since the purpose of this project is exploratory and there is no adequate data published to investigate the Marketing Strategies used by Private Universities in Cyprus and Students’ perception of promotional tools used by the universities, qualitative research will be used. Qualitative research is used to explore and understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviour and interactions (Bandolier, 2007). It seeks out the ‘why’, not the ‘how’ of its topic through the analysis of unstructured information – things like interview transcripts and recordings, emails, notes, feedback forms, photos and videos. It does not just rely on statistics or numbers, which are the domain of quantitative researchers (QSR International, 2007).

Initially, to capture the domain of the constructs in the research model the author carried out an extensive literature search on Marketing and Promotion of Tertiary Education. Then an exploratory study was performed through in-depth personal interviews with 20 students. Students were interviewed for 60 minutes each. The responses were analyzed through content analysis. Similar method used by Priporas and Mylona (2008), and Mylona and Priporas, (2008) in their studies with university students. This method was used in an effort to identify the major promotional issues that affect student selection in Tertiary Education. Afterwards, three focus groups of University administrative staff were conducted to seek an understanding and develop a language of the university’s main marketing issues in all three private universities. As Burns and Bush (2006) has stated, focus groups are used to generate ideas, understand consumer vocabulary and to reveal consumer needs, motives, perceptions and attitudes. The focus groups consisted of five senior managers directly or indirectly responsible for the marketing of the university. The results of the focus groups were used as a basis for developing structured questionnaires that will be used in quantitative research. Although the results can only be



considered as tentative at this stage they do shed light on the marketing effectiveness of the private institutions of tertiary education in Cyprus.

The full scale data collection is taking place at the present through personal surveys. The findings will be based on a survey of 400 students from different nationalities. The questionnaires will be distributed to the three privately owned, English speaking institutions in the Republic of Cyprus. The semi structured questionnaire consists of both open and close ended questions and in some cases 5 point Likert scale questions were used. The sample is a non probability, convenient sample from students taking Marketing courses as part of their undergraduate degrees. The students are surveyed in classrooms as part of the research team teaching schedule. The respondents voluntarily participate with no pressure, penalty or reward used for those who did or did not wish to do so. The data will be analyzed using the SPSS package.

## **4. ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS/ FINDINGS**

### **4.1. IN DEPTH INTERVIEWS ANALYSIS**

As stated by students, effectively reaching the new generation of students for student recruitment purposes, and eventually alumni communications, will require a shift from traditional media and messages. First and foremost, neither mass media advertising nor more strident claims about your institution will be effective. The author found that only three of 10 young people believe advertising paints a true picture of a product. This generation is very skeptical about that thing that they understand and that includes media and advertising. That is why simplicity and honesty are often more effective and credible in the admissions process – even if it is not as “slick” as the mass media.

This age group hates to be bored. They seek entertainment in everything they do – this not only includes what they expect from college, but how they get their information. A research study performed by the author in 2007 suggested that the attention span of most adolescents is about eleven minutes – roughly the time between commercials in a typical television show. The need for more exciting and entertaining admissions materials as well a greater use of interactive techniques will become the status quo of tomorrow.

Interestingly, the day of the college video may already be over. Young people see film and video as the ultimate managed medium. After all, they have seen Jurassic Park but they know dinosaurs no longer exist. Great special effect, however, do. The author found that only two out of 10 respondents said a university video had a great impact on a student’s decision to apply to an institution. These young people know that you can manufacture a happy campus, complete with happy kids, and shoot a tree from a hundred angles to make it look like a forest. Student produced material (even videos) or an Internet “chat room” where prospective students can ask questions of students, faculty and staff will have greater impact for many students that a flawlessly produced video.

Colleges will also need to be more cautious of the visual images. This generation is visually sophisticated. During the interviews, the author has found that students often ignore the foreground of admissions photographs and concentrate on the detail in the background. They look for truth in the details, not in the things we want them to see.

The final warning: universities cannot think all students respond alike. In our studies of students concerning admissions communications the author has found a variety of differences. Science students, for example, prefer telephone call to printed materials. Students interested in business are more likely to prefer electronic contacts such as e-mail or the university's own website. Students interested in the humanities prefer student written materials to "official materials of the college."

## **4.2. FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS**

### **1.2.4 Customer Orientation**

The notion of consumer is still problematic in higher educations (Wasmer, et al, 1997) with comments ranging from "I am not sure if we have customers – we have learners who pay", to "we must be customer focused if we are to sell our programmes" which was evident of a general rhetoric of marketing speak within the group. However, this rhetoric failed to be converted into the practice of marketing management. "We attract students by advertising, fairs and personal contacts, it's a matter of doing better than we did last year, X does the local market and Y gets the international students". The development of recruitment plans does not seem to involve faculty directly only in roles subordinate to and supportive of the admissions, "I could do more and would like to be more involved but I get confused about who does what!"

The overwhelming theme of recruitment is of increasing numbers in a sales-driven climate. This may be due to the fact that the private universities suffer from the lack of a financial safety net that the public universities have, a short-sightedness of management on student recruitment or the stage of development of the educational market in Cyprus. Anecdotally it seems to be a mixture of all three. Frequent comments made in the focus group were exemplified by, "I agree we ought to recruit for quality but we need the numbers," "We can't plan until we know the numbers". There is almost a fear of developing a long-term marketing strategy which might make the recruiters/marketers vulnerable to accountability for their performance. One claimed, "the market is too complex, we have to wait and react and then see what happens and what we then need to do".

Research on how students responded to the advertising campaigns is carried out and used to inform the agency for further campaigns. However, the style of the promotion and the relationship with the agency is personal to the Owner/ President, "I see it is my responsibility to keep our image consistent, I am the guardian of the Institution's image". Although this creates cohesion it fails to pick-up and utilizes the information available throughout the university's staff. There is little attempt made to educate potential students as to the different benefits provided by the different private universities' pedagogical style and the college's positioning strength.

Finally, there is a pervasive 'sales' rather than a 'marketing' orientation in all the discourse with emphasis on increasing sales with less concern for satisfying customer needs by designing the appropriate services. There is limited, if any, consumer research and where it is present it is used to correct staff performance, not to change corporate culture.

### **2.2.4 Integrated marketing organization and communications**

There are no long-term marketing strategies incorporated into the colleges' strategic plans. Marketing is treated as an independent part of the business plan but not reflecting any of the organizations'

objectives and generally unrelated to the overall organizational objectives. The overwhelming feeling was of a lack of a co-ordination, marketing seen as advertising (although the Presidents understood the importance of design in the marketing mix), individual decision-making confused by role ambiguities and no long-term strategy other than to “increase the numbers”.

Significant in the discussions was the lack of setting marketing objectives by the universities and this was partially evident in the policy used towards international agents. No standards of performance had been given to the representatives and no targets are given for international recruitment when attending exhibitions – “It is very difficult to measure, so many other factors are involved and it can take years before someone we have seen applies”. Little use of marketing theory or transfer of experience from other sectors have been used or indeed appears have been consulted.

Issues of academic quality were viewed as external issues, “It is important how many accredited programs we have, university X claims more and is gaining more students”, and “We get the students when we get to see them but if they just check with SEKAP (accrediting body) they see X has more programs and go there first”.

The lack of marketing awareness is compounded by the antithesis to marketing that seemingly is still found in academic communities (Swenson, 1998). The majority is academics involved in the marketing and recruitment from a number of different fields, where on-the-job training is usually provided but they have no concept of student/customer orientation, target marketing, customer satisfaction or any other marketing function. One academic we spoke to said, “Marketing has nothing to do with higher education, at least nothing to do with me”. This attitude tends to undermine any good marketing practices. However, this attitude might be a function of poor internal communication and an unwillingness to involve academics early in the planning and implementation process.

The notion of ‘integrated marketing communications’ seems to be confused with a notion of needing to know. Communication methods used often were incompatible with the message and lacked the internal constituency of the colleges interviewed. Often staff “read about what we were doing in the newspaper”. Most activities are repeated out of habit or in an effort to simply copy what other institutions’ competitors do – “I do what I am told to do, it’s really the same every year, rush around, panic, get the numbers and then the lectures!”.

### **3.2.4 Budget**

A manifestation of the notion that marketing is sales recruitment is in the development and utilization of the marketing budget. Its calculation is often unknown, (“I only look after conferences so I don’t know what we spend”), unaccountable, (“the Enrollment Manager handles it – it must be quite a lot”) and often unaccountable as was identified by recruitment fair expenditure. As in many other organizations the budget is a manifestation of the power of the holder. Little collaborative input is made; it is decided top down without inputs.

The budget is usually negotiated or approved by the board of directors/executive council/president of the institution but it rarely reflects the cost of the marketing activities and often it is agreed without a plan, “it is gifted, often as an act of faith”. As one academic stated, “It seems that they take last years figures and add some more. When it runs out we might spend more in some areas and none in the most deserving – mine!”

## 5. DISCUSSION

Student welfare is high on each institution's priorities and considerable success has been achieved in increasing student numbers. This, however, seemed to be in response to demand created not by the private universities, but from their particular position in Cyprus and regional educational markets (indeed the mention of a positioning statement was almost absent from all our discussions – “we have a good location”) but is a response to external contingencies such as fee support and the crisis in a visa application created by the 11 September 2001 atrocity. This we see as problematic for the long term sustainability of the educational institutions and for the national goal of being a centre of excellence in higher education when Cyprus opens its markets to European based universities who have a more professional and focused approach.

What is needed, the author suggest is the adoption of an educational marketing perspective that re-defines the notion of customer and other elements of marketing mix (Gibbs, 2002) and operates both on national and institutional levels. This requires collaborative competition, a clear mission for the country's higher education (Tsakkiros, et al, 2002) and; a will to see the development of a marketing strategy that is sustainable and proactive. It requires a cultural change in the way the institutions think and act in their interfaces with potential recruits, building long-term mutually beneficial relationships. Such a change seems unlikely at the moment in terms of the educational institutions and it is compounded by the educational infrastructure that regulates them. This ranges from dependence upon the principles of governance of public universities, the accreditation of the private institutions and the internal ambiguities of accreditation by national and international bodies.

One respondent who said, “We need the Government to continue to support us but they must be market responsive as well”, encapsulated the situation. “They need to show that they understand our problems as well as their own.”

## 6. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This study even though qualitative in nature has contributed to the knowledge of Marketing of Tertiary Education. It should be noted however that this study was qualitative in nature and the focus was explicitly on obtaining depth of understanding rather than generalization. More research is needed to better understand the current state of Promotion of Education in Cyprus. The sample used at this exploratory stage was adequate for the purpose of the study and allowed reasonable conclusions to be drawn. The findings however are not conclusive by the sample and measures used. The research has shown that the marketing of Cypriot higher education is still product driven, which implies a sales rather than a marketing focus. There is often an awareness of the need to apply to holistic marketing philosophy but these aspirations are restricted by short-termism encouraged by the government's attitude to private education and the institution's own financial goals. This is problematic, for the realization of Cyprus as a centre of excellence is on the shoulders of the private colleges.

We recommend that, like other European countries, the government either applies a fair market mechanism or it develops a strong marketing strategy that embraces all higher education institutions. Not to do this will ensure failure to match its goals, increasingly waste its marketing resources and, we predict, lead to decline in the number of students attending Cypriot institutions.

Additionally, colleges and universities must re evaluate the traditional communication methods used with more personal ways to reach an increasing number of interested students who are looking for entertainment in every message they receive. As one can now tell these are not futuristic and far-fetched predictions. All the areas discussed already exist at numerous institutions. The public relations and promotional experts on campus must see the “big picture.” They must be able to explain who their audiences are, what motivates them and how to reach them. Regardless of the current limitations, the study brought to light some findings which may assist Marketing Officers/Enrollment Managers of Private Universities in better understanding of how students/customers respond to their Marketing Activities.

## **7. FURTHER RESEARCH**

Even though the above exploratory qualitative research has definitely given us an insight into the Marketing of Tertiary Education in Cyprus, it has additionally stressed the need for further quantitative among both administrators and students. We need to uncover the needs that students attending private universities have and how could these needs assist us in creating an effective Marketing/Promotional plan.

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