CHAPTER 4

Marketing Standpoints of International Students

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Introduction to a Marketing Point of View

Useful, Important, and Frequently Used Marketing Terms

As we proceed to discuss various marketing-related concepts, and to ensure we (authors and readers, academics and practitioners) will have a common language, we first define several terminologies that will aid in understanding the marketing vantage point of this chapter. Some of these terms will receive further discussion and elaboration later in the chapter, as they are core factors to this book. As such, we *strongly encourage the reader to view Appendix D before proceeding in this chapter* in order to review the terminology list.

What Is Marketing?

In this section, we will explain the general notion of marketing, what it is, and what its core components are (with respect to our main goal of the current book). We will firmly tie it to the specific area of international student mobility and higher education.

At its very base, marketing revolves around the exchange between buyers and sellers (Bagozzi, 1974). It is "the process by which companies create value for customers and build strong customer relationships in

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order to capture value from customers in return" (Kotler & Armstrong, 2014, p. 29). The American Marketing Association (AMA) offered this formal definition: "Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large" (American Marketing Association, 2013). By and large, marketing is about identifying human and social needs (at the individual, group or the societal level), and meeting them in a profitable manner (Kotler & Keller, 2012, 2016). It has three main foundations: (1) market institutions (e.g., consumers, firms and channels, regulators)[1]; (2) processes (e.g., innovation, brands, brand equities, customer experience, and value appropriation); and (3) value creation (e.g., value for consumers, value for firms, and value for society) (Eckhardt et al., 2019; Moorman, Van Heerde, Moreau, & Palmatier, 2019).

Successful marketing also entails the acknowledgment that *everything* matters in marketing, meaning that a broad and integrated point of view may often be indispensable (or even inevitable) (Kotler & Keller, 2012). This perspective is called holistic marketing.[2] The main idea behind holistic marketing is that being more effective than competitors is a key component in achieving organizational goals; that is to say, being "better" (or more effective) than others in creating, delivering, and communicating superior customer value to the target market/population (Kotler & Keller, 2012). We can, hence, argue, with Kotler and Keller, that:

> **Good marketing is no accident**, but a result of careful planning and execution using state-of-the-art tools and techniques… [to] survive in an unforgiving economic environment. Finance, operations, accounting, and other business functions won't really matter without sufficient demand for products and services… In other words, there must be a top line for there to be a bottom line. Thus financial success often depends on marketing ability. (Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 25; original emphasis)

[1] "(1) consumers (i.e., entities that consume offerings), (2) firms (i.e., entities that create offerings) and channels (i.e., entities that facilitate access to offerings), and (3) regulators (i.e., entities that govern the exchange of offerings)" (Eckhardt et al., 2019, p. 9).

[2] Holistic marketing comprises four bases (Kotler & Keller, 2012): (1) internal marketing—marketing department, senior management, other departments; (2) integrated marketing—communications, products and services, channels; (3) performance marketing—sales revenue, brand and customer equity, ethics, environment, legal, community, financial accountability, social responsibility; and (4) relationship marketing—customers, networks, partners, alliances.

Consumer Psychology: The Customer and the Consumer

As mentioned in the Glossary (see Appendix D), the term *customer* (or a client) refers to someone who purchases from a particular store/company/firm, whereas the term *consumer* is a more generalized definition. In other words, someone who buys a pencil from a store X, for example, is their customer. However, someone who could *potentially* buy a pencil from said store X, or anything purchasable for that matter, is a consumer (as the end buyer). Thus, a consumer may or may not become a customer, de facto (Loudon & Della Bitta, 1993). The definition of consumers is not limited to monetary exchanges alone, but also other services and intangibles (e.g., education, philosophy, ideas, etc.). It becomes obvious why the understanding of these distinctions is important in the competitive marketing world (see Loudon & Della Bitta, 1993), especially when dealing with international higher education. Although the consumer leads the product's design and strategy, marketing efforts are more customer oriented as they are the potential buyers/clients of the organization, and it is from them (the latter) that the revenues are drawn.

Marketing and consumer psychology intertwine, as the former may be based on the latter. Consumer psychology is a research field exploring how thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and perceptions affect the ways that people buy and/or relate to goods and services (Loudon & Della Bitta, 1993). This field it is often multidisciplinary, deriving contributions and information from many disciplines as a "natural extension" (Jansson-Boyd, 2019, p. 1) of them: (1) psychology (individuals' behavior and mental processes); (2) sociology (collective behavior and group decisions); (3) social-psychology (how individuals affect and are maybe influenced by others or groups); (4) anthropology (individual–culture relationships); and (5) economics and marketing (production, exchange, and consumption of goods and services) (Chen, 2008; Jansson-Boyd, 2019; Kotler & Armstrong, 2014; Kotler & Keller, 2016; Loudon & Della Bitta, 1993).

The Brand

Branding

In Appendix D, we present a succinct definition of the term "branding." However, we believe it is necessary to have a deeper and better understanding of the scope of branding and how it relates to brand positioning. Successful marketers design and implement marketing activities and programs need to be built to measure and manage the brands to maximize their values. They do it through identifying and establishing brand positioning, planning, and implementing adequate brand marketing, measuring and interpreting the brand's performance, and growing and sustaining the value with more brand positioning and other strategies (e.g., Kotler & Keller, 2012, 2016).

A *brand* can be a name, a symbol, a term, sign, or a design that makes a product or service offered by someone (seller, company, service provider, etc.) *identifiable*, and renders them as *unique and distinguished* from those offered by competitors (that are designed to satisfy the same need) (Keller, 2011; Kotler & Armstrong, 2014; Kotler & Keller, 2012; Tasci, 2011; Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009). The differentiation may be functional, rational, or tangible (i.e., related to the brand's performance) or more symbolic, emotional, or intangible (i.e., related to what the brand represents, in the abstract sense) (Kotler & Keller, 2012, 2016). So, a brand emphasizes the identification with these goods or services and the differentiation of them from other competitors in the market, in a promise of quality as a means to gain a sustainable competitive advantage (Tasci, 2011). Most things can be branded: physical goods (e.g., Tylenol medication for pain relieving), a service (e.g., Turkish Airlines), a store (e.g., Zara and Primark), a person (e.g., Angelina Jolie and Roger Federer), a place (e.g., Sydney, New York, Spain and Italy), an organization (e.g., American Psychologists/American Marketing Association), and even an idea (e.g., free trade rights) (Kotler & Keller, 2012).

A brand conveys that by purchasing/acquiring the good one would enjoy functional, economical, or psychological benefits, outlined by unique aspects of the branded good or service. It is a package of perceived rewards and added features that the customer recognizes as having more merits and is more advantageous in company X as differentiated from (or as opposed to) company Y. This package's aim is to attract (i.e., pull), motivate, and retain the (current or potential) customers (Theurer, Tumasjan, Welpe, & Lievens, 2018). A good marketing strategy will create brand value through meaningful and noticeable differences of the brand in question, as opposed to others in the same products and services market category. These differences relate to attributes, properties, and characteristics of the product itself (Keller, 2011; Kotler & Keller, 2012; Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009). A credible and viable brand exudes a certain level of quality and responsibility, so that satisfied (or future) customers can choose the brand again, among a plethora of other shopping goods (Keller, 2011; Kotler & Keller, 2012).

"As consumers' lives become more complicated, rushed, and time-starved, a brand's ability to simplify decision-making and reduce risk become invaluable" (Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 264). So, by branding, a company teaches consumers "who" the product is (giving it a name and other brand elements), what the product is, and why they should care about it. By doing so, the company can create mental structures that help consumers organize their knowledge about products and services to facilitate and clarify their decision-making, which in turn may create value for the company altogether. The brand can be viewed as the "personality" (or "the face") of the company, and thus it should strive to evoke positive emotional responses from the target market segments[3] (Kotler & Keller, 2012, 2016; see also Durkin, McKenna, & Cummins, 2012).

The goal of the company is to *create brand equity*, and as mentioned it is the added value(s) endowed on products and services that may be reflected by how consumers feel, think, talk, and act with respect to the brand itself (as well as in the prices, market share, and profitability of the brand). The power of a brand nests in what customers have read, seen, heard, learned, talked about, thought, felt, and imagined about the brand over time (Keller, 2011; Kotler & Keller, 2012). When consumers react more favorably to a brand, a positive equity is reached, while when the consumers react less favorably or with indifference, under the same circumstances, the equity is negative (Kotler & Keller, 2012, 2016).

Branding strategies deal with many aspects, but most revolve around core elements of a successful brand (Kotler & Armstrong, 2014; Kotler & Keller, 2012, 2016):

[3] This strategy has been shown to have positive impact on the business development in higher education, specifically (e.g., Durkin et al., 2012).

- **Advantageous differentiation**: A brand's point(s) of difference from others, and that it is believed to have an emotional or a rational advantage over other brands in the same market category.
- **Relevance**: The appropriateness and breadth of the brand's appeal to the consumers. The brand needs to be relevant to the consumers' needs, price range, or consideration set.
- **Esteem/viability**: The perceptions of quality (and loyalty), how well the brand is regarded and respected.
- **Knowledge**: How and to what extent the consumers are familiar with the brand.
- **Performance**: The perception that the brand will deliver adequate product performance. How well the product or service meets customers' functional needs.
- **Salience**: How often and easily customers think about the brand given different purchase or decision-making situations.
- **Imagery**: Extrinsic characteristics of the product/service, including the ways that the brand attempts to meet customers' needs (e.g., psychological, social, economic, and functional).
- **Bonding and feelings**: The rational and/or emotional attachments to the brand, excluding other brands. This is the challenge for most marketers, to encourage low-bonded customers to become highly bonded.

Succinctly, a brand needs to address three main areas, illustrated by the following questions:

1. **Customer expectations**: "What do I think the brand *can* do for me and what do I think it *should* and *will* do for me as a result?"
2. **Customer experience**: "What does the brand *actually* do for me and how I do feel about it?"
3. **Customer equity**: "What *has* the brand done for me over time and how much value do I feel it has created for me?" (Keller, 2019, p. 277; original emphasis).

Brand Positioning

Marketing strategies are built on segmentation, targeting, and positioning (STP)—discovering different needs in the marketplace, targeting potential consumer populations, providing superior satisfaction, and then positioning products or services in such a way that the target segments will recognize a company's distinctive offerings and images (Keller, 2011; Kotler & Keller, 2012, 2016). Specifically:

> **Positioning** is the act of designing a company's offering and image to occupy a distinctive place in the minds of the target market. The goal is to locate the brand in the minds of consumers to maximize the potential benefit to the firm. A good brand positioning helps guide marketing strategy by clarifying the brand's essence, identifying the goals it helps the consumer achieve, and showing how it does so in a unique way. Everyone in the organization should understand the brand positioning and use it as context for making decisions. (Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 298; original emphasis)

Positioning is a supporting pole and a vital and integral part of successful branding. A market entity (e.g., seller and service provider) positions itself by establishing (and maintaining) a *favorable place* in the eyes and minds of the target market population, as opposed to its competitors (this is another effort of differentiation). Typically, positioning revolves around the target market population/segment, making the product distinguishable from those of others', and the creation of a positive image of the goods or services (Tasci, 2011; see also Fyall, 2019). As mentioned, this is done through determining the target market segments that a company wishes to address *and* the competitors in this market category, and making a perceptively distinct differentiation from said company's competitors. In other words, identifying the target population (locally, nationally, or internationally, with criteria such as gender, age groups, behavioral patterns, etc.), and based on this target market segment(s), the company may offer its product or package in different ways. The result of good positioning is the successful creation of a customer-focused value proposition—a sound reason the target consumer should buy the product (Kotler, 1997; Kotler & Keller, 2012).

Brand positioning should provide an answer to the customer's question: "Why should I buy your brand?" (Kotler & Armstrong, 2014, p. 237). When designing brand positioning, a company should think about:

- the *importance* of the difference (a highly valued benefit to a sufficient number of customers);
- the *distinctiveness* (an element of the product that is not offered by others);
- the *superiority* (the product should be superior in some regards or superior to other ways of obtaining the same benefit);
- the *communicability* (the distinct elements of the product are communicable and visible to customers);
- the *pre-emptive* nature of the difference (the distinct element cannot be easily copied by competitors);
- the *affordability* (the customer can afford to pay for the distinct product's elements); and
- the *profitability* (the company must deem it profitable to introduce a distinct—new or redesigned—element of the product) (Kotler, 1997).

Well-designed positioning also identifies the optimal points-of-parity (POPs) and points-of-difference (PODs). POPs are about the attributes or benefits associations that are not necessarily unique to the brand, and are often shared between brands and competitors. On the other hand, PODs are those attributes and benefits that consumers strongly associate with a specific brand, that they positively evaluate and believe that they could not find the same "package" with a competitive brand (Kotler & Keller, 2012, 2016). "A company that competes by offering unique products that are widely valued by customers is following a *differentiation strategy*. Product differences might come from exceptionally high quality, extraordinary service, innovative design, technological capability, or an unusually positive brand image" (Robbins & Coulter, 2012, p. 234; original emphasis). Other differentiating methods may be different product offerings, pricing, distribution channels and promotional efforts, responsiveness to customer needs and customer services, and added features.

The following is a simple example related to higher education. Two academic institutions (X and Y) offer an MBA (Master of Business Administration) program, each demanding around the same price for this degree—these are the POPs for institution X and Y. However, if X includes fieldwork related to the degree, enabling its students to gain practical training and experience in tandem with studying the degree, these can be significant PODs that just may tilt the scales in institution

X's favor. We suggest a succinct description of branding and positioning—branding creates positive user expectations from your products or services, but positioning is the establishing and generating of preference for your brand relative to competitors, based on a unique and important difference. Thus, branding communicates the "promise" of good user experiences, while positioning relays the brand's unique competitive difference that makes the promise compelling and appealing (based on Boykin, 2019, n.p.).

Brand mantras. Brand mantras (or mottos) are another important and essential way for brand positioning (Keller, 2019; Kotler & Keller, 2012). Beyond their basic definition (see Appendix D), their purpose is to ensure that all employees within the company and all external marketing partners, including consumers, understand what the brand is, in the most fundamental sense. They must economically communicate what the brand is and, even more profoundly, what it is not (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Examples of known mantras are:

- Barack Hussein Obama II: "Yes, we can."
- Disney: "Fun, family, entertainment."
- Nike: "Authentic athletic performance."
- BMW: "The ultimate driving machine."
- Betty Crocker: "Homemade made easy."
- Apple: "Think different."
- McDonald's: "Food, folks, and fun."
- Kit Kat: "Take a break."
- Coca Cola: "Sharing, happiness, tasty."
- American Express: "Worldclass service, personal recognition."
- Academic institutions around the world: "Veritas."

The last example, Veritas, is a unique example of a point-of-parity between universities across nations, all abiding by the same motto—"Veritas" (the Latin word for "truth")—or a variant of it (for example, Harvard University, Hutchesons' Grammar School, The University of Western Ontario, Drake University, Knox College (Illinois), the University of California, Hastings College of the Law, as well as the Dominican Order of the Roman Catholic Church, Loyola College in Nigeria, University of Cape Coast in Ghana, Doshisha University in Japan, Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research in India, Payap University in Thailand, Seoul National University, in South Korea, Uppsala University in Sweden, and more). This clearly shows that academic institutions have similar mottos, but still differ from one another in their brand positioning. This indicates that they are using distinguished differentiation strategies from one another to make their brand noticeable and unique. This makes marketing for this market very interesting and important.

Devising mantras can be complicated and delicate, but worthwhile. We recommend further reading in Kotler and Armstrong (2014) and Kotler and Keller (2012, 2016).

Brand slogans. While mantras are more direct, internal, descriptive, and aim to capture the essence of the brand, slogans are more evocative and abstract. Brand slogans are the external expression of the positioning of the brand and are used in advertisements and more commercial mediums and communications (Keller, 2019). A slogan,[4] sometimes called a tagline, is "the verbal or written portion of an advertising message that summarizes the main idea in a few memorable words" (Marketing Dictionary, 2019c), and is considered another effective tool for brand positioning (Kohli et al., 2007).

A slogan plays a vital supporting role in brand identity and positioning. It can (and must) tell the consumer something about the image of the product/service, capturing the meaning of the brand, and facilitating consumers' recognition, recall, and favorable associations of it. In other words, the slogan should, ideally, affect the brand's image and awareness, which will entice consumers to seek more knowledge and information about it (Kohli et al., 2007). One of the more prominent advantages of a slogan is its flexibility, as "it is the most dynamic element of a brand's identity, the one most easily and most often altered, when needed" (Kohli et al., 2007, p. 416). In conclusion, a slogan should strategically be a part of brand identity. In contrast to the brand's name (or logo), a slogan is may tell us "where the brand is going." As such, it must be memorable, but not necessarily "simple." Moreover, a slogan can play a key role in implementing a differentiation strategy, and thus help shaping the brand's image and positioning. As such, effective slogans emphasize points of difference that are not only meaningful, but also congruent with extant brand perceptions (based on Kohli et al., 2007, p. 421).

[4]The word *slogan* is an evolution of the Scottish Gaelic word *slogorne*, which means "battle cry" (Kohli, Leuthesser, & Suri, 2007, p. 415).

More Ways of Differentiation

As was mentioned earlier, there are many ways to distinguish one brand from those of competitors. However, those were aspects of the product or the service. There are other ways of differentiation (Kotler & Keller, 2012, 2016). They include (based on Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 312):

- **Employee differentiation**: Better-trained workers who provide the products or services. In higher education, this can go in work in two directions: hiring better-trained administrative staff able to answer the needs of a plethora of students, and provide superior service and "bureaucratic experience"; hiring better academic staff (teaching, research, practical, etc.).
- **Channel differentiation**: More effective and efficient ways of distribution channels (coverage, expertise, and performance) to make the purchasing experience of the product easier and more enjoyable and rewarding. In higher education, this could be translated into different studying methods, such as online/virtual learning (discussed in Chapter 1).
- **Image differentiation**: Crafting powerful and compelling images that appeal to consumers' needs (e.g., psychological, social, economic, and functional). In higher education, this could mean higher and better institutional reputation, related to the academy *and* the industry/market, esteemed and quality research reputation, and more.
- **Service differentiation**: Designing a better and faster delivery system that provides more effective and efficient solutions to consumers. The company needs to think about its own and its suppliers' reliability, resilience, and innovativeness when attempting a service differentiation. In higher education, this could be reflected by fast and appropriate response to students' needs and queries (e.g., scholarships, enrollments, and classes).

Competition

Additionally, organizations should monitor and benchmark when analyzing potential threats from competitors on three main dimensions (based on Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 313):

- share of market—the competitors' share of the available target market;
- share of mind—the proportion of customers who named the competitor in response to: "Name the first company that comes to mind in this industry";
- share of heart—the proportion of customers who named the competitor in response to: "Name the company from which you would prefer to buy the product/service."

It is important not to focus on one dimension, because all the dimensions have a kind of relationship such that "companies that make steady gains in mind share and heart share will inevitably make gains in market share and profitability" (Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 313). Evidently, having a big market share, without providing other aspects and elements of the product (e.g., availability, technical assistance, customer service, and innovation) will not last, and the company will encounter a decline in its market share, followed by revenue.

Branding in Contemporary Times

The technological and digital revolutions experienced over recent decades have fundamentally transformed marketing practice, consumer behavior, and competitive dynamics, and presented new policy and societal challenges. At the same time, the world's many economic, social, and political problems can benefit from proactive, purpose-driven marketing thought. In this arena of dynamic change and unprecedented opportunity, the marketing discipline is poised to offer new knowledge that contributes to the full range of marketing stakeholders, including the students we educate (Moorman et al., 2019, p. 1).

We can clearly see that today's customers are becoming increasingly confident in their own abilities to make a decision between goods, services, and suppliers' offers (e.g., Mitchell, Bauer, & Hausruckinger, 2003), by seeking advice from peers, but especially with the development of the Internet and technological advancements, which facilitate, for example, information search (e.g., Dexeus, 2019). Word-of-mouth (and electronic word-of-mouth) increasingly proliferate customers' perceptions through conversations, social media, Internet and more, as they put more trust in close peers or opinion leaders than commercial entities (like advertisements and salespeople) (e.g., Dexeus, 2019; Kotler & Armstrong, 2014; Susilowati & Sugandini, 2018; Voramontri & Klieb, 2018). Coupled with the modern market, in which marketers do not exclusively create the value for the brand (Knox, 2004), it is even more important to understand and manage the company's brand in a responsible and adequate manner. In addition, customers seek an accessible product, value for time, value for money, customizability, and good service delivery (Knox, 2004). Hence, branding alone cannot command premium prices. As such, the notion of *added value* (e.g., Boykin, 2019) of a purchase should become more prominent, clear, and transparent in marketing strategies:

> From the customer's point of view, value is created when the benefits (perceived quality) they receive exceed the costs of owning it (perceived sacrifice). These components of customer value can be disaggregated further into the benefits derived from the core product and customised service against the purchase price and the consumer's transaction costs.... The real price includes everything the customer has to do to realise its value: time and money spent searching for the right product and sales outlet, travel and purchasing costs, consumption and disposal costs (Mitchell, 1998). (Knox, 2004, p. 107)

So, a successful brand positioning may need to ensure three major factors. First, the most important is ensuring that the brand (of any goods or services provided) is *relevant* to the target market population. They need to see the brand as appealing, otherwise it will not make it into their decision-making process, regardless of how differentiated or credible the brand is. Second, as mentioned earlier, a company needs to ensure that its brand is *differentiated* from the competitors', and it must be positioned in a unique fashion. Last, the brand must be *credible and attainable*, meaning that if the company cannot provide the goods and/or services in a credible manner, customers may be left with hollow promises (Koelzer, 2019).

Before we delve into the next section of the marketing vantage point of higher education from a completely different perspective, we wish to introduce a quote that shows how brand positioning is very important, yet often ill-managed:

> Oscar Wilde wrote that a cynic is someone who knows the price of everything but the value of nothing. He may well have been talking about the attitude many chief executives have towards their brands and, indeed, the

> ways in which the organisation itself is managed as a brand. It is only relatively recently that senior managers have started talking about brands as assets and brand equity as a major component of their organisation's market place value (Davidson, 1998; Ward and Perrier, 1998). If anyone is in any doubt about the value of brands, they need do only two things: look at what CEOs are prepared to pay for top brands and observe the extent to which the market capitalisation of brand-led organisations exceeds the value of their tangible assets. (Knox, 2004, p. 105)

It is evident that branding works even in higher education. For example, many prospects "know" that Harvard University or Yale symbolize a high-quality product, regardless of whether they know or remember where they are located (i.e., Cambridge, MA and New Haven, CT, respectively). As conceived in Chapter 3, branding can work on three different areas (based on Facet B: Attractors (push–pull factors):

- The *country* (or a *nation*): People "know" that if one wants to experience good-quality pastries and sweets, he or she should go to an Italian or a French pastry shop (i.e., *pasticceria* and *patisserie*, respectively); we often hear people say: "French pastries revolves around perfection, you have to try some!" Another example is the United States, which is often branded as the land of unlimited opportunities and freedom.
- The *institution* (or a *company*): People "know" that BMW produces quality cars/motorcycles; we can often hear someone say: "Hey, you should buy a BMW, yes they are expensive, but they are very good and high quality!"). Another prominent example is Disney (i.e., The Walt Disney Company) which revolves around movies, theme parks, and loveable memorable characters (e.g., Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and Goofy). Their branding image is about a fantasy world, dreams, magic, happiness, and fun.
- The *city*: One of the most well-known examples is New York, as most of us know the slogan "I ♥ NY," which can be seen in many places, on many clothes, and is known for its international and diverse population. Another example is Amsterdam, which is known to be one of the most diverse cities in the world, but is also known to revolve around "sex, drugs, and canals." The city's new slogan

"**I am**sterdam" signifies the identification with the brand—the city itself.[5]

Thus, even without reading the ranking charts or surveys, people know the brand positioning by heart. It often takes quite some time to reach such a point for any seller or service provider, and in higher education, as mentioned, it works just the same. In this case then, brand positioning is managed around the student (as the core factor—as a customer or as a consumer) in various spheres of influence, as we will elaborate further in the chapter (see section "Spheres of Influence: Ecosystems of the International Higher Education Market").

A Word of Warning

The strategies and theories presented up until this point are all well and good, but we strongly advise a company (or an academic institution) to keep tabs on its brand and reputation. While positive public response to the brand may elevate and uplift the company, a negative one can, just as easily, drag the firm into oblivion. Furthermore, we, as human beings, are more influenced by negative things than positive ones (i.e., we react more strongly to them). In other words, we suffer more from the negative than we derive enjoyment from the positive (Tversky & Kahneman, 1991). This analogy is crystal clear with regard to the importance of constant regulation and supervision for the brand's position and value in the market, as negative publicity might damage the company more than it may have the ability to rectify and repair itself. We encourage further reading in Eckhardt et al. (2019), Keller (2009, 2011), Kotler (1997), Kotler and Armstrong (2014), Kotler and Keller (2012, 2016), and Wæraas and Solbakk (2009).

It is clear why effective marketing is important for companies in general, and academic institutions in particular,[6] as we will further explain in what follows.

[5] We wish to emphasize that these are merely examples, and by no means dictate the relative success of either country/institution/city. To each their own, as there is no accounting for taste.

[6] Also, "there is a striking paucity of research on branding in higher education" (Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009, p. 449), leading us to believe that more focus on this subject is needed.

The Case of Higher Education and International Students

The national and international competitions have spurred universities and colleges all over the world to search for a unique self-definition. This is for the sake of differentiating themselves and attracting students and academic staff. All of these are, de facto, making higher education institutions more aware of the association between what they "stand for" (i.e., terms of values and characteristics), and how they are perceived (based on Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009, p. 449).

This marathon for higher education consists of many participants: (1) the potential consumers of higher education (i.e., students)[7]; (2) the provider of higher education (i.e., academic institutions); (3) governments; (4) the economic systems (globally and locally), and so on (e.g., Beech, 2018; Beine, Noël, & Ragot, 2014). This chapter will focus on these actors and their interrelationships—from a marketing standpoint.[8]

Kotler and Fox (1985) have described *marketing for education*[9] as involving "designing the institution's offerings to meet the target market's needs and desires, and using effective pricing, communication, distribution to inform, motivate, and service the markets" (p. 7). At its simplest, the goal of any marketing strategy is to bring potential consumers and customers closer to purchasing a product(s) or a service(s). Academic institutions strive to use certain approaches in order to "take students to places they do not yet know they want to go" (Pinar, Trapp, Girard, & Boyt, 2011, p. 735). Marketing strategies are indeed

[7] However, students can also be considered as a product of academia and not consumers of it, as Lovelock and Rothschild (1980) have noted: "There is a further twist in Higher Education. Students are not only consumers of educational services. They are also changed by the experience and themselves become a product of the institution in the eyes of third parties such as employers" (as cited in Conway, Mackay, & Yorke, 1994, p. 32).

[8] The great importance of marketing in education in general, and higher education specifically, can also be understood through the specific and expert domains in journals on this topic, such as the *Journal of Marketing Education*, *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, and other variations.

[9] Another term used in the same context is *marketization of education*, which constitutes "a set of beliefs that puts customers' interest first, but at the same time raises the school's awareness of the need to obtain information about competitors and establish cross-departmental activities to satisfy customers' needs, in order to gain a competitive edge in the turbulent, competitive environment" (Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2007, p. 293; see also Jongbloed, 2003).

needed in the academic arena (e.g., Gibbs & Murphy, 2009; Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). This is to pull and entice international students into purchasing what academic institutions "sell"—higher education in the form of different degrees, certificates, and diplomas.

Thus, some scholars have stressed that there is a need to adapt marketing logics (e.g., Gibbs & Murphy, 2009) and competitive strategies (e.g., Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016) to the rapidly changing modern academic world (e.g., Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016; Živković, Nikolić, Savić, Djordjević, & Mihajlović, 2017). In the same vein, Wæraas and Solbakk (2009) showed that "a new vocabulary consisting of terms such as branding, corporate communication, identity, and reputation has emerged in academia, making higher education organizations more aware of the link between what they 'stand for' in terms of values and characteristics, and how they are perceived" (p. 449; see also Melewar & Akel, 2005).

However, even though academic institutes are each unique in their own way, from a marketing perspective they "fail to distinguish themselves by using a common marketing strategy" (Goi, Kalidas, & Yunus, 2018, p. 90; see also Prugsamatz, Pentecost, & Ofstad, 2006), and also need to examine and understand their own *raison d'être* (Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009) because developing competitive advantage for international education may be complex (Mazzarol, 1998). This further emphasizes that making use of consumer behavior and pure marketing strategies is a necessity for future sustainability or survivability (e.g., Goi et al., 2018; Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016).

In this chapter, we will begin with basic definitions and terminologies that will help and accompany us (both authors and readers) throughout the chapter. We will address the marketing viewpoint of higher education in general, and then will focus the resolution on international higher education specifically.

Higher Education as a Marketable Service

Indeed, consumer psychology may help us understand and tackle the marketing front and should be applied to higher education (e.g., Guilbault, 2018; Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). However, before we delve into the marketing strategies and possible interventions, first and foremost we need to understand why higher education is marketable.

Higher education is considered as an intangible (e.g., Mazzarol, 1998), tradable commodity (e.g., Knight, 2008; Lomer, Papatsiba, & Naidoo, 2018), or a marketable service (e.g., Americanos, 2011; Guilbault, 2018; Mazzarol, 1998; Pinar et al., 2011; see also McManus, Haddock-Fraser, & Rands, 2017) that someone may purchase, and hence consumer behavior applies in this domain (see Chapman, 1981; Cubillo, Sánchez, & Cerviño, 2006; Gomes & Murphy, 2003; Guilbault, 2018; Maringe & Carter, 2007; Moogan, Baron, & Harris, 1999). As Knight (2011a, p. 224) has argued, "regional and world trade agreements began to include education as a tradable service and private and public education providers saw new commercial possibilities in cross-border education."

In this sense, there is also a debate whether students are to be regarded as customers (e.g., Conway et al., 1994; Guilbault, 2018; Melewar & Akel, 2005; Nixon, Scullion, & Hearn, 2018; Woodall, Hiller, & Resnick, 2014). In any case, they perceive themselves and expect to be treated as such (Guilbault, 2018; Koris & Nokelainen, 2015) in several areas (e.g., student feedback, classroom studies, and communication; Koris & Nokelainen, 2015, p. 128) or even as "sovereign consumers" (Nixon et al., 2018, p. 972).

Regardless of this inane discourse, it is advisable that academic institutes, along with all their employees at all levels, have a customer orientation (i.e., customer-centric focus) toward students (Black, 2008, as cited in Pinar et al., 2011, p. 728; see also Guilbault, 2018) "and not lose academic integrity" (Guilbault, 2018, p. 297; see also Babatunde, 2018) in the process.

If students (domestic and international alike) are regarded as potential customers, it is crucial to know what their expectations and needs are. This may "provide insight for increasing enrolment, reducing disappointments … and more effective use of marketing strategies" (Prugsamatz et al., 2006, p. 142) to increase customer value of the service (e.g., Chen, 2008). Because these needs and expectations may act as a basis for comparisons by prospective students, they may impact their perceived value of the service they acquire (e.g., Woodall et al., 2014), satisfaction, and perceptions of the quality of the service (Nixon et al., 2018; Prugsamatz et al., 2006). Thus, identifying, meeting, or even exceeding these expectations could support institutions' marketing efforts (e.g., Prugsamatz et al., 2006; Woodall et al., 2014).

Moreover, higher education has become a complex phenomenon with regard to marketing as it works through two major channels, as we discussed in Chapter 1: traditional *physically* taught classes and *virtually* taught classes. These are two distinct ways for communicating higher education. The former requires perhaps familiar marketing strategies. However, the latter may necessitate learning new strategies or tactics.

From a marketing point of view, "the need to understand how prospective students decide which higher education institution to attend is becoming of paramount importance as the policy context for higher education moves towards market-based systems in many countries" (McManus et al., 2017, p. 390). Thus, now we delve into the decision-making process with special regard to international students.

The General Decision-Making Process

The general decision-making process is typically conceptualized as five consecutive stages:

1. Identification of a problem/challenge.
2. Searching/acquiring information.
3. Evaluating different alternatives.
4. *Making* the purchase decision.
5. *Evaluating* the purchase decision (e.g., Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Therefore, this is "a multistage and complex process undertaken consciously and sometimes subconsciously by a student intending to enter HE [higher education] and by which the problem of choosing a study destination and programme is resolved" (Maringe & Carter, 2007, p. 463).

Differentiation and consolidation theory (DCT; Svenson, 1992, 1996) was one of the earliest concepts of decision-making that formed our understanding of how people make decisions. The theory argues that decision-making is an active process of differentiating between available alternatives, aimed at choosing not necessarily the optimal option, but the superiorly sufficient (Svenson, 1992) or dominant one (Montgomery, 1998). Post-process, there is a consolidation phase that is aimed at supporting the decision made (it is also a process in its own right of continuously differentiating alternatives from the chosen one; Svenson, 1996). Thus, the goal of the consolidation phase is to attain sufficient support for the chosen alternative and "this process continues to strengthen the decision when afterthoughts and outcomes follow" (Svenson, Salo, & Lindholm, 2009, p. 397). Meyer (2018) portrayed this model in a concise table, as reproduced in Table 4.1.

Indeed, Prenger and Schildkamp (2018) have argued that intention to use information-based decision-making and using it, de facto, is influenced by:

- the student's perceived control (perceived autonomy to make decisions);
- self-efficacy (one's confidence in performing a desired behavior across a range of situations);
- collective efficacy (shared perceptions of a group's ability to achieve collective goals);
- affective attitudes (emotions, such as fear, curiosity, etc.);
- instrumental attitudes (beliefs about the likely consequences or other attributes);
- subjective norms (beliefs about the normative expectations of other people, which result in perceived social pressure).

Table 4.1 Stages and activities in the decision-making process based on the DCT

Stage 1 pre-decision stage	*Stage 2 differentiation stage*	*Stage 3 consolidation stage*
• Recognizing there is a problem • Identifying decision alternatives	• Establishing criteria • Weighing pros and cons • Assessing available information • Gathering more information (inquiry) • Testing information in the situation • Identifying new alternatives	• Increasing confidence in decision (which includes some of the same activities as stage 2) • Minimizing regret (negative outcomes)

Source Meyer (2018, p. 11, Table 1)

However, after conducting empirical research, the authors reached only partial support for their model—only perceived control, affective attitudes, and instrumental attitudes were found to be significantly associated with intention to use information-based decision-making.

Nevertheless, some argue that the axiom of “rational decision-making process” is inappropriate (e.g., Davey, 2005), and either overly simplifies complex human cognitive processing and behaviors (e.g., Chisnall, 1997), which proved to be stochastic and hard to calculate (see Jackson, 1982), or ignores the fact that some people may be impatient or not disciplined enough to go through a rigorous process as presented above (e.g., Solomon, 2002).

The Decision-Making Process to Purchase Higher Education Oversees as an Intangible Service/Good

Decision-making for pursuing higher education overseas is a high-risk and high-cost complex process (see Caldwell & Hyams-Ssekasi, 2016; Cubillo et al., 2006; Maringe & Carter, 2007; Pimpa, 2003). “The decision to study abroad increases the complexity of the selection process. Thus, when the prospective student chooses a country in which to study, he is not only buying the education service but he is also acquiring an important pack of services jointly provided with the core service…. Consumers usually associate intangibility with high level of risk” (Cubillo et al., 2006, pp. 102–103). International education is not a frequent purchase, and, as such, demands great levels of involvement from the buyer (i.e., the student) (Nicholls, Harris, Morgan, Clarke, & Sims, 1995). Figure 4.1 illustrates the relative complexity of making the decision to purchase higher education internationally (Lazić & Brkić, 2015, p. 19).

An example of the complexity and consequences of such a decision may be based not only on “where to study,” but also on “where to work after graduation.” Basically, there are four possibilities in this regard: (1) graduate at home and migrate after graduating; (2) graduate abroad and stay in the hosting country to work (since studying there facilitates access to the labor market); (3) graduate abroad and migrate to another country after graduation; and (4) graduate abroad and migrate back home to get a job (Beine et al., 2014).

Furthermore, Maringe and Carter (2007) have reviewed four main theories that attempt to explain how young people make choices regarding their future education. They concluded after the review that

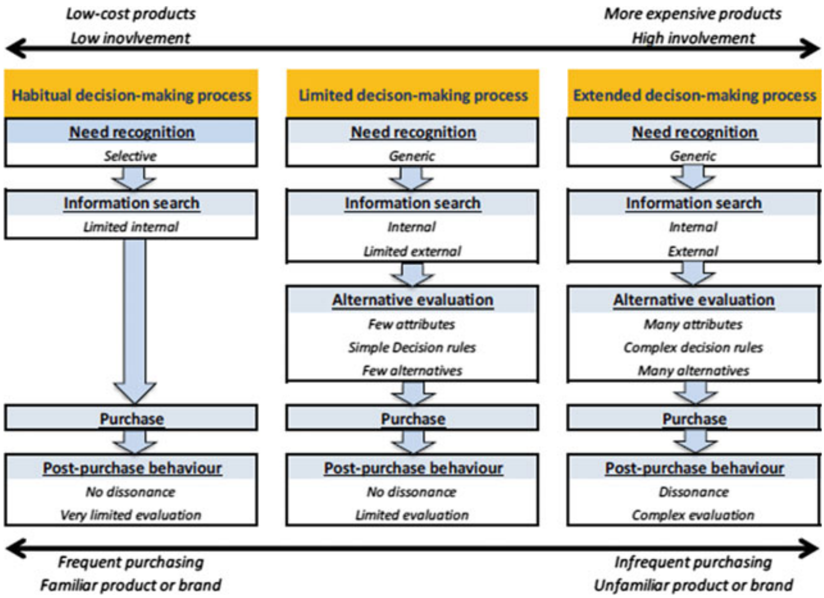

Fig. 4.1 Decision-making process of international students (*Source* Lazić & Brkić, 2015, p. 19, Figure 5)

decisions/choices about participating in higher education (especially overseas) "come under the influence of a range of factors including the broad context in which the decision is made, the environmental, organizational and individual influences and the inner personal factors which mark the individual's internal value systems and perceptions" (Maringe & Carter, 2007, p. 463; see also Jackson, 1982; Kember, Ho, & Hong, 2010). Students also consider what is important and relevant to them, and then make a conscious (or unconscious) trade-off (pros vs. cons; see also DCT; Svenson, 1992, 1996) among the many attributes and preferences (Soutar & Turner, 2002).

When a student needs to make a decision to study abroad, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) argued that there are three distinct and subsequent stages when selecting a final place to study:

1. In the first stage, the student decides to study abroad, rather than locally.

2. In the second stage, the student decides on the host country to which he or she will immigrate.
3. In the third (and last) stage, the student selects an institution[10] in the hosting country.

Another suggested decision-making process constitutes different stages that "typically include problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and evaluation of the purchase decision" (Wilkins, Balakrishnan, & Huisman, 2012, p. 415; see also Kotler & Armstrong, 2014; Lazić & Brkić, 2015).

From a marketing standpoint, regardless of the decision-making theory chosen, each engenders a great opportunity for employing marketing strategies. From an academic institute's vantage point, we will give an example based on DCT theory (Svenson, 1992, 1996; see also Meyer, 2018).

The *pre-decision* stage is understood, on the institutional level, as an opportunity to penetrate the awareness of potential student pool, such as maintaining strong branding (internationally). In the *differentiation* stage, we would suggest making information easier to obtain by prospective international students (especially ones who are not necessarily familiar with the local language, for instance), and emphasizing positive/appealing/attracting factors of what the institution may offer (such as the high-quality education, scholarships and funding possibilities, varied and flexible programs, etc.). In the *consolidation* stage "a positively evaluated aspect of the initially preferred alternative can be bolstered to make the alternative seem even better when a decision has been reached … the chosen alternative is upgraded in attractiveness or in diagnostic value of evidence pro that alternative (Simon, Krawczyk, & Holyoak, 2004), and/or the non-chosen alternative is downgraded before and after a decision" (Svenson et al., 2009, p. 397; see also Montgomery, 1998, p. 280). Furthermore, "the further this alternative has been differentiated and consolidated, the less the risk of post-decision ambiguity, regret or decision reversal" (Svenson, 1992, p. 143). This indicates that (1) it is never too late to engage in marketing interventions; (2) the objects

[10] Nevertheless, we must emphasize that this book's focus is not on the choice among different degrees and different disciplines, as these also have an impact on the choice of international students and the decision-making process, in general (e.g., Kember et al., 2010).

of these marketing strategies are not exclusively the prospective students, but also current and graduated/graduating international students (e.g., satisfied current and graduate students can act as potential recommenders who may communicate their satisfaction and well-being via good *word-of-mouth* to other potential students; Americanos, 2011; Prugsamatz et al., 2006).

Why Bother Courting International Students?

The recruitment of international students is a "key migration industry" involving many actors, with vast competition between academic institutes (Beech, 2018, p. 622). As illustrated by Educations.com (2019), when deciding on international higher education, *most* prospective international students choose (1) a program (the degree/diploma they will pursue); (2) a country to immigrate to; and (3) then the school/university in which to study the particular program. "Students are needed [sic] to be treated as clients and the Universities have to work more towards satisfaction of the changing needs and ambition of the students" (Sridevi, 2019, p. 49), as their customers (e.g., Bunce, Baird, & Jones, 2017). This is because international students are sought by many academic institutes and countries alike, mainly for the following reasons:

- They are a "profit center" (Altbach, 2015, p. 2) and a substantial income source[11] (e.g., Beine et al., 2014; Bolsmann & Miller, 2008; Deloitte Access Economics, 2015[12]; Lee, 2015; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2008; Townsend & Jun Poh, 2008; Verbik, Lasanowski, & Lasanowski, 2007). This is to the extent that, as cited by one of Bolsmann and Miller's (2008) interviewees (in the UK): "On overseas students we make a profit, on undergraduate home and EU students we make a loss" (p. 86).

[11] The reason is the increasingly higher tuition fees international students pay as opposed to their domestic counterparts (e.g., Altbach, 2015; Beech, 2018; Bolsmann & Miller, 2008; Lee, 2015).

[12] Deloitte Access Economics states that "international education is currently Australia's third largest export overall and its largest services export" (p. 8), as can be also seen by the ever-increasing international student enrolment in Australia from 2015 to 2018 (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2018).

- They are able to maintain or raise institutions' competitive edge and prestige (e.g., Lee, 2015) and academic status (e.g., Bolsmann & Miller, 2008), mainly in the research area (e.g., Onk & Joseph, 2017).
- They are considered to be potential skilled/talented workers (e.g., Beine et al., 2014; Lee, 2015; Rosenzweig, 2008).
- They provide diverse cultural knowledge and perspectives, which are valued and necessary in the globalized world (e.g., Beine et al., 2014; Lee, 2015).
- They may provide valuable networks between host and origin countries for the work market and the academy (e.g., Lee, 2015).

For illustration purposes, we regard academic institutes or countries as *magnets* of varying strengths and the students as equated to *steel*. In this sense, each magnet (i.e., the institute/country) tries to attract the steel (i.e., the student) and "fights"[13] other magnetic forces in the vicinity. Of course, each magnet has a different level of magnetic field and strength, and there are those that are already made from a strong-quality material. It is obvious that the attracting capacity of a strong or a large magnet is greater than a weak or a small one (this is the case, for example, of high-reputation academic institutes as opposed to less prestigious ones). However, as was mentioned in Chapter 3 (about migration as gravitation), distance may also play an important factor in this equation, such that a weak magnet may attract steel in close proximity, as the stronger magnet is too far to apply its magnetic field. Furthermore, a magnet may be charged to produce even stronger attraction, thus enabling previously weaker ones to become stronger. In this sense, every institute/country has different attracting properties[14] to influence the pull of potential students. These properties may be augmented and enhanced, or even remade, in order to attract as many students as possible.

Just as a magnet works within a broader context of many forces (e.g., other magnetic forces, gravitation, electricity, etc.), academic institutes also operate within certain complex environments.[15] As such, to attract

[13] "Fight" is an analogy for the competition between higher education institutes for international students (e.g., Beech, 2018).

[14] See also Chapter 3 for further reading on pull–push factors.

[15] See the next section on "Ecosystems."

students, an institution may need to emphasize its own *strengths* and take advantage of *opportunities*, while being aware of its own *weaknesses* and *threats* from the surrounding environment.[16]

However, as opposed to pure physics, it is unrealistic to think about the steel (i.e., the student) as strictly passive in relation to the environment (see also Gargano, 2009). While metal has no consciousness, a student has cognitive processes. As such, it is important to note that the decision-making process of the student in choosing a potential hosting academic institute must nest in a relative cognitive equilibrium. There is no "perfect decision" (e.g., Montgomery, 1998; Svenson, 1992, 1996), and every pulling or pushing factor has pros and cons that are taken into account when making the decision itself. The student makes an evaluation of these possible positive and negative aspects of the decision (e.g., Li & Bray, 2007). Therefore, relevant and appropriate marketing tactics may influence the decision-making process itself, or even its pre- and post-decision stages (e.g., Brooks & Waters, 2009; Cowley & Hyams-Ssekasi, 2018; Hyams-Ssekasi, Mushibwe, & Caldwell, 2014; Pimpa, 2003). This shows that the student is also a player who should be taken into consideration for marketing purposes. As students are recognized as customers, universities need to apply strategies to maintain and enhance their relative competitiveness. Thus, developing a competitive advantage becomes a necessity as a pivotal part of the corporate identity (CI). In addition, the universities will need to communicate and relay the competitive advantage's characteristics, effectively and consistently, to all of the relevant stakeholders (based on Melewar & Akel, 2005, p. 41).

Spheres of Influence: Ecosystems of the International Higher Education Market

In this section, we will structure spheres of influence according to the *ecosystem*'s framework (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986, 1999, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).[17] We chose this paradigm

[16] See the SWOT analysis further in the chapter.

[17] The bioecological theory of human development was developed and matured from ecological systems theory (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986, 1994). However, this was not a shift in paradigm conceptuality. In the "matured" form of the theory, the focus has now moved from the environment (i.e., the context) to the proximal processes (i.e., forms of interactions between the person and the environment, which occur over

because it allows for a more holistic examination of the experiences of international students (Elliot, Reid, & Baumfield, 2016; Mayne, 2019; Taylor & Ali, 2017; Zhang, 2018). In addition, "as with any robust theoretical model, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of development is parsimonious and applicable to areas outside of its original purpose" (McGuckin & Minton, 2014, p. 8).

A single sphere cannot provide a good enough explanation, especially for a complex phenomenon like migration, of which student mobility is a part. As Hadler (2006) stated: "Macro-level models can be used to identify critical macro-level circumstances related to overall movements, but cannot explain individual behavior. Individual explanations emphasize personal circumstances and characteristics, but do not consider objective impacts at the macro level" (p. 112).

The ecosystems are defined such that "the ecological environment is conceived topologically as a nested arrangement of structures, each contained within the next" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 514). These layered ecological structures (i.e., ecosystems) are typically as follows (from the smallest to the largest containing sphere): micro-system; meso-system; exo-system; and macro-system (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Taylor & Ali, 2017; Tudge et al., 2009). These systems operate in specific settings: "A setting is defined as a place with particular physical features in which the participants engage in particular activities in particular roles … for particular periods of time" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 514).

Micro-Systems

Micro-systems represent the network of relations between an individual and the immediate environment/setting in which he or she is contained (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Elliot et al., 2016; Jackson & Ward, 2016; Taylor & Ali, 2017; Tudge et al., 2009). Hence, this system typically consists of family members, peers (e.g., fellow domestic or international students), colleagues, friends, direct administrators (e.g., department's secretary),

time) as the engine or primary mechanism of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 79). As such, and in the context of higher education, the student is "an active agent" (Elliot et al., 2016, p. 2215) who may influence and be affected by the environment—namely, the ecological systems/contexts. For further reading, see Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, and Karnick (2009).

direct managers, professors and their assistants, mentors, advisors, consultants, etc.[18]

All these may directly interact with the student in various ways (such as funding, recommendations, support, assisting, and advising), and therefore may have a very important role in generating the student's expectations regarding (international) higher education (e.g., Prugsamatz et al., 2006; see also Kosmützky & Putty, 2016). They can have a great impact on students' decision-making processes to pursue cross-border higher education, as they also usually have close relationships with him or her. Furthermore, as Prugsamatz and colleagues (2006) have identified, word-of-mouth (WOM) in close circles (e.g., family, friends, significant others) is one of the most influential sources from which students may derive information (e.g., Americanos, 2011; Ngamkamollert & Ruangkanjanases, 2015). Such WOM may help shape prospects' expectations and image of overseas universities. Hence, for marketing purposes, academic institutions may also perceive all the micro-systems as distal customers (see the review in Conway et al., 1994). This requires that marketing strategy address them as well.

A very central example is the student's parents. They have vast influence in terms of *support* they may provide (e.g., financially, emotionally, and physically; see Becker & Kolster, 2012; see reviews in Lewis, 2016; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Tan, 2015; Tantivorakulchai, 2018; Yang, 2007) and *recommendations* they may convey (Ahmad, Buchanan, & Ahmad, 2016; Cubillo et al., 2006; Jianvittayakit & Dimanche, 2010; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Tan, 2015; Tantivorakulchai, 2018; Yang, 2007). The unique power parents may have can be seen in the potential sponsorship they provide to their child (i.e., the student) (e.g., Huang, Binney, & Hede, 2010) and/or familial obligations and expectations they have of their offspring to pursue higher education (e.g., Nghia, 2015; Woodall et al., 2014).

Meso-Systems

Meso-systems represent the interrelations among different micro-systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Elliot et al., 2016; Jackson & Ward, 2016; Taylor & Ali, 2017; Tudge et al., 2009). One example may be an

[18] Some of these were discussed in Chapter 3.

Indian prospective student who is currently studying for an M.A. in the origin country (India) under a certain professor (i.e., micro-system). The student wishes to study for a Ph.D. in a UK institution, and the professor acts as a medium between the Indian student and a potential UK professor to facilitate the process of supervision selection and admission processes. In other words, the relationship the Indian professor has with the UK counterpart is evidence of a meso-system, for the relationship may (or may not) affect the student in question.

A very special and contemporary example is the increasing use of social media—that is, any tool utilized to integrate and incorporate technology into our lives in order to facilitate communication and information processing (DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield, & Fiore, 2012; Greenhow & Lewin, 2016; Richardson, Brinson, & Lemoine, 2018; Veletsianos, 2011). Using social media may manifest in many different ways, such as sharing pictures and information, instant messaging, virtual meetings, and social networking. Using social media is a special case because not only does it replace face-to-face encounters, it may also enable simultaneous mass communication with all other micro-systems, making it accessible beyond any distance or barriers. As such, social media may be considered as a significant marketing tool for recruiting potential students in global higher education in general (e.g., Richardson et al., 2018), and international higher education in particular. For example, a prospective student may use social media to view recommendations or criticisms from people who are not the student's personal friends (e.g., friends of the student's friends, alumni that the student's friends are familiar with, etc.).

Exo-Systems

Exo-systems exist outside the individual's setting and do not immediately contain him or her, although they may indirectly influence them, formally or informally (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Elliot et al., 2016; Jackson & Ward, 2016; Tudge et al., 2009), even though they still remain powerful (e.g., Elliot et al., 2016, p. 2200). Main examples revolve around[19]:

[19] For further reading, see Americanos (2011), Jackson and Ward (2016), Lee (2015), Nada and Araújo (2018), Pinar et al. (2011), Prugsamatz et al. (2006), and Ra and Trusty (2017).

- Non-human resources like infrastructures (e.g., e-learning environments, laboratories, libraries, technological utilities, sports facilities, employability centers, accommodation/dormitories, and Mensa (e.g., Americanos, 2011; Goi et al., 2018; Gribble, 2014; Jackson & Ward, 2016; Jacoby, 2015).
- Human resources, such as non-customer-facing administrative staff (for instance, librarians, security, maintenance, and IT) and strong alumni (e.g., Americanos, 2011; Goi et al., 2018; Gribble, 2014; Jackson & Ward, 2016).
- Different support modes like financial support, loans, and scholarships, professional and social support (e.g., Jackson & Ward, 2016; Nada & Araújo, 2018; Ra & Trusty, 2017), and international student support centers (e.g., Lee, 2015; Prugsamatz et al., 2006).
- Academic, pre-academic (e.g., Polyakova, Lavrentieva, Shipilova, & Glazyrina, 2015), and extracurricular programs (e.g., Gribble, 2014).
- Facilitated admissions (e.g., easier processes, recognizing previous qualifications; Ahmad et al., 2016; Becker & Kolster, 2012; Huong & Cong, 2018; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Tan, 2015) and other administration and bureaucratic procedures.
- Institutions' identity, like public vs. private (Becker & Kolster, 2012; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), or institutions' reputation and branding (e.g., Pinar et al., 2011). Nevertheless, research on branding (in higher education) is not vast, focusing largely on its external aspects, such as logos and slogans, advertising, promotional materials, and mottos (e.g., Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Pinar et al., 2011; Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009). Branding may lead to the *trap* of self-presenting in a clichéd fashion like "the best," "world-class," "leading," and so on (e.g., Belanger, Mount, & Wilson, 2002) rather than presenting distinguishable characteristics and unique features (Antorini & Schultz, 2005; Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009).
- Competitors (e.g., Americanos, 2011; Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016), such as academic institutions that try to pull a prospective student to them instead of them applying to another institution.

Macro-Systems

Macro-systems are the broadest level of ecological system. They are "blueprints" of socioeconomic, cultural/subcultural, and political contexts, and its members share value or belief systems, life course options, lifestyles, social exchange patterns, difficulties and challenges, and other larger social forces (see Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Elliot et al., 2016; Jackson & Ward, 2016; Kotler & Armstrong, 2014; Taylor & Ali, 2017; Tudge et al., 2009).

One example of a macro-system is the level of free market in the country. We introduce eight conditions for a free market (Jongbloed, 2003). Four of them relate to the provider/supplier (i.e., academic institutions) of education, and four to the consumers (i.e., the students). From the providers' side are: (1) freedom of entry; (2) freedom to specify the product; (3) freedom to use available resources; and (4) freedom to determine prices. From the consumers' side are: (1) freedom to choose a provider; (2) freedom to choose a product; (3) adequate information on prices and quality; and (4) direct and cost-covering prices paid.

However, Jongbloed (2003) has also concluded that: "There is no such thing as a truly 'free market' in higher education" (p. 134). This finds support in the different levels of regulations of higher education by governments worldwide. Moreover, Americanos (2011) summarizes that academic institutions are not to be regarded as any common business "due to their high level of regulation derived from the government funding and curriculum policies. Therefore, various authors use the term 'quasi-market' which indicates that the educational market differs from the other free markets" (p. 24), and a question arises as to what may be a "cleverly designed balance of government regulation" (Jongbloed, 2003, p. 134).

One governmental response is *deregulation*, that is, reducing state regulations, which are country-dependent governmental policies that might change the relative competitiveness of the players in international higher education. In deregulated countries, the role of the government has shifted from being restrictive or controlling to being more cooperative and participative (Jongbloed, 2003). As Pucciarelli and Kaplan (2016) stated:

> the field of education … has undergone substantial deregulation, and as a result, the sector currently faces a stronger need to react to the competitive

> environment … the process of deregulation that the sector has undergone over the past decade has decreased protections afforded to established public institutions, thereby permitting the entrance of new private players. At the same time, however, deregulation has increased the autonomy of those same institutions in choosing their competitive strategies and allocating their resources. (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016, pp. 312–313)

For example, in the UK, deregulations abolished the division between universities and polytechnics, which allowed the latter to gain university status, while also enabling them to attract more students into their fold (Beech, 2018; see also Kosmützky & Putty, 2016, pp. 19–20). Evidently, this increases independence of academic institutes (e.g., Živković et al., 2017) and raises competition between them, locally and globally, from a marketing point of view, especially with the diminishing financial support higher education institutes face (e.g., Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011b; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2012; Živković et al., 2017). In the general sense, Beech (2018) stated that these notions "enabled universities to adopt free-market principles and generate some of their own funding in the aim of increasing efficiency through competition" (p. 612). The United States and Canada are also examples of a "free rein" environment (in recruiting international students) of higher education (see Onk & Joseph, 2017). However, these changes come in tandem with increasing tuition fees around the world (e.g., Mazzarol & Soutar, 2012) that weigh increasingly heavily on international students specifically (see also Shahijan, Rezaei, & Preece, 2016).

On the other hand, this deregulation notion is not relevant to every country. Academic institutes in China, for instance, are highly regulated by government regarding permission to recruit international students (Onk & Joseph, 2017).

Another example of a macro-system is a country's national branding. National branding is "a strategic intent and action" to brand a country's higher education collectively (Lomer et al., 2018, p. 134). Prospective students may perceive positive branding as leading to high-quality higher education, which may help every academic institution gain a higher perceived reputation.

Time

In addition, and in tandem with the four ecosystems mentioned above, there is also a *time* aspect that encompasses them all. It examines the life changes and transitions in the course of time, on every level (i.e., micro, meso, exo, macro), such as socio-historical events (e.g., demographical shifts and migrations) and other situations that affect development trajectories (e.g., Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Dalla, 2004; Elliot et al., 2016; Taylor & Ali, 2017; Tudge et al., 2009).

Chronological changes may be linked to many time-lapsed phenomena, such as:

- The evolution of generations, from "baby boomers" to Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z, as each have different attitudes, predispositions, values, and needs, requiring different "generational" marketing approaches.
- Large-scale migrations (internationally and regionally, from rural to metropolitan areas alike, and so on).
- Increase in the values, frequencies, and proportions of diversity in many places in the world.
- Demographical changes and greater accessibility to higher education, leading to a larger professional white-collar population.
- Emergence of environmental sustainability strategies (regarding physical environment and natural resources) for the world economy as a whole.
- Perpetual and rapid technological advancements and evolutions, such as the development of the Internet (e.g., Lakkaraju, Tech, & Deng, 2018), allowing greater accessibility to virtually unlimited possibilities, like e-learning, communication, social media, and networks.[20]
- Also, in the new era, one of the most powerful resources organizations can use in their favor is their knowledge-creation process. This process is of particular importance for constituting and maintaining the organizations' competitive advantage (Bhatti, Juhari, Piaralal, & Piaralal, 2017). In these organizations, workers often have an academic degree.

[20] For further reading, see Chapter 3 in Kotler and Armstrong (2014).

Trends in International Higher Education

We will now give special regard to trends in international higher education. Capitalizing on recent trends in the higher education domain and mobility of international students, the extent of this phenomenon is growing steadily and surely (e.g., Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011b; Knight, 2008, 2012, 2014; Kosmützky & Putty, 2016; Lee, 2015; Popa & Knezevic, 2018; Shahijan et al., 2016). A specific example is Europe, in which there is great emphasis on cross-border cooperation of any kind (Vidovic, 2015, as cited in Popa & Knezevic, 2018).

This notion is supported by two mutually exclusive yet complementary trends. The first is the rapid development of transportation modes and routes intra- and/or inter-country that has facilitated accessibility and mobility to cross-border higher education (e.g., Ahmad et al., 2016; Becker & Kolster, 2012; Beine et al., 2014; Huong & Cong, 2018; Lee, 2015; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Tan, 2015). The second trend is "the technological revolution of the past two decades," which "has changed global higher education, particularly with the impact of social media" (Richardson et al., 2018, p. 226; see also Lawton, 2015; Teichler, 2017; Vilhelmson & Thulin, 2008). This "distance education is providing opportunities for learning anytime and anywhere" (Stravredes & Herder, 2015, p. 257; see also Garratt-Reed, Roberts, & Heritage, 2016). A result of this "technological revolution" (Richardson et al., 2018, p. 226) is the increasing number of online courses and programs/diplomas being offered by an increasing number of academic institutes worldwide (e.g., Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011a, 2011b; García-Álvarez, Novo-Corti, & Varela-Candamio, 2018; Garratt-Reed et al., 2016; Kamal Basha, Sweeney, & Soutar, 2016; Kenyon, Lyons, & Rafferty, 2002; Lawton, 2015; Mejía, Martelo, & Villabona, 2018; Richardson et al., 2018; Stravredes & Herder, 2015; Teichler, 2017; Xin, Kempland, & Blankson, 2015), effectively expanding the student pool from all over the world, regardless of physical distance.

A Summary of Ecosystems and Their Applications

A visual presentation and a suggested application for the ecosystems in an academic setting (and for international students) is presented in Fig. 4.2.

After understanding the vast spheres of influence and the broadest contexts of the international higher education domain, and acknowledging

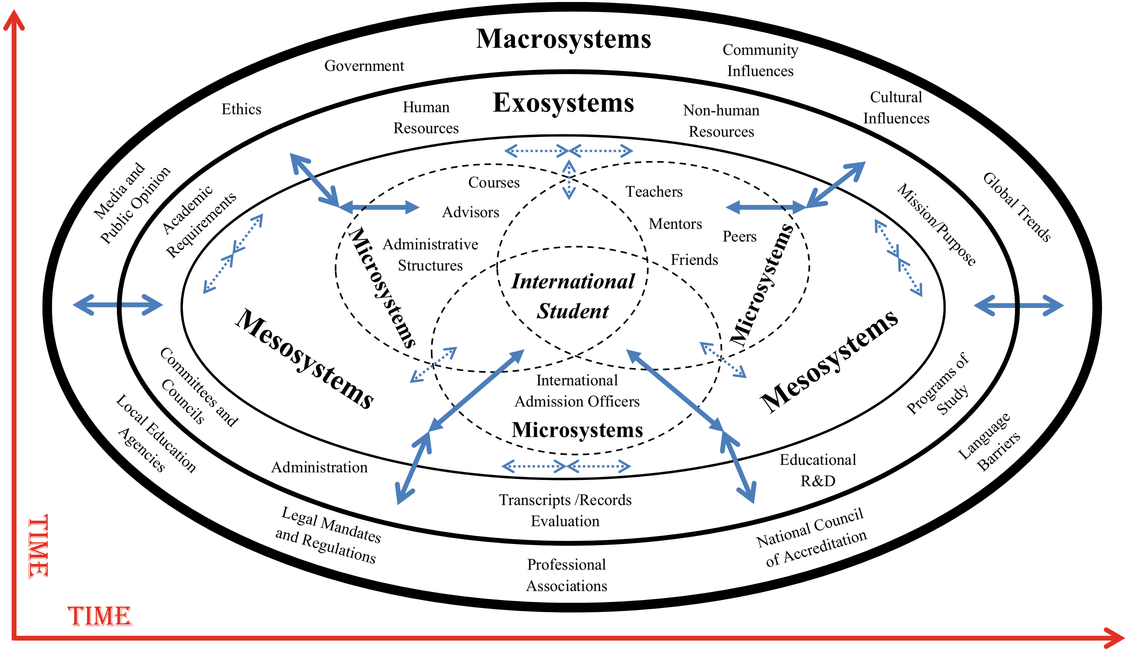

Fig. 4.2 Ecosystems model, an example in an academic setting for international students (*Sources* Based on Jump! Foundation, 2019; Zhang, 2018, p. 1770)

the importance of branding and positioning for academic institutions, we are ready to focus our microscope on the marketing standpoint, via a SWOT analysis, as will be further elaborated below.

SWOT Analysis

A SWOT (an acronym for: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis helps us to identify *internal* (i.e., strengths and weaknesses) and *external* (i.e., opportunities and threats) factors that may affect an investigated entity (e.g., a firm, a school, a hospital, a university, etc.). The main goal of this model/analysis is to provide a systematic assessment of the issue under investigation to support decision-makers in forming and leading strategic goals of the organization (Alsharari, 2019; Dyson, 2004; Leiber, Stensaker, & Harvey, 2018; Phadermrod, Crowder, & Wills, 2019). It represents a foundation for designing future growth and development strategies (Živković et al., 2017), and can serve as a basis for developing marketing plans to initiate meaningful changes (Romero-Gutierrez, Jimenez-Liso, & Martinez-Chico, 2016). Therefore, this may "help to build on strengths, minimize weaknesses, seize opportunities and counteract threats. Thus, a SWOT analysis is often part of strategic planning by informing strategic decisions" (Leiber et al., 2018, p. 353; see also Romero-Gutierrez et al., 2016, p. 42). In addition, SWOT analysis tries to reduce complexity of the assessment by simplifying the picture surrounding the issues and entities involved[21] (e.g., Leiber et al., 2018; Orr, 2013).

In general, *strengths* refer to what an organization *can* do (i.e., a positive-internal aspect); *weaknesses* refer what an organization *cannot* do or areas it needs to improve (i.e., negative-internal); *opportunities* refer to potential *favorable environmental conditions/situations* for an organization to take advantage of (i.e., positive-external); and *threats* refer to potential *unfavorable environmental conditions/situations* for an organization to be wary of (i.e., negative-external) (e.g., Orr, 2013; Romero-Gutierrez et al., 2016).

[21] Although SWOT has clear benefits and advantages, there are also limitations to this method of analysis, such as overlap between factors (e.g., a strength point can be also regarded as the opposite of a weakness point) (for further reading, see Leiber et al., 2018).

Before we utilize the SWOT model for international higher education, it is imperative to present an overview of key trends and developments influencing higher education in the broader sense (see Table 4.2, based on Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016, p. 303; for another SWOT analysis, please refer to Sridevi, 2019).

Table 4.2 SWOT analysis of current key trends impacting higher education

SWOT item	*Examples*
Strengths	*Vital source of talents and innovativeness in the society*: Regulated public service with a mission aimed at the society level. An essential provider of knowledge and creativity (skills and innovation) *National and global driver:* HE can be a resource instrumental in growth and economic recovery. The propagation and diffusion of global knowledge and international expansion
Weaknesses	*Delayed entry to and utilization of business practices in HE*: HE perceived as traditional (a public service that receives finances and protection from the government). Change might face resistance from the faculty members (often organized in public sector unions) *Low receptivity and tolerance to changes in the corporate world*: Programs and curricula fail to adapt to recruiters' needs and job expectations. Dogmatic and shortsighted "publish-or-perish" academic research strategies leading to publications of purely academic nature (with little-to-no consideration of other stakeholders)
Opportunities	*HE environment is evolving rapidly and steadily* via *ICT*: New markets evolve and develop (potential productivity gains (and branding options). Growth and improvement of both the general knowledge and network society *Socio-demographic factors encourage rapid transformation*: *People* of generation Y (millennials) are increasingly seeking augmented educational experience. Student population is changing (growing and transforming)
Threats	*Perpetual and noticeable decrease in public funding*: Greater need for external funds and grants (and increased reliance on self-financing. "Need for marketization of HE (potentially lowering academic standards and quality)" (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016, p. 303) *The academic arena is becoming increasingly competitive:* Deregulation leading to new market entrants and emergence of new competitors. Competition is on a glocal and international scale

Note ICT = Information and communications technology. Glocal = global and local
Source Based on Pucciarelli and Kaplan (2016, p. 303)

A SWOT Analysis for International Higher Education[22]

In this section, we propose a SWOT analysis for *international* higher education, as broad as theoretically possible. We decided to focus on the "bigger picture," the broader aspect of (international) higher education, to enable us to include as many items for a general audience (also, read footnote 22).

Strengths

- Personalization of programs: Today, there is a greater need for greater personalization of both academic programs and marketing strategies, especially when it comes to international students (e.g., Onk & Joseph, 2017; Prugsamatz et al., 2006). Academic institutes that can tailor degrees/programs and/or offer higher flexibility to better fit the needs of potential international students actually possess a significant strength (see also Ahmad et al., 2016; Beech, 2018; Yang, 2007). In other words, by "tailoring recruitment materials, advertisements, outreach events, and other recruitment programs to the university's specialty, international students will be attracted to the university whose program best fits their needs" (Onk & Joseph, 2017, p. 31; see also Kosmützky & Putty, 2016). Chen (2008) adds that: "The ultimate college choice decision made by students will depend on the match between the characteristics of the students … and the characteristics of the institutions … and the information exchanged between the two parties" (pp. 6–7).
- Specialization of programs: Wæraas and Solbakk (2009) argued that "in the face of national and international competition, universities and colleges in all parts of the world have begun a search for a unique definition of what they are in order to differentiate themselves and attract students and academic staff" (p. 449). As such,

[22] In the literature, SWOT analyses were undertaken on higher education in general (e.g., Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016; Sridevi, 2019) and on specific academic institutions (e.g., Dyson, 2004; Huang et al., 2010; Romero-Gutierrez et al., 2016), but as the main theme of the current book is "international students," we focus on a SWOT analysis of *international* higher education.

institutions now strive to create specific specializations in their programs to distinguish themselves in the academic arena. For example, Mazzarol and Soutar (2012) argued that smaller institutes, rather than larger ones, could benefit from specializations "by focusing on niche areas that allow them to concentrate their limited resources in order to develop internationally competitive skills and reputation around a few fields" (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2012, p. 732). In other words, with respect to brand positioning, a specialized program is a very good example of a well-differentiated but not so relevant brand. This can be a marketing strategy for niche markets and providers (Koelzer, 2019), and this is in no way a "bad" branding strategy—it is just more focused and surgical.

- Online courses/degrees and distance learning via the Internet and social media: This is the ability to provide virtual learning environments, especially for those who cannot be present physically or have other constraints (e.g., many students enrolled in fully online degree programs are working adults; Eduventures, 2008). In addition, these modes of learning offer more flexibility, allowing the students to undertake multiple things and roles without sacrificing too much (Stravredes & Herder, 2015; see also Mazzarol & Souter, 2012). This, by definition, opens an important door to institutions for recruiting more students from around the world.
- Battery of support systems:
  - Quality and diverse infrastructures (e.g., e-learning environments, laboratories, libraries, technological utilities, sports facilities, employability centers, accommodation/dormitories, and Mensa; Americanos, 2011; Gribble, 2014; Jackson & Ward, 2016; Jacoby, 2015). Social media, specifically, have clear advantages, since they may facilitate teaching, managerial, and marketing efforts in higher education (Mejía et al., 2018; Richardson et al., 2018). They can drive students to engage in learning and may enhance academic performance[23] (e.g., Greenhow & Lewin, 2016; Mejía et al., 2018; Richardson et al., 2018).

[23] However, some argue that the great openness that social media offer worldwide might pose problematic security issues or even improper use of personal information (e.g., García-Álvarez et al., 2018; Lemoine, Hackett, & Richardson, 2016).

  - Supportive human resources, such as administrative staff (non-customer-facing people, such as librarians, security, maintenance, IT, etc.).
  - Strong alumni (e.g., Americanos, 2011; Gribble, 2014; Jackson & Ward, 2016).
  - Financial support, loans, and scholarships (e.g., Huong & Cong, 2018; Jackson & Ward, 2016; Lee, 2015; Nada & Araújo, 2018; Nghia, 2015; Ra & Trusty, 2017).
  - Professional and social support, including psychological counseling, mentoring, and advocacy (e.g., Jackson & Ward, 2016; Lee, 2015; McKenna, Robinson, Penman, & Hills, 2017; Nada & Araújo, 2018; Ra & Trusty, 2017).
  - Facilitated admissions (e.g., easier processes and recognition of previous qualifications) (e.g., Ahmad et al., 2016; Becker & Kolster, 2012; Huong & Cong, 2018; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Tan, 2015).
  - International student support centers (e.g., Lee, 2015; Prugsamatz et al., 2006).

- Reasonable tuition fees (e.g., Americanos, 2011).
- Financial stability (including established fundraising) (e.g., Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002, 2012).
- Reputation and branding of the institution: Reputation and prestige are two of the main attracting factors for students in general, and international students in particular (e.g., Ahmad et al., 2016; Beine et al., 2014; Heffernan, Wilkins, & Butt, 2018; Nathan, 2017; Pinar et al., 2011). There are myriad indicators for reputation and perceived quality of the institutions:

  - Ranking position,[24] quality reputation, research reputation, innovative reputation, international reputation (e.g., Ahmad et al., 2016; Americanos, 2011; Becker & Kolster, 2012; Beine et al., 2014; Cubillo et al., 2006; Jianvittayakit & Dimanche, 2010; see reviews in Lewis, 2016; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; McManus et al., 2017; Shahijan et al., 2016; Tantivorakulchai, 2018; Varghese, 2008).

[24] *Positioning:* Arranging for a market offering to occupy a clear, distinctive, and desirable place relative to competing products (in the same market) in the minds of target consumers (cited from Kotler & Armstrong, 2014, p. 678 and from Chen, 2008, p. 7).

- Academically recognizable and valid degrees/diplomas and their marketability (e.g., Ahmad et al., 2016; Becker & Kolster, 2012; Huong & Cong, 2018; Maringe & Carter, 2007; Nathan, 2017; Tantivorakulchai, 2018; Yang, 2007).
- Quality academic staff (e.g., expertise, research reputation, experience, and teaching skills) (e.g., Ahmad et al., 2016; Becker & Kolster, 2012; Cubillo et al., 2006; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).
- Internationally trained academic staff (e.g., Shahijan et al., 2016).
- Satisfaction of current and graduated students who can act as potential recommenders ("ambassadors") (e.g., Americanos, 2011; Prugsamatz et al., 2006).
- Campus atmosphere (e.g., Becker & Kolster, 2012; Cubillo et al., 2006; Jianvittayakit & Dimanche, 2010; Nghia, 2015) with a sense of safety and security (Becker & Kolster, 2012; Cubillo et al., 2006).
- Facilities and resources (e.g., library, sports, technological, quiet areas for studying, etc.) (e.g., Americanos, 2011; Becker & Kolster, 2012; Cubillo et al., 2006; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Tantivorakulchai, 2018).
- Employability opportunities due to the institution's brand and prestige (e.g., Popa & Knezevic, 2018).

- Long-term relationships between international academic institutions (e.g., accreditation, shared programs or funds, strategic alliances, shared credentials, branch campuses, franchising, twinning, joint-degree programs, etc.) (e.g., Becker & Kolster, 2012; Garrett, 2018; Knight, 2012; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002, 2012; Shahijan et al., 2016; Wilkins et al., 2012).
- Long-term relationships with industries (e.g., Mazzarol & Soutar, 2012) that "secure funding for research and teaching" and that may enable "access to industry expertise and opportunities to provide career pathways for student[s]" (p. 725).
- Job/employment opportunities mid-program (e.g., teaching or research assistance, lecturing, working in laboratories, and intern/professional year programs) (e.g., Becker & Kolster, 2012; Beech, 2018; Gribble, 2014; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2012).

- Information about the *institute* from online, hard-copy and social media sources (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and advertisements) (e.g., Becker & Kolster, 2012; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Nghia, 2015; Reddy, 2014) and other marketing efforts (e.g., Chien, 2013; Eder, Smith, & Pitts, 2010; Mazzarol, 1998). A unique example (from the UK) is that students can access an education hub's website for an "International Virtual Open Day."[25]

Weaknesses

- Discrimination levels because of origin, race, and/or religion (e.g., Becker & Kolster, 2012). Examples range from social exclusion and isolation, mocking, avoidance, racial slurs, verbal and physical assaults, sexual harassment, burdening prospects with more difficult admissions processes (e.g., Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005; Houshmand, Spanierman, & Tafarodi, 2014; Lee, 2015; Lee & Rice, 2007; McKenna et al., 2017; Yan & Pei, 2018) to even organized discrimination that specifically targets students (for instance, international students from Israel, who due to their origin are threatened by the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions [BDS] movement; Berman, Fine, Hirsh, & Nelson, 2016).
- Non-secure or non-safe campus, such as high crime rates (e.g., Becker & Kolster, 2012; Cubillo et al., 2006).
- Providing misleading or unprofessional information about the institution (via marketing agents) (e.g., Americanos, 2011).
- Decision-making in academic institutions is highly centralized (Sridevi, 2019).
- Complicated bureaucratic procedures and administrative staff that are not trained adequately to deal with international students (Sridevi, 2019).
- Lack of internationalization (as it is considered as an indicator of quality) (e.g., Perez-Esparrells & Orduna-Malea, 2018; Shahijan et al., 2016; Urban & Palmer, 2014). This may be derived from human resources deficits, budget constraints, worldwide knowledge

[25] See, for example, the Virtual Open Day at Coventry University in the UK at: https://www.coventry.ac.uk/international-students-hub/new-students/virtual-open-day/.

transfer paucity, inability to access large pools of talents, etc. (e.g., Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016; Shahijan et al., 2016; Teichler, 2017).

- Over-focusing on branding of quality, instead of increasing the quality itself (e.g., Johnes, 2018; Perez-Esparrells & Orduna-Malea, 2018). An academic institution that supplies quality higher education may benefit from a corresponding quality student population. As Popa and Knezevic (2018) argue, "[an] institution that provides the global knowledge and innovation for students, will have better chances to select the best of them" (p. 167). On the other hand, focusing only on the cover of the book and not emphasizing its contents might decrease the quality of the human material that the institution "imports" and "exports."
- Offering programs/degrees in only one language, such as English, because language is an attracting key mobility driver (Lasanowski, 2011).

Opportunities

- Potential diverse international student population: Paying more attention to subcultures is becoming increasingly important (e.g., Kotler & Armstrong, 2014). However, there is a lack of research that deals with differentiation of students' experiences by their countries of origin (Lee, 2015). For instance, Chinese students react better to marketing efforts based on experiences of previous Chinese students rather than on pricing and location (e.g., Prugsamatz et al., 2006). As opposed to Canadian and Western European students, Latin American, Asian, and African international students (in the United States) reported more social difficulties and psychological distress. This emphasizes the need for marketing efforts to be based on social and academic aspects and support (for further reading, see Lee, 2015, p. 113; Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, & Kommers, 2012). Hotta and Ting-Toomey (2013) have demonstrated that different international student groups (i.e., from varying countries of origin) report distinct adaptability and adjustment satisfaction processes/trends (e.g., a linear trend for Canadian students vs. a multiple M-shaped[26] curve trend for Turkish students), making

[26] This is a function with several minimum and maximum points.

tailoring of programs and attention to needs even more important. However, focusing on personalized "education packages" should be supported by market segmentation followed by target marketing.[27]

- Reputation and branding of the country: As mentioned above, reputation and prestige are two of the main attracting factors for students in general, and international students in particular (e.g., Ahmad et al., 2016; Beine et al., 2014; Heffernan et al., 2018; Nathan, 2017; Pinar et al., 2011; see also Chapter 3 for more information regarding this attracting factor). Lomer et al. (2018) concluded that national brand is a highly important strategic resource in the competitive world of international higher education:

> National brand was found to generate a set of particular characteristics for higher education as a commodity, emphasizing iconic elite institutions … and positive experiences to symbolize high-quality education.… A national brand for higher education acts as a resource for the construction of identity, behaviours and social status of international students. (Lomer et al., 2018, pp. 148–149)

One by-product of the increasing importance of the reputation and prestige of a country (academic or otherwise) is the creation of education hubs[28] because "a common perception is that being recognized as an education hub will increase a country's reputation, competitiveness, and geopolitical status within the region and beyond" (Knight, 2011a, p. 237; see also Knight, 2011b; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2012). Education hubs' main goal (particularly, *student hubs*) is the recruitment of international students, and hence many countries focus on this endeavor (Knight, 2015). In order to do so, a country must realize that this "requires substantial planning; policy preparedness, human resources, infrastructure; and financial

[27] *Market segmentation and target marketing:* Processes for identifying and dividing groups of people with certain shared characteristics, needs, or behaviors that require separate ("personalized") marketing strategies, within the broad product-service market. For example, this is aimed at examining how different groups of students (i.e., different cultures, ethnicities, etc.) choose their colleges and are offered adequate/matching marketing responses (cited from Kotler & Armstrong, 2014, p. 677 and from Chen, 2008, p. 7).

[28] Education hubs are special zones/regions that are intended exclusively for the purpose of acquiring knowledge, training, and development both for domestic and international students (Knight, 2012, 2014).

reserves"[29] (Knight, 2011a, p. 237; 2015; see also Jon, Lee, & Byun, 2014; Nathan, 2017).

Although it might seem that students are influenced in their choice of destination based on academic aspects alone, there is evidence that other dimensions of national branding are vital in the students' decision-making process—for example, a country's culture, tourist attractions, technological innovation, and food, etc. (e.g., Ahmad et al., 2016; Cubillo et al., 2006; Huong & Cong, 2018; Jianvittayakit & Dimanche, 2010; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Nathan, 2017; Tan, 2015; Yang, 2007).

- Governmental assistance: Governments and regulations may facilitate international higher education in many ways such as generating education hubs (e.g., Jon et al., 2014; Knight, 2011a, 2015; Knight & Morshidi, 2011), encouragement and incentive policies to pull foreign students to host countries (e.g., Becker & Kolster, 2012; Nathan, 2017; Onk & Joseph, 2017).
- Location of the institution: A good location can be very advantageous. A good location includes convenience (e.g., Nghia, 2015; Shahijan et al., 2016), centrality, and proximity to accommodation, workplaces, and various social events around the city (e.g., Americanos, 2011), cost of living (in the city; e.g., Aarinen, 2012; Becker & Kolster, 2012; Cubillo et al., 2006; Mikalayeva, 2015), and more.
- Availability, accessibility, and cost of transportation (e.g., Ahmad et al., 2016; Becker & Kolster, 2012; Beine et al., 2014; Huong & Cong, 2018; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Tan, 2015).
- Growing demand for international education (e.g., Jon et al., 2014) and increasing populations of international students worldwide (e.g., Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011b; Knight, 2011b; Teichler, 2017).
- Deregulation-facilitated entry to private institutions and freer choice of resource allocation and strategies for institutions (e.g., Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016).

[29] However, even though the concept of education hub is "very popular—almost trendy" (Knight, 2015, p. 20), education hubs, to date, have yet to be precisely defined by their certain characteristics or assessments of their success and sustainability (Knight, 2015).

- Positive cultural notions and evolution: For example, the closed-off culture of Japan has recently begun to be more open to foreigners, due to fewer ethnic exclusions (e.g., Onk & Joseph, 2017).
- Social networks of foreign communities: People from the same origin or social background tend to help each other when in a foreign country, and as such the existence of such a network reduces migration costs for international students (e.g., Beine et al., 2014). This could potentially attract more students of a specific background to places with the same population.
- Technological evolution: Web education, Internet, video conferencing, for example, may be utilized to the fullest extent (Sridevi, 2019).

Threats

- Visa constraints: Strict visa restrictions for international students might lead to a decline in enrollment (e.g., Lee, 2015)—for example, as occurred in the United States after the 9/11 incident and extra restrictions in the UK for student visas (e.g., Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011b; Nachatar Singh, Schapper, & Jack, 2014; Sirat, 2008).
- Stagnant academic systems, lagging the evolutions taking place in our world in general, and in higher education in particular, and not adapting to the changing motivations and needs students exhibit: "[The] [m]ajority of the students are studying traditional courses out of compulsion and lack of alternative but without an interest to pursue them earnestly…. Several courses are run just for sake of survival of those departments and to sustain the jobs of teachers…. Most of the doctoral researchers do not contribute to knowledge but only create additional data" (Sridevi, 2019, p. 49).

- Academic boycott[30]: Academic boycott is a threat undermining the essence of academic freedom (Nelson, 2016). It might force potential international students to stay away from boycotted academic institutions or countries, even if they want to study there (or have even applied already). To illustrate, boycott resolutions on a certain (potential) host country might affect international students' decision to study there, even if it may be perceived as a high-quality education provider (see, for example, the case of South Africa; Nordkvelle, 1990).
- Deregulation has opened up greater competition, which has expanded the potential number of competitors in the market (e.g., Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016), forcing public institutions to be more proactive.
- Over-commercializing higher education (e.g., Sridevi, 2019).
- Relative or specific decrease of students:
  - Even though Bhandari and Blumenthal (2011b) forecasted a significant increase in the total number of students pursuing higher education around the world, it is country dependent (e.g., an increase in Israel, Australia, the Netherlands, and other countries, as opposed to a decrease in other countries such as the USA, North America, the United Kingdom, and Italy; for more comparisons and countries, see Roser & Ortiz-Ospina, 2018). This increase is also sector dependent (e.g., a decrease in the number of students in the fields of higher, technical, and vocational education, HTVE; Huang et al., 2010).
  - Sending and/or developing countries have begun attracting students (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011b; Verbik et al., 2007), as "the overall pie of global mobility is expanding with more countries emerging as important destinations for international

[30] "Academic boycotts range from calls to sever some or all relationships with a single university to wholesale efforts to boycott all the universities of a given country. Such boycotts may encompass refusing to participate in any and all activities at the target universities; refusing to write letters of recommendation for students seeking to study there; closing down joint degree programs or research projects with the boycotted universities; refusing to provide external evaluations for faculty or student projects at the targeted schools; refusing to publish articles by students and faculty at boycotted schools; blocking boycotted universities from access to resources from disciplinary organizations like announcements of academic position or fellowship opportunities; removing faculty from editorial boards; and blacklisting and shunning of faculty" (Nelson, 2016, p. 14).

students" (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011b, p. 9). Thus, the mobility of international students has transferred from the familiar and common United States and Western Europe to Oceania and Asia (e.g., Lee, 2015) and also to non-OECD countries (e.g., Beine et al., 2014). Hence, the dominance of the traditional suppliers of international education (i.e., United States and Western Europe) has begun to diminish (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2001b).[31]
  - In addition to the mobility issues mentions above, language is also implicated, meaning that the dominance of English as a globally taught language, and thus as a pull factor for international students, might decrease (e.g., Lasanowski, 2011).

- Economic crisis (e.g., Shahijan et al., 2016).
- Bankruptcy and shutting-down of currently operating academic institutions: This last point can be regarded as both an opportunity or a threat, depending on the point of view. For the ones that are about to be shut down it is an imminent threat, which will inevitably lead to the organization's demise. However, the discharged students are a potential pool of talent. They will want to be assimilated to another institution to finish their studies and will take a more lenient approach in that regard. Institutions can use this to their advantage and promote assimilation and implement specialized programs for them (e.g., exemptions from courses, reduced tuition fees, etc.).

Conclusion

In conclusion, we focused on the marketing vantage point of international students, their mobility, and higher education. We have described international higher education as a tradable service, and we suggest that academic institutions invest in it as a part of strategic planning that may contribute to their prosperity, as can be understood through the review and the SWOT analysis in this chapter, and in Chapter 3.

[31] This is a *threat* for the developed countries (such as USA and Western Europe), but is an *opportunity* for developing countries (such as Malaysia, the United Arab Emirates, and Singapore).

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