

Building Customer-Based Brand Equity in Higher Education:

Applying Brand Equity Theory to an International Higher Education Marketing Context

Kieran Clarke

Lund University

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abstract

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Key Words	higher education, marketing, brand equity
Thesis Purpose	The purpose of this study is to establish the key elements of brand equity in international higher education marketing. The study uses the theoretical model developed by Kevin L. Keller on building customer-based brand equity and explores its application to the higher education context.
Methodology	This study used a qualitative research strategy and case study research design. The cases are identified as four Universities: Queensland University of Technology (Australia), James Cook University (Australia), Lund University (Sweden), and Stockholm University (Sweden). The research explored how the case Universities conducted international marketing activities relevant to the aforementioned theoretical model on customer-based brand equity. The result was an adaptation of the theoretical model for higher education.
Theoretical Perspective	The theories consulted in this study were those concerning brand equity, and more specifically customer-based brand equity, and marketing of higher education.
Empirical Data	Empirical data was obtained through conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews, and supported by a qualitative analysis of web content.
Conclusion	The findings of this research provided evidence that the customer-based brand equity model can be applied to the higher education context and used to guide marketing activities for Universities internationally.

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chapterone introduction

1.1 Introduction to topic

Over the past 50 years Higher Education (HE), like most industries, has been impacted by globalisation. During this time, international student mobility within higher education has grown exponentially resulting in universities around the world competing for international students. Countries such as the UK, USA, Canada, and Australia have been at the forefront of international student recruitment. While marketing may be regarded in many academic circles as a dirty word, this hasn't stopped institutions from recognising that they need to market themselves in a climate of international competition (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006).

There has been extensive research into marketing of HE institutions, possibly resulting from the opportunity for economic gain in the growing industry of international student mobility. Research is however limited in the area of 'University' branding, and is virtually non-existent in the area of customer-based brand equity in a higher education international student context. Arguably, the only thing that can connect a prospective international student with a University is the brand. For many students, the decision to undertake studies overseas is perhaps the most significant and expensive one they will ever make (Mazzarol, 1998). Prospective international students are rarely afforded the luxury of being able to visit the physical campus location, meet with University staff and explore the urban landscape in which the University is located. Therefore suffice it to say that brand equity will play a role in a student's choice of Universities.

The Swedish government is proposing to introduce tuition fees for non-EU internationals, which will mean that Swedish Universities will need to compete more intensely with other countries for these students. Until now, Sweden has not charged tuition fees and consequently has had little need to actively market their product due to demand. Branding will thus play a vital role in the overall marketing efforts of HE institutions. It is the intent of this study to identify the elements of brand equity within a HE context and provide managerial implications for Universities globally in how they conduct themselves in international student recruitment activities. This study explores the international marketing activities of four case Universities, two Swedish and two Australian, and attempts to apply an established theoretical model in building brand equity to the higher education context. It is anticipated that the outcomes of this study will not only benefit the case Universities but Universities engaged in or looking to engage in international marketing activities. More specifically this study is directed at marketing professionals with international responsibilities within higher education with an interest in building brand equity among students.

This paper begins with a review of literature on customer-based brand equity theory and research conducted into brand equity within higher education, followed by sections on the knowledge gap identified, problem formulation and limitations surrounding the study. It will then proceed to discuss the theoretical framework for this study. Following on from this will be the methodology and then the empirical analysis before finishing with discussion and conclusions.

1.2 Literature Review

The first section of this literature review will analyse established theory concerning brand equity, and more specifically customer-based brand equity. The second section will look at research conducted into marketing of higher education.

In the last two decades there has been significant research into defining, building and measuring customer-based brand equity. It has been examined from two perspectives – financial and customer based – and has been recognised as a critical component to building successful brands and as a source of competitive advantage (Lassar, Mittal, & Sharma 1995). Brand equity can have added value to the firm, the trade, or the consumer (Farquhar, 1990). As this study will be focusing on identifying the critical elements of creating brand equity in a higher education marketing context, the focus of the literature review will be on customer-based brand equity.

Looking at it from the supply-side, building a strong brand and brand equity has been shown to provide numerous benefits (including financial) to organisations (Keller, 2001). Additionally, brand loyalty which has been obtained through building a strong brand can generate value mainly by reducing marketing

costs; it has been stated many times that retaining existing customers is much less costly than attracting new ones (Aaker, 1992; Keller, 2001). Strong brands offer another advantage by providing resistance from a competitive attack (Farquhar, 1990). Alternatively on the demand-side, brand equity can bring value to the customer, Aaker (1992) offers that brand equity can: help a customer interpret, process, store, and retrieve a large quantity of information about products and brands; affect the customer's confidence in the purchase decision; and enhance a customer's satisfaction when the individual uses the product.

Perhaps the first step to building a strong brand and fostering brand equity is to identify the power of the brand. Aaker (1992) proposes five brand equity assets as the source of the value created, they are: brand loyalty, brand name awareness, perceived brand quality, brand associations in addition to perceived quality, and other proprietary brand assets (patents, trademarks etc.). It is common for managers to recognise the importance of brand equity as an asset however their actions are sometimes more focused on short-term results than on that of building brand equity (Aaker, 1992). Further, if brand-building activities are overlooked in lieu of activities that are more beneficial for short-term performance, declines in brand equity may not be realised if adequate systems to measure it are not in place (Ibid, 1992). Building a strong brand is a common feature of managerial rhetoric however what is said about brand building and what is enacted can be two separate things. Brand building activities warrant a long-term focus, however are often sacrificed for sales promotions that yield a short-term return (Aaker, 1992). A great brand is not built by accident, but rather it is the result of accomplishing a series of logically linked steps with consumers (Keller, 2008).

Farquhar (1990) offers three elements for building a strong brand; they are a positive brand evaluation, accessible brand attitude and a consistent brand image. Positive brand evaluations involve the consumer believing that the brand delivers superior performance (Ibid, 1990). Accessibility of a brand attitude relates to how quickly an individual can retrieve something stored in memory (Ibid, 1990), which is similar to Keller's (2008) brand recognition and recall. Finally, Farquhar (1990) describes the importance of a consistent brand image, meaning that all marketing communications should be integrated and the message to be consistent throughout all mediums. Ultimately it has been found that 'it is the consistency of this brand-consumer relationship that counts; if one changes, the other must too,' (Farquhar, 1990: p.6).

Keller (2001, 2008: pp. 59-60) provides four steps to brand building/development, each step contingent on achieving the objectives of the previous one. The steps are as follows:

- 1. Ensure identification of the brand with customers and an association of the brand in customers' minds with specific product class or customer need;*
- 2. Firmly establish the totality of brand meaning in the minds of customers by strategically linking a host of tangible and intangible brand associations with certain properties;*
- 3. Elicit the proper customer responses to this brand identification and brand meaning;*
- 4. Convert brand response to create an intense, active loyalty relationship between customers and the brand.*

Spawning from these four steps, Keller (2001, 2008) develops the 'Customer-Based Brand Equity Pyramid' which serves as 'building blocks' for brands to establish brand equity. At the bottom of the pyramid is brand salience, which corresponds to the notion of brand identity and measures awareness among consumers. The second level looks at brand performance and imagery, which relates to the brand meaning. On the third level sits brand judgements and feelings, which connects with brand responses. Finally, at the top of the pyramid is brand resonance, which looks at loyalty among customers to the brand. Keller contends that high brand resonance is paramount to establishing high levels of brand equity and is achieved by few (Keller, 2001 & 2008).

Keller's brand building blocks are quite comprehensive, however its applicability to higher education is at times limited, or rather it can be said that its applicability to higher education has yet to be explored. The customer-based brand equity model provides a good foundation for brand building, however according to Keller (2001) specific applications of this model should be refined, edited and embellished accordingly to suit the needs of its users. The examples used in defining each of the brand building blocks are often centred around fast moving consumer goods and how to get your customers to make repeat purchases. Although many of the steps outlined in Keller's pyramid are transferable to higher education marketing, the decision-making process and consequent 'purchase' of a degree is quite different to purchasing a low involvement product, for example, a can of Campbell's soup. Therefore, the aim of this study shall be to explore the relatedness of this model to higher education through empirical research.

For many, a university degree is a one-time purchase. Therefore, when looking at brand loyalty and brand equity and the application of existing theoretical models to higher education marketing, one must consider these differences. For instance in the higher education context there could be less emphasis on developing brand loyalty in terms of repeat purchase, and more emphasis on building customer-based brand equity to promote positive word of mouth marketing. This is not to say that brand loyalty is not pertinent to higher education marketing as it is. But rather brand loyalty may look somewhat different in higher education. In Keller's pyramid (2001), brand resonance (loyalty) assumes top priority and alludes to the importance of this in generating repeat purchases. It is described as the 'ultimate relationship' between brand and consumer and should be the underlying goal in marketing decision-making (Keller, 2001). However, repeat purchase in higher education may not be the key driver, but rather it could be student satisfaction, i.e. the experience involving the use of the product, as the key measure in developing customer-based brand equity. Keller's (2001) model for establishing brand equity is possibly the most comprehensive and will serve as the foundation for the discussion on establishing customer-based brand equity in the higher education sector.

Customer-based brand equity is said to have been achieved when the consumer has a high level of awareness and familiarity with the brand and holds some strong, favourable, and unique brand associations in memory (Keller, 2008). This is an important factor when applying it to higher education

as it could take a number of years for a student to achieve these feelings. For example, a prospective student may be aware of a University as a brand but may not be familiar with the product having never used it. Furthermore, the student may not achieve strong, favourable and unique associations with the brand until they have completed a degree, or even longer, possibly years after graduation. The key focus of Keller's statement should be in achieving a high level of awareness, as students' decisions on study destinations are quite often made on recommendations from family, friends and current teachers (Maringe, 2006).

There has been a great deal of research conducted on marketing of higher education institutions internationally (Gatfield, Barker, & Graham, 1999; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Ivy, 2008; Maringe, 2006; Mazarol & Soutar, 1999 & 2002; Nguyen & LeBlanc 2001; Srikatanyoo & Gnoth, 2002). However, there has been limited research into the notion of branding in Higher Education (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). More specifically, there has been minimal, if any, amount of research conducted into establishing what builds customer-based brand equity within this specific industry.

Empirical studies investigating marketing, branding and international student recruitment have looked at various countries that are well established in this market, including studies of one or more on the Australian, Canadian, New Zealand, South African, UK, and USA markets (Mazarol, 1998; Srikatanyoo & Gnoth, 2002; Ivy, 2008; Maringe, 2006; Lowrie, 2007). However, there is little if any research surrounding international student recruitment to Sweden. For this study the most pertinent research found to date was by Mazarol (1998) who examined the critical success strategies for marketing international education. This study provides a comprehensive overview of the different components that can contribute to a University's successful international student recruitment however it is unrealistic for a University to excel in all of these areas and will be covered in further detail in chapter 2. Further, it can be argued that success in one of the many above critical success strategies will help build the University brand and consequently, brand equity.

1.3 Knowledge Gap and Problem Formulation

The knowledge gap identified for this study therefore is in the identification of the key elements of customer-based brand equity in a higher education context. Although there has been an incredible amount of research conducted into brand equity theory, and to a lesser extent research into marketing of higher education institutions, there has been limited, if any, attention given to identifying the key elements of customer-based brand equity within higher education. Moreover, the author was unable to find evidence of research that compared an established international University marketing nation (such as Australia) with a Sweden (a nation with a much smaller amount of international marketing). By conducting a study across two countries it will broaden the generalizability of the application of customer-based brand equity in the international higher education realm. Thus, by establishing the

elements of brand equity in this international student recruitment context it is hoped that this study will provide areas of focus for Universities looking to engage in international student recruitment and provide guidance for the focus of their marketing efforts.

Existing brand equity theory more or less always contends that achieving customer loyalty, which leads to repeat purchase, as the pinnacle of successful brands. Higher Education warrants a slightly different tact as repeat purchases among customers (students) is not always viable. Therefore, conducting empirical research into identifying the key elements of brand equity in a HE context (and drivers of such) will help provide focus for University marketing and international student recruitment efforts.

It is hoped that this research will encourage other researchers to investigate the area of customer-based brand equity in higher education. In particular in the Swedish context as the institutions will soon need to compete globally for international students once they begin charging tuition fees.

1.4 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to establish the key elements of brand equity for international students by exploring existing brand equity theory in its applicability to international higher education. The study will look at Keller's (2001 & 2008) theory on building customer-based brand equity and establish how this can be transferred into the higher education context. Through doing this, the key components for building brand equity in this context will be established.

chapter two

theory

In order to establish the theoretical framework of this paper a broad literature search has been conducted looking at customer-based brand equity in services marketing context as well as material on higher education marketing. This chapter will consist of a review of the existing literature on branding theory and higher education marketing in order to provide a clear understanding of the key theoretical foundations of this study. The section on branding theory will include key terms and its relevance to this research. It will then explore theory on brand equity in general followed by more specific theory on customer-based brand equity. The section on higher education will explore the challenges that exist in this sector, the literature on the marketing and branding of higher education, and discussion on previous research relevant to this study. Resulting from this review of literature will be the theoretical framework to be used to guide the empirical research.

2.1 Branding

2.1.1 WHAT IS A BRAND? WHY IS IT SO RELEVANT?

In the last decade branding has emerged as a top management priority due to the growing realization that brands are one of the most valuable intangible assets that firms possess (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). The concept of a brand however is not a new phenomenon. Brickmakers in ancient Egypt placed symbols on their bricks to identify their products; in the sixteenth century whiskey distillers shipped their barrels with the name of the producer 'branded' (literally) on each barrel; and by the eighteenth

century pictures of animals and places of origin were used in lieu of the producer's name (Farquhar, 1990). Today, a brand can be a name, symbol, design, or mark that enhances the value of a product beyond its functional purpose (Ibid, 1990). This evolution of the meaning of brand is captured by Keller & Lehmann (2006: p.745):

'While initially a brand may be synonymous with the product it makes, over time through advertising, usage experience, and other activities and influences it can develop a series of attachments and associations that exist over and beyond the objective product.'

Therefore, through effective marketing activities attributes can be added to a brand that span further than simply the functionality of the product. It should be noted, however, that showing irrelevant information could be counterproductive in consumer decision-making (Meyvis & Janiszewski, 2002). As such, there is a point at which marketing activities can be detrimental to the brand in the eyes of the consumer.

The functions of a brand are vast and varied as they not only serve as markers for the offerings of a firm but also reflect the complete experience that customers have with products (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). This provides a connection for the consumer to the brand, an affinity of sorts. What's more, the intangible nature of a brand is a common means by which marketers differentiate their brand with consumers (Park et. al, 1986). It has been established that brands are initially built on the function of the product, and can then be enhanced through marketing activities. The ultimate success of a brand is measured by the use (or non-use) by customers (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). This is an important factor to consider when exploring brand equity theory – the customer dictates the equity of a brand and thus the level of its success.

The benefits of branding for customers are worth noting. Brands can simplify choice, promise a particular quality level, reduce risk, and/or engender trust (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Brands, thus help consumers identify with a particular product, the degree to which it will influence their purchase behaviour.

2.1.2 BRAND EQUITY

In recent decades there has been a significant amount of research on brand equity (Aaker, 1992; Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Farquhar, 1990; Walfried, Mittal, & Sharma, 1995). Brand equity is regarded as a very important concept in business practice because marketers can gain competitive advantage through successful brands (Walfried, Mittal, & Sharma, 1995) Keller (1993: p.1) provides the following definition:

'In a general sense, brand equity is defined in terms of the marketing effects uniquely attributable to the brand—for example, when certain outcomes result from the marketing of a product or service because of its brand name that would not occur if the same product or service did not have that name.'

Brand equity can be described as the juncture reached as a result of marketing on the part of the firm and the purchase behaviour on the part of the customer. The most cited dimensions of brand equity are the ones established by Aaker (1991): brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other brand assets (Bravo et. al, 2007). This is continuously referred to in branding literature and is possibly the most widely accepted elements of brand equity. Brand loyalty is more often than not the result of a high level of brand equity. As loyalty often translates into a profit stream, focusing on this is often an effective way to manage brand equity (Aaker, 1992). Brand awareness is also important and can be described as the degree to which customers recognise the brand during their purchase decision-making process. It is more or less the familiarity the customer has with the brand. From an individual consumer's perspective brand equity is reflected by the increase in attitude strength for a product using the brand (Farquhar, 1990).

Brand equity can create value for a company and can be classified as the additional value that accrues to a firm because of the presence of the brand name that would not accrue to an equivalent unbranded product (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Brand equity can also create competitive advantages for a firm in the form of providing a platform for launching new products, offering resiliency to endure crisis situations such as shifts in consumer tastes, and resistance from a competitive attack (Lassar, Mittal, & Sharma, 1995). In other words, the degree of brand equity a company possesses can influence the effectiveness of marketing efforts. Thus, if a company has a high level of brand equity they will receive a greater return on marketing investment than a company with a lower level of brand equity. For the producer or the firm, brand equity can be measured by the incremental cash flow from associating the brand with the product. This incremental cash flow can result from premium pricing and reduced promotional expenses (Farquhar, 1990). Consumers ultimately determine the level of brand equity for a firm. Through their purchase behaviour, based on whatever factors they deem important, consumers decide which brands have more equity than others (Villas-Boas, 2004).

2.1.3 CUSTOMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY

Customer-based brand equity is the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand (Keller, 1993). It occurs when the consumer holds some favourable, strong and unique brand associations in their memory (Kamakura & Russell, 1991). A brand is said to have positive customer-based brand equity when consumers react more favourably to an element of the marketing mix for the brand than they do to the same marketing mix element when used by a fictitiously named or unnamed version of the product or service (Keller, 1993). In other words, it can be defined as how much a customer likes the brand and how much this affinity toward the brand influences purchase behaviour. A true measure of the strength of a brand depends on how consumers think, feel, and act with respect to that brand (Keller, 2008). Further, a key consideration when defining brand equity is that it is not absolute but relative to competition, i.e. it is the amount of confidence consumers place in a brand relative to its competitors and is thus the consumers' willingness to pay a premium price for that brand (Lassar, Mittal, & Sharma, 1995).

2.1.4 CUSTOMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY PYRAMID

As covered in chapter 1, Keller’s (2008) steps to building a strong brand through the customer-based brand equity model will form the theoretical framework for exploring brand equity theory in its relevance to international student recruitment. In this section, the steps outlined in the customer-based brand equity model, which are designed to serve as brand building blocks, will be broken down and addressed step by step with relevance to the higher education industry. The outcome of the analysis of this theoretical model will shape the structure of the interviews to be conducted for the empirical study. The following section looks at the four different stages of the customer-based brand equity model in detail (and building blocks of each stage therein).

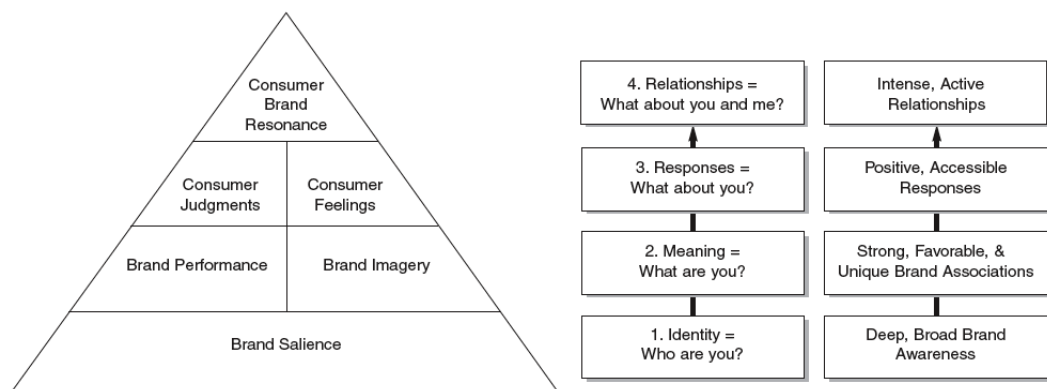


Figure 2.1 – Customer-Based Brand Equity Pyramid (Keller, 2001: 7)

The first stage relates to brand identity and uses brand salience as a measure of the awareness of the brand (Keller, 2008: 60). In essence, by developing the level of brand awareness it helps customers to recognise the industry in which the brand competes and the particular products of this brand (Keller, 2008: 61). In the case of an individual University as a brand, the industry they participate in is higher education. Within this industry, competition can come from other Universities on a national and international level. To explore the application of this step in the brand building process to higher education, the interview will involve questions on the general awareness of the brand within the international market. These questions will attempt to establish the level of brand awareness within the international market and ask for examples of marketing activities that are undertaken to foster such awareness. A full description of the interview structure and questions will be provided in the methodology chapter.

The second stage relates to brand meaning and uses two building blocks entitled performance (brand perspective – meeting and/or surpassing customer’s functional needs/expectations) and imagery (customer perspective – meeting the customer’s psychological or social needs) (Keller, 2008: 60-65). This stage is not so clear-cut when it comes to higher education as brand performance and imagery can overlap and evolve during the time the student experiences the University. An important characteristic of higher education is that, as is the case with most services, it is not always easy

to separate production from consumption, as principally the customer will remain involved in the production for the duration of the learning process (Mazzarol, 1998). That said, to investigate the nature of this stage in the higher education context, the interview will attempt to establish how a University could measure and monitor factors such as brand performance and imagery. To explore the application of the brand performance stage the interview format will discuss customer feedback and service focus of the University and how they collect this. To explore the application of brand imagery the interview will discuss the ways in which the University meets the student's psychological and social needs. This can occur in the form of the availability and accessibility of student support services.

The third stage relates to brand responses and looks at brand judgements (best defined as thoughts coming from the head), and brand feelings (defined as thoughts coming from the heart) (Keller, 2008: 67-69). Brand judgements relate to customers' personal opinions and evaluations with regard to the brand and can be broken down into a subset comprising of four types including: brand quality, brand credibility, brand consideration and brand superiority (Keller, 2001). These judgements on the part of the customer will be most critical for the brand during the purchase decision-making process. Perhaps the most crucial are the concepts of brand consideration and brand superiority. Brand consideration trumps any judgements of quality and credibility as it involves the consumer choosing this brand over another (Keller, 2001). Further, brand superiority follows on from consideration and addresses whether this brand holds any unique advantages or offers over other brands. To gauge brand judgements the interview will ask each University to define what it sees as their unique selling proposition relative to their competitors on a national or international level.

Brand feelings on the other hand are related to customers' emotional response (i.e. the heart) and reactions to the brand which are made up of six types of feelings including: warmth, fun, excitement, security, social approval, and self-respect (Keller, 2001). Perhaps the most pertinent to higher education brand equity are the feelings involving security, social approval, and self-respect. For the sake of this study security is identified as occupational or professional security. A student will feel a level of security while undertaking the degree program in that their immediate future is decided upon; and later upon completing the degree there will be the level of professional security once the graduate finds employment. Social approval can include approval from friends, family, peers and potential employers; that is it's the sense of approval that comes attached to the University's name (brand). Self-respect is the feeling the student has within himself or herself, i.e. how good they feel about being a student of University X. To explore how this stage applies to higher education the interviewer will ask Universities to describe how they collect information on students' feelings toward the brand and the level of priority placed. Brand feelings play a role in the marketing message of a University, and are often conveyed through student testimonials which, in a sense, explores customer satisfaction on a deeper, more emotional level. The Universities will be asked to discuss the level of importance placed on brand feelings through the collection of student testimonials.

Finally, the fourth stage relates to brand relationships and uses brand resonance as a definition of the

ultimate relationship and identification between the customer and the brand (Keller, 2001). This stage essentially addresses the intensity of the loyalty among the customer to the brand and is broken down into behavioural loyalty, attitudinal attachment, sense of community, and active engagement (Ibid, 2001). A key consideration for this stage of the brand building model is the concept of customer loyalty. Customer loyalty is often personified in customers through repeat purchases, something that is not as common in the higher education industry as in other service industries. Rather, the notion of service loyalty in this context should be broadened to include the customer's rejection of competitive offerings (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2002). The most relevant, and possibly most transferable, to higher education would be the categories of sense of community and active engagement. It is expected that there may be a degree of overlap between these two categories. Brand communities are seen as the most applicable example of brand relationships within the higher education industry. To explore this through the empirical research, interview questions will address the areas of brand communities and how they are utilised by each University. Perhaps the most established form of brand community within academia is the alumni society. This is an example of a company-initiated brand community. The interviews will also explore the presence of customer-initiated brand communities. By investigating the application of brand relationships to this industry it will also help to establish how applicable this model is to higher education.

2.2 Higher Education

Higher Education is a unique industry with respect to it being a marketable service. Historically, it has not been seen as commercial in nature and has been somewhat sheltered from market forces. However, education policy reform in many countries during the last fifty years has seen a shift from away from centralised control to a more decentralised and deregulated model. As such, in the past few decades higher education has been subject to more institutional reform than any other part of the educational establishment in advanced industrial states (Ansell, 2008). The education community however did not necessarily welcome this reform. Barrett (1996: p.70) states 'It is both regrettable and ominous that the marketing focus, explicitly borrowed from business, should be accepted and even welcomed (to the higher education industry).' In most countries, however, this paradigm shift, or 'marketisation' (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006: p.317), has been viewed as a 'compromise between privatisation, academic autonomy and state control,' (Young, 2002: p.79).

2.2.1 CHALLENGES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

There has been some research conducted in the field of higher education marketing, though the areas explored are quite varied and sporadic. The topics covered include the changing nature of the higher education political landscape (Ansell, 2008); the concept of students as informed consumers (Baldwin & James, 2000); influences on student choice of institution and destination (Mazzarol, 2002; Maringe, 2006; Srikatanyoo & Gnoth, 2002); the role of institutional image and reputation on loyalty (Nguyen &

LeBlanc, 2001); and the effectiveness of communication materials (Gatfield et. al, 1999). Perhaps the most relevant research for higher education marketing to date was conducted by Mazzarol (1998), which identified the critical success factors for international education marketing. However, despite this research there does exist some challenges for the industry.

One key challenge that faces the higher education sector is the lack of applied research on marketing and more specifically, branding and brand equity. There has been an absence of education as a specific marketing area from services research (Mazzarol & Soutar, 1999). Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, (2006: p.316) conducted a systematic review of literature on higher education marketing and concluded that ‘...the literature on HE (higher education) marketing is incoherent, even inchoate, and lacks theoretical models that reflect upon the particular context of HE and that nature of their services.’ There is a clear need for further research in this field.

Another challenge for higher education institutions is the growing competition surrounding recruitment of students. In the context of increasing competition, Universities have recognised the need to market themselves to attract students (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). However, it’s important to note that higher education institutions operate in a climate of limited resources and are not always afforded the luxury of large marketing budgets. Therefore, by recognising the need to market their service does not imply that the institutions will be resourced accordingly.

2.2.2 MARKETING OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Early research into higher education marketing saw it as a product rather than a service. Kotler and Fox (1985: p.6) defined education marketing as:

‘...the analysis, planning, implementation and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with a target market to achieve organisational objectives.’

Research into higher education marketing evolved throughout the 1990s and recognised it as a service rather than a product. The definition of which was based on the assumption that in order for a higher education institution to market itself successfully, managers would need to examine the decision-making process and the means by which potential students searched for information (Hemsley-Brown, 2006).

There are a variety of factors that influence a student’s choice to study overseas including the perceived quality of education in the host country and institutional reputation (Mazzarol, 2002). Research into HE marketing on the demand-side conducted by Gatfield, Barker, & Graham (1999) examined the advertising materials of Australian Universities for their international marketing efforts. A scale, determining the factors considered important among students in their choice of University education, was used for this study (Ibid.). At the time, few investigations had been directed at measuring the effectiveness of promotional material therefore this study aimed to determine the factors considered important to international students in receiving this material, as well as looking at the content of the

international study guides (prospectuses) (Gatfield et. al, 1999). This was one of the more focused studies on how students search for information and how they prefer to receive it.

Research has also been conducted from the supply-side perspective of higher education exploring the concept of customer loyalty. Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001) assessed the influence on institutional image and institutional reputation on customer loyalty by testing the moderating relationships between these two concepts. This study looked at the testing of the relationship between image and reputation with 'retention intention', i.e. the degree to which an existing student intended to undertake further studies with the same institution, with results indicating that the degree of loyalty is higher when perceptions of institutional reputation and image are favourable (Ibid.).

2.2.3 BRANDING OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The role of the brand in higher education has been considered as very important. The brand is possibly the most important connection a prospective student has with an institution. The brand of a University carries with it a promise of a particular level of service and student outcomes. In the case of education, the service is more than a simple set of tangible features but is a complex bundle of benefits that satisfy customer's needs (Ivy, 2008). The level of satisfaction in a customer will influence the level of brand equity. Further, brand image and reputation help to conjure up a level of brand equity in a prospective student. Image and reputation are critical in developing customer loyalty among University students. In the context of higher education, loyalty can include a student's decision to stay on for advanced (postgraduate) studies following the completion of a bachelor (undergraduate) degree (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001).

2.2.4 MAZZAROL'S STUDY

In order to apply Keller's (2001 & 2008) theoretical model involving brand equity building blocks, previous empirical research conducted by Tim Mazzarol (1998) on the critical success factors for international education marketing will be incorporated to guide the empirical research. In conducting his study, Mazzarol (1998) examined literature on services marketing and competitive advantage and then consulted industry professionals within international offices of several Australian Universities. From this preliminary research he identified seventeen items critical to the success of education institutions operating in international markets, of which he termed 'critical success factors' (Mazzarol, 1998). These seventeen items are grouped under four categories labelled critical success factors; they read as follows (Ibid.):

Promotion and recruitment

1. Use of private recruitment agents
2. Size of overseas advertising budget
3. Possession of offshore recruitment offices
4. Use of government information offices overseas
5. Size of international student enrolments

Image and resources

6. Level of market profile or recognition
7. Strength of financial resources
8. Reputation for quality
9. Size and influence of alumni
10. Range of courses and programs

People and culture

11. Level of innovation within the institutions' culture
12. Level of customer orientation within the culture
13. Effective use of information technology
14. Quality and expertise of staff
15. Level of technical superiority

Coalition and forward integration

16. Possession of international strategic alliances
17. Possession of offshore teaching programs

This study will build on Mazzarol's critical success factors by drawing upon them to help guide the interview discussion with the case Universities. Building on an established higher education marketing framework will enable a more focused study when investigating the applicability of Keller's (2001 & 2008) customer-based brand equity building blocks.

2.3 Theoretical framework

The focus of this research is to determine the applicability of existing theory on customer-based brand equity to higher education. The nature of the research is such that it will focus on the international student context of customer-based brand equity.

2.3.1 FACTORS TO BE USED IN ANALYSIS SECTION

In this study the cases identified are four Universities – two Swedish Universities and two Australian Universities. The study will look at the behaviour of each of the case Universities with reference to their international marketing activities directed at international student recruitment. It is the aim of the study to explore the application of Keller's (2001 & 2008) model on building customer-based brand equity. By studying the marketing and recruitment activities of each of the case Universities it will explore the applicability of Keller's (2001 & 2008) model to higher education. To do this, Mazzarol's critical success factors will be applied to the appropriate stages of Keller's (2001 & 2008) model to form the framework of this investigation. Next, each of Keller's stages in the pyramid will need to be investigated. As such this study will use in-depth interviews with University employees and a qualitative website content analysis. These methods will be discussed in detail in chapter 3. The structure of the interviews will be

such that they address each stage of Keller's model, including: brand identity (salience), brand meaning (performance and imagery), brand responses (judgements and feelings), and brand relationships (resonance). The end result will look at how the critical success factors identified by Mazzarol are applied to Keller's customer-based brand equity model, and thus how Keller's model can be applied to the higher education context. The Analysis chapter of this thesis will look at the performance of each University with respect to their marketing activities. The analysis of marketing activities will provide evidence of how the Universities build brand equity in international students. Consequently, it will be possible to examine how Keller's model applies to higher education.

2.3.2 INTEGRATING BRAND EQUITY THEORY AND HIGHER EDUCATION MARKETING

This research will involve using Keller's (2001 & 2008) theoretical model on building customer-based brand equity and exploring the pertinence of the 'building blocks' to the higher education international student recruitment market. Each stage of the brand-building pyramid will be addressed using the concepts developed in Mazzarol's (1998) study on the critical success factors for international education marketing. The concepts developed by Mazzarol (1998), which he determined as critical to the success of Universities' international marketing efforts, will be applied to each level of Keller's (2001 & 2008) customer-based brand equity pyramid. This will form the basis from which the application of the model to higher education can be investigated.

chapterthree methodology

This chapter provides an overview of how this study was undertaken. It begins with a methodological overview defining the research strategy and design, followed by the research objectives. The semi-structured interview method is discussed including a justification of the case selection and the selection of participants, followed by the content analysis method. Finally, the concepts of reliability and validity are discussed with relevance to this study.

The purpose of this study is to explore existing customer-based brand equity theory and its applicability to international higher education. By doing so, the aim of this study is to identify the key elements that help build customer-based brand equity in this context. The previous theoretical chapter outlined existing theory on customer-based brand equity and research conducted on higher education marketing. This, in turn formed the theoretical framework for which this study will be based upon. Keller's (2001 & 2008) model on building customer-based brand equity will be explored during this study in its application to a higher education context. The additional theory discussed in the previous chapter will help guide the empirical research of this study. As this research has been conducted from a supply-side perspective it was decided that two research methods would be used to increase the depth and richness of analysis. The two types of methods used in the empirical research were semi-structured interviews and a qualitative content analysis of the University websites.

3.1 Methodological Overview

When making a methodological choice for research it is important that the research strategy fits the study. A research strategy is the general orientation to the conduct of the business research (Bryman and Bell, 2007: 28). This study is concerned with the application of existing theory to a previously unapplied context, as such it was decided that a flexible approach would be required. Therefore, qualitative research strategy has been adopted as to provide flexibility when investigating this arguably new realm. When compared with a quantitative strategy, qualitative research emphasises words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data, and is an approach in which theory and categorization emerge out of the collection and analysis of data (Bryman and Bell, 2007: 402-404). The emphasis of this study is to use the analysed data obtained from the empirical research and apply it to existing theory in a new realm, rather than develop a new theory altogether.

The nature of this study is that involved two data collection methods: qualitative web content analysis and semi structured interviews. The nature of this research was such that it involved elements of an iterative approach. Bryman & Bell (2007: p.407) describe this approach as interplay between interpretation and theorizing on one hand and data collection on the other. In other words it involves empirical data being interpreted and re-interpreted with relation to theory. Relevant to this study, the interviews were interpreted and then re-interpreted over time in to realise the true relationship between the theory and research findings.

The research design selected was in the form of a case study, involving four cases, i.e. the four Universities. The case study design allows for an intensive, detailed examination of a case (Bryman & Bell, 2007: p.62), which is required for this study. The process that defined this study occurred in the following stages. The first stage involved narrowing the research topic down to that of brand equity and its applicability to international higher education. The next stage involved selecting an appropriate context in which to conduct the empirical research, two countries were selected: Australia and Sweden. The intention was to broaden the scope of the study by conducting the research across to different educational environments, in particular two environments with different policies on international students, namely with regard to the charging of tuition fees. The cases were then identified. It was decided that interviewing University staff as well as conducting an analysis of the Universities' web content to be most appropriate. Following on from this an analysis of the empirical data collected, then interpreted and applied to customer-based brand equity theory. Finally, the findings show the adaptation of the customer-based brand equity theory to higher education in an international student context.

3.2 Research Objectives

The interviews were constructed to address each stage of Keller's (2001 & 2008) 'brand equity building blocks' (as discussed in chapter two) ensuring that the analysis of applying this theory to the higher education context was possible and credible. Further, Mazzarol's (1998) study that established the critical success for international education marketing was used to guide the specific wording of the questions. By using Mazzarol's study to guide the formation of interview questions, it forms a segway between the theory and its application to the higher education industry.

3.3 Semi-structured Interviews with Higher Education Professionals

The semi-structured interview was one of the two chosen research methods due to the flexibility it offers and the ability to delve deeply into particular topics where relevant, both of which are important factors for this study. In-depth interviews are recommended to adopt a holistic and global perspective in the study (Moore, Wilkie, & Lutz, 2002; cited in Bravo, Fraj, & Martinez, 2007). Bryman and Bell (2007: 213) provide a detailed definition of the semi-structured interview:

'... It typically refers to a context in which the interviewer has a series of questions that are in the general form of an interview schedule but is able to vary the sequence of questions. The questions are frequently somewhat more general in their frame of reference than that typically found in a structured interview schedule. Also, the interviewer usually has some latitude to ask further questions in response to what are seen as significant replies.'

The order of the interview questions varied across all cases to ensure a smooth flow of conversation and to allow further discussion and elaboration in the interviewee on particular points as the interviewer saw fit. In other words, if there was a topic that the interviewee held particular insights or expertise on, they were encouraged to elaborate. The interview questions were directed at identifying the particular marketing activities undertaken by each institution.

As the semi structured interviews demands a certain list of topics that need to be covered in the interviewer a question template or interview guide was prepared in which comprised of the following four main topic areas:

Brand Identity – broad questions on the types of marketing activities and communication channels used to generate awareness of the University within the international market. It also covered the involvement of the University in strategic alliances and the use of recruitment and government agencies.

Brand Meaning (Performance and Imagery) – interview questions were based around how customer feedback was collected, value-added offerings and the availability and accessibility of support services. *Brand Responses (Consumer Judgements and Feelings)* – this addressed the unique selling points of the University, how it viewed competitors and competition in general, and how student testimonials were used in marketing.

Brand Responses (Consumer Judgements and Feelings) – this addressed the unique selling points of the University, how it viewed competitors and competition in general, and how student testimonials were used in marketing.

Brand Relationships (Resonance) – these questions covered how the University engaged in brand communities such as alumni networks, social networking sites, and word of mouth marketing. It also looks at repeat purchases, i.e. students continuing their studies at the same University at a postgraduate level.

These interviews were all conducted over the phone for two reasons: 1. It was not practical to interview all of the interviewees in person due to their location, i.e. the Australian University staff members were located in another country; and 2. For the sake consistency across all the interviews, the interviews with the Swedish University staff members were conducted over the phone. The interviews were recorded and later analysed, ensuring that direct quotes were accurate and that the interviewees were not misrepresented. In all cases one staff member was interviewed from each University.

3.3.1 CASE SELECTION

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives from four different universities, including two Australian, and two Swedish institutions. The two countries were selected on the basis that they operate in different education systems with regard to funding, i.e. in Australia international students pay tuition fees while in Sweden they do not. This was done to broaden the scope of the empirical findings and increase the generalizability of the analysis while remaining feasible with regard to the time parameters of the study. The Universities were selected on the criteria that they were all state-funded institutions with a comprehensive offering of disciplines in teaching and learning, i.e. course offerings at undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD levels across most or all disciplines. Australia was chosen, as it is an established supplier of education to international fee-paying students. Sweden was chosen, as it is also a supplier of education to international students, however it does not charge tuition fees. The staff members to be interviewed were selected on the basis of their responsibility. The most appropriate person to interview in each case was one that had an overview of their University's international marketing activities and was able to go into detail on all of the interview topics.

3.3.2 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

The primary objective of this research is to ascertain how a theoretical model on building brand equity can be applied to the marketing of higher education. In order to reach this objective, previous empirical research conducted by Tim Mazzarol (1998) into higher education marketing was consulted. As such the targeted interviewees were marketing, recruitment or communications managers (or a combination of these) with responsibility for, and/or knowledge of, international markets. Every attempt was made to find staff in similar roles across the universities so as to ensure that the best comparisons possible can be made. Some flexibility was required in locating the appropriate interview subjects, as it was not always possible to find staff with equal responsibilities across different Universities. Despite holding similar or identical position titles, individual staff responsibility across the universities was found to vary. To combat this, the interview questions were kept broad and open-ended so as to maximise discussion on the interviewee's part. Further, interviewees were encouraged to elaborate on topics surrounding their area of expertise to increase the depth of discussion. See Appendix 1 for interviewee profiles.

3.4 Qualitative Content Analysis

A qualitative content analysis is an approach to the analysis of documents and texts, which may be printed or visual, and requires that the analysis be objective and systematic (Bryman and Bell, 2007: 302). It was selected as the second research method because it provided an indication of the image that each University projects through its web communications and was used to support the main method of semi-structured interviews. This complements the semi-structured interview in that it analyses what the Universities actually do as compared with what they say they do. This method was selected because the internet plays a large role (possibly the largest) in conveying information about the University to the international student. This form of content analysis has been used to analyze text in order to find patterns, ideas and concepts, as well as analysing pictures and conversations (Do & Wang, 2007). This qualitative method focuses on creating an understanding of texts and images (Ibid.).

The parameters of the website content analysis are defined as English web pages only that provide information for international students were consulted. For the sake of this study an international student is one that comes from a country other than Sweden (for Lund and Stockholm Universities) and Australia (for James Cook University and Queensland University of Technology. The content analysed includes written text, the use of images, and the use of multimedia (video, audio communications etc.). The analysis involved defining key areas of web content that are seen as important to an international student and exploring the amount of attention devoted to these areas on the University websites. As the nature of information contained on websites is often in a state of flux (i.e. it is updated on an ongoing basis) this qualitative analysis of all websites was conducted on the same day. Thus, ensuring a fair and equal comparison of the University websites was possible.

3.5 Reliability

Reliability and Validity 'are different kinds of measures of the quality, rigour and wider potential of research,' (Mason, 1996: 21). That said they are an integral part of any research. Reliability is broken into two parts, external and internal. External reliability is a measure to which the study can be replicated (Bryman and Bell, 2007: 410). This can be a difficult criterion to meet in qualitative research, in particular this study. For example, it would be very difficult to replicate this study after a period of time, as the interviewees may have moved to another position and the website content updated. However, it would be possible to conduct a similar study on other Universities around the world, i.e by using the same research methods as in this study. Internal reliability is a measure of whether the members of the researching team agree on what they observe (Ibid.). As there is only one researcher in this study, it has a high level of internal reliability.

3.6 Validity

Validity is also divided into two parts, internal and external, and can be defined as the degree to which a test or instrument measures the attributes that it is supposed to measure (Easterby-Smith et. al, 2002). Internal validity gauges whether or not there is a good match between the researcher's observations and the theoretical ideas they develop (Bryman and Bell, 2007: 410). As this study used a qualitative approach it allowed for a high level of convergence between the theory and empirical outcomes. External validity refers to the generalizability of the study. The degree of generalizability of this study can extend to Universities broadly conducting international marketing and student recruitment activities. The purpose of the study was not to create a universal theoretical model applicable to all university contexts, as such there would need to be considerations made concerning the culture and nature of the education system, before applying this study to a new context.

3.7 Limitations

There some disadvantages associated with qualitative research, perhaps the most common is that it is not measured or quantified in a way that can be analysed statistically. Further, it is somewhat at the mercy of the researcher in how they interpret the empirical data. One disadvantage of using semi-structured interviews as a research method is that there is the opportunity that the interviews won't be exactly the same across all cases. Another drawback of this method is that the analysis and interpretation can be influenced by the researcher's subjectivity. There are also some disadvantages with the content analysis research method, which is sometimes referred to as atheoretical (Bryman and

Bell, 2007: 321). This can result in the researcher focusing on what is measurable rather than on what is theoretically important (Ibid.). This problem is somewhat diluted in the qualitative content analysis of this study as the focus of the interviews is on how the interviewee's responses relate to the theory. Moreover, web content is constantly being updated, therefore the specific findings of this study has a limited lifespan. A key consideration that should be made for this study is that this study needed to be completed within a ten-week timeframe. Therefore, it was not viable to conduct extensive quantitative research, for example a mass survey, as completing analysis of this data within the defined period would not have been plausible.

chapterfour

empirical findings & analysis

This chapter contains the empirical research findings and analysis sections. It begins with an overview of the empirical findings of the web content analysis on, and interviews with, the four case Universities. The analysis section then integrates the research findings with the theoretical framework resulting in an adapted customer-based brand equity model for higher education.

4.1 Empirical Findings

4.1.1 INTRODUCTION

This section covers the analysis of the case Universities' website content and interview analysis. As outlined in the theoretical framework the web content analysis was used to gather background information on each University with relation to the information they provide for international students. The interviews were directed at gaining insight into the international marketing activities conducted by each case University and how they relate to each stage of the preliminary theoretical model – an adaptation of Keller's (2001 & 2008) customer-based brand equity pyramid. Each interview was structured around ascertaining how each stage of the model could be influenced by marketing exercises.

4.1.2 QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

Web Content

URL: <http://www.qut.edu.au/study/intstud.jsp>

The link to the international homepage is present on the QUT homepage (see Appendix 2). QUT has 4 campuses all located in the city of Brisbane, they are Gardens Point, Kelvin Grove, Carseldine, and Caboolture. At the international student homepage browsers can enter sites for either 'Current' or 'Future' international students. A feature of the QUT website is that it provides information (not the entire site) in 9 other languages, additional to English. The Current Students section appears to be directed at those who have arrived at the University, or will be arriving soon. This section includes information on the following areas (see Appendix 3) and includes a FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) link dedicated to each section of the Current Students site:

- > Orientation – Pre-departure (information pertaining to what needs to occur before leaving your home country), Arrival (what to expect when you arrive in Australia and at QUT), Orientation Programs (the different orientation programs as relevant to the area and level of study), and Your Next Step (a checklist of important things to do prior to and upon arrival).
- > Language and Learning – What Students Say (student testimonials), Language and Learning Service (academic approach in Australia), Language Exchange Program, Learning Materials (for some specific academic programs), Making an Appointment (instructions of how to make contact with the international office staff).
- > Student Life – includes all aspects of student life on campus, among them is information on accommodation, advice and counselling, cost of living, employment, health and medical, religious groups, student associations, student guild, and transport.
- > Resources – Information Sheets (on most of the information contained within the website in pdf format), Immigration information, News, Travel Tips, Workshops and Seminars (on counselling, and careers and employment), and About ISS (International Student Services roles and responsibilities).

The Future Students section contains more marketing type information for prospective students gathering information. This is broken down into the following areas (see Appendix 4):

- > Choose a Course – information on the various course offerings at QUT at undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD, and English language programs, as well as information on Study Abroad and Student Exchange.
- > Applying to QUT – includes information on the application process and fees associated with each course, academic entry requirements, advanced standing (credit for previous studies), overseas student health cover, and scholarships.
- > Student Support Services – QUT ISS (links back to the current international students section), Student Accommodation Service, and Arrivals and Airport Reception.

Interview with QUT

Stacey Walker works within the central international office at Queensland University of Technology, Australia, and is Regional Marketing Manager, responsible for Europe & the Americas, and Study Abroad recruitment. Her position fundamentally involves marketing and recruitment through the management of relationships with agents, institutions, and the development of new recruitment channels. The position includes responsibility for international development, business development, and government-to-government relationships.

Brand Identity

Queensland University of Technology (QUT) primarily uses agent networks and international alliances as a means of promotion and awareness creation internationally. International networks and alliances are seen as an important communication channel in creating awareness of QUT. Walker (2009) commented that 'Their brand equity passes off on to you through association,' with regard to partner institutions. QUT is part of the Queensland (Australia)/Hessen (Germany) international alliance (which is a government level agreement between the state of Queensland and the Hessen province), and domestically with ATN (Australian Technical Network of Universities) research network. This is viewed as important for profiling the University internationally. QUT classify their partners into three groups: aspiration partners, equal partners, and feeder institutions. This classification highlights a conscious effort and focus on building international networks.

Traditional advertising is not seen as a priority. The relationship between the recruitment agent and the institution is seen as having greater influence on where the students go. 'I think they influence a lot, with reference to student recruitment.' The only form of advertising is conducted through agent networks, in the form of newsletter or website promotions. QUT do conduct some E-marketing activities such as website optimisation and using online marketing platforms, for example, websites that promote University programs.

QUT undertakes different marketing approaches to different markets. As a consequence they have a subtly different brand image and reputation in these markets. For example, in Germany the 'Technology' part of their name is seen as favourable among engineering students who identify with the University immediately, whereas in Norway they emphasise that they are a comprehensive University.

Currently, the majority of QUT's international communications resources go in the development and distribution of print publications, however each year more resources are put into electronic communications such as web-based 'brochure builder' applications. QUT outsource their international enquiry management to a company called Hobsons. This company uses template responses to handle student enquiries and runs 'made-offer campaigns' designed to increase conversion of students from the offer to acceptance stage.

With respect to Australian Government agencies, QUT uses Austrade (the Government department in charge of promoting Australian exports) rarely, only if they need market information on new markets, but this is an expensive service. They also occasionally use services offered by AEI (Australian Education International, a sub-branch of Austrade which is present in markets where education is a large export) for market intelligence. Walker mentioned that these services are only used when exploring opportunities in new markets.

Brand Meaning (Performance and Imagery)

QUT collects feedback from students in two ways. The first is in the form of an anonymous survey, whereby students are offered a small item of University merchandise as an incentive to complete it. The second way is through focus group studies (held once or twice each year) designed to collect more in depth feedback on positive and negative student experiences.

In terms of value-adding activities QUT host a student camp for study abroad students, as well as several functions for all international students during the year. Promoting a positive student experience is a focus of the international office. These events are seen as creating goodwill in international students and assisting in the building of brand equity.

Brand Responses (Consumer Judgements and Feelings)

Walker identified QUT's main competition as other Universities within the same city (Brisbane), i.e. Bond University, University of Queensland, and Griffith University.

QUT use student testimonials in their marketing material. 'It's really important I think.' They currently use them in their printed guides and intend to include them on the website with the impending website redesign scheduled to occur in the next 12 months.

Brand Relationships (Resonance)

QUT have an office dedicated to managing the alumni network. However, due to some administrative hindrances this doesn't operate as efficiently as desired. One of the problems they face is maintaining up to date student contact information such as the email address. As such, the University often loses contact with students.

QUT are mildly active through the social networking site Facebook. They have a study abroad group, administered by the office primarily to promote events on campus and within Brisbane. 'They (the students) never check their emails' so this is a good utility. 'The only way we can really get them is through Facebook.' With regard to student-initiated groups on Facebook, Walker (2009) said 'I've heard of a couple, one's not favourable.'

When asked if QUT target current students for further studies, Stacey said 'We're not doing as much as I'd like to see.' The main reason for this was due to ambiguity regarding whose responsibility it was

to manage this area of marketing. That said, QUT are trialling a new scholarship initiative. 'Students who have finished a full degree with us get scholarships for the first year or so of their postgrad(uate) degree.'

Finally, when asked what she saw as the most important aspect in international marketing, Walker (2009) responded with: 'Word of mouth is the strongest factor we have... if students thoroughly enjoy their time they will tell their friends.'

4.1.3 JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY

Web Content

URL: <http://www.jcu.edu.au/international/>

JCU has four campuses, located in Townsville, Cairns, Brisbane and Singapore. A link to the international homepage is present on the JCU homepage (see Appendix 5). The international homepage at JCU is neat and broken up into four areas: Discover JCU (essentially marketing information), Study Options (course offerings and degree information), Applying to Study (the process), and Preparing for Arrival. Each of these areas has subsections, discussed briefly below (see Appendix 6).

> Discover JCU – Why Choose JCU (marketing information including an overview of unique selling points), Campus Locations, Student Services (all services available on campus including language support, medical services, student counselling, sports facilities etc.), International Student Support Centre, Current International Students (all information pertinent to students currently studying at JCU), What Our Students Say (student testimonials – text and video), and Publications (electronic versions of printed publications).

> Study Options – Courses and Degrees (full listings of all academic programs by discipline area), Study Abroad and Student Exchange, AusAid at JCU (Australian Government scholarship program), Pathways to JCU (for high school, language studies and diploma students), and English Language Centre.

> Applying to Study – Entry Requirements (academic entry requirements across all programs), How to Apply (details the application process), Fees and Costs (tuition fees, living expenses and insurance), Scholarships and Financial Aid (information about Australian scholarships and loan schemes from other countries, including government student loans), Visas and Deadlines (immigration requirements and teaching periods), and Policies and Procedures (information concerning Australian Government legislation pertaining to international students and tuition fee cancellation policy).

> Preparing for Arrival – Pre-Departure Information (checklist of things to do before leaving home country), Arrival Service and Orientation (airport reception and temporary accommodation services, and orientation programs), Accommodation, Important Dates (orientation dates and teaching periods), Frequently Asked Questions, and Contact Us (for Townsville and Cairns campuses, includes JCU's presence on social networking sites Facebook and Orkut).

Interview with JCU

Kelly Donohue is the International Marketing Manager responsible for all student recruitment, relationships and partnerships in Europe at James Cook University (JCU), Australia. Managing relationships is fundamental part her role and involves managing the overseas partner network, i.e. agents and institutions, within the Europe region. Kelly works within international office located centrally at the University and departments of International Support, International Admissions, International Compliance, and International Marketing (this is the team that Kelly sits in).

Brand Identity

JCU undertake marketing activities to promote awareness of their brand internationally. Recently, JCU decided to move away from traditional marketing activities such as large education fairs, and focus on more specialised trips. This is a result of the view that ‘...student fairs and roadshows are pretty out of date.’ Once a year JCU tries to coordinate a faculty (academic staff) led mission into exploring new recruitment possibilities. This is seen as a more effective way of creating brand awareness. ‘A big push at the moment is to find niche areas and get into cohort recruitment, so the establishment of double-degrees and top-up pathway programs.’ These sorts of activities will supersede the traditional recruitment channels of education fairs and roadshows.

JCU’s advertising activities vary depending on the market, for example not a lot of advertising is done in Europe, however within other markets such as India it is used more frequently. Instead a focus is on using the agent network and their partner institutions. ‘We will use our agents more to better establish and cultivate these types of relationships and then we can just have more of a personalised approach.’

The web is a focus for providing information to international students. JCU uses google analytics software to track web traffic and monitor the performance of their web sites. The website is seen as the most important communication channel for international students. Presently, JCU allocate the majority of their budget on printed publications, but next year there will be more focus on creating a marketing DVD for use internationally. They are increasingly using multimedia in their marketing efforts. For example, the Business Faculty is creating an international student-specific presentation to publish on the website, including audio testimonials. JCU are currently updating their website to include more audio content to make it more interactive.

JCU’s international reputation is ‘More of a study abroad destination, than full degree.’ The areas of academic strength include environmental science, marine biology, plant and animal sciences, and geosciences. ‘We don’t have to do a lot of pushing in the market to get the students, it’s just world renowned. We’re consistently ranked in the world’s top three (in the field of environmental science), and the students just know about us.’ In this respect, the academic reputation precedes any marketing messages, as such the marketing efforts require a more sophisticated approach so as not to contradict or compromise the academic reputation.

Enquiry management at JCU is also outsourced to Hobsons and perform the same functions as they do for QUT.

With regard to strategic alliances, JCU is part of the Innovative Research Universities of Australia (IRUA). Internationally, they are looking to engage with one of the environmental science networks (it was requested that this network remain anonymous as the negotiating process is incomplete). Marketing staff often seeks out opportunities to engage in these networks and then feed that back to academic staff. These alliances are joined to help raise the international profile of the university. 'After joining an alliance of such to try and get cohorts of students by establishing double-masters, double degrees... and maybe even research collaboration.' These relationships are academic in nature, however the international office often manages their coordination centrally. The agents also assist in initiating relationships and establishing Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) between JCU and the international institution.

JCU is a popular choice for AusAid (Australian Government scholarship program) scholarship recipients, from countries like Vietnam and Papua New Guinea. This is seen as an important part of raising their international profile.

Brand Meaning (Performance and Imagery)

JCU collect student feedback in the form of student surveys. Students are surveyed when they arrive on campus, primarily those that have come through an agent, as a means of monitoring the agent performance and counselling service provided to the student. Students also complete a departure survey. JCU sometimes have used focus groups in the past however it was found that the students are not always completely open and honest regarding negative experiences in this forum. 'We try not to use focus groups as much because the students won't give honest answers when they're in a big group.' Student testimonials are used by JCU in their printed publications, and audio testimonials are available on the website.

The function of the Student Support team at JCU encompasses student and agent support. The student aspect involves coordinating the international orientation, and handling issues of an academic or personal nature. For some serious student issues, the marketing team is called in as it may impact on the relationship with the overseas partner. The international marketing team is also involved in the student orientation, returning home services, and functions throughout the semester. This is a type of post-purchase marketing used to enhance the student experience and collect feedback from the students. It is believed that by building a rapport with the students throughout their stay, the marketing team are able to collect feedback and testimonials.

Activities such as fieldtrips attached to academic programs are seen as enhancing the student experience. At JCU fieldtrips can include trips to the Great Barrier Reef, and trips to indigenous regions to view rock art. It is a focus of the academic programs to have practical, hands-on elements.

Brand Responses (Consumer Judgements and Feelings)

Destination plays a very important role for JCU and Donohue described this as a unique feature of JCU in terms of their international student population. 'A clear indicator of how important study abroad is – the one semester and two semester visiting students – it is a fact that we are very different from other Australian Unis (Universities), where we hardly have any Indian or Chinese (students)... (which are) the traditional markets for Australian Unis. Our two largest markets are Europe and North America.' Destination is recognised by JCU as a key selling point and a source of competitive advantage. 'The environment becomes the student's classroom most of the time.' The location of the campus, which is in close proximity to natural environments such as the Great Barrier Reef and the Daintree Rainforest, is seen as important for the academic programs offered.

With regard to competition, JCU benchmark themselves against other IRUA member Universities (Flinders University, South Australia; Griffith University, Queensland; La Trobe University, Victoria; Murdoch University, Western Australia; and The University of Newcastle, New South Wales), on items such as setting tuition fees, conversion rates.

Brand Relationships (Resonance)

When asked to comment on the alumni network at JCU, Donohue (2009) said 'It's something that we don't do well. There is an alumni unit but it's not something that's utilised well enough.'

With regard to social networking sites, JCU do use Facebook, but it is not formally monitored or regulated due to the fact that there is no allocated responsibility for doing this. They also use ORKUT social networking site in the sub continent.

Marketing to students to undertake further studies at the University is not focus of marketing efforts, however Donohue (2009) commented: 'We find that there is quite a high percentage (of students) that do come on and do masters (studies) after the study abroad.' This is tracked through the student information system.

4.1.4 LUND UNIVERSITY

Web Content

URL: <http://www.lu.se/lund-university/international-relations>

Lund University (LU) has a link to their International Relations website on the University homepage (see Appendix 7). At LU the International Relations has two divisions: The International Student Mobility Group and The International Relations office. The International Student Mobility Group just has a list of contacts and no website. The International Relations office operates a central level and looks after the internationalisation activities of the University including developing academic exchange and research agreements (see Appendix 8). This office is designed to promote and facilitate research collaboration internationally and the site contains a downloadable version of LU's internationalisation policy.

The Exchange student website includes information on the following areas:

- > What is an Exchange student – describes which students the information is relevant to.
- > Course for exchange students – individual units/subjects broken down by faculty and area of study.
- > Apply – details the application process including the role of the home institution
- > Information for Coordinators at Partner Universities – information sheet on important contacts within the University, and information on orientation, the credit system, insurance, costs of living etc.

The Masters student website includes information on the following areas:

- > FAQ – Master Programs – this cover frequently asked questions on Accommodation, Admission Results, Coming to Lund (more arrival information), Costs and Funding (living costs and scholarship information), Eligibility and Qualifications, Insurance and Health Care, Part Time Work, PhD Studies, and Residence Permit (migration and visa information).
- > Find Programmes (Masters Programmes at Lund University) – lists all the Masters programmes by discipline.
- > Apply Help (How to Apply) – Studera.nu Requirements, Acceptance and Selection (details the role of Studera.nu), When to Apply, Before you Apply (things to consider), Step by Step Guide (application process), Admission Requirements and Selection, Documentation (transcripts and certificates to include in application), Application Help, and Late Applications.
- > Fees – costs associated with studying in Sweden.
- > Living Costs.
- > Find Somewhere to Live – how to apply for housing.
- > Your Arrival in Lund – includes Registration, Introduction Day, Money Health and Insurance, Introduction Weeks, and Pre-Arrival Information.

- > Residence Permits – same information as under the Masters FAQ section above.
- > Help and Advice – where to find help on programme content, application help, practical help, and health related support.
- > Apply for your Degree Certificate – information for completing students.
- > Travel to Lund – different transport options.
- > Acceptance Email – links to a site with information regarding student acceptance to the University and the upcoming Arrival Day. There is also information for students wanting help and information with links to the Studera.nu wiki and Facebook group, as well as an external Living in Sweden site.

LU also offers Bachelor program in Development Studies taught in English. To apply for this program students are directed to Studera.nu which is the Swedish national applications website.

Interview with Lund University

Caroline Runéus is the Communication Manager at Lund University (LU). Runéus' responsibility includes production of presentation material, graphical profile, media relations, University magazine, and the production of marketing and recruitment material. It's important to note that the vast majority of international students at LU are undergraduate exchange students and full-degree masters students. An important issue facing Swedish Universities at the moment is the impending introduction of tuition fees for non-EU international students, scheduled for implementation in 2011. Runéus is well aware of what other countries do in terms of their marketing and recruitment activities, however is restricted by the university in terms of what she can do, i.e. resources etc. LU have excessive demand for courses, as such they don't have to market extensively to recruit students. However Runéus recognises the need to be more service focused in LU's approach once fees are introduced.

Brand Identity

International recruitment activities at LU are undertaken for Master level programs. This is decentralised and a function of individual faculties. There is central coordination of the web content and to a lesser extent printed material listing all the masters' courses. Runéus believes that most students obtain course information from the web. Also, LU tracks the web traffic to their site, with the vast majority of international student traffic coming from the Swedish Institute site.

At present there is little to no budget allocated for international marketing as this is not a focus for LU resources. Runéus (2009) offered the following reason, 'we have very little money to market, and it's not within the tradition of Swedish Universities to market. It's a new phenomenon... we don't charge fees, there is no heavy stress on international marketing at the moment in Lund because we do not have housing... if we market more and we cannot provide housing it's not really nice for the students coming into Lund and it is a reason why there isn't a lot of money put into international marketing.'

Regarding international partners 'we have a lot of joint programs with international partners, who do a lot of marketing. We are a part of a lot of consortiums and networks.' One example is the U21 (Universitas 21) network of 21 research-intensive Universities and its purpose to promote research collaboration among the member institutions. LU views such alliances as providing exposure of the University internationally, 'There is a lot of promotion we make outside the ordinary marketing channels, which I think explains the interest in Lund University.'

Runéus mentioned that although LU has a good reputation internationally, it's not enough to rely on that in terms of marketing. The components of the brand need to project what the University is, i.e. historical but also innovative. 'The 'Old' thing is not enough, they (prospective students) need to know that we are innovative as well... that we can combine the old knowledge with the new knowledge.'

With regard to enquiry management, Runéus lamented that 'that is not our strong side,' and that a lot of work needs to be done. Responsibility for this sits with the admissions offices that are located within the different faculties and departments. As such the handling of enquiries is largely decentralised. On the broader issue of student recruitment Runéus conceded that although LU have a good product, they have a lot to learn.

Brand Meaning (Performance and Imagery)

LU collect feedback from international students, this responsibility sits with the English web editor. This feedback is collected through student interviews and focus groups. LU also conducts research into how students prefer to receive information.

Runéus mentioned that following the introduction of tuition fees there will most likely be a greater expectation placed on the level of service on the part of the students. The service areas Caroline identified as needing improvement included international student support services, the processing of applications, the quality of our education, and the IT/web system. Other external services identified as needing improvement include Studera.nu (the central Swedish University application portal) and the immigration department's processing operations. Presently, the majority of the focus of support services is on the exchange students, who receive extra support, relative to Masters students.

Brand Responses (Consumer Judgements and Feelings)

Regarding competition, Runéus mentioned that a lot occurs on a national level within the Swedish market however there is also a great deal of cooperation. Cooperation occurs on the level of collecting student data through surveys etc., as there isn't a lot of funding within Swedish Universities for marketing. 'We are a very, very small country... and we are a very unknown country.' The Universities cooperate to market Sweden as a destination, and then compete beyond that. Some of the smaller unknown universities are forced to travel and market, however LU has not been in that situation. LU sees their advantage over smaller universities as being able to leverage off all their research strengths to create attractive programs.

Student testimonials are used by LU and are seen as an important part of communication materials

Brand Relationships (Resonance)

The alumni operation has a central coordinator, but is largely decentralised with the majority of responsibility residing on a departmental or faculty level. With respect to fundraising, Runéus (2009) commented that ‘this is premature in Sweden... a new phenomenon... the business school is quite active.’

Social networking mediums such as Facebook, Twitter and staff blogs are used on a small scale, however ‘We have a lot of work to do.’ Runéus believes that the majority of positive word of mouth marketing for LU stems from the international networks they are associated with including their exchange partners.

4.1.5 STOCKHOLM UNIVERSITY

Web Content

URL: <http://www.su.se/english/study>

Stockholm University (SU) has an entire version of their website in English. The link ‘Study with us’ from the University homepage directs browsers to the information for international students wishing to study at SU (see Appendix 9). The ‘Study with us’ section of the website is divided into the following areas of information (see Appendix 10).

- > Application and Admissions – Admissions office (responsibilities), Application – step by step guide, Application dates for Master’s Programmes, Financial Support (information on financial resources required to study in Sweden)
- > Courses and Programmes – a comprehensive list of Master’s programmes (arranged by discipline), as well as information on courses taught in Swedish and part-time study options.
- > Current Students – Grants and Funding (costs associated with study), Health Service, Master’s Orientation 2009, Student Services, and Transferral of Studies (applying for credit for previous studies).
- > Disability – support services for students with disabilities.
- > Educational System – information on the Swedish Education system and grading, and the Bologna process.
- > Equal Treatment – students’ rights for equal treatment.
- > Exchange Students – About the IEU (International Exchange Unit), Accepted Students (information for before you leave home and the student union fee), Application Procedure (includes faculty contact persons and exchange student handbook), Partner Universities, Housing, and Orientation Days (information and resources).

- > FAQ for Students – on topics including Admissions, Campus, Course Information, Degree Certificates, Housing, Visas, and Work.
- > Grants and Funding – study related costs and available scholarships.
- > Health Service.
- > Postgraduate Studies – entrance requirements for these programs.
- > Student Profiles – testimonials of previous international exchange, master’s and PhD students.
- > Student Services – contact information.
- > Visa Information – residence permits and visas.

Interview with Stockholm University

Paul Parker is the Content Manager for the English language website at Stockholm University (SU) and has worked there for nearly two years. His responsibilities extend to include marketing of courses to international students and looking at how SU appears in the media, mostly on a Swedish national level, but also on an international level, regarding international rankings. Another part of Parker’s responsibility includes focusing on producing marketing and communication material Masters students. Stockholm University, like Lund University is preparing for the introduction of tuition fees for international students. Over the past 12 months University staff have attended conferences surrounding the introduction of fees, which included guests from Holland and Denmark who gave talks on what has happened following the introduction of tuition fees in their respective countries.

Brand Identity

At SU the main focus of marketing efforts are the website, ‘we put a lot of time and energy and emphasis on our website... it’s the primary channel of communication.’ Web traffic data is collected, with the majority of traffic to the English site coming via the Swedish Institute site. With regard to communications materials SU currently distribute a printed course catalogue. Currently this catalogue is being developed in a digital format, ‘that’s going to be the way that we market our masters programs to overseas students.’ The printed catalogues are distributed through various channels, i.e. Swedish embassies and overseas partner Universities. In terms of international alliances, SU has 600 exchange agreements that facilitate mobility of students and researchers.

SU don’t prioritise international marketing in the conventional sense at the moment, though they do have representatives attend various international events such as education fairs. On the future focus of these international marketing events, Parker (2009) commented ‘we might consider changing to that in the next couple of years.’ Parker expects that next year there will be more focus of marketing their programs to international students than they do now. ‘At the moment this year, it’s just an exploration of different marketing options.’ However, Parker’s view is that international student recruitment will not reap large amounts of revenue. ‘The thing is it’s (charging tuition fees) never going to be a money winner for those big Swedish Universities... it’s not going to be a substantial contribution to the budget;

it's going to be an administrative headache. And it seems to be in as much, driven by principles as it is by any kind of economic consideration.'

SU don't commission any agents to conduct student recruitment on their behalf due to the excessive demand for their courses. Last year SU received 18,000 applications for their masters programs which had approximately 500 available seats. Although they are not employed by SU there are agencies that assist students in applying for courses, for example in Pakistan, and charge a fee for their service.

They do have their courses listed on third party websites with, for example, Masters portal websites. Parker doesn't have a lot of faith in those sites, though there's not much to lose. His main concern was that once you start to put your course information out there someone has to look after it and monitor it for accuracy. SU have about 90 masters programs, of which 70 are suitable for international students. Thus, keeping that information updated is resource intensive.

The student services and admissions departments handle enquiry management at SU.

Brand Meaning (Performance and Imagery)

The largest administrative burden that SU face is in the processing of applications. In 2008, 18,000 international students applied, 500 accepted, and only 200 showed up. A focus of the marketing and support services departments is to improve this attrition rate, 'we don't have the resources to manage more applications, so what we need is a focused information campaign whereby we get the right people to apply.'

At SU the Student Services department has responsibility for all 52,000 students (domestic and international). Within this department the responsibility for international students lies with the admissions unit to answer questions and enquiries. There is a separate unit responsible for exchange student support. Housing is also a problem in Stockholm in that it's limited and expensive. Parker acknowledged that some universities help with finding housing for Masters students but SU doesn't. SU help provide exchange students with support to find housing because they have special resourcing for that.

SU collects feedback from students that participated in the welcome days, through a web-based survey. They have also conducted research with the Swedish Institute on attitudes toward Sweden as a study destination.

SU focus on enhancing the international student experience through their Welcome Day (orientation) for Masters students, and more extensive Welcome Program for exchange students which runs over several days. This year they will combine the two programs, 'I feel like we are pushing things forward in terms of how we receive masters students.'

Brand Responses (Consumer Judgements and Feelings)

SU competitors are the other Swedish Universities for the recruitment of Swedish students. Competing for international students it's quite limited, it is important but it's a question of resources. SU is not as reliant on international students as other Swedish Universities. Högskola are more reliant on international students, 'they've got 90% international students on their masters programs, which is generally not considered to be a good thing.' This may become an issue when the fees are introduced. 'According the evidence presented from Denmark and Holland applications dramatically reduce in period after the introduction of fees.' Parker doesn't see these institutions as competitors, as much as the likes of Lund University, Uppsala University, and KTH. There is small amount of collaboration between SU and other Universities in joint marketing efforts among faculties to promote their programs.

SU use student testimonials in their marketing material. Parker has also conducted interviews with students and uses their responses in marketing material. This has involved meeting with the students several times during their stay, somewhat of a longitudinal study. 'That's the way I've approached it, meeting students, talking to them, listening and getting their stories.'

Brand Relationships (Resonance)

Regarding the SU alumni network, they monitor a website called 'Sweden in touch' which is hosted by the Swedish Institute. It's a website where anyone can join, whether they've already studied, are currently studying, or are interested in studying in Sweden. It's a 'networking forum' that's still in its trial phase. Parker is optimistic with regard to possible of this program.

In terms of social networking sites and alternative media SU are quite engaged. They have an English page on lastfm.com, and feature on youtube, Facebook and Twitter. Parker's exploring these types of communication channels this year and will provide recommendations on how best to manage these sites. It's time consuming, and it's not clear what benefit can be derived. However, Parker sees it as important to explore these. 'We're looking next year at investing more time and resources in youtube and possibly other social media channels, both in the Swedish language groups and English language groups.' Both the University itself and the students initiate these sites. Currently, the role of SU is to just monitor the activity on these sites. They also monitor blogs and actively engage in them.

SU doesn't actively track the amount of students that stay on to complete further studies, however anecdotally, Parker said that those most likely to do this would be free mover students that chose to study at SU for one term and then decide to continue their studies. He recognised that this could be a good area to focus on, 'from masters studies to PhD, that's absolutely a viable channel. Exchange students, not so much because they implicitly usually have to complete studies at their home university.' SU are considering promoting their masters programs to their exchange partner Universities, in an attempt to capture those exchange students that have studied at SU and liked it, and are looking to return. 'The payback would be dramatically increased if one markets in relation to existing students.'

4.2 Analysis

In this section the empirical findings have been analysed and integrated into each stage of Keller's (2001 & 2008) model for building customer-based brand equity. The empirical findings from the interviews provide the majority of the material used in this analysis with the findings from the web content analysis providing support material. The two methods are combined to provide an in depth analysis of each stage of the model. The end result is an adaptation of Keller's (2001 & 2008) model.

4.2.1 BRAND IDENTITY

As outlined in chapter 2 the first step to building customer-based brand equity involves brand identity, which is measured by the level of brand awareness. In the higher education context, as with many service industries, awareness can be increased through marketing activities. In higher education this requires a unique level of sophistication. All of the case Universities marketed their institution internationally, albeit at different levels. The Australian Universities were found to be greater beneficiaries of international marketing resources than the Swedish Universities. This could be attributed to the demand phenomenon whereby the Swedish Universities had far more applicants than they could accommodate both into academic programs and housing; hence marketing to attract more students was not a priority. Through analysis of the empirical research key elements for creating awareness have been identified as marketing activities including advertising and promotion, fostering of publicity channels, customer relationship management, and web communications.

It was found from the empirical research that University marketing activities involving advertising and promotional campaigns were not conducted on a mass global level, but rather they were targeted, focused and market specific. For example, JCU uses advertising in the Indian market, but it is virtually non-existent in their European markets.

'We barely do advertising at all, it's all through word of mouth.' (Stacey, QUT)

'A big push at the moment is to find niche areas and get into cohort recruitment, so the establishment of double-degrees and top-up pathway programs.' (Kelly, JCU)

As a different approach to marketing JCU conduct faculty-led tours involving academic staff visiting partner institutions. This was found to be a credible and effective way to build awareness of the University internationally. In a similar vein, at LU the individual faculties conduct international marketing and recruitment activities for Master's programs. Similarly, SU have faculty representatives attend various international events such as education fairs. And though this is currently conducted on a small scale, it is expected that these activities will increase in the short term.

The empirical evidence suggests that brand awareness can be generated by fostering publicity channels such as international alliances, exchange partners and in-country third party representatives (agents).

'It (who you align yourself with) is a really important part of profiling... people put you in the same category as universities that you partner with. Their brand equity passes off on to you through association,' (Stacey, QUT)

QUT uses agent networks and international alliances as a means of promotion and awareness creation internationally. JCU leverage their international partnerships to generate recruitment of student cohorts, research collaboration, and establish joint programs such as double degrees. All of these ventures are seen as beneficial in raising their international profile. Similarly, LU benefit from being engaged in the U21 network in terms of international exposure and research collaboration.

Relationship management in the form of handling student enquiries were acknowledged as marketing functions in all cases, the control and responsibility of which varied. QUT and JCU outsource their enquiry management to a private company, while LU and SU manage theirs in-house. Regardless of the level of service in this area, all Universities recognised its importance.

There was unanimous sentiment in all cases surrounding the importance of the web in facilitating communication with international students. Each of the Universities expressed that they are increasingly investing in the development of electronic communications for marketing purposes. Further, All of the Universities conducted some sort of analysis of traffic to their websites. The majority of international student traffic for the Swedish came via the Swedish Institute's website and through Studera.nu. For the Australian Universities, the focus of collecting this data was in optimising web traffic and improving website performance. The empirical findings of the web content analysis supported this notion the web is an important communication tool, in that all Universities had detailed information on course offerings, application procedures and support services.

4.2.2 BRAND MEANING (PERFORMANCE AND IMAGERY)

The second step in building customer based brand equity involves brand meaning, which is measured by performance and imagery. As outlined in the chapter 2 brand performance was defined as the level to which customer's functional needs and expectations were met, while brand imagery was defined at meeting the customer's psychological or social needs. The empirical research found that the service focus of the case Universities and customer feedback forums they provided could gauge the brand performance. Brand imagery was then measured by the types of support services available to students and the methods used by the Universities to create goodwill.

The service focus of the case Universities with regard to application processing differed slightly. A key consideration is that the Swedish Universities receive their full degree applications via the central

application processing facility Studera.nu, while the Australian Universities receive applications directly from the student or via an agent, for immediate processing. LU and SU mentioned that during peak periods there have been some problems with Studera.nu crashing which in turn created delays in processing. LU acknowledged that following the introduction of tuition fees there would most likely be a greater expectation placed on the level of service. The Australian Universities didn't appear to receive nearly the amount of applications that the Swedish Universities did. This could be attributed to the fact that the Swedish Universities don't charge fees. Consequently, the Swedish Universities were more focused on attracting only legitimate applications to reduce the administrative workload.

'We don't have the resources to manage more applications, so what we need is a focused information campaign whereby we get the right people to apply.' (Parker, SU)

Further, another difference in the service focus was in that the Swedish Universities tended to have greater resources allocated to Exchange and Erasmus programs, while the Australian Universities focused their resources on servicing fee-paying students. This was evidence in the web content analysis with the Swedish Universities providing more of a focus on information for Exchange students than the Australian Universities.

All of the four case Universities collected customer feedback and there was a consensus across the findings that this exercise played an important role in monitoring performance. The most common method of collecting feedback was in the form of a student survey, the other methods varied slightly across the Universities. QUT collects feedback from students through an anonymous survey prior to departure. They also host focus group studies each year to get a more in depth view of the students' positive and negative experiences. Similarly, LU collects feedback from international students through student interviews and focus groups. LU also conducts research into how students prefer to receive information. JCU collects student feedback in the form of student surveys on a slightly more frequent basis. Initially students that have come via an agent are surveyed when they arrive on campus, primarily to measure their agent's performance and counselling service provided to the student. Students also then complete a departure survey. SU's focus in collecting feedback is on students that participated in the orientation welcome days, through a web-based survey. They have also conducted research with the Swedish Institute on attitudes toward Sweden as a study destination.

The brand imagery of a University was found to be influenced by the level of support services. This was seen as a way of meeting a student's psychological and social needs, and is seen as the responsibility of the University directly after the students arrive, and vicariously through the agent prior to arrival in the case of the Australian Universities. Each of the case Universities offered a level of student support, within the Swedish Universities it was a centralised office or department and within the Australian Universities it was a function of the international office. At LU the support of international students involved a combination of departments, including the admissions office, international office and within the individual faculties. At SU the Student Services department has responsibility for all 52,000 students (domestic and international). Within this department the responsibility for

international students lies with the admissions unit to answer questions and enquiries. There is a separate unit responsible for exchange student support. The function of the Student Support team at JCU encompasses student and agent support. Student support included hosting the international orientation, returning home services, and functions throughout the semester, and handling issues of an academic or personal nature. If there was an issue of a serious nature concerning an agent or overseas partner the marketing team were involved in the interest of relationship management.

Creating goodwill through enhancing the student experience was found to occur in several ways across the Universities. QUT host a student camp for study abroad students, as well as several functions for all international students during the year. At JCU fieldtrips attached to academic programs are seen as enhancing the student experience. SU focus on enhancing the international student experience through their Welcome Day (orientation) for Masters students, and more extensive Welcome Program for exchange students which runs over several days. The empirical findings identified that enhancing the student experience created goodwill on the part of the University.

4.2.3 BRAND RESPONSES (CONSUMER JUDGEMENTS AND FEELINGS)

The third step in building customer-based brand equity involves brand responses and is measured by judgements of, and feelings toward the brand in consumers. The brand judgements were measured by the unique selling points of the case Universities relative to their competitors, while brand feelings were measured through student testimonials.

Each of the Universities acknowledged that there is a sense of competition with other Universities, namely those within close proximity. QUT's main competitors were those within the same city (Brisbane, Australia), i.e. Bond University, University of Queensland, and Griffith University. QUT viewed themselves as having an advantage of these institutions in the Technology-related disciplines. At JCU, destination was seen as a unique feature and a source of competitive advantage. Their close proximity to natural environments such as the Great Barrier Reef and the Daintree Rainforest was seen as important for their flagship academic programs in Environmental Science. LU viewed their unique selling points extended to their research strengths and attractive programs. SU recognised that their competition was primarily with the older, more established Universities such as Lund University, Uppsala University, and KTH, rather than the Högskola (University Colleges).

All Universities mentioned that they used student testimonials in their marketing material, be it in print publications and/or on the web. For obvious reasons, the testimonials used on the website depicted positive experiences, which comes as no surprise. However, it would seem reasonable to assume that not all experiences had by students would be in the same positive vein as those used in marketing materials. Therefore, by collecting testimonials brand feelings among the students, both positive and negative, could be gauged.

4.2.4 BRAND RELATIONSHIPS (RESONANCE)

The fourth and final stage of the customer-based brand equity model involves brand relationships, with customer loyalty being the key measurement. As outlined in the theoretical framework loyalty in the context of higher education has been identified as the sense of community and active engagement of customers (students) with the brand (University). The measures used in the empirical research to identify customer loyalty were alumni programs, brand communities and the notion of repeat purchase. The findings are explored below.

Traditionally, Universities have fostered alumni networks as a source of revenue through fundraising activities. However, none of the case Universities identified this as the outcome of their alumni operation. In fact all of the Universities recognised that they could do more in terms of alumni relations. QUT has an office dedicated to managing the alumni network, however it doesn't operate as efficiently as desired. One of the problems they face is maintaining contact with students after they graduate. JCU iterated that alumni relations are not their strong point. At LU the alumni operation is largely decentralised and responsibility sits with the faculties, with the Business school being the most active.

Brand communities play a role in facilitating the engagement of customers with the brand. In the higher education context online brand communities and social networking are becoming increasingly important. The empirical research found that all Universities were at least aware of social networking utilities and some were actively engaged. QUT have a Facebook study abroad group, primarily used to keep students updated on the events that are taking place on campus. They also acknowledged that this was a good way of maintaining contact with students who don't monitor their email accounts. JCU also participate in Facebook, but in an informal capacity – it is not monitored regularly. They also use ORKUT social networking site in the sub continent. LU are aware of the social networking mediums but concede they have a lot of work to do in terms of engagement. SU were the most actively engaged in social networking mediums and are present on lastfm.com, Facebook and Twitter and feature on youtube. SU recognised the importance of exploring new mediums through which they can communicate and engage with students.

The concept of repeat purchase within higher education would involve students undertaking further studies after completing a degree. The empirical findings illustrated that the Universities were aware of this phenomenon occurring, however it was not necessarily a focus of marketing efforts. QUT are exploring this recruitment channel by offering partial scholarships to students who stay on for further studies in postgraduate programs. JCU stated that marketing to students to stay on was not a priority, however it the number of students that stay on for further studies is quite high relative to other Australian Universities. They track this through their student information system. SU recognised that marketing to exchange students through their exchange partners could be a good way to attract Master's and PhD students.

4.2.5 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS: A CBBE MODEL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

The outcome of the empirical research into the marketing activities of the four case Universities and the prevailing analysis is an application of Keller’s (2001, 2008) customer-based brand equity model in figure 4.1. Each stage has been adapted to suit the higher education context, and includes ways in which institutions can focus their marketing efforts to achieve each stage. This customer-based brand equity pyramid for higher education can be used to guide marketing activities for Universities internationally.

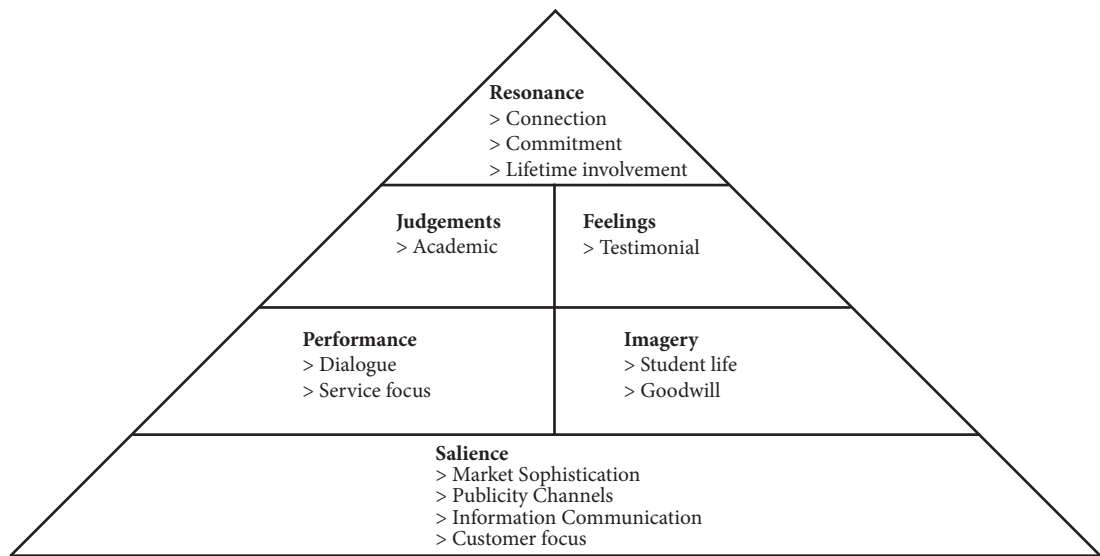


Figure 4.1: Customer-based brand equity pyramid for higher education

Brand Salience (brand awareness) for higher education includes market sophistication, publicity channels, information communication, and customer focus as its key elements. Market sophistication refers to promotional and advertising activities, in that they should be calculated and sensitive to market needs. Publicity channels refers to the different ways in which Universities can build awareness internationally, including international alliances (research collaboration, double degrees), exchange partners, government agencies, and recruitment agents. Information communication refers to the way information is received by students, primarily this comes from the web. Customer focus refers to relationship management and marketing of customers and agents.

Brand Meaning (performance and imagery) performance is measure by the amount of dialogue between the University and customer in the form of feedback forums, focus groups and one-on-one interviews. A second measure of performance is service focus which encompasses application processing, response to enquiries and generally managing expectations. Imagery includes enhanced experience (support services) and goodwill (generated through value-adding exercises such as field trips, orientation programs and student camps).

Brand Responses (judgements and feelings) – judgements are gauged by the academic strengths of a University relative to their identified competitors, including unique program offerings. Feelings are measured in the form of testimonials. Testimonial is used as a term to describe a student's story and not simply a sound bite used in marketing material.

Brand Relationships (resonance) is the ultimate in loyalty in the higher education industry. It is defined by three components: connection (through social networking media and online brand communities), commitment (repeat purchase in the form of further study) and lifetime involvements (engagement in alumni network).

chapterfive

conclusions

5.1 Conclusions

The findings of this research provided evidence that the customer-based brand equity model can be applied to the higher education context and used to guide marketing activities for Universities internationally. This chapter provides a summary of the paper and evidence that the purpose has been fulfilled. Following this, the implications for branding theory and higher education marketing are discussed, before concluding with the limitations of this study and opportunities for further research.

5.2 Summary

The paper began with a review of literature on customer-based brand equity theory and marketing of higher education in chapter 1. The knowledge gap identified for this study was the key elements of customer-based brand equity applied in a higher education context. Despite the large amounts of research into brand equity, none appeared to have focused on higher education. Moreover, there had been no research conducted in this realm that used cases from Australia and Sweden.

Chapter 2 explored existing literature on branding theory and higher education marketing in order to provide a clear understanding of the key theoretical foundations of this study. It explored theory on brand equity in general and more specifically theory on customer-based brand equity. There was a section on higher education that explored the challenges that exist in this sector, the literature on the marketing and branding of higher education, and a discussion on previous research relevant to this study. Resulting from this review of literature was the theoretical framework used to guide the empirical research.

The methodology chapter described how this study was undertaken. It began with a methodological overview defining the research strategy and design, followed by the research objectives. The justified methods of data collection were semi-structured interviews and a qualitative content analysis.

The presentation of empirical findings detailed the outcomes of the research for the semi-structured interviews and qualitative web content analysis. In the following analysis section the empirical findings were analysed and integrated into each stage of Keller's (2001 & 2008) model for building customer-based brand equity. The empirical findings from the interviews provided the majority of the material used in this analysis with the findings from the web content analysis providing support material. The two methods were combined to provide an in depth analysis of each stage of the model. The end result was an adaptation of Keller's (2001 & 2008) model. Each stage of this model was adapted to suit the higher education context, and included areas in which institutions can focus their marketing efforts to achieve each stage. This adapted customer-based brand equity pyramid for higher education can be used to guide marketing activities for Universities internationally.

5.3 Fulfilment of Purpose

The intent of this research was to identify the elements of customer-based brand equity applied in a higher education context by using existing theory. Despite the large amounts of research into brand equity, none appeared to have focused on higher education, which is how I arrived at the purpose for this research. The purpose of this study was to explore the application of existing brand equity theory to international higher education. The study used Keller's (2001 & 2008) model on building customer-based brand equity and established how it could be transferred to higher education. The findings of the empirical research converged with the theoretical framework in section 4.2 – Analysis. Within this section each stage of the theoretical model was addressed with relevance to higher education and thus the model was adapted for this context. The result of this paper involved a fulfilment of the purpose, which was to apply customer-based brand equity theory to higher education.

5.4 Implications for branding theory

This paper did not set out to establish a new brand equity theory. Rather, it took an existing theory and applied it to an unexplored context. The outcomes of this are two-fold; first, it demonstrates that Keller's (2001 & 2008) customer-based brand equity model can be applied to higher education, and second it provides an initial step into advancing research into higher education marketing. The findings of this study do not claim to be all encompassing in its applicability to higher education, i.e. in no way do I claim that the adapted customer-based brand equity model will be applicable in all higher education environments. Instead, this study explores a new realm of treating a University brand as an entity in its own right when it comes to brand research. There is plenty of room for further research into branding within the higher education context.

5.5 Implications higher education marketing

On the surface the findings of this study could appear to be largely contextual in that it only uses cases from two countries, Australia and Sweden. As a consequence I initially thought that the transferability or generalizability of the findings would be somewhat constrained to the cases used in this research. However, following the analysis of the empirical research I feel that there were outcomes that can be applied to other Universities within Australia and Sweden. This is exemplified by the fact that all of the case Universities were heavily engaged in international cooperations with other institutions around the world. As a consequence, I feel that the findings identifying the elements of brand equity for this context could be used in countries other than Australia and Sweden. Universities engaged in, or looking to engage in, international marketing activities could benefit from the findings of this research in focusing their marketing efforts to build brand equity.

5.6 Limitations

This study looks at customer-based brand equity from the supply side (i.e. Universities) only and is thus lacking the customer's perspective when it comes to their impressions of brand equity elements. Further, this study does not provide mechanisms for measuring customer-based brand equity in HE, rather it just identifies the key elements.

5.7 Further Research

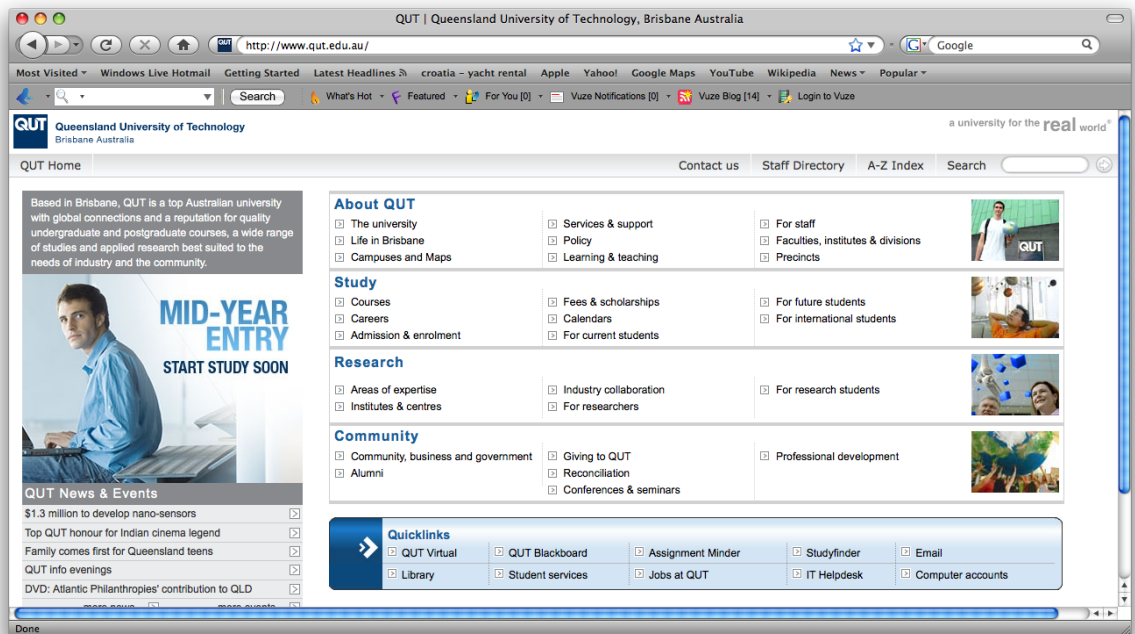
Opportunities for further research exist in researching the elements of customer-based brand equity from the demand-side as well as developing a theoretical model to measure it. This could be performed by a longitudinal study of students undertaking international study at a range of Universities across a range of countries. This would provide for better insight into building brand equity in different educational contexts, thus increasing the transferability of findings to more cultures. It is hoped that this research will encourage further investigation into the area of customer-based brand equity in higher education. In particular in the Swedish context as the institutions will soon need to compete globally for international students once they begin charging tuition fees. Moreover, the distribution of scholarships by Universities were not considered as a marketing function for the sake of this study, and thus wasn't a focus of the research, however this could be explored.

appendices

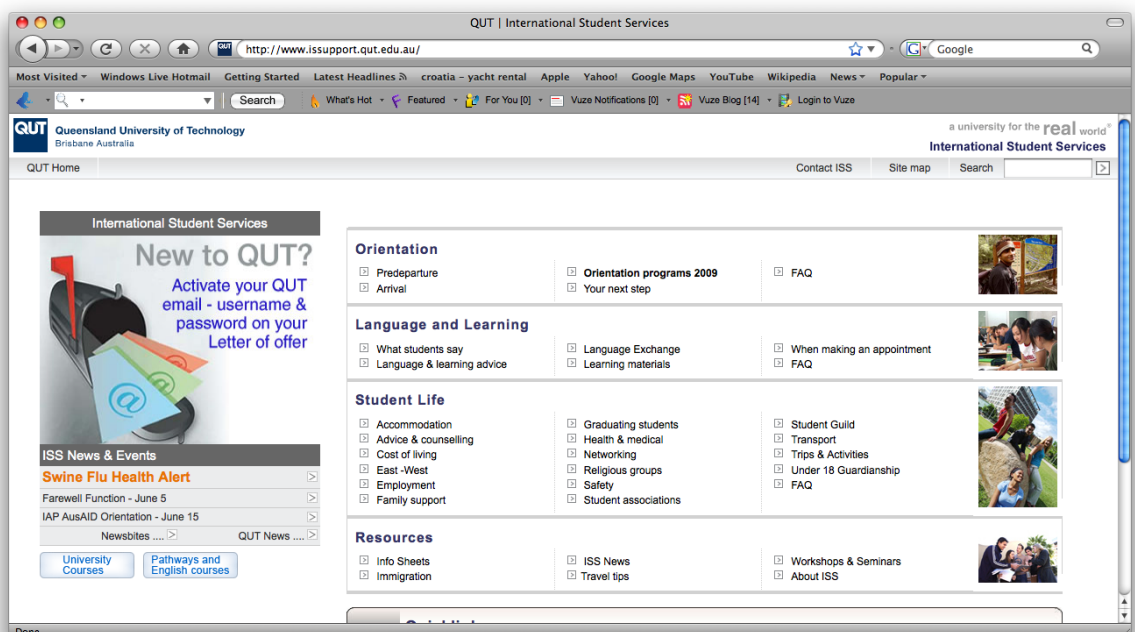
Appendix 1: Interviewee Profiles

Name	Position	University	Contact Details
Stacey Walker	International Regional Manager (Europe & Americas and Study Abroad)	Queensland University of Technology, Australia	Telephone: +61 423 845 686 Email: stacey.walker@qut.edu.au
Kelly Donohue	International Marketing Manager (responsible for international relationships and partnerships within Europe)	James Cook University, Australia	Telephone: +61 409 644 961 Email: kelly.donohue@jcu.edu.au
Caroline Runéus	Kommunikationschef (Communication Manager)	Lund University, Sweden	Telephone: +46 46-2227041 Email: Caroline.Runeus@rektor.lu.se
Paul Parker	English web editor,	Stockholm University, Sweden	Telephone: +46 73-656 10 34 Email: paul.parker@kommunikation.su.se

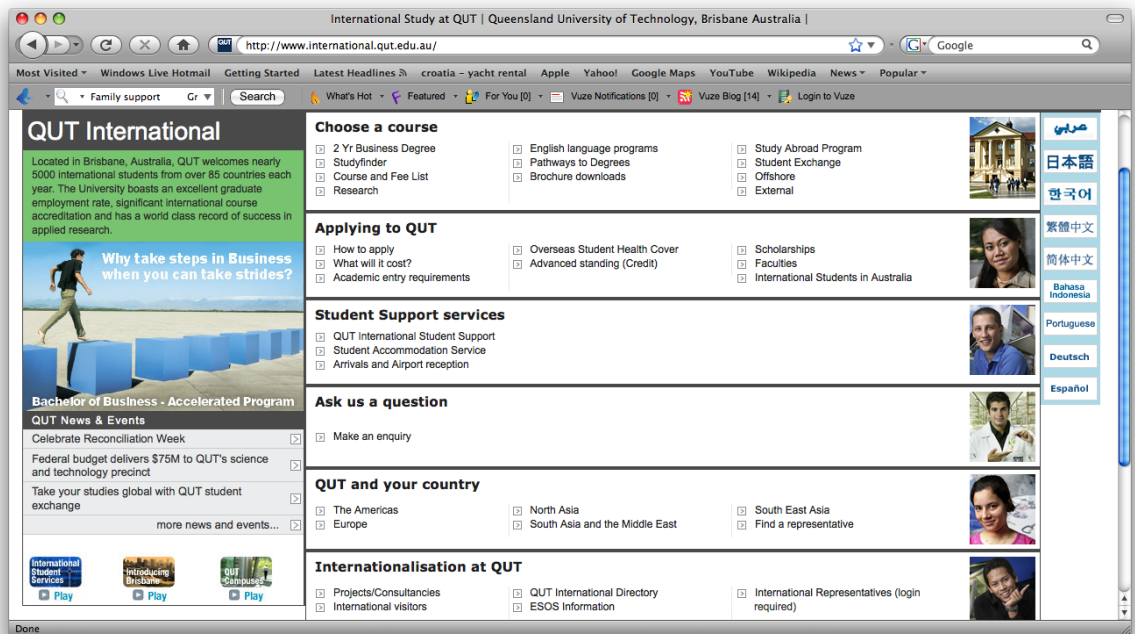
Appendix 2: QUT Homepage



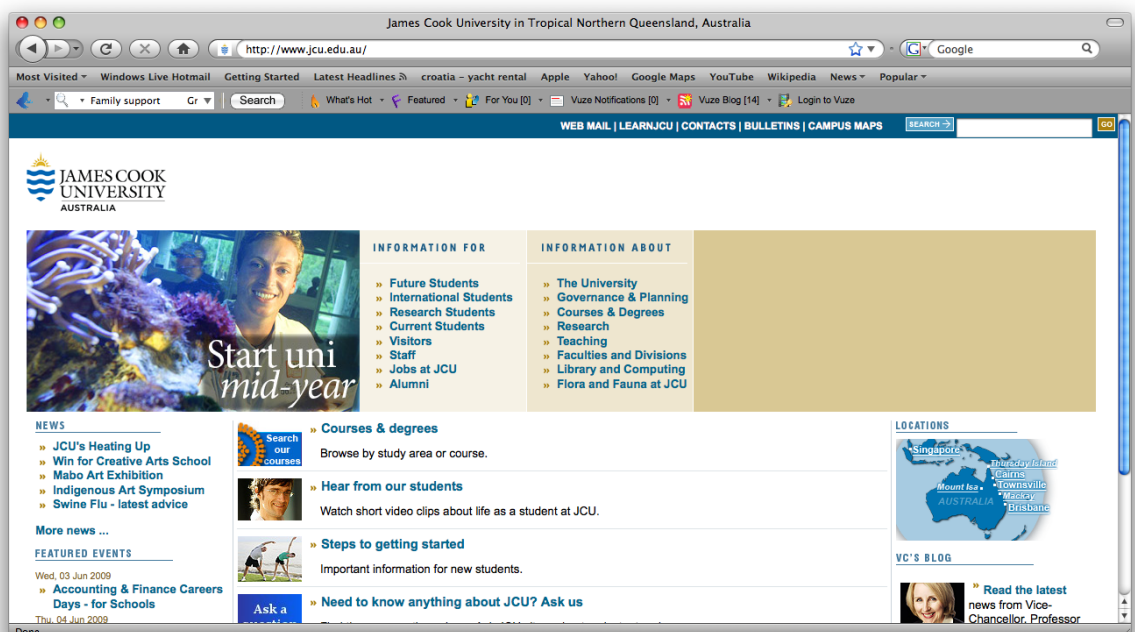
Appendix 3: QUT Current International Students Website



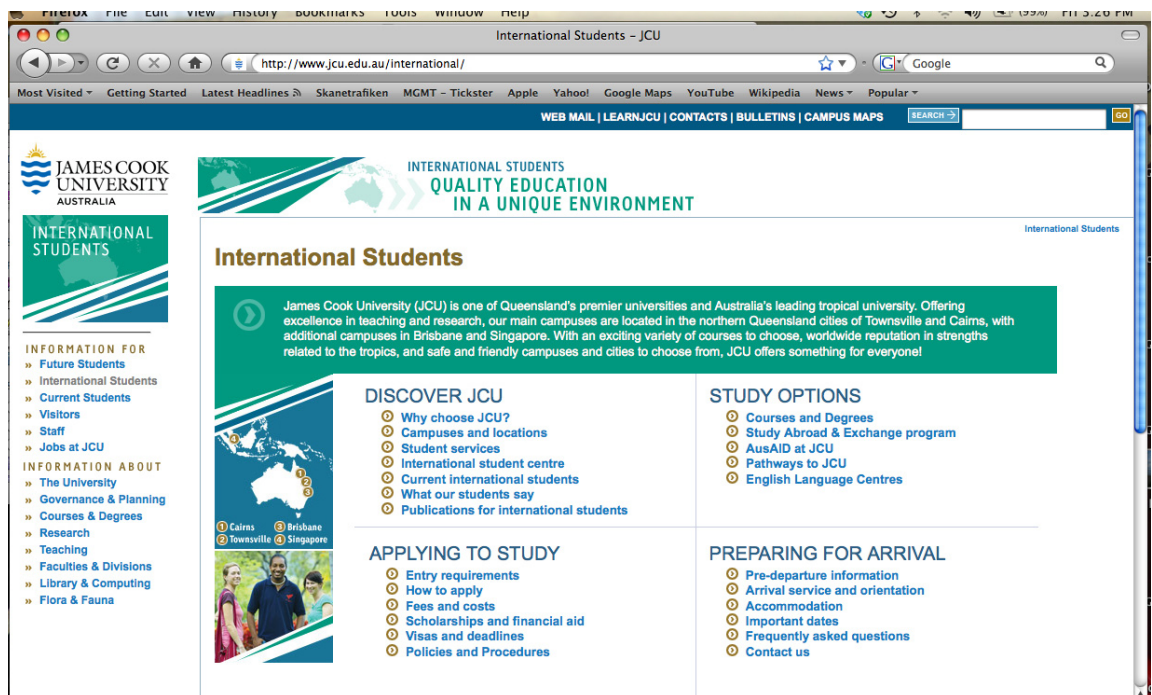
Appendix 4: QUT Future International Students Website



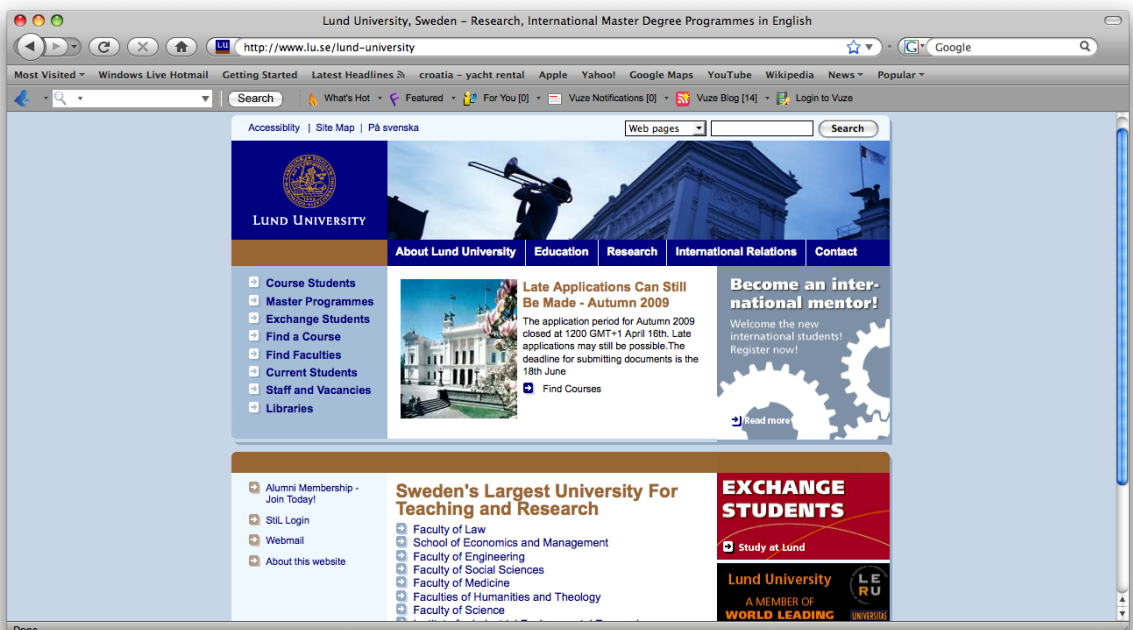
Appendix 5: JCU Homepage



Appendix 6: JCU International homepage



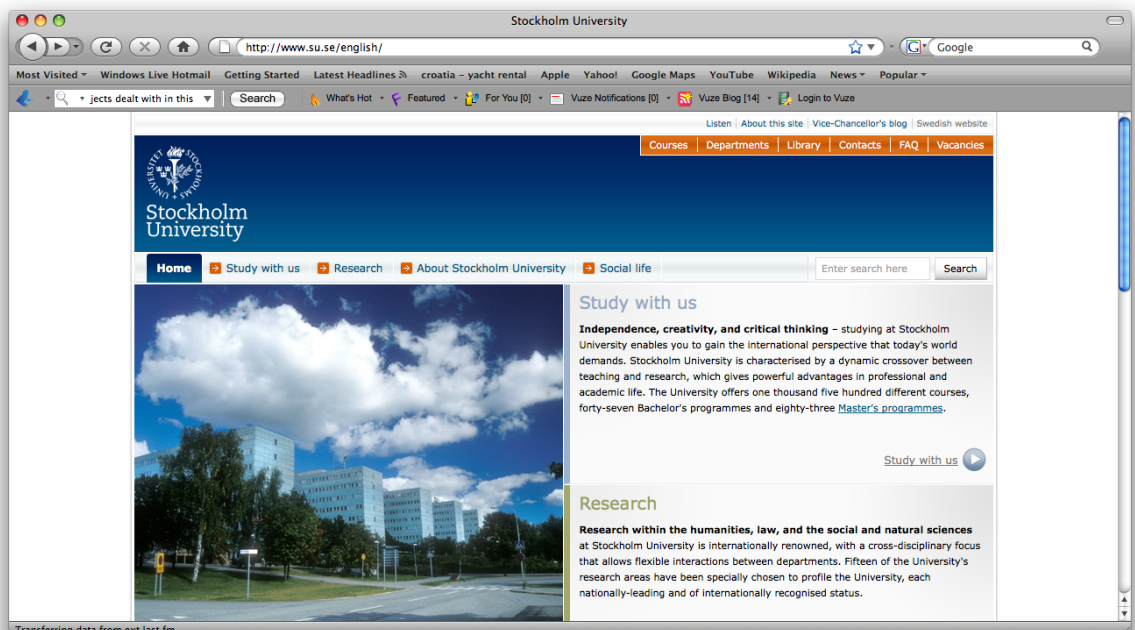
Appendix 7: Lund University homepage



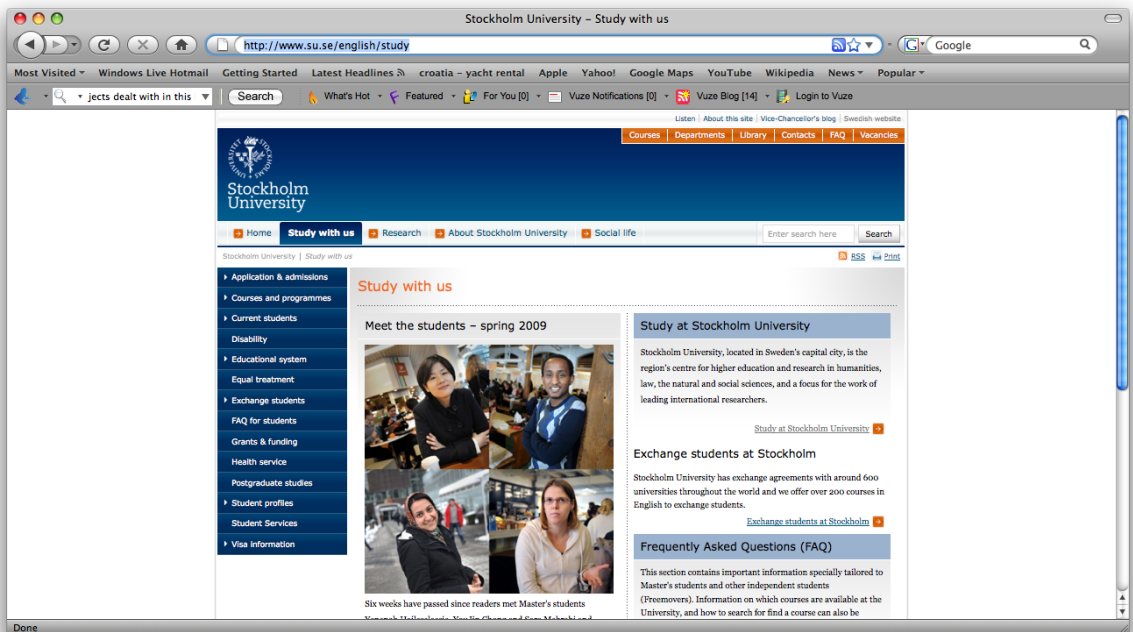
Appendix 8: LU International Relations homepage



Appendix 9: Stockholm University English homepage



Appendix 10: Stockholm University 'Study with us' homepage



glossary

Agent is any form of third-party service provider. In this context it covers student recruitment agents and government agencies.

Double-degrees are programs that taught across two institutions (i.e. two campuses) and are accredited by both institutions. The student thus holds a degree from two institutions.

Full Degree refers to enrolment within a full award program, i.e. an undergraduate, postgraduate, or PhD study program.

Pathway programs a University will accept students from a feeder institution, be it from a diploma program within their institution, or from another institution either onshore or offshore.

Postgraduate Program refers to Masters studies, or studies undertaken after the completion of an Undergraduate program.

Study Abroad is the program whereby students study at a University on a fee-paying basis for one or two terms/semesters. Students do not take out an award or degree from the host University, however it is possible that the credit for study be transferred to another University degree, usually in the student's home country. It is also possible for students to undertake a Study Abroad semester without being currently being enrolled in a University degree.

Top-up programs involve the host institution accrediting prior studies from another institution (usually a vocationally focused degree/diploma) toward a bachelor degree. Students are usually required to complete a minimum of one years' study at the host institution.

Undergraduate Program refers to studies at the Bachelor level.

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