Open University of Cyprus

FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT

BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (MBA)

MASTER THESIS

BRAND EQUITY OF OPEN UNIVERSITY OF CYPRUS

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

ΕΙΣΑΓΩΓΗ: Τα τελευταία χρόνια ο ανταγωνισμός μεταξύ των πανεπιστημίων έχει αυξηθεί σημαντικά, το γεγονός αυτό οδήγησε πολλά πανεπιστήμια στο να υιοθετήσουν νέες στρατηγικές μάρκετινγκ, όπως το branding (Becher & Trowler, 2001). Αυτή η μορφή μάρκετινγκ εξελίχθηκε διαμέσου των αιώνων, όπου αρχικά χρησιμοποιήθηκε για να υποδεικνύει την ιδιοκτησία και την ποιότητα των ζώων και κρεάτων, ενώ σήμερα εκφράζει τα ιδανικά και τις προσωπικότητες του πελάτη (Chapleo, 2015, Briciu & Briciu, 2016). Σκοπός αυτής της εργασίας είναι η διερεύνηση της αξίας της Εταιρικής επωνυμίας (Branding Equity) του Ανοικτού Πανεπιστημίου Κύπρου (ΑΠΚΥ).

ΣΥΛΛΟΓΗ ΔΕΔΟΜΕΝΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΔΙΑΔΙΚΑΣΙΑ ΑΝΑΛΥΣΗΣ: Αυτή η μελέτη βασίστηκε στη συλλογή δεδομένων, μέσω ερωτηματολογίου και από δευτερεύοντες πηγές, ενώ οι τεχνικές ανάλυσης δεδομένων που χρησιμοποιήθηκαν ήταν: ποσοστιαία ανάλυση και στατιστικά εργαλεία όπως ο μέσος όρος, η τυπική απόκλιση (Standard Deviation) και η ακριβής δοκιμή του Fisher (Fisher Exact Test).

ΑΠΟΤΕΛΕΣΜΑΤΑ: Συνολικά υπήρξαν 105 απαντήσεις, εκ των οποίων 35% συνδέονται με το ΑΠΚΥ, είτε ως υπάλληλοί (διοικητικοί ή ακαδημαϊκοί), είτε ως απόφοιτοι, είτε ως φοιτητές ή ως συνδυασμός των τριών. Συνοπτικά, τα αποτελέσματα της μελέτης ήταν τα εξής: Οι ερωτήσεις σχετικά με το πόσοι αναγνωρίζουν την Επωνυμία ΑΠΚΥ, υπογραμμίζουν την ανάγκη για περαιτέρω έρευνα και πιο επιθετικές στρατηγικές μάρκετινγκ, καθώς μόνο το ήμισυ των κατοίκων της Κύπρου και μόνο το 25% των μη Κυπρίων απάντησαν θετικά. Επιπλέον, το 17% πιστεύει ότι το ΑΠΚΥ είναι μέρος του Πανεπιστημίου Κύπρου, οι μισοί εκ των οποίων ήδη γνωρίζουν το ΑΠΚΥ, ενώ ένας εκ των οποίων είναι φοιτητής και ο άλλος απόφοιτος. Ένα άλλο απογοητευτικό αποτέλεσμα προήλθε από την ερώτηση "Πιστεύετε ότι τα πτυχία του ΑΠΚΥ είναι ισοδύναμα, διαπιστευμένα και αξιόπιστα;" όπου το 69% των ατόμων που δεν συνδέονται με το ΑΠΚΥ και το 16% των ατόμων που σχετίζονται απάντησαν αρνητικά ή δεν ήταν σίγουροι. Ενώ η πλειοψηφία (78%) αυτών των ατόμων δηλώνουν ότι δεν έχουν σκοπό να διεκδικήσουν ένα, υποθετικό, πτυχίο στο μέλλον από το ΑΠΚΥ. Ενώ στο ερώτημα σχετικά με το λογότυπο του ΑΠΚΥ τα περισσότερα άτομα το συνέδεσαν με αρνητικά συναισθήματα. Επίσης η αντίληψή τους όσον αφορά τα αυτοπεριγραφικά χαρακτηριστικά του Πανεπιστημίου χρειάζεται βελτίωση. Συνεπώς, για να επιτευχθεί η συσχέτιση του λογότυπου με τα προαναφερθέντα χαρακτηριστικά από το ευρύ κοινό, πρέπει πρώτα να τα πιστεύουν και να τα στηρίζουν οι διοικητικές και ακαδημαϊκές κοινότητες του ΑΠΚΥ. Το να πιστεύει η ίδια η οικογένεια του ΑΠΚΥ στο όραμα του οργανισμού και να μπορεί να μεταδώσει αυτή την αγάπη στους πελάτες είναι από της πιο σημαντικές προϋποθέσεις για μια επιτυχημένη Επωνυμία (Brand). Ακολούθως οι συμμετέχοντες ερωτήθηκαν αν θα πρότειναν το ΑΠΚΥ σε τρίτους, ώστε να καταγραφεί η εμπιστοσύνη και αφοσίωση τους προς το Πανεπιστήμιο. Στην ερώτηση αυτή το 61% απάντησε ναι, ενώ το 19% απάντησε όχι. Από την τελευταία ομάδα όμως το 16% είναι υπάλληλοι (1/3 εκ των οποίων είναι ή να ήταν φοιτητής στο ΑΠΚΥ) ενώ το 3% είναι απόφοιτοι του ΑΠΚΥ. Άτομα με τέτοιες πεποιθήσεις θα μπορούσαν να επηρεάσουν αρνητικά τη φήμη του Πανεπιστημίου και, συνεπώς, να βλάψουν την εικόνα του. Αυτά τα δεδομένα υποδηλώνουν την ανάγκη του να εξεταστεί και να βελτιωθεί η εσωτερική κουλτούρα του ΑΠΚΥ, όπως επίσης στο να βελτιωθεί η ποιότητα των υπηρεσιών που προσφέρονται. Ένας από τους σημαντικότερους παράγοντες για μια σταθερή και θετική Επωνυμία είναι η θετική σύσταση του ΑΠΚΥ σε τρίτους, επομένως η ικανοποίηση των πελατών και των εργαζομένων πρέπει να αποτελεί προτεραιότητα. Από το 19% που απάντησε όχι, οι τέσσερις κύριοι λόγοι της αρνητικής τους στάσης ήταν: το γεγονός ότι δεν υπάρχουν προϋποθέσεις για εισδοχή, έλλειψη οργάνωσης, χαμηλή ποιότητα διδασκαλίας και πτυχία χαμηλού κύρους. Με βάση τα αποτελέσματα αυτής της μελέτης, έγιναν και κάποιες εισηγήσεις. Ελπίσουμε η μελέτη αυτή να παράσχει έστω τις βασικές πληροφορίες που απαιτούνται για τη δημιουργία μιας δυνατής Επωνυμίας για το Πανεπιστήμιο, με την προώθηση των Θεματικών ενοτήτων και με το να καθιερώσει το ΑΠΚΥ ως ένα επιτυχημένο και μοναδικό πανεπιστήμιο στην αγορά. Ωστόσο, πρέπει πάντα να έχουμε υπόψη ότι, παρά τη βιβλιογραφία που παρατίθεται σχετικά με το brand μάρκετινγκ στην τριτοβάθμιας εκπαίδευσης, πρέπει να είμαστε ρεαλιστές και να έχουμε κατά νου ότι η δημιουργία μιας Πανεπιστημιακής Επωνυμίας είναι πολύ περίπλοκη.

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The competition among Universities skyrocketed in the past few years, which has driven Universities to adopt new marketing strategies such as branding (Becher & Trowler, 2001). Branding, the main focus of this study, has evolved over the centuries, from originally been used to mark ownership and convey the quality of livestock to today's concept where it expresses customer's ideals and personalities (Chapleo, 2015; Briciu & Briciu, 2016). The purpose of this thesis is to investigate OUC's Brand Equity, via carrying out a survey among its stakeholders.

DATA COLLECTION and ANALYSIS PROCESS

This study was based on the collection of primary data, via a questionnaire, and secondary data. The data analysis techniques used were: percentage analysis and statistical tools such as mean, Standard Deviation and Fisher Exact Test.

RESULTS

In total there were 105 responses, 35% of which were associated with OUC, being either an Employee (Administrative or Academic), alumni, student or a combination of all three. In summary the results of the study were the following: Brand recall questions, emphasize the necessity for further research and more aggressive marketing strategies, as only half of the Cypriot residents and only 25% of the non-Cypriots recalled OUC. Furthermore 17% of responders, actually believed that OUC is part of the University of Cyprus, with more than half already being familiar with OUC, while two of them are a current student and an alumna. Another disappointing result came from the question "Do you believe OUC's degrees are equivalent, accredited and trustworthy?" where 69% of those not associated with OUC and 16% of those associated with the University gave a negative reply or were not sure. With the majority (78%) of these individuals stating that would not consider OUC for a future hypothetical degree. Whereas questions concerning Brand Image value have indicated that most individuals associate OUC logo with negative feelings, while their perception in regards to OUC self-descriptive characteristics needs to be improved for all attributes. However, before aiming for the brand to be associated with these characteristics by the general public, they must be believed and embraced by OUC's administrative and academic societies. One of the most important factors in brand marketing is for the organization's team to believe in its vision and pass this belief and love to the customers. To test Brand Loyalty, responders were asked if they would recommend OUC to others. Eighty-one percent replied yes, while 19% replied no. From the last group 16% are employees (with one third of them also being a current or a former OUC student) and the 3% being OUC alumni. Individuals with such beliefs could affect OUC's reputation and thus damage its Brand Image. This data suggests that OUC should examine how to improve the internal culture of the University and aim for a high standard of quality in all services offered. Peer recommendation is one of the most important factors for a solid and positive brand, and thus customer and employee satisfaction should be a priority. Out of the 19% that replied no, their 4 main reasons for this negative attitude were: the fact that there are no prerequisites for admission, lack of organization, poor quality of teaching and low prestige degrees.

Based on the results of this study a number of recommendation have been given and discussed throughout the chapters. Hopefully, these will provide the essential information needed to create a solid brand, reinforce advertising, promote courses and establish OUC as a successful and unique University in the market. However, one must always keep in mind that despite literature on Higher Education Branding, one must be realistic and have in mind that University Branding is too complex to express in a concise brand scheme.

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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

The competition among Universities skyrocketed in the past few years, in fact research shows that within the past twenty years there is a fundamental shift in the global higher education market. This increased competition has driven Universities to adopt new marketing strategies such as branding (Becher & Trowler, 2001). The Open University of Cyprus (hereafter known as "OUC"), has not been left unaffected, and even though it is quite a young University it is facing a crisis, experiencing a decrease in student registration.

The reason open and distance Universities have been impacted more by this increased competition is that more and more of the conventional Universities around the globe now offer long distance courses, in addition, e-learning platforms are springing up like mushrooms offering long-distance courses as well. Any University, including OUC, must act quickly and adjust to these changes, i.e. evolve technologically, academically and more importantly adjust their marketing strategy in order to maintain and increase their share in the education market.

Marketing is the key to surviving this crisis. Through brand management it can increase the University's competitive advantage and market share. As a result, an ever growing number of Universities are now managed as corporate brands (Chapleo, 2015). Branding, the main focus of this study, has evolved over the centuries, from originally been used to mark ownership and convey the quality of livestock to today's concept where it expresses customer's ideals and personalities (Chapleo, 2015; Briciu & Briciu, 2016). A successful Branding Strategy can only be considered as an asset, if it can sustain a competitive advantage, increase profitability and market performance (Chernatony & McDonald, 2005).

1.1. THESIS AIM

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate OUC's Brand Equity, via carrying out a survey among its stakeholders. Hopefully, the results will provide the essential information needed to create a solid brand, reinforce advertising, promote courses and establish OUC as a successful and unique University in the market.

1.2. CASE STUDY SELECTED: OPEN UNIVERSITY OF CYPRUS

The Open University of Cyprus (OUC), was founded in 2002 and is the only one of the three State Universities in Cyprus that is entirely dedicated to open and distance education. OUC offers 26 programs of study in "classical" and contemporary scientific fields in both Greek and English at the Undergraduate, Master and Doctoral level. OUC has no age limit, financial or social preconditions in accepting students (OUC, n.d.).

1.2.1. BRIEF HISTORY

OUC was established in 2002, whereas the first group of students was admitted in 2006, which made up the first graduate group in 2008. Half of its budget comes from the Cypriot Government and since February 1st, 2018, the day on which the University became independent, the management of the University is no longer a Steering Committee, instead its governance includes the Council, the Senate, the Rector, Vice- Rector, the Faculties' Internal Boards and the Deans (*Figure 1*) (OUC, n.d.).

Figure 1: OUC management organization chart
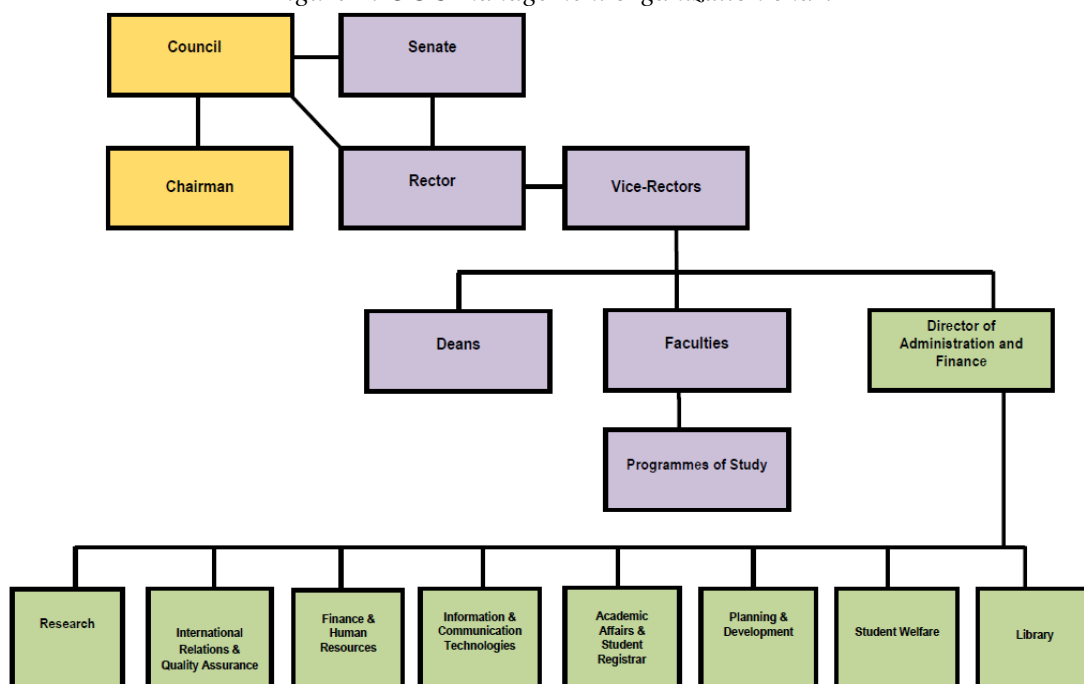
1.2.2. FACTS AND FIGURES

Currently, OUC employees 84 administrative, 25 permanent academic research personnel and 350 adjunct academic tutors. The graph below shows the change in the total number of personnel employed at the University throughout the years 2004-2018 (*Figure 2*) (OUC, n.d.).

Figure 2: OUC employee shift 2004-2018
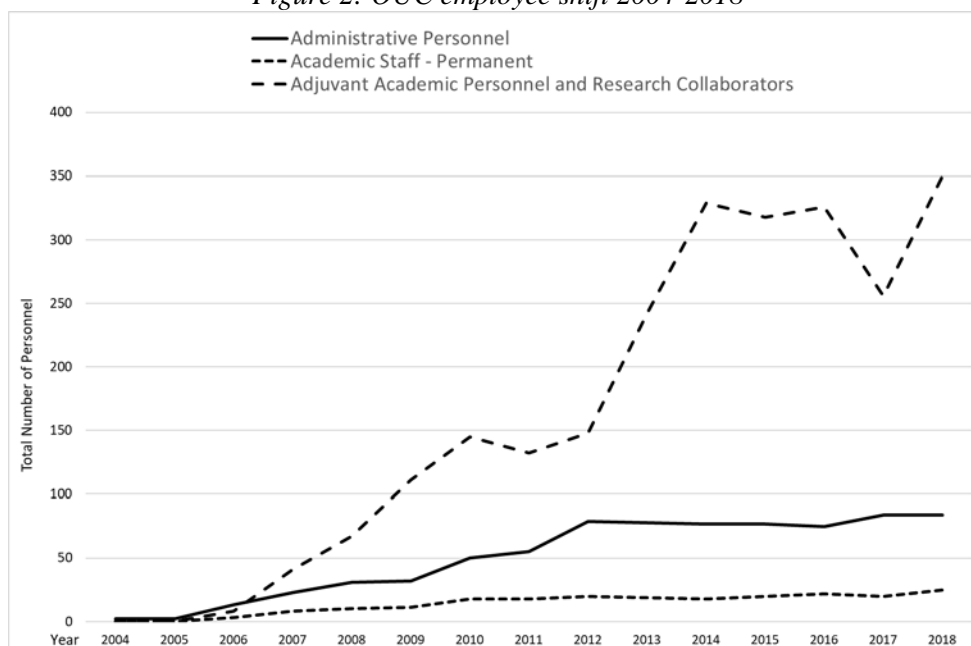
During the academic year 2018-2019 a total of 4100 students have been enrolled to the University. *Figure 3* shows the change in the total number of students' applications, new entrances and number of graduates through the years 2004-2018 (OUC, n.d.).

Figure 3: Number of students and graduates 2004-2018
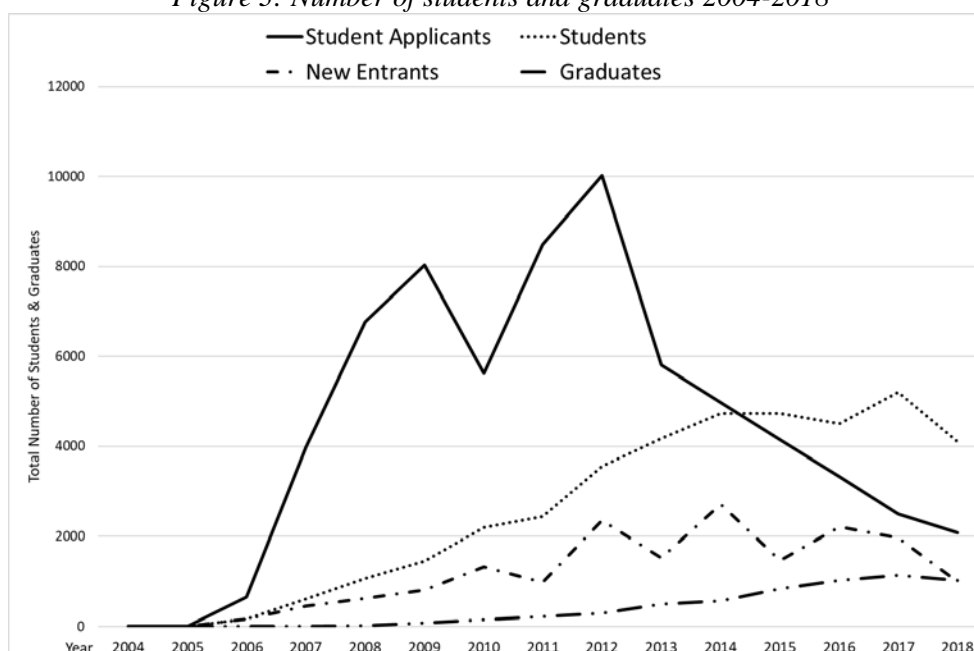
According to OUC's student data, 35% live in Cyprus and 63% in Greece with only 2% being from a total of 34 other countries (*Figure 4*). Around 59.6% are women and the rest (40.4%) are men. Seventy-four percent of all students being within the age range 26 to 45 years old, while the average age is 38 (OUC, n.d.).

3

Figure 4: Student distribution according to Country of origin.
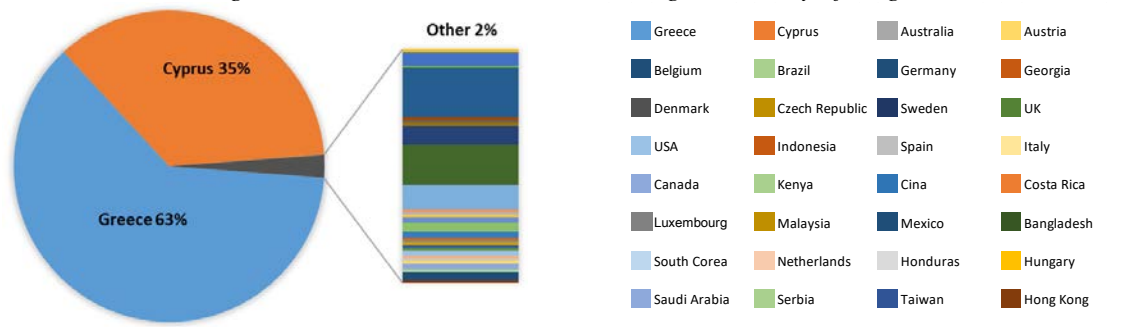
OUC, as previously stated, is both governmental and privately founded. For the year 2018-2019 OUC has received €5.737.510 as a Government Grant, whereas €6.142.490 have been received from student tuitions and research grants (*Figure 5*) (OUC, n.d.).

Figure 5: OUC budgets through the years 2004-2018
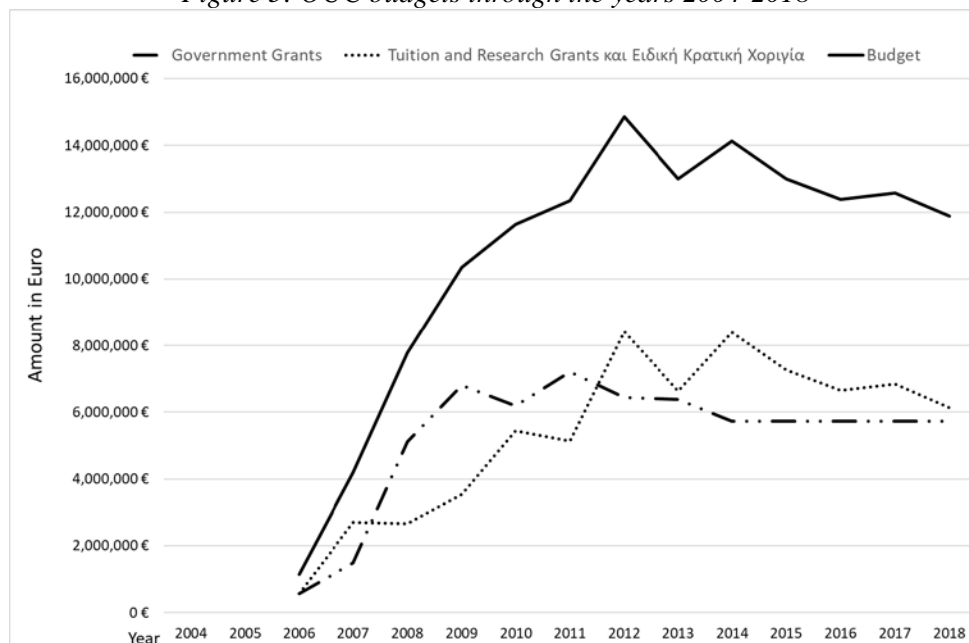
1.2.3. STAKEHOLDERS

There are 10 categories of stakeholders:

- Students
- Graduates
- Administrative Personnel
- Permanent Academic Research Personnel
- Adjunct Academic Tutors
- Management

- Government
- Other professional bodies
- The Community around the University and in Cyprus in general
- Local Media

1.2.4. COMPETITORS

The evolution of technology has allowed the development of new forms of delivering education, where it is no longer bound by rigid constrains such as space, time and pedagogical methods. Today the process of gaining skills, competences and knowledge is simpler, more direct, more flexible and accessible, as more and more Universities around the globe offer long distance courses, in addition to the emergence of e-learning platforms that offer single modules or entire degrees at the touch of your fingertips. Consequently, OUC's competitors are not only Universities in Cyprus and Greece. Thus, if it misses out in marketing and evolving technologically and academically it will soon lose its marketing position. It must adopt and evolve along with its competitors. However, if we consider that the majority of OUC students are Greek speakers (98%) then its main competitors are Universities that offer long-distance courses in Greek (*Table 1*).

Table 1: List of Universities in Cyprus and Greece offering online (long-distance) courses.

Cyprus Established Campuses

Open University of Cyprus
European University Cyprus
Frederick University
University of Nicosia
Neapolis University
The Cyprus Institute of Marketing BVI (CIM, BVI)

Foreign University Campuses in Cyprus

University of Central Lancashire
University of the West of England
University of the West of Scotland

Greece Established Campuses

Hellenic Open University
Business College Athens (BCA)
National and Kapodistrian University
National Technical University of Athens
ICon College

1.3. BRANDING UNIVERSITIES

Every year millions of people seek for the right University for them, either as a first degree, or for a master or a specialty certification for job advancement. Everyone is looking for the edge that will help them advance in their career or land their dream job. Thus, choosing the right University most probably is one of the most difficult decisions in life. Students must go through a process of selection and elimination that requires lots of research and time, during this process students take into consideration the brand equity and differentiation of the University in addition to the prestige of its degrees (Schoenfeld & Bruce, 2005). Consequently, it is crucial for Universities to acknowledge and pursuit their marketability to prospective students, through a powerful brand identity that will set them on the map and act as a recruitment tool. According to Scarborough, 2007, a University must not only implement a brand strategy, but it must also be appealing to a target audience, to be separate from an overall marketing strategy and be differentiated in a flooded market (Scarborough, 2007; Hinds, et al., 2010).

1.3.1. NEED FOR UNIVERSITY DIFFERENTIATION

As students become more demanding in their choices for University, the competition increase and this subsequently increases the need for each University to differentiate itself from the market. However, in order to successful differentiate and gain a competitive advantage an Institution requires more than traditional advertising; according to Lancendorfer (2007), it must create a consistent and powerful brand identity by amplifying the qualities that set it apart (Lancendorfer, 2007; Hinds, et al., 2010). Further supported by a 2005, Perkin and Will, presentation: Institutes that manage, craft and present a unified brand identity, experience and unique environment, are able to not only retain but also build loyalty amongst their alumni, students, administrative personnel, faculty and benefactors (Perkins & Will, 2005). Therefore, it is crucial that a University integrates its brand into an engaging, memorable and of course unique and thus identifiable experience. But for such a brand concept to be shaped, a number of factors come into play, such as, the University's academic reputation, location, distinguished alumnae, expense, teaching quality, flexibility, the learning environment and the quality of its services.

1.3.1.1. DIFFICULTY IN UNIVERSITY DIFFERENTIATION

The external environment, the demand for knowledge by employers and the necessity for education in order to advance in your career, have increased radically. These possess the biggest

challenge, because, not all Universities can adapt and react to the demands of the market. The pace is must faster than what are most Universities capable of following, in terms not only of culture, but also of technology and budgeting. Unfortunately, those that are not embracing a more competitive branding strategies and an internal culture change, are seeing a decrease in student enrollment (Chapleo, 2015).

1.4. IMPORTANCE OF BRADNING

As already mentioned competition is fierce, and students are becoming more and more demanding. People, today, are much more educated, time-pressed (most combine education with employment), but all expect lots more for what they pay, in terms of high quality teaching, excellent service and in the case of Universities, prestigious degrees. The ability of a brand to simplify decision-making and reduce the risk is, and, will always be invaluable. Thus, any institute that aims not only on its survival but also into a profitable future, must be able to satisfy the customer and must match its services and products to the customer's ever-changing requirements.

A brand is that promise given to the customer by the "seller" to deliver a specific set of services, products, attributes and high quality. Students, today, are more introspective and seek meaning in their choices, they have high levels of technological knowledge and skills, communication savvy and expect a well-developed brand (Perkins & Will, 2005). Just providing a quality education is not enough anymore, students need and seek for a "sense of place" and a "memorable experience" when they decide on what University to apply to. Consequently, the rationales for applying branding principles to Universities are evident, in fact branding is vital for a University's success and for attracting new students (Rauschnabela, et al., 2016)

As, excellently put, by McDonald and Christopher (1995) "It is not factories that make profits, but relationships with customers, and it is company and brand names which secure those relationships" (McDonald & Christopher, 1995). For a University to secure (customer) student relationship and build a successful brand must ensure high quality, operational functionality, and value stability of both services and products (i.e. degrees). Therefore, by aiming to provide students with an all rounded, unique experience will lead to more students being enrolled, primarily due to peer recommendations and that's what a brand is "A mixture of tangible and intangible attributes symbolized in a trademark, which, if properly managed, creates influence and generates value" (Duncan, 2005). These attributes are the University's name, reputation,

history and environment, as seen and felt by each students and how it affects their experiences, expectations and impression (Perkins & Will, 2005).

However, all that has been discussed do not only apply for students; a University, as any other type of organization, it should also aim to engage and retain its staff (administration and faculty) and any other stakeholder e.g. the funding-decision makers or the media. This is because "A great brand lives in the hearts and minds of its audience (Daryl Travis of Brandtrust - University Business, 2008). Therefore, it is necessary to build brand awareness strategies by instilling trust and loyalty among students and staff. However, this can only be achieved if all individuals, associated with the University, recommend it and if its name carries credibility, prestige, consistency and quality. According to Harris and de Chernatony, 2001, in order to maintain a competitive advantage a University must be able to communicate emotional values and the brands promise through its employees' interactions with different stakeholders, across all contact points (Harris & Chematony, 2001; Vallaster & Chernatony, 2005).

Modern times and competition demand key changes to by employed in the marketing strategies of higher education institutes. The aim of this study is to identify OUC brand value and how it is viewed by its stakeholders, but more importantly by its prospective students. By identifying all factors that strengthen or weaken OUC's brand, suggestions can be made and propose a way forward in developing and strengthening OUC's position in the educational market.

Chapter 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. A BRAND

In essence "a brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of these, intended to identify the products/services of a "seller"" (AMA, 2017). Whereas according to Hankinson and Cowing, 1993, branding is the creation of tangible values as well as intangible values that differentiate an organization from all others in the minds of the customer (Hankinson & Cowking, 1993).

2.1.1. BRIEF HISTORY OF BRANDING

According to Briciu 2016, branding is as old as the human civilization and even though the concept and use changed and evolved through history (*Figure 6), (Holland, 2017)*, two of the defining characteristics of brands have remained unchanged: first the information it provides to the interested party (i.e. in regards to quality etc.) and second the information in regards to the origin of the product (i.e. production, differentiated information etc.) (Briciu & Briciu, 2016).

Figure 6: The Evolving Meaning of Branding

https://www.skyword.com/contentstandard/creativity/branding-brief-history/
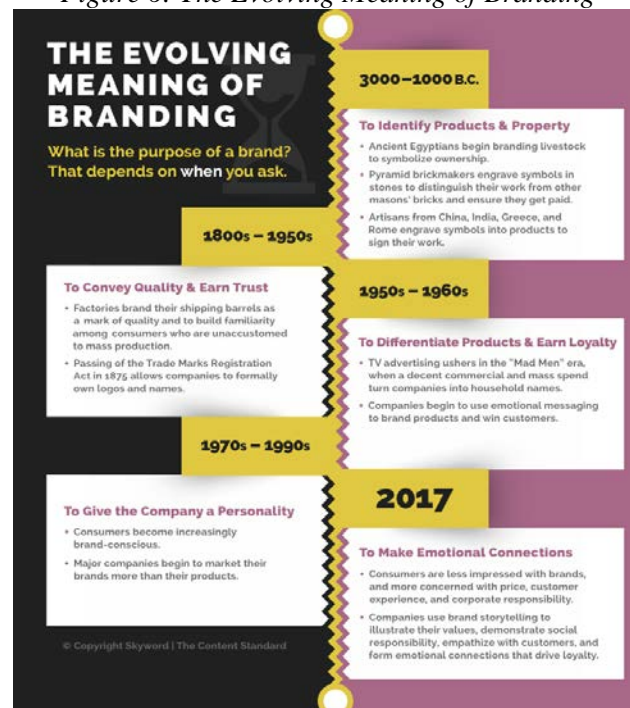
Branding was initially used to mark (brand) livestock, as evident from cave painting as old as 2000 years BC. Whereas pottery, dating as old as 4000 – 5000 years old, were marked to identify its origin, the material used and who made it (Briciu & Briciu, 2016). "Between 1600s and 1800s, criminals were branded, as a form of punishment and identification" (Rajaram & Shelly, 2012). Branding, later on, during the Renaissance, evolved, as artists like Leonardo Da Vinci began signing their work (Holland, 2017). A few centuries later, during the Industrial Revolution, factories introduced mass branding of products, which failed in terms of selling, as people were accustomed to buying local known products from merchants they knew. So then factories began branding logos onto their products to identify specific merchants, origins and quality. In the 19th century packaged branded products such as Coca-Cola were born, for which branding was used in an effort to increase buyer familiarity and loyalty to the product (Briciu & Briciu, 2016). So in 1875, the Trade Marks Registration Act was passed, which was the first legislation that recognized branding as something you own and aimed to protect it from competitors.

The next great milestone of branding occurred in 1889, when James Walter Thompson published The Thompson Blue and Red Books of Advertising, in which he gave the first definition of what we call branding, by explaining how to use trademarks for advertising. This led to a race between sellers in order to differentiate their brand, through the introduction of slogans, jingles, mascots and a range of other techniques. Through radio and television new branding strategies emerged that allowed the differentiation of products and introduced emotional connection with brands (Holland, 2017). In the 1950s, the concept of brand management (marketing) was developed, which began to put a face on each brand by telling a story with each advertisement and thus each company developed a strategic personality (Briciu & Briciu, 2016).

Thus, branding has evolved over the centuries and in the digital era it is more important than ever. However, now, competition is harder, quality standards are closer together and differentiating in an ocean of organizations, products and services is extremely difficult (Holland, 2017). Old-school advertising doesn't work anymore, consumers want to hear stories and be connected with a brand as they are more price-, socially- and of course brand-conscious. They want to feel secure about the brand they buy, and will do business with brands that support and value the same causes as them (Holland, 2017). In the early days of economic revolution customers had to accept what the manufactures produced, but, now, they are more demanding, educated and search for products that suit their ever changing life styles. Subsequently, their

expectations have increased forcing manufacturers, service providers and Universities to evolve in order to be able to satisfy them.

2.2. BRANDING

Through the creation of a great brand, an organization, including Universities, will gain increased word-of-mouth recommendations, improve customer (students and staff) retention, reduce cost of future marketing, drive customers' preferences for their services, reduce customer price sensitivity and sustain a high market share. A brand, in essence, adds dimensions (unique and timeless, tangible and intangible values) to the organization and differentiates it from the competitors (Hankinson & Cowking, 1993; King, 1991).

2.2.1. EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL BRANDS

Any product, any service, for which customers have a choice, then branding can be applied, for example:

- A person (e.g. Audrey Hepburn → lifestyle, elegance, fashion)
- A car (e.g. Rolls Royce (*Figure 7*) → luxury, being rich)

Figure 7: Rolls Royce advertising. Rolls Royce Branding Strategy

- A product (e.g. PlayStation → relax, friends, manly)
- An organization (e.g. UNICEF → charity, humanitarians, saving children)
- A service (e.g. FedEx (*Figure 8*) → overnight delivery)

Figure 8: FedEx advertising. Branding Strategy

- A symbol (e.g. Adidas three strips (*Figure 9*) → Impossible is nothing, push yourself to your limit, finest equipment/shoes/clothing, high street)

Figure 9: Adidas advertising. Branding Strategy

All of the aforementioned are considered successful brands as their name and, or symbol are unique and develop a set of deep positive associations with their audience. The personality, values and culture they represent defines an unmistakable essence that can only be considered as an asset, this essence in terms of marketing is called brand, brand equity.

2.2.2. WHY BRANDING IS SUCCESSFUL

Humans as a species require psychological support, a sense of belonging, fulfilment and a sense of purpose, and these can come from being part of a group, organization, religion or even a social class. Brands can actually, sometimes, help humans, in achieving these inner feelings and needs. By purchasing a specific brand, attending a specific University, being part of certain alumnae associations can make an individual have a sense of belonging, a sense of purpose, psychological support and life fulfilment (*Figure 10*). In fact, a University's stakeholders can be considered as a community, a brand community, who if they are strong, committed and deep

believers of that brand will increase the number of prospective students and reduce the power of competitor Universities.

Figure 10: Example of University Branding Marketing

By anthropomorphizing a brand (a product, a service, an organization) then customers can build a relationship with it. These type of relationships can be driven by a range of factors, all of which have as a base the customer's needs, which as aforementioned are psychological/emotional and social, but can also be physiological and cultural (Fournier, 1998).

2.3. BRAND EQUITY

The concept of brand equity appeared in the eighties and several definitions were proposed, but according to Keller, as given in a 2019 Hunt paper, "Brand equity may be viewed as the value that accrues to firms as a result of brand ownership. Ultimately, this value results from the positive associations that targeted consumers and industrial buyers have with respect to the brand" (D.Hunt, 2019). Brand equity, thus, is an important intangible asset that has both financial and psychological value to an organization/company. In fact, brand equity is the commercial value that arises from the perceptions of the customers in regards to the product or service, rather than the actual value of the product or service itself.

2.3.1. WHAT IS BRAND PERCEPTION

According to the Oxford Dictionary, perception is "The way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted. i.e. a person's intuitive understanding and insight". Thus, perception is the process of making sense of one's environment, i.e. it is how an individual not only selects but also organizes and interprets external stimuli (Fill, 2002). Subsequently, the organization and interpretation of stimuli, is influenced by our unique needs, values and expectations, thus perception can be quite different from one individual to another (Schiffman, et al., 2012). However, the process of perception in each person leads to specific emotional and functional associations that are assigned to a brand, and according to Kotler a brand is capable of conveying up to six different levels of meaning to a targeted audience, known as the "Six Dimensions of The Brand" (Kotler, 2005; Kotler, 1999):

1. Attributes/Characteristics (e.g. organized, structured)
2. Benefits, (what makes the brand attractive)
3. Values, (organizations, brand, mission and core values)
4. Culture, (sociocultural characteristics)
5. Personality, (anthropomorphic characteristics)
6. User/stakeholders, (all the relationships).

2.3.2. BRAND EQUITY FIVE DIMENSIONS

Through the literature there is a range of articles proposing Brand Equity dimensions, the most cited version is Aaker's, 1991, where he proposed the following five (Aaker, 1991; Buil, et al., 2013):

1. Brand Awareness
2. Brand Association
3. Brand Loyalty
4. Perceived Quality
5. Other Proprietary Brand Assets such as Brand Image

2.3.2.1. BRAND AWARENESS

Brand awareness is when the customer recognizes the brand either from advertising or prior experience. It can be measured by recording brand recognition and recall. Brand recognition is the customer's ability to identify/distinguish or confirm being previously exposed to the brand, whereas brand recall is when a customer can correctly remember the brand name, logo, slogan

and general attributes (Keller, 2008). Research, shows that high level of awareness and recognition is created across all its stakeholders through successful branding communication (Rauschnabel, et al., 2016; Chapleo, 2010).

2.3.2.2. BRAND ASSOCIATION

Brand association is defined as "anything linked in memory to a brand" (Aaker, 1991). A direct positive experience with a brand, that created strong associations and thus benefits brand equity (Khudi & Farjana, 2017).

2.3.2.3. BRAND LOYALTY

Brand loyalty is when a customer is committed to a specific brand despite marketing or situational changes, as the brand has created commitment with the customer due to its unique value associations matching up with the customers' preferences. It has created an emotional relationship with the customer (Khudi & Farjana, 2017).

2.3.2.4. PERCEIVED QUALITY

Perceived quality is defined as the customer's subjective valuation of the service or product rather than an objective valuation of the brand. This is where brand differentiation comes into major play, as those differences from the competitor are fundamental in creating a competitive advantage. According to Kotler, 2000, a strong brand equity can be created, which will lead to profitability, only if an organization has high quality of services and products, in addition to its customers being satisfied (Kotler, 2000; Khudi & Farjana, 2017).

2.3.2.5. OTHER PROPRIETARY BRAND ASSETS - BRAND IMAGE

Brand Image, this is the personality, physique and culture of the brand. This unique brand asset can influence the price, the willingness to pay for that price, peer recommendation (word-to-mouth), investments and customer satisfaction (Cho, et al., 2015).

2.3.3. CUSTOMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY

Customer-based brand equity is the differential effect brand knowledge has on customer response to a specific brand. When a customer reacts favorably to a brand it is said to have a positive customer-based brand equity. According to Keller 2008, page 692, the theoretical

framework of how consumer-based brand equity is formed, is based on all five dimensions proposed by Aaker and this is illustrated in *Figure 11* (Keller, 2008).

Figure 11: The theoretical framework of how consumer-based brand equity is formed (Keller, 2008)
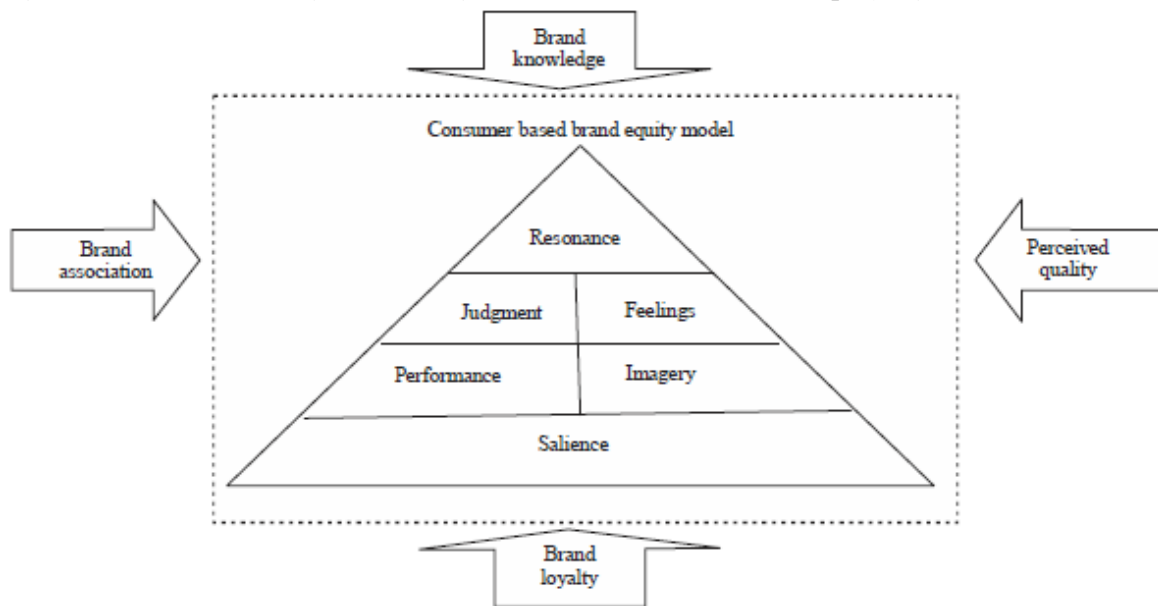
The challenge for getting a positive customer-based brand equity lies on the marketing department of each organization, which must ensure that all customers have the right type of experience with their services or products as well as the right knowledge about their organization. The quality, the emotion and the impact an experience has on a customer drives the brand equity of an organization. An example of a positive customer-based brand equity is Apple, a company that always aims to offer their customers a consistent experience, by being dependable, purposeful and innovating. Therefore, customers still line up for the new iPhone, even though it got mediocre reviews. A well-known example of a negative customer-based brand equity is the 2015 Volkswagen fiasco, when it became publicly known that Volkswagen were falsifying emission numbers. This lie caused them to lose brand equity since customers and the public in general started to now associated Volkswagen as untrustworthy and harmful to the environment.

Today, due to the increased competition that exists, building and maintaining a strong customer-based brand equity has become extremely challenging.

2.4. HOW TO CREATE A BRAND

As already explained, a brand is all about the customer's experience. An organization such as OUC must focus and aim to deliver excellent and high-quality services on all contact points of the customer with the University. Apart from conventional advertising and promotions, an organization must "teach" its customers about "who" they are, "what" they do and "why" the customer should care and associate with the organization's values, in this case with the University's values.

The aim is to create a mental structure in the mind and heart of the customer with enough knowledge and associations about the brand that will clarify the customer's decision-making when they are about to choose "your" brand. Basically convince the customer that the differences of this brand from its competitors are meaningful and carry value. If this is done successful, then the brand will pop first in a prospective customer's mind when its decision time, thus, lead to profitability. Furthermore, by having a high quality and excellent service offered at all contact points with the customer, continual innovation, consistency in communication and development of a successful branded environment, an organization can be profitable and survive competition. Examples of organizations that have been leading the competition for decades, each for their own category, are Adidas, Gillette, Sony, Harvard, Oxford University.

Most of these, successful brands, have established a Branded Environment around their product or service which not only established but also maintains and enhances their brand. They have initially defined the essence of their brand and subsequently communicate their brand's identity, characteristic and benefits to their audience. Their main similarity is the all rounded experience they offer across every contact point with their audience. They do not remain statistic, but they adopt to their changing audience and through: Branded Environments, special events, displays, interactive advertising (for some of them), broadcast media, social media, brochures and catalogs in addition to direct mail they transfer across their values (*Figure: 12)*. But most importantly they make sure that at every face-to-face interaction the communication is positive, supportive and pleasant.

Figure: 12 Communicating a brand across multi-channels (contact points) – example: Harvard

2.5. BRANDING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Students, alumni and even the staff, as all human beings, are seeking a "sense of belonging" and memorable, interesting and engaging experience both at work and at school. For Higher Education institutions a branded environment can be built through the institution's name, reputation, history, unique qualities and features, its values, culture and the teaching and leisure environment associated with the institute. However, Universities face one more challenge, University brands cannot be controlled, they are living entities that are affected by everything that happen in and around the University, by anything that can affect its stakeholders' experiences, expectations and impressions. Thus, the marketing and branding strategies of Universities are very challenging as they operate in an ever-changing environment, internal challenges, external stakeholders' influences and that they have to deal with a large range of audience in terms of age, occupation and needs in addition to the underdeveloped research on University branding (Rauschnabel, et al., 2016; Chapleo, 2010; Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009).

As discussed on a Duesterhaus and Duesterhaus 2014 paper, students do not take into consideration University ranking results, which might portray assurance of quality, when evaluating their potential Universities, instead they take into consideration emotional attributes, relational connections and up-to-date technology available at the University (Duesterhaus & Duesterhaus, 2014; Rauschnabel, et al., 2016). As a result, branding should transmit to the

University's stakeholders all its tangible and intangible branding features, including tuition fees, teaching quality, values, mission, emotional/psychological qualities, means of support and technology in a passionate and excited way (Rauschnabel, et al., 2016).

2.5.1. THE UNIVERSITY BRAND PERSONALITY CONCEPT

The University Brand Personality concept embodies the anthropomorphic characteristics to which the marketing strategy of a University will want to convey to its audience. All Universities recognize the importance of marketing and public relations, and their websites is the main way of convey their message, as a well build website and an effective marketing strategy increases the level of recognition for a University (Rauschnabel, et al., 2016). Consequently, OUC's website contain its mission statement, vision, history and self-descriptive characteristics that encompasses its values and identity. These self-descriptive characteristics make up OUC's brand personality and as can been since in *Table 2,* OUC's marketing has a total of 29 "personality" characteristics listed in its website.

Table 2: OUC self-descriptive characteristics according to OUC's website (OUC, n.d.)

General University Profile

Public	Distance learning	Accredited	Recognized
Refined	Inspiring	Innovating	Open
Growing quickly	Flexible	Adaptable	International
Stimulating	Encouraging	Modern educational systems	Lifelong learning
No preconditions (age, finance, social)	Degrees at all levels (Bachelor, MPhil, PhD)	New technological advancements	Lifting student's personal constraints

Academic Programs

International	Well planned	High quality	Outstanding teaching
Diverse	Flexible	Adaptable	Accessible
Collaborating	Live interaction	Supporting	Career-oriented
Synch or Asynchronous communication	Real time tools	Upgrading knowledge and expertise	European Credit Transfer System ECTS

Research

Development/enhancement	Publications	Innovative	Impact

Social Activities

Promote culture	Committed to community	Collaboration with neighboring countries	Unrivalled links to industry

2.5.2. SIX UNIVERSITY BRAND PERSONALITY DIMENSIONS

According to a Rauschnabel et al., 2016, paper, their study developed and validated a six-dimension scale (University Brand Personality Dimensions Scale **-**UBPS) that can be applied to all Universities, and their results have shown a strong relation of this scale to brand love, positive word-of-mouth, and students' intention to support their university as alumni (Rauschnabel, et al., 2016). The scale they proposed consists of six dimensions: 1) prestige, 2) sincerity, 3) appeal, 4) lively, 5) conscientiousness, and 6) cosmopolitan (Rauschnabel, et al., 2016). This scale can be used to understand student decision-making process and to not only attract but also retained students, staff, alumni and even potential sponsors by improving the University's brand image (Rauschnabel, et al., 2016). The UBPS scale is used in this study to evaluate OUC's brand equity.

2.5.2.1. PRESTIGE

Prestige, the first of the six UBPS factors, is not always included, some studies include genuineness instead (Rauschnabel, et al., 2016). However, both dimensions, prestige and genuineness, represent the following attributes: accepted, leading, reputable, successful-thriving, considerable and imposing, thus, the University's overall reputation and perceived success. A University may gain a prestigious personality by achieving any of the above characteristics, but also by ranking high at the university ranking list or by having demanding admission processes or by carefully selecting students and sponsors. Any individual associated with a University can affect the Prestige UBPS factor and consequently a selective admission of students and staff is evident (Rauschnabel, et al., 2016; McCracken, 1989)

2.5.2.2. SINCERITY

This dimension represents the following attributes: humane, helpful, friendly, trustworthy, fair, and these attributes arise from a strong and healthy interaction between students and the staff (administrative and academic) of the University (Rauschnabel, et al., 2016). This dimension focuses on the personal interactions and relationships that can shape the customers (students) perception.

2.5.2.3. APPEAL

The appeal dimension represents the more desirable anthropomorphic characteristics such as attractiveness and productivity. By having its stakeholder's perceiving the University as special

and attractive, by incorporating characteristics such as "elegant" and "stylish", then the University can use these into its advantage to create a competitive advantage (Rauschnabel, et al., 2016).

2.5.2.4. LIVELY

The lively dimension represents excitement, creativity along with the attributes dynamic and athletic (Rauschnabel, et al., 2016). Even though, several studies, especially in the USA, emphasize the athletic component of this dimensions, this cannot be used in this study as OUC has no athletic activities due to being a distance-learning University.

2.5.2.5. CONSCIENTIOUSNESS

This dimensions, describes the level of organization of a University's administrative processes, the teaching quality offered and the behavior of University employees (Rauschnabel, et al., 2016; McCracken, 1989). The attributes representing this dimension are: organized, competent, structured and effective (Rauschnabel, et al., 2016).

2.5.2.6. COSMOPOLITAN

The final dimension, represents those attributes that define a University as closed or open, i.e. networked, international and cosmopolitan. However, this dimension is difficult to apply it for OUC, as it offers in its majority Greek modules, so perhaps the attributes associated with this dimension should be in regards to OUC's relationships with companies and other Universities. If a University offers opportunities for obtaining a job, a training, or study abroad, then that could be categorized as a cosmopolitan University (Rauschnabel, et al., 2016; Hemsley-Brown, 2012).

2.6. UNIQUENESS OF STUDY

Currently there is no study examining OUC's brand equity and how it is perceived by its stakeholders. Through this study a constructive framework for future marketing strategies can be created that will benefit the University, by increasing retention, loyalty and peer recommendation, thus, allowing OUC to be differentiated from its competitors (Rauschnabel, et al., 2016; Devault, 2018).

Chapter 3
RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents and discusses all the procedures and techniques used in order to solve the problem stated in this study. According to a McDonald, 2007 article, research methodology in marketing is "the systematic gathering, recording, and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data about issues relating to marketing products and services" (McDonald, 2007).

3.1. SCOPE OF STUDY – AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

As previously discussed, OUC is going through a crisis as it tries to survive in a highly competitive market during an economic crisis. In an attempt to not only hold but also increase its current market share it must improve in many aspects, such as quality, services, communication and more importantly its relationship with all its stakeholders (students, alumni, prospective students, employees and general public). Thus, it is important to identify and record its stakeholders' perception, i.e. measure its brand equity.

The parameters used in this study are the six dimensions of the UBPS (Rauschnabel, et al., 2016) and the non-overlapping dimensions representing Brand Equity. This will also result in identifying the following: factors affecting prospective students' decision-making, word associations with OUC's brand, major competitors, prioritize the areas that need improvement.

3.1.1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study will attempt to answer the following:

1. Identify and record stakeholders' perception in regards to OUC brand
2. Measure OUC's brand equity.
3. Identify the factors affecting prospective students' decision-making
4. Record word associations with OUC's brand
5. Identify OUC's major competitors
6. Prioritize the areas that need improvement.
7. Identify the reasons for the decrease in students' applications and students' preferences.
8. Make suggestions in regards to OUC's future marketing strategy.

3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

There is no previous literature on these questions. So in order to design the research, one must consider the following: who should be surveyed, how should they be surveyed (i.e. surveyed method), what questions should the study ask and how many people should be surveyed.

3.2.1. WHO SHOULD BE SURVEYED

The categories of most importance for this study, from those given in section 1.2.3, are:

1. Students
2. Alumnae
3. Employees (Administrative and Academic)
4. Community, public

3.2.2. CHOICE OF SURVEY

There is a range of surveying methods, such as personal interviews, telephone or skype interviews, paper or online questionnaires, or a combination of all the above. The choice comes down to three factors length of time, cost, labor, and bias and based on *Table 3*, the clear choice for this study was to use an online questionnaire.

Table 3: Analysis of Survey Methods

	Personal Interviews	Phone or Skype Interview	Paper Questionnaire	Online Questionnaire	Combination of all Four
Length of Time	4	4	2	1	5
Cost	4	4	3	1	5
Labor	4	3	4	2	5
Bias	3	3	2	2	3

*Rating between 1 to 5, 1 being the shortest or lower and 5 being the longest and highest

In more detail, using interviews (personal or through phone or skype) during a survey introduces a bias to the responders' answers due to the interviewers' tone of voice or face morphism, rooting from his/her own perceptions. This is why hardcopy or online questionnaires are more preferred; they are anonymous, thus, people are more willing to answer their true

opinion. Also a questionnaire is less time and labor demanding, from the surveyors point of view (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005). However, hardcopy/online questionnaires may be affected by a phenomenon called "sequence bias", i.e. if a responder is able to see the whole questionnaire before answering it may affect his/her responses, or cause him/her to skip questions affecting the accuracy of the results (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005). In order to overcome this issue, and remove the bias, the questionnaire was divided in sections and thus the responders had to answer a couple of question first before moving on to the next section.

3.2.3. CHOICE OF QUESTIONS - REASONING

The questionnaire used in this study was constructed in such a way as to assesses stakeholder's intentions, support, behaviorally related constructs and their psychological relationship with the University.

The questionnaire was made as short as possible and we aimed for the questions to have a natural and rational flow in addition to covering all possible responses along with being mutually exclusive. Simple language and vocabulary were used so that it could be answered fast and effortless; without the need to research information. In addition, closed-ended questions are also a better choice for the researcher, as the data collected are directly comparable between all responders and carry less potential error that could be generated from a diverse set of open-ended question answers.

The questionnaire length changes according to the responders' answers, the shortest version consists of 16 questions and the longest consists of 27. In total there are 5 versions, consisting of 16, 17, 19 and the last two of 27 questions.

It contains closed-ended questions, demographic questions and one open-ended question. The closed-ended questions are divided to three types: ranking, single choice or multiple-choice. In ranking questions responders define the level of their agreement or disagreement with each questions, whereas in single or multiple choice questions responders choose their most desired or matching option/s as an answer.

The open- ended question was the last one, no matter what route was chosen during the completion of the questionnaire, the last question was the same for all, i.e. the responders were

asked to share their recommendations or suggestions for the improvement of OUC. Through this question a respondent could freely express his/her own believes and ideas.

Question 24 (in Versions 4 and 5) asks the responders to rank the UBPS attributes, with OUC in mind, according to their own perceptions and understanding. The UBPS scale was used because according to a Rauschnabel, 2016 article, it correlates with brand love, word-of mouth and students' intention to support their University after graduation (Rauschnabel, et al., 2016). This is a ranking question, for which an odd scale was used 1 to 5 (*Table 4*). Unfortunately, this carries a risk, i.e. the middle number can be used as an escape by responders that cannot decide on an answer or that do not want to answer. Nonetheless, this could also be favored be responders that truly believe that they have no opinion on the matter, whereas if the rank was an even scale then the responders would be forced to choose one of the poled alternatives which could contribute to a potential error (Schuman & Presser, 2006).

Table 4: Ranking Statements for Question 24 (Version 4 and 5)

Rank	Statement
1	Strongly Disagree
2	Disagree
3	Neither Agree Nor Disagree
4	Agree
5	Strongly Agree

The questionnaire measures brand awareness, brand image, brand loyalty and brand personality. The type of questions, the dimension or influencing factor measured by each questions, along with the reasoning behind each one is listed in *Appendix 1*, whereas, the entire Questionnaire can be seen in *Appendix 2* or through the following link: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeFTlSYzxHpl0QIJopMlvnPPkOEorsErWmkbg4niOXkcYgKPg/viewform?usp=pp_url

3.2.4. SAMPLING METHOD AND SAMPLE SIZE

In research terms, a sample is a group of people taken from a larger population in order to make measurements or answer research questions. The sample should in fact be representative of the population in order for the findings to apply in general to the entire population (Bineham, 2006).

The reason a sample is used, is because it is smaller and a more manageable version of a larger group. We aimed for the largest sample size possible for such a small study, running in a short time, that would contain OUC students, alumni, employees and members of the general public living both in Cyprus and Greece. Sample size is very important as it can affect the precision and validity of any inferences made (Wikipedia, n.d.).

There is a range of sampling techniques available but for this study only two methods were used: deliberate sampling and simple random sampling. Deliberate sampling in regards to OUC's students, alumni and employees and simple random sampling in regards to responders of the general public.

3.2.5. STUDY VALIDITY

Validity in research and more particularly in data collection means that the results truly represent what the study measures. In order to increase the validity of this study, the following aims were set (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005):

- Large sample size was targeted
- Long time duration for data collection
- Use of questionnaires for data collection, as this decreases bias
- Type of questions asked.
- Possible errors within the process were identified and corrected/eliminated.

Sources of error and the correction steps followed are mentioned in various sections of this thesis. Most of the potential errors recognized however, are mention in section 3.4., called Limitations.

3.2.6. STUDY RELIABILITY

Another important factor in research is reliability, this factor defines how repeatable, consistent, trustworthy, independent but still comparable the methods and results of a study are (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005). The reliability of this study was increased by measuring the same parameter through differently phrased questions.

3.2.7. GDPR

The General Data Protection Regulation of the European Union must be taken into consideration when distributing a questionnaire, as all responders are located within the European Union. First step is to make sure that the questionnaires are anonymous, thus, no personal data are processed (GDPR Article 4.1).

Data processing was only on the grounds of completing this MBA thesis, and no data were stored for more than 3 months after completion, apart from statistical conclusions that were part of the thesis write up. The lawful basis for the collection of these anonymous set of personal data is the responders consent, as in the introduction of the questionnaire they were informed that this questionnaire is anonymous, how the data will be processed, by who, how long the data will be stored and what is the purpose of processing (*Appendix 2*).

3.2.8. STUDY OVERVIEW AND DURATION

Table 5 summarizes the steps taken to complete this study.

Table 5: Study Overview

Steps	Objective	Sample/Method	Findings
1	Literature review		
2	Identification of adjectives	Content analyses of OUC's self-descriptions based on publicly available information on OUC's website.	29 adjective
3	Decisions on adjectives to be used		
4	Identify stakeholders		10 categories of stakeholders
5	Decide on the sample	Most accessible and important stakeholders	Students, Alumni, Employee, General Public
6	Questionnaire created	Brand Equity and Brand Personality Dimensions (Based on Literature)	
7	Questionnaire distribution	Via email, mobile sms, social media (Facebook and twitter), hardcopy distribution	
8	Analysis, evaluation	Graphs	
9	Statistical analysis	Fishers Exact Test, Mean, Percentage Change	
10	Conclusions		
11	Suggestions		

Whereas *Figure 13*, summarized the duration of each stage. The study commenced in September 2018 and lasted 15 months.

Figure 13: Gantt Chart of the different study steps

Steps	2018				2019										
	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November
Develop Research Proposal															
Literature Review															
Develop Qeustions for Data Collection															
Pilot Study															
Data Collection															
Data Analysis															
Write up for first draft of Chapter 1															
Write up for first draft of Chapter 2															
Write up for first draft of Chapter 3															
Write up for first draft of Chapter 4															
Write up for first draft of Chapter 5															
Write up for first draft of Chapter 6															
Write up for first draft of Chapter 7															
Send for Correction															
Write up for final draft															
Submission of Disseration															

3.2.9. PILOT STUDY

Before the survey was initiated, a pilot study was carried out. During this time the questionnaire was given to 8 individuals, ranging between 20 and 65 years of age. The purpose of carrying out this pilot study was to see how easy it was to access the questionnaire, how much time it took to finish it, to identify any terms or words that might be unfamiliar, to make sure that all questions were clear, in addiction to checking the flow of the question asked. The aim was to increase the level of quality of the questionnaire and the level of response.

3.2.10. INCREASE SURVEY RESPONSE LEVEL

There is a range of different methods, that can be used to increase response rates in a survey (Sorman, 2017; Praiseworthy, 2017), some of which were applied to this study, such as:

- Made the main message special, by emphasizing on the value of the responders' opinion and that we are respectful of their time.
- Personalized the invitations
- Kept the invitation short
- Offered anonymity
- Stated the duration of the survey in advance
- Featured a progress bar
- Kept the questionnaire relevant

- Kept the questionnaire short and concise
- Offered the questionnaire through multiple channels of communication i.e. email, sms, social media, messaging and in hardcopy.
- Invited respondents to share the questionnaire with others.
- Made sure questions flow
- Used google forms so to make sure the questionnaire was adaptive to mobile, tablet, and desktop

3.3. DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

This study was based on the collection of primary and secondary data. According to Kotler and Armstrong, 2009, primary data consists of data/information collected for a specific purpose, whereas secondary data consists of information that has already been collected for another purpose but which are available for others to use (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018).

3.3.1. PRIMARY DATA – QUESTIONNAIRE

The primary data were collected via questionnaires, through which the experiences, perception and the views of OUC's stakeholders in regards to its brand personality and, thus, brand equity were recorded. The framework of the questionnaire is as follows: initially there was a brief introduction which described the purpose of the survey, an estimate of the time required for completion and the confidentiality policy, then the questions followed and last but not least the questionnaire contained a concluding paragraph, where the responders were thanked for their time and effort.

3.3.1.2. DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

In this study a range of data analysis techniques are used such as: percentage analysis, statistical tools such as mean, Standard Deviation and Fisher Exact Test.

3.3.2. SECONDARY DATA

Secondary data are information that have been collected for another purpose, regarding the same concept, and are already available online or in hardcopy and thus were available for analysis and interpretation for this study as well. The secondary data, were collected from books, journals, website articles, periodicals, newspapers, conference reports and websites.

Whereas, OUC's data were collected from OUC's website, brochures, reports, records and advertisements.

3.4. LIMITATIONS

By definition limitations are those characteristics of the research's design and methodology, or of unanticipated challenges during the study, that could influence the results or the interpretation of the results. Every study has potential limitations (Price & Murnan, 2004). A list of possible limitations linked to this study are:

- Sample size
- Lack of prior research studies on OUC branding
- Access to OUC Students, Alumni and Employees: this was very difficult, as due to GDPR the University could not grant access to Students and Alumni personal email addresses. Nonetheless, this does not impact significantly the study as the research was aimed to OUC's stakeholders in general.
- Sequence bias: Because the responder most of the times could see the next question before answering, it might have affected his/her responses, or cause him/her to skip a question affecting the accuracy of the results (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005), thus, most of the questions were made mandatory, to overcome this limitation.
- Only one open-ended question: As most questions were close-ended this prevented the recording of responders personal, true opinions.
- Employees sampling was done during working hours, so there might be some wrong responses due to the workload of responders
- Fluency in a language: These questionnaires were written in English, but English is used as a second language in Greece and Cyprus and this may have introduced some issues with certain responders not fully understanding a question.
- Questions used: A question might have been missed to be asked that could give us a better measure of OUC's brand personality and brand equity.

Chapter 4
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In total there were 105 responses, 35% of which were associated with OUC, being either an Employee (administrative and academic), alumni, student or had two or all three statuses. The data collected were processed and analyzed by using Excel.

4.1. DEMOGRAPHIC

The first section aimed to establish key demographic information, that is statistical data on responders' gender, age, occupation, country of origin, education background and employment status. They are collected in order to determine the responder's profile and whether the sample is representative to the resource's target population.

4.1.1. GENDER

Figure 14: Survey Responder's Gender
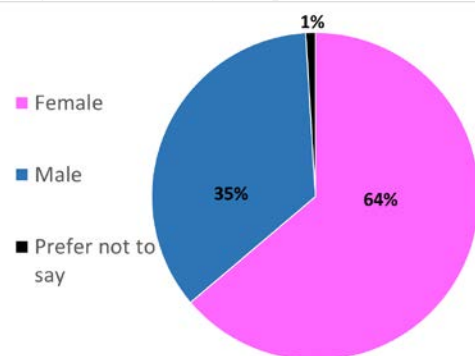
The majority of the responders (*Figure 14*) were female (64%), which is consistent with OUC's student and employee profile on record for 2019 (*Table 6; Figure 15*). This suggests that the responder's behavior will be representative of OUC's main stakeholders. In regards to OUC's Student, the gender inequality can be reversed by offering courses that would increase male interest and thus male registration

Figure 15 and Table 6: Gender Comparison between Survey Responders and OUC Students and Employees on record on 2019

Gender? *	Survey Responders	OUC Students 2019 record	OUC Employees 2019 record
Female	64%	61%	63%
Male	35%	39%	37%
Prefer not to say	1%		
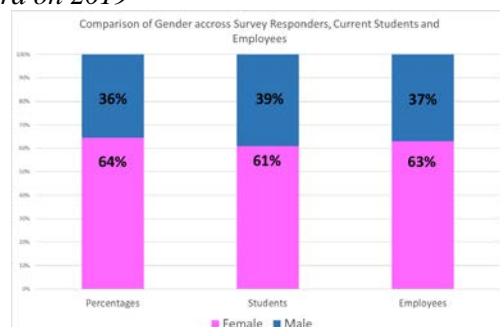
4.1.2. COUNTRY of ORIGIN

Figure 16: Survey Responder's Country of Origin
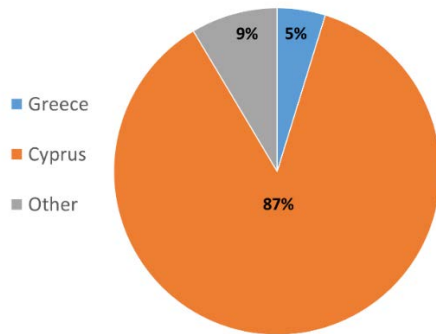
Based on OUC public records, 35% of its registered students come from Cyprus, with 63.4% living in Greece and 1.6% in other countries. Unfortunately, based on this survey's results a total of 87% was from Cyprus, 5% from Greece and 9% from other countries (*Figure 16)*. This is not representative of OUC's profile, but it is still within the scope of this research, to identify and record OUC's Brand Equity in Cyprus.

4.1.3. AGE

Figure 17: Survey Responder's Versus OUC's Students and Employees Age Groups
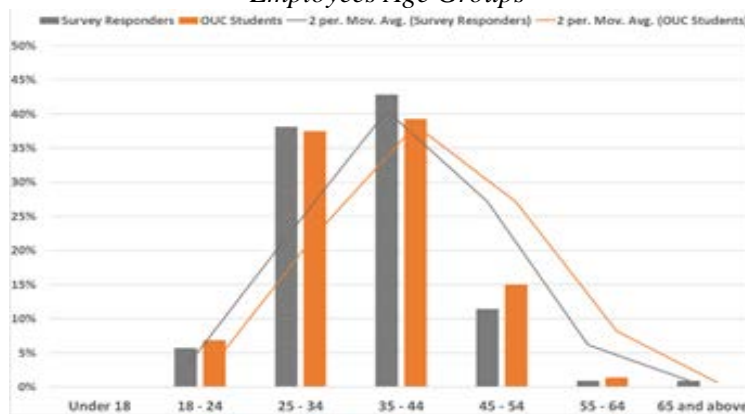
Responders Age profile is very important as it helps determine whether the survey has targeted OUC's main stakeholders: mature students. As one can see the age ranges is consistent with OUC's students (*Figure 17)*. Furthermore, age profiles

show maturity level and the ability to make decisions. The average age group of responders is 35 to 44 years of age.

4.1.4. EDUCATION and EMPLOYMENT PROFILE

Figure 18: Responder's Education Status
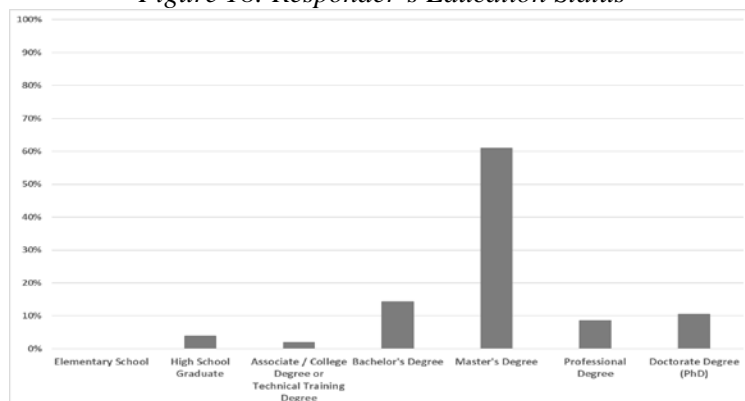
The majority of responders are graduates, indicating that they are educated and qualified (*Figure 18 and 19)*, as the majority 61% have at least one Master Degree with 10% also having a PhD.

In regards to employment status, *Figure 19*, 51% work in the private sector, 39% work in the public sector, 8% are students, and 1% are retired or involved in Housekeeping.

Figure 19: Responder's Employment Status
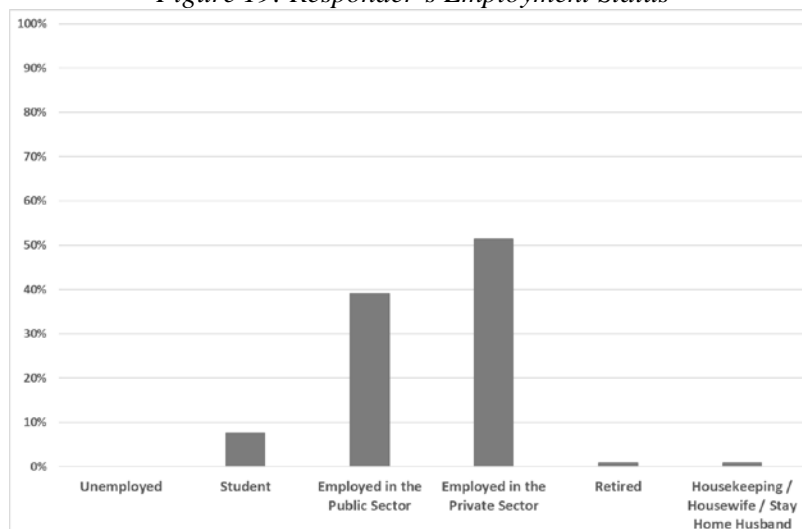
4.2. MAIN BODY – COMMON QUESTIONS

The main body consisted of 19 questions, and can be divided into five versions, depending on the responder's replies. A number of questions were common among the different versions and these will be discussed first.

4.2.1. UNIVERSITY RECOGNITION – BRAND RECALL

All Responders were given a list of eleven Universities that offer courses in Greek, from *Table 1*, and were asked to selected those that they recognize in order to record Brand Awareness - Recall. Overall, 48% of the responders could recall OUC, however when they were divide into Cypriot and Non-Cypriot residents, one can see that only 51% and 25%, respectively, could recall OUC (*Figure 20*). This values might also include a bias as the majority of responders one way or the other were associated with the author of this thesis, thus, they might have recognized OUC due to this relationship, consequently, the actual recall data might be even lower. Brand Awareness should be researched again on a wider audience, as this data suggest that OUC's popularity and brand recognition, subsequently its degree of influence, lags compared to other Universities. Furthermore, this data emphasizes the necessity for advertising not only abroad, but also within Cyprus.

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Figure 20: University Brand Awareness among Cypriot and Non-Cypriot Residents.
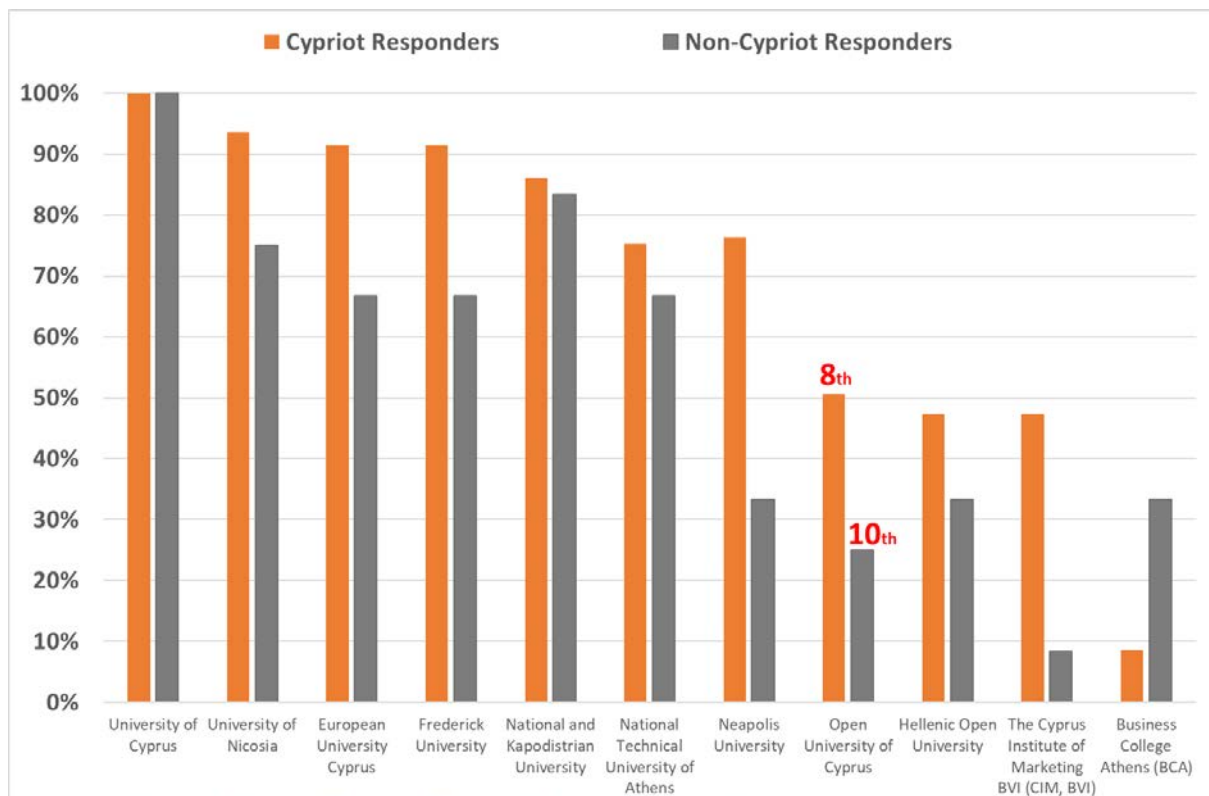
According to Aaker (1991) "Brand Awareness, is the ability of potential customers to recognize (recall) a brand when deciding to use or not a specific product/service", and subsequently they created the awareness pyramid (*Figure 21*) to describe the degree of costumer recognition of a product/service by name. This is a very useful marketing tool in terms of creating a marketing strategy, as the primary goal of an organization should be the top of the pyramid, which is associated with maximum loyalty, retention and increased market share.

Figure 21: Aaker (1991) *Awareness Pyramid*

34
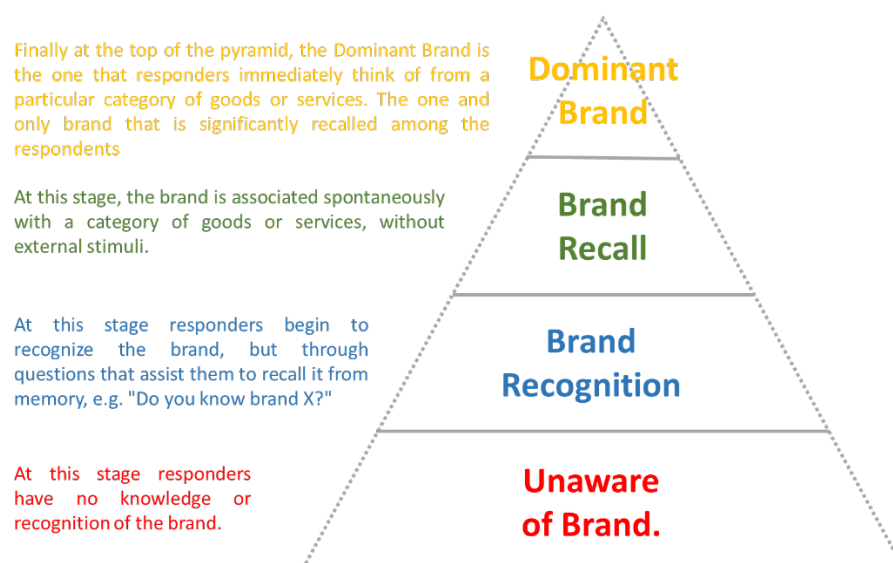
4.2.2. UNIVERSITY RANKING – BRAND VALUE

The next question requested from responders to select and rank the top five out of the eleven Universities, according to their own perception. Based on the overall results, OUC ranked 5th, however, this is a biased result as 35% of the responders are associated with OUC, which group ranked OUC 2nd (*Figure 22*). When divided into those associated or not with the University, then it was observed that those not associated with OUC rank it 6th.

Figure 22: University Ranking (Responders Associated Versus Responders not associates with OUC).
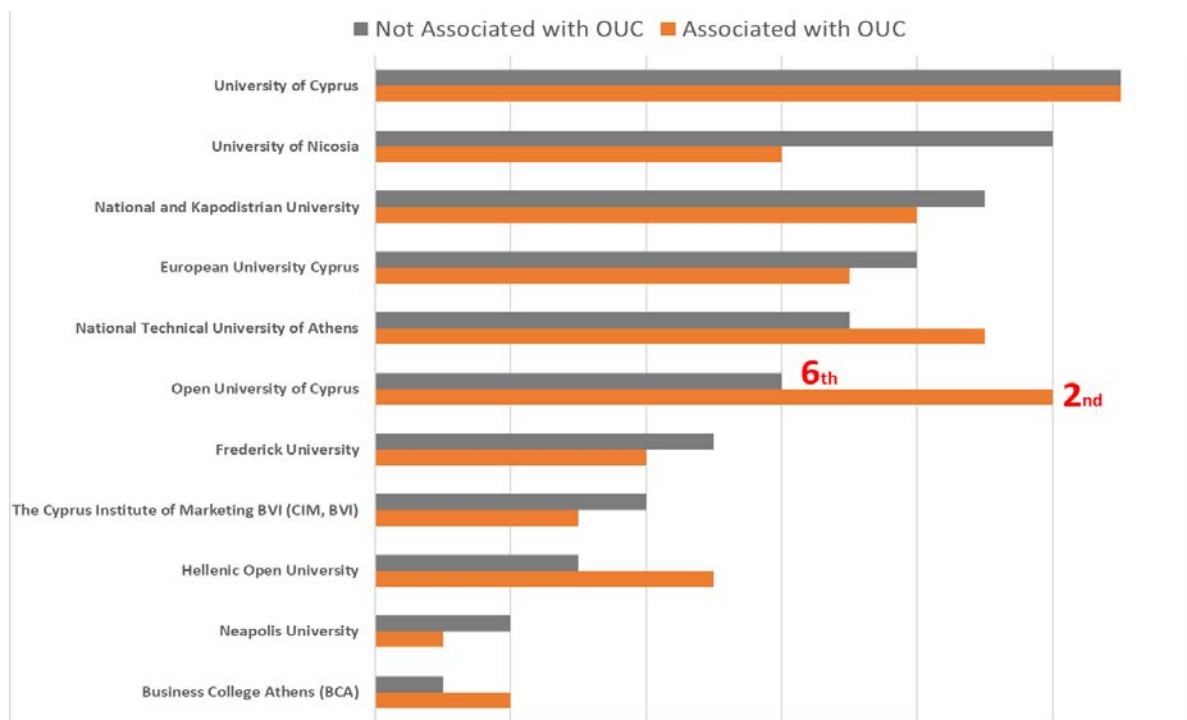
4.2.3. OUC'S BRAND AWARENESS

Next, they were asked whether they had heard of OUC before attempting this questionnaire. Twenty percent responded that had not; with 12% being Cypriot Residents (*Figure 23*). This further emphasizes the need for a more aggressive marketing campaign in OUC's home country.

Figure 23: Have you heard of OUC before (this questionnaire)?
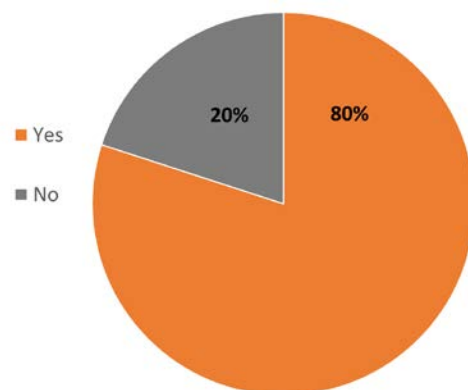
4.2.4. OUC's Logo - Brand Image

A logo is an important part of an organization's brand, it in fact makes a significant impact on the organization's public perception, as it is the face of the organization. The logo is the first interaction, the first thing that a potential customer will notice. It is not just an image, it is a point of recognition among current and future stakeholders, thus one of the most important elements in brand awareness.

As most people form an opinion in a fraction of a second, one can understand the importance of a well-designed logo that would have the potential to convey across that the organization is professional, trustworthy, and provides a high quality of services (Melewar & Saunders, 1998; Foroudi, et al., 2017; Chadwick & Walters, 2009).

Unfortunately, 71% of those responders that saw the logo for the first time had a negative feeling compared to 51% of those that are associated with the University (*Table7; Figure 24*).

Table 7: Negative Vs Positive Perception of OUC Logo

	All Responders	Associated with OUC	Never Heard of OUC before	Not Associated with OUC
Negative	58%	51%	71%	62%
Positive	42%	49%	29%	38%

Overall, 58% of all responders had negative feelings associated with the OUC logo. These results indicate the necessity to redesign the logo, taking into account a broader strategy of brand marketing and what attributes the University wants to get across. A range of logos were given to the responders as sampling controls, thus, there is a high confidence in the results.

Figure 24: How do you feel when you see the OUC logo?
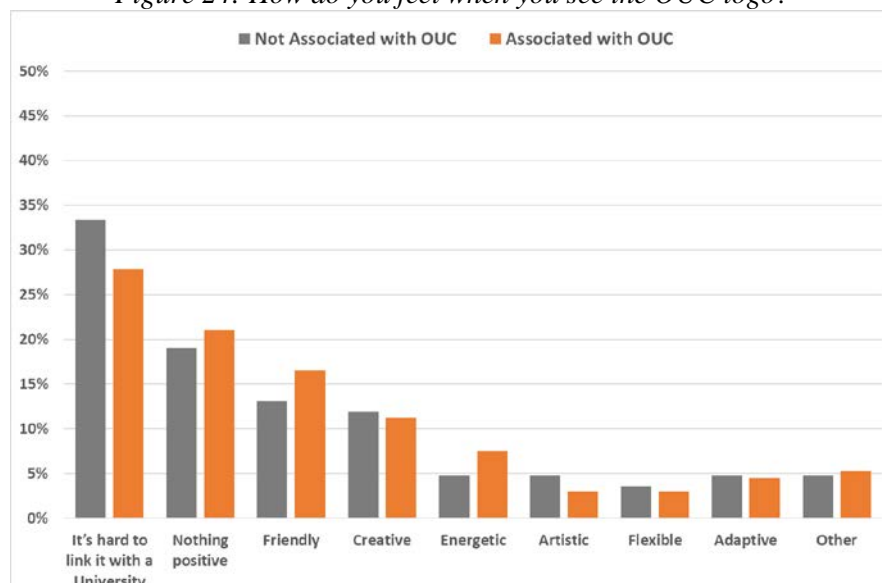
From the options given to the responders, the ones counted as negative were:

1. It's hard to link it with a University (30%)
2. Nothing positive (23%)
3. Other (5%) (*Table 8*)

Table 8: Other responses regarding OUC logo

27%	**Indifferent**
	It could be better
	It does not cause any particular feeling
	It reminds me of a woman giving birth
18%	**It's hard to link it with quality teaching provision/ status**
	Religious symbol
	Represents a man with his hands up surrendering to the police
	The eye of Mordor (Lord of the Rings)

Furthermore, through web research it was discovered that a very similar version to OUC's logo is been used by a local village council (Psimolofou) in OUC's city (*Figure 25*) ((Council, n.d.). This is another negative factor affecting the OUC's logo impact on its Brand Equity.

Figure 25: Psimolofou Council Logo (Facebook Screenshot)

4.2.5. OUC STATUS – BRAND VALUE/IMAGE

Another important criterion in determining OUC's Brand Equity is whether the responders knew whether it was an independent University or part of the University of Cyprus, as their names are similar. Initially there was no surprise here as 6.7% of the responders who believed that OUC is part of the University of Cyprus (UCY) had never heard of OUC before, whereas the majority of responders that had not heard of the University before, could clearly identify from the website extract given to them and from OUC's name that it was an independent university.

Figure 26: Is OUC an independent University or the long distance department of the UCY?

- Independent University
- Part of UCY (University of Cyprus)

17% 83%
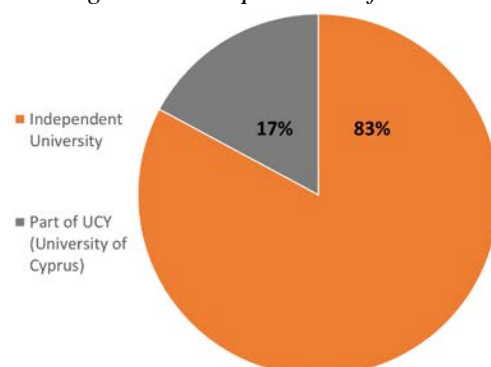
However, another 9.5% of those that believed that OUC is the long distance department of the UCY, had heard of OUC before this questionnaire, this percentage unfortunately included two Cypriots that were also associated with OUC, a student and an alumna (*Figure 26*).

4.2.6. OUC DEGREE BRAND VALUE

Accreditation is very important as it helps determine if a University at least meets the minimum standards of quality and ensures University accountability (Happe, 2015), it is the A and Z criterion for students application decision as all employers' request applicants with accredited degrees. Thus, accredited programs of study boost public trust and confidence (Worldwidelearn, 2017). According to this study, when responders were asked if they "Believe OUC's degrees are equivalent, accredited and trustworthy?", only 50% replied confidently Yes, the other 50% choose "No" or "I do not know" (*Table 9*).

Table 9: OUC Degree Brand Value

Do you believe OUC's degrees are equivalent, accredited and trustworthy as the degrees from conventional universities? *	All Survey Responders	Not Associated with OUC	Associated with OUC
Yes	50%	31%	84%
No	14%	16%	11%
Do not Know	36%	53%	5%

However, when we divided the results to those that are associated and not associated with OUC, unfortunately for one more time the necessity for an aggressive marketing campaign is evident as 69% of those not associated with OUC and 16% of those associated with OUC, replied that its degrees are not accredited or they do not know if they are (*Figure 27*). Employees, students and alumni are OUC's ambassadors, if 16% believe its degrees are not accredited or equivalent with those of other Universities, then that is one of the worst advertisement for a Higher Education Institute.

Figure 27: Do you believe OUC's degrees are equivalent, accredited and trustworthy as the degrees from conventional universities?

Responders not associated with OUC

- Yes
- No
- Do not Know

53% 31% 16%

Responders associated with OUC

- Yes
- No
- Do not Know

84% 11% 5%
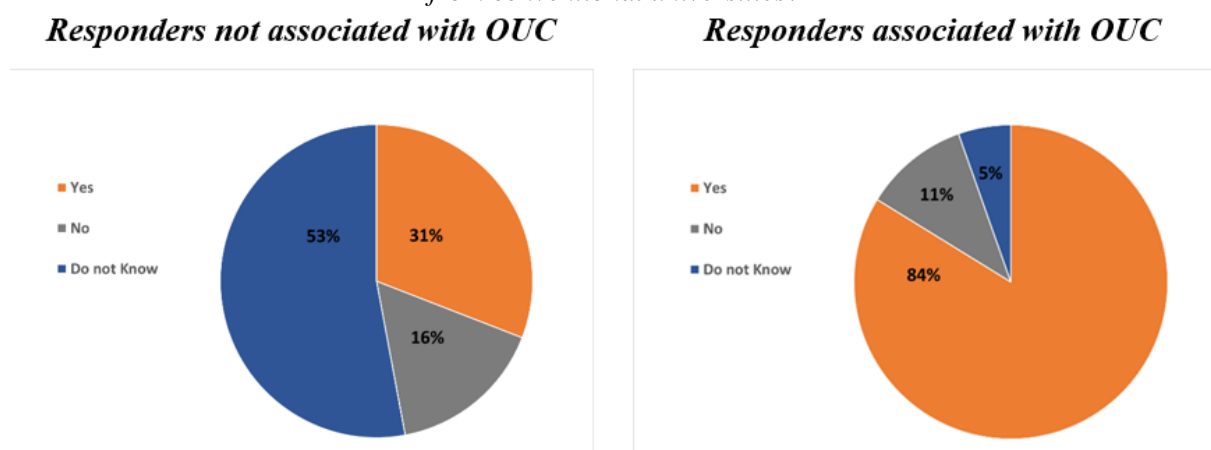
4.2.7. "WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A UNIVERSITY"

Additionally, when responders were asked what are the factors/attributes they are looking for when selecting a University for their own or a relative's studies, 84% ranked "accredited" as the primary deciding factor. Whereas, "high teaching quality" and "organizes" followed with 79% and 72% respectively (*Figure 28*). With "Cosmopolitan" and "other" (e.g. pricing), ranking last with 7% and 4% respectively. This result further emphasizes the necessity to market to the public that OUC degrees are accredited.

Figure 28: Decision influencing factors for University Selection
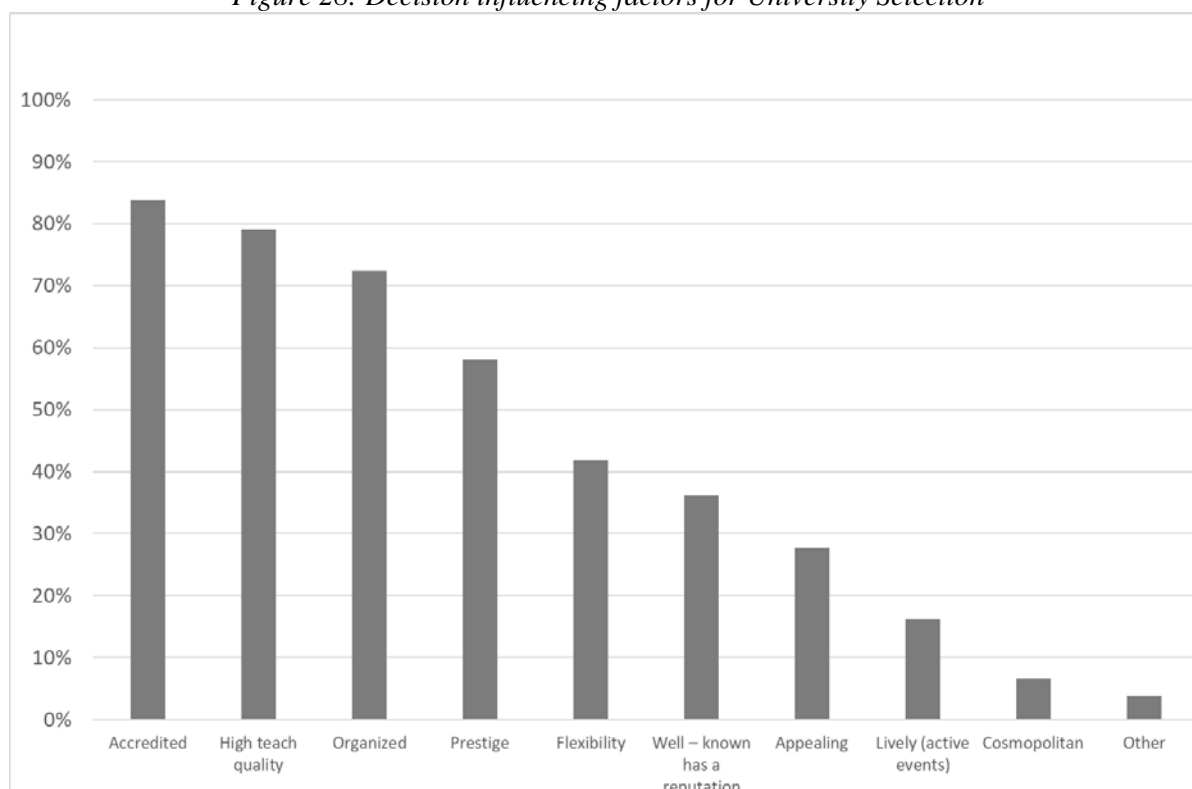
4.2.8. OUC Selection – Brand Equity

Figure 29: OUC selection for future studies
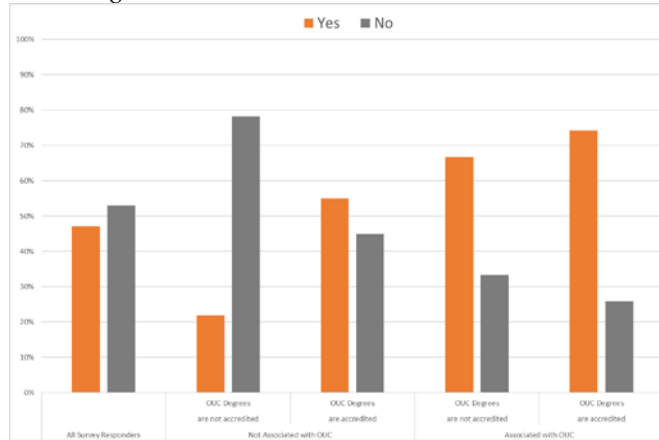
When asked if they would apply to OUC for the acquisition of a hypothetical degree, the majority of the responders replied "no", but when further analyzed it was recorded that the majority of those associated with OUC, would consider it for a potential future degree no matter if they believe or not that OUC degrees are accredited and equivalent to those of other Universities, 67% and 74% respectively. On the other hand, from the group that is not associated with OUC, 78% of those that did not believe OUC is accredited, would not consider it for a potential future degree (*Table 10; Figure 29*).

Table 10: OUC selection for future studies

If you were going to start a degree now would you apply to OUC?	All Survey Responders	Not Associated with OUC		Associated with OUC	
		OUC Degrees are not accredited	OUC Degrees are accredited	OUC Degrees are not accredited	OUC Degrees are accredited
Yes	47%	22%	**55%**	**67%**	**74%**
No	**53%**	**78%**	45%	33%	26%

4.2.9. Brand Awareness – "How did you come to know OUC?"

The majority of responders (61%) came to know OUC through word-of-mouth, i.e. through friends or family (*Figure 30*). This emphasizes the importance of delivering a high quality of service and teaching, to increase peer recommendation and loyalty and the necessity for a more intensive marketing strategy through social media, radio, TV, events and through traditional advertising (newspapers, magazines, billboards). Peer recommendation, i.e. word-of-mouth, is a free and effective form of advertising; research indicates that it is more effective than any other types of marketing and it can greatly influence a student's university choice (Harahap, et al., 2017; Herold, 2011). However, in order to manage word-of-mouth, marketers must: understand the customer and how information are transmitted and processed by potential customers. In addition, the management of the organization must keep satisfied and motivate those associated with it, so that they talk positively (spontaneously) about its services. Furthermore, it should be aimed to continuously improve quality of services offered and

personnel. In the case of OUC possible first actions towards improvement are: development of academic and administrative personnel, increase in moral, and establishment of a good alumni program to strengthen alumni relationship with the University (Mira, 2006).

Figure 30: How did you come to know OUC?
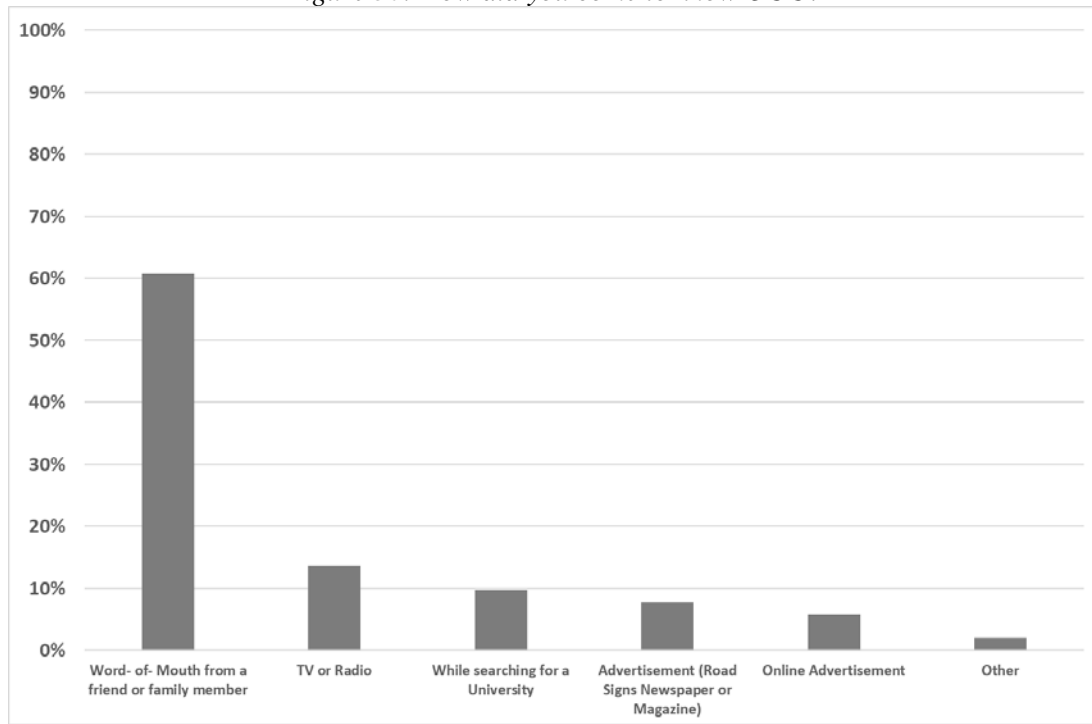
4.2.10. BRAND IMAGE – "WHO DO YOU THINK ATTENDS OUC?"

This question intends to measure OUC's Brand Image. Brand image is "the "character" of the brand and it is the set of perceptions, impressions and beliefs that its customers have formed in their minds based upon the experience and interaction with the organization, not necessarily by using its services". The idea behind it is that the customer is not purchasing a service but also the image associated with it (Keller, 2003). The Brand image is a composite of perceive quality and esteem dimensions a customer holds; thus, it reflects their overall impression. If a customer has a high perception of the organization, he/she is more likely to develop loyalty towards it. Brand Image is divided into the functional, experiential and symbolic (internal) needs to the customer; this question measures the symbolic dimension of Brand Image. This dimension, satisfies a customer's internal needs for status and self-worth by connecting individuals with their desired self-image, roles in society and with specific populations, i.e. desired social group (social reputation). According to literature, if Brand Image is positive and concedes with customers' self-image it can enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty (Pimentel & Heckler, 2003). Therefore, the responders were asked to decide based on their own perception what type

of individuals attend OUC, and they were divided into two groups (associated or not with OUC). Even though there seems to be a difference in the responses between the two groups (*Figure 31*), according to Fishers Exact Test[1] the p-value is 0.156, thus non significant difference with a confidence of 95%. It is important to note that both groups classified "Business man and woman" and "People with busy lives" as their first choices; this promotes a positive image for the University as it helps customers (potential students) better fit into an esteem social group and improves the way they would be perceived by others.

Figure 31: Who do you think attends OUC?
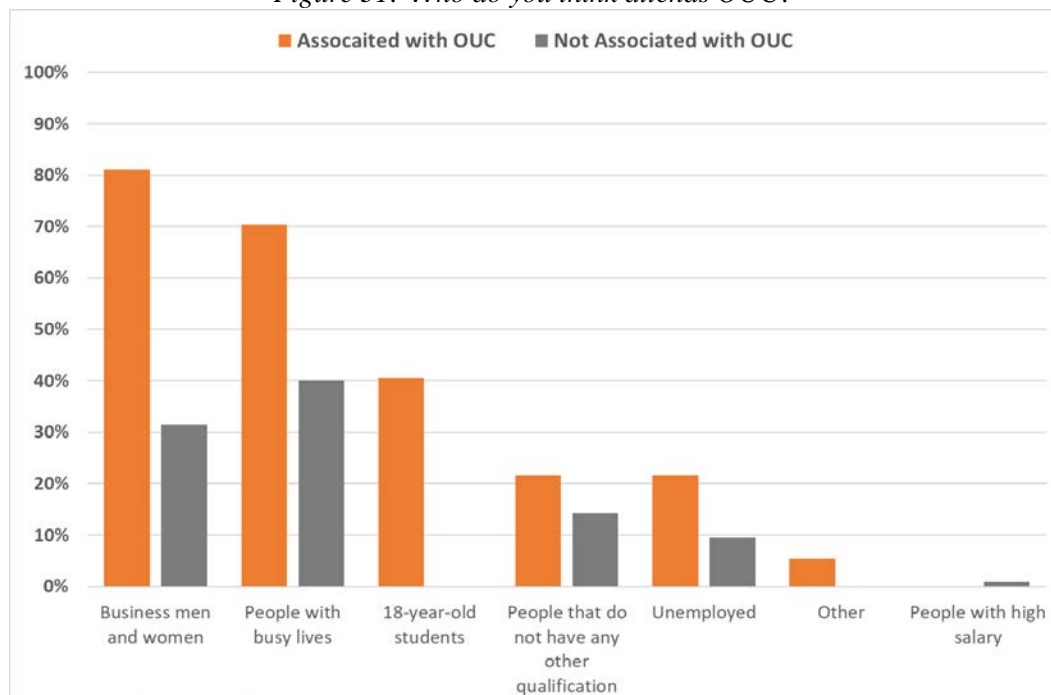
Nonetheless, building a reputed brand image and attracting new customers is a very complicated and challenging task for any marketing department. However, by aiming for a service which constantly holds a favorable image by the public, would be the first and most important step to providing the University with an increased market share and a sustainable competitive advantage.

4.2.11. BRAND IMAGE – OUC'S SELF-DESCRIPTIVE CHARACTERISTICS

This question measures Brand Image by recording the beliefs and perceptions the responders (associated with OUC or not) have about the University. As can be seen by *Figure 32*, the

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[1] Used to examine the significance of the association between two kinds of classifications, used in the place of chi square especially used in cases of small samples. It also finds the probability of every possible combination, thus, providing more evidence of association.

perception of the general public in regards to OUC needs to be improved for all characteristics, but especially for the attributes: Innovating, Inspiring, Outstanding Teaching, and Stimulating. Additionally, through proper marketing it should be aimed to decrease the percentage of those that have replied "None of the above" and "I don't know". The most worrying response recorded is that 11% of those associated with OUC, selected the option "None of the above", this indicates low satisfaction and subsequently low levels of loyalty.

Figure 32: Brand Image – OUC's Self-Descriptive Characteristics
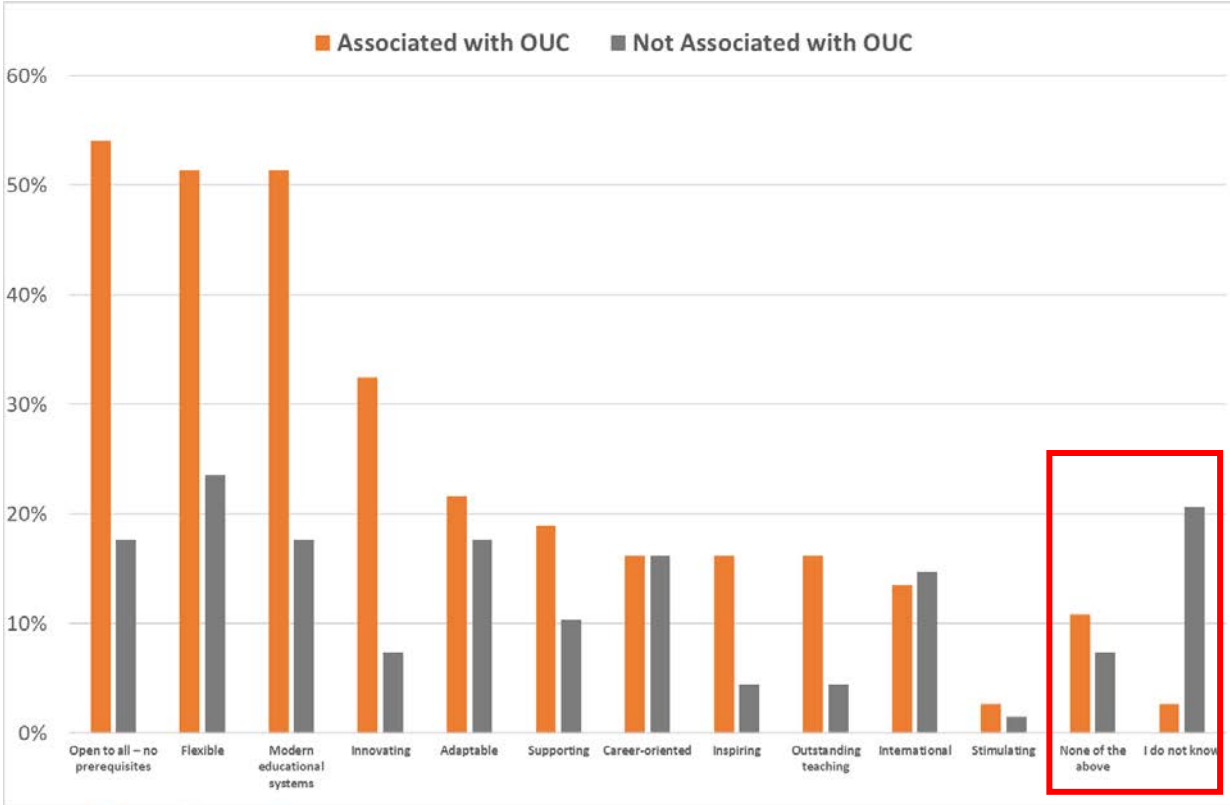
4.3. QUESTIONNAIRE VERSIONS

As already descript depending on the responders' replies, the questionnaire can be divided into 5 versions. The percentage of responders submitting each version can be seen in *Table 11*.

Table 11: Percentage of responders submitting each version

Versions	1	2	3	4	5
Percentages of responders	16%	4%	45%	11%	24%

4.3.1. VERSION 1

Version 1 consisted of 16 questions and was completed by those that had never heard of the University before and would also not consider it for a potential/hypothetical future degree, even after reading a short description about the University. The demographics of this group were the same as the overall results. There were no unique questions within this version.

4.3.2. VERSION 2

Version 2 consisted of 17 questions, and was complete by individuals that had never heard of the University before but after reading a short description about the University they were considering of starting a potential/hypothetical future degree at OUC. The demographics of this group were slightly different compared to the overall results, gender division was 50-50, while the mean age groups mean is 45-54. A number of individuals from this group also made suggestions /recommendations for OUC improvement; 50% suggested a more intensive and targeted marketing strategy to be employed, so that more people will be familiar with the University's services and programs offered.

When the responses of Version 1 and 2 are compared the question with the most significant difference according to Fishers Exact Test is "Which type of people do you think attend OUC?", with a p-value of 0.0302 (statistically significant). Twenty-six percent of Version 1 responders, which would not consider OUC for a future potential degree, believed that OUC is for 18year old students, and as based on their demographics none of them was 18, a good reason to explain why they immediately reject the option of studying at OUC; this further emphasizes the need for a targeted marketing campaign.

4.3.3. VERSION 3

Version 3 consisted of 19 questions, and was completed by individuals that had heard of the University before this questionnaire, but were not associated in anyway with it (i.e. as a student, alumnae or employee). The demographics of this group were also the same as the overall results, while great insights arise by examining the data.

4.3.3.1. OUC STATUS – BRAND VALUE / IMAGE

One fifth of Version 3 responders believed that OUC is the long distance department of the University of Cyprus, even though half of them had heard of OUC from friends or a family. This further emphasizes the need to invest in a more intensive and targeted marketing strategy, so that more people will be familiar with the University.

4.3.3.2. OUC LOGO – BRAND IMAGE

When Version 3 responders were prompt to identify OUC's logo, only half were successful (*Figure 33*), whereas 21% choose the logo with the right shape but wrong colors and 11% chose the logo of UCY, this is consistent with the percentage of people that believe OUC is the long distance department of the UCY. The rest of the replies were divided among the logos of other private Universities in Nicosia.

Figure 33:Responders' selection of OUC logo

53%

4%

0%

21%

2%

0%

11%

2%

4%

2%
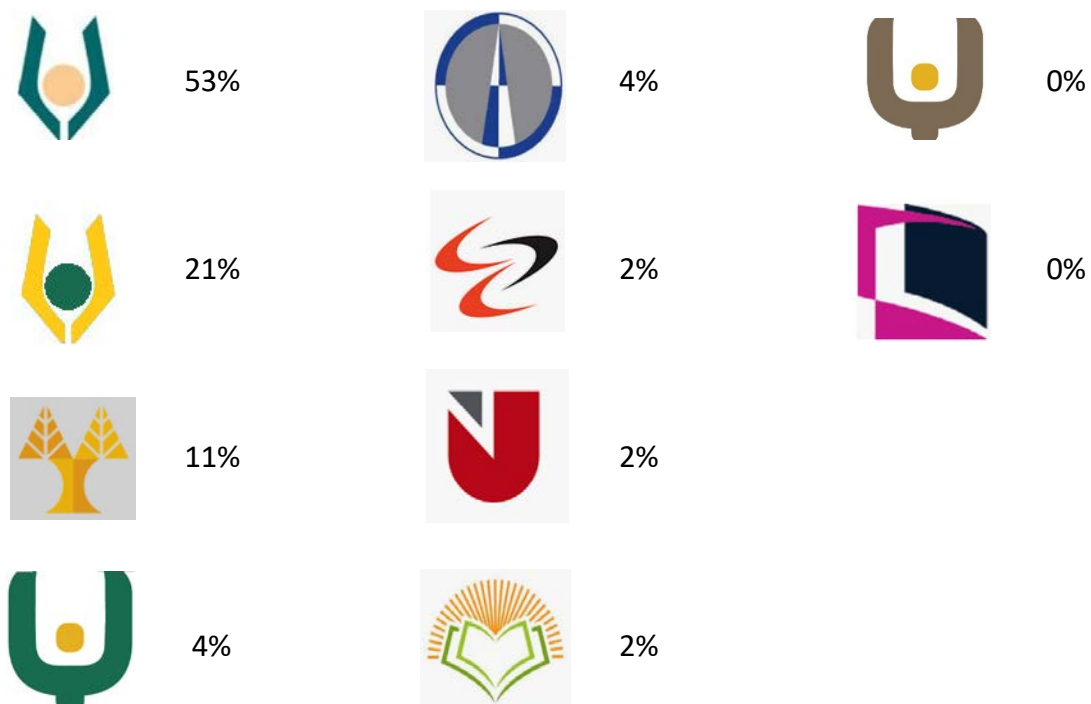
4.3.3.3. OUC DEGREE BRAND VALUE AND OUC VALUE

When asked if they believe if OUC's degrees are equivalent, accredited and trustworthy as those of conventional Universities, unfortunately, 60% responded no or that they do not know. This correlated to the 66% of individuals that responded that they would not consider OUC for a future potential/hypothetical degree (*Table 12*).

Table 12: OUC Degree Brand Value

Do you believe OUC's degrees are equivalent, accredited and trustworthy as the degrees from conventional universities? *	Percentages	Percentage		If you were going to start a degree now would you apply to OUC (Open University of Cyprus)? *	Percentages
Yes	40%	40%	34%	Yes	34%
No	15%			No	66%
Do not Know	45%	60%	66%		

4.3.3.4. SUGGESTIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS TO OUC FROM RESPONDERS

A number of responders, also made suggestions / recommendations in regards to improvements they believe have to be made by OUC management (*Table 13*).

Table 13: Responder's suggestions / recommendations

Create more PhD programs of study on the educational field

Since I got to talk to people studying in the Open University, the feedback that I got were not encouraging. Unorganized, teaching methodology not inspiring, not the best model of blended education etc. The reason behind the discouraging comments was the fact that students perceive that the academic faculty does not provide the same attention to the course as in the case of conventional Universities i.e. The University of Cyprus. It is in my opinion operating in the "shadow" of UCY and perceived as a lower level Educational Institution. In my humble opinion the Open University of Cyprus is in need of rebranding - internally and externally.

Change of webpage and quality of materials of study. Also single point of contact for students instead of multiple different contacts for different queries.

Increase marketing. Inform the public about OUC services.

More courses in English.

It should extend its curricula. Add more courses / program of studies.

Offer more scholarships, a way to also achieve advertising (similar strategy carried out by UCY for their MBA courses).

Change your logo. It looks like a person with his/her hands up in the air.

More advertising

4.3.4. VERSIONS 4 AND 5

Both versions 4 and 5, consisted of 27 questions and include individuals associated with OUC (i.e. student, alumnae or employee). Version 4 differs from version 5 only in the second from last question, where responders were divided into two groups: those that have a negative perception and those that have a positive perception of the University and thus might consider

it for a potential future degree. One third of responders was both student/alumni and employees, so they have a full rounded experience of OUC's services. The demographics of both groups were the same as the overall results.

4.3.4.1. OUC LOGO – BRAND IMAGE

All associated with OUC have correctly identified its logo but the majority 68% have expressed negative feelings towards it (*Figure 34*). The replies counted towards the negative responses are "Nothing positive" 32%, "It's hard to link it with a University" 22% and "Other" 14%, as the comments given were negative (*Table 9*).

Figure 34: OUC Logo Brand Image
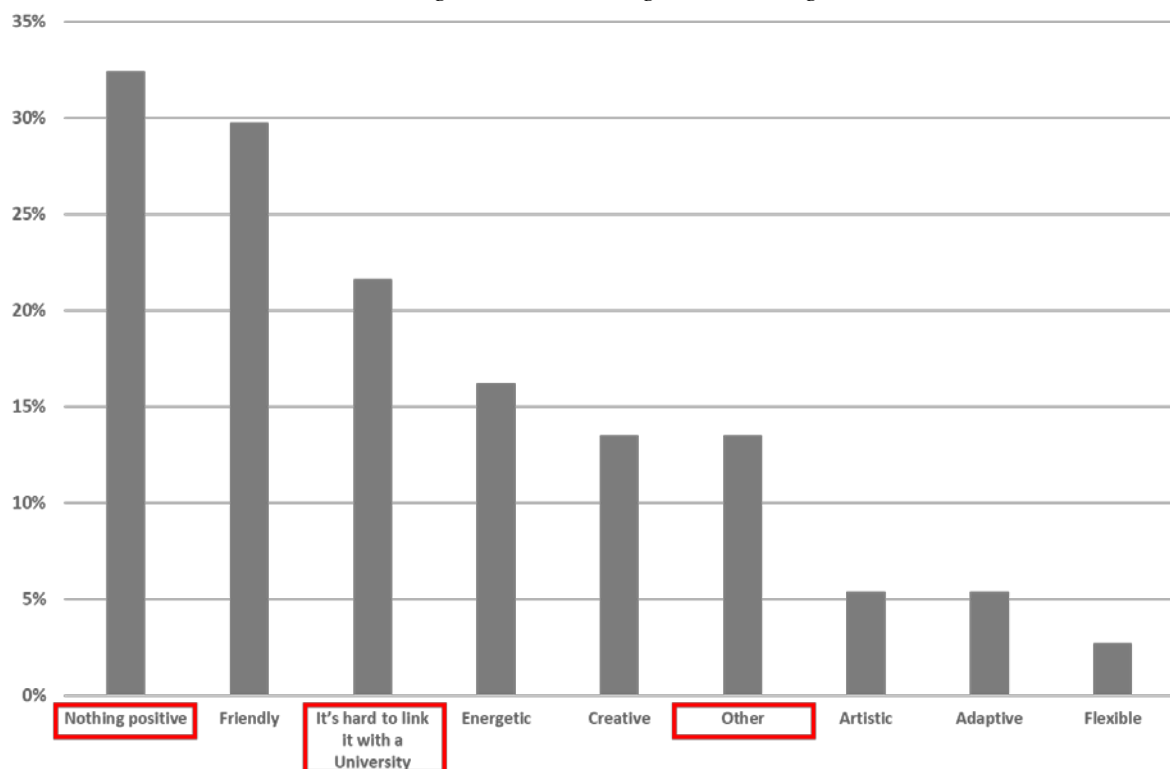
4.3.4.2. OUC DEGREE BRAND VALUE

Of the 16% that responded negatively or that they do not know if OUC degrees are equivalent, accredited and trustworthy (to those of conventional Universities), unfortunately 83% are employees (while 28% are also former or current OUC students) and 17% are alumnae (*Figure 35*). These results show the importance of promoting OUC's accreditation, its programs of study and the necessity for a more aggressive marketing strategy. OUC brand must be strengthened, through events, by improving OUC culture, enriching OUC's social media, strengthening and intensifying communication and emphasize its key qualities and benefits.

Figure 35: OUC Degree Brand Value
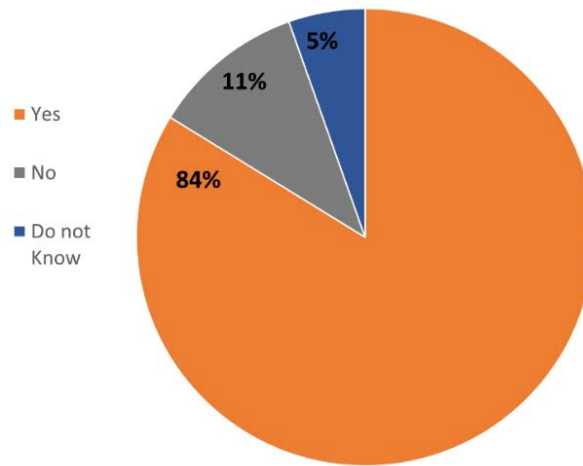
4.3.4.3. BRAND IMAGE – OUC'S SELF-DESCRIPTIVE CHARACTERISTICS

The worrying result in terms of branding is that 11% of those associated with OUC actually do not believe any of the self-descriptive characteristics given on OUC's website. These individuals are the core of OUC's brand, they must believe to the brand in order for the brand to be successful. Fortunately, on the other hand, 54% to 32% believed 4 of the 11 of these characteristics (*Figure 36*).

Before aiming for the brand to be associated with these characteristics by the general public, they must be believed and embraced by OUC's administrative and academic employees, but also by the management. One of the most important factors in brand marketing is for the organization's team to believe in its vision, to desire and carry it in their hearts, so that they can pass this belief, this love, to the customer.

The difficultly in achieving this, is that an employee's belief is crafted through years of life experience, and even though it sounds time consuming OUC should aim in defining what its employees should believe in each day at work, as this will encourage them to behave in certain ways at work and most importantly towards the customer. If it is not defined by the organization, then it is left by each individual to define his or her own set of beliefs and thus the University will lose the opportunity to "guide their thoughts and actions". The latter can be seen to have occur in the case of OUC as there is an inconsistency in what employees believe in regard to OUC brand, this unfortunately leads to the delivery of poor experiences to students.

Figure 36: Self-descriptive Characteristics as seen by those associated with OUC
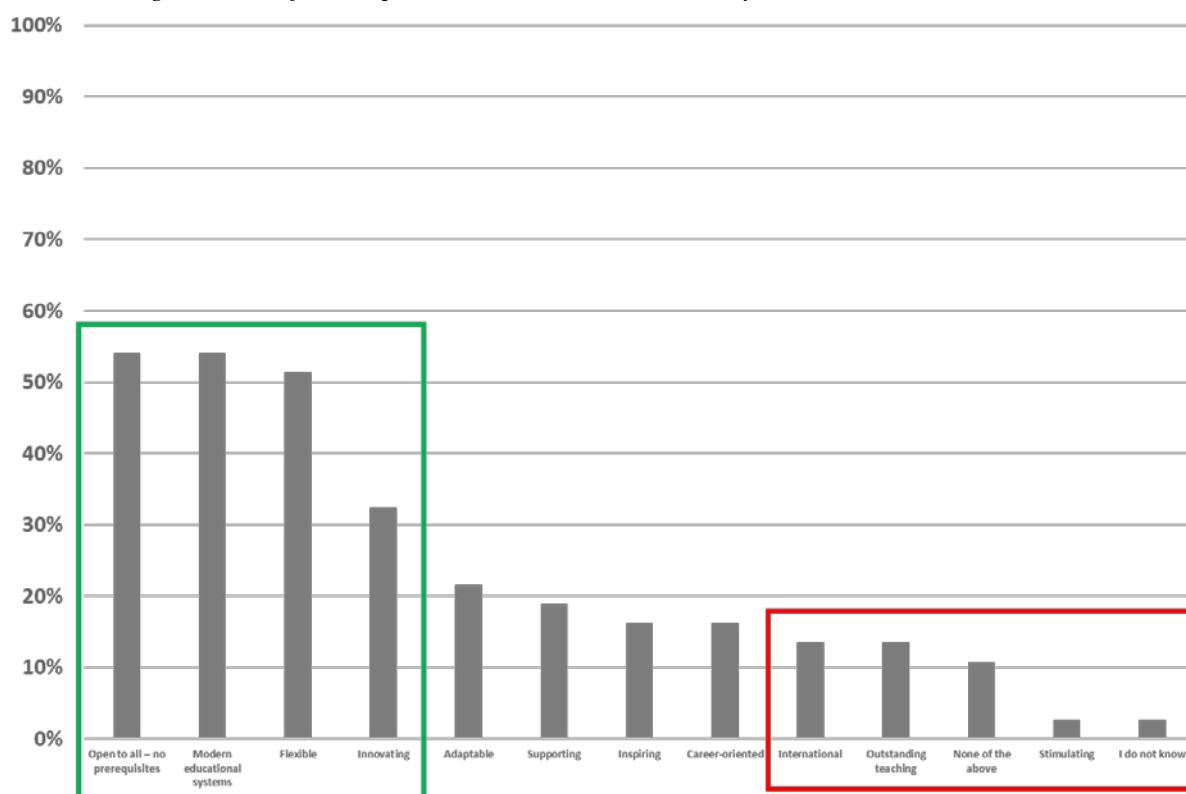
4.3.4.4. BRAND LOYALTY – "WOULD YOU RECOMMEND OUC TO OTHERS WITH POSITIVE DESCRIPTIONS?"

Eighty-one percent replied yes, showing a positive association and loyalty towards the University. Whereas, 19% replied no, out of which 16% are employees (with one third also being a current or a former OUC student), the remaining 3% is OUC alumni (*Figure 37*).

Figure 37: Would you recommend OUC?
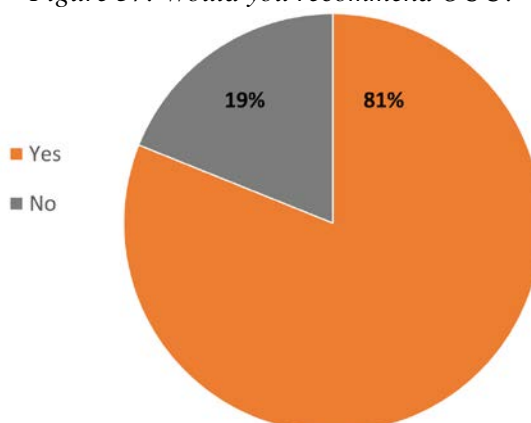
Those that replied negatively, all were not full satisfied from all OUC departments thus responded that the quality of services depends on the department. In addition, they also

responded that they would not consider OUC for a future potential degree. This is a large percentage (19%) that could affect OUC's reputation and thus damage its brand image. It further emphasizes the need to investigate and improve the internal culture of the University and aim for a high standard of quality in all services offered. Peer recommendation is one of the most important factors for a solid and positive brand, and thus customer and employee satisfaction should be a priority.

4.3.4.5. BRAND LOYALTY

When given a list of positive arguments and prompt to choose those that express them, even though no one chose the phrase "Overall, my feelings towards OUC are positive" and 14% chose "None of the above", the rest of the responders responded positively to this question (*Figure 38*). Forty-six percent showed willingness to help (phrase 1), whereas 30% choose the phrase that shows loyalty (phrase 2). These beliefs and attitudes expressed should be further cultivated and strengthened.

Figure 38: Brand Loyalty
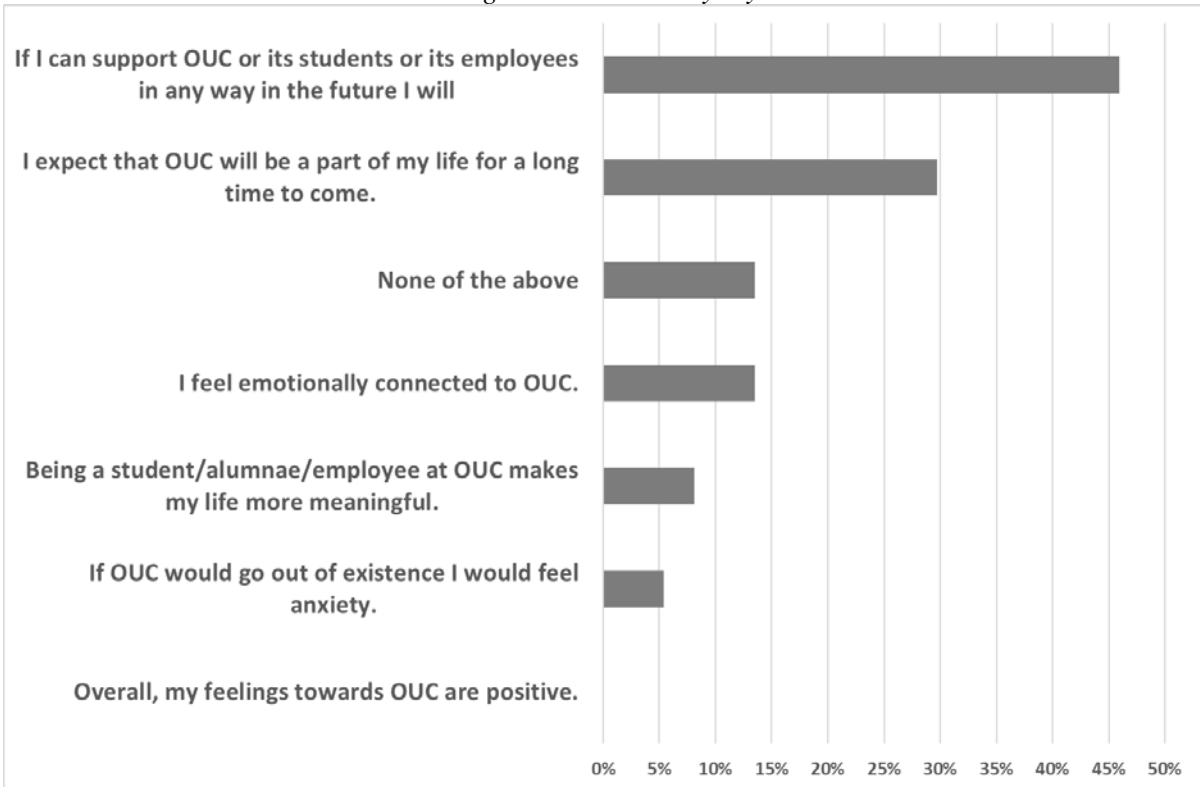
4.3.4.6. SATISFACTION BASED ON SERVICES

As previously discussed, neither all of its employees nor all of its students/alumni are fully satisfied with all of the administrative services offered by the University. More than half, 57% of the employees and 65% of the students/alumni choose the middle option "Quality of services depends on the department" (*Table 14*). The prevailing of such perception decreases the value of OUC's Brand Equity, and damages the peer recommendation factor.

Table 14: Satisfaction based on services

In your opinion, is it easy to go through the processes, i.e. administrative services (Accounts Office, Student Support, HR, Faculties etc) of the university? *	All Responders Associated with OUC	Employees	Students/Alumni
Yes	45%	43%	35%
Depends on the Department / or Service	55%	**57%**	**65%**
No	0%	0%	0%

4.3.4.7. BRAND PERSONALITY ATTRIBUTES (UBPS)

A Rauschnabel et al., 2016, developed and validated a six-dimension scale (University Brand Personality Dimensions Scale -UBPS) that can be applied to all universities, and their results have shown a strong relation of this scale to brand love, positive word-of-mouth, and students' intention to support their university. The scale can be used by OUC management to understand student decision-making process in order to not only attract but also retained students, staff (administration and faculty), alumni and even potential sponsors by improving the University's brand image (Rauschnabel, et al., 2016). Question 24 examines the UBPS scale, each of the attributes asked belongs to one of the six UBPS dimensions (prestige, sincerity, appeal, lively, conscientiousness, cosmopolitan - *Table 15*).

Table 15: UBPS Dimensions and Attributes

Dimension	Attribute
Prestige	Imposing
	Leading
	Reputable
Sincerity	Humane - Helpful
	Friendly
	Trustworthy
Appealing	Attractive
	Productive
Lively	Dynamic
Conscientiousness	Organized
	High Teaching Quality
	High Service Quality
	Administrative Personnel Exhibits Excellent Behaviour
Cosmopolitan	Academics Exhibit Excellent Behaviour
	Networked
	International
OUC Important Attributes	Price - Cheap
	Flexible - meets your needs
	Diverse Range of Courses Offered
	Excellent Educational Material

If we calculate the mean value of each group for each dimension one can clearly see that those that expressed intension in recommending OUC graded each of the attributes above the average except dimensions "Lively" and "Cosmopolitan". Whereas the group that had no intention in recommending OUC graded all dimension below average (*Figure 39*).

Figure 39: Brand personality attributes
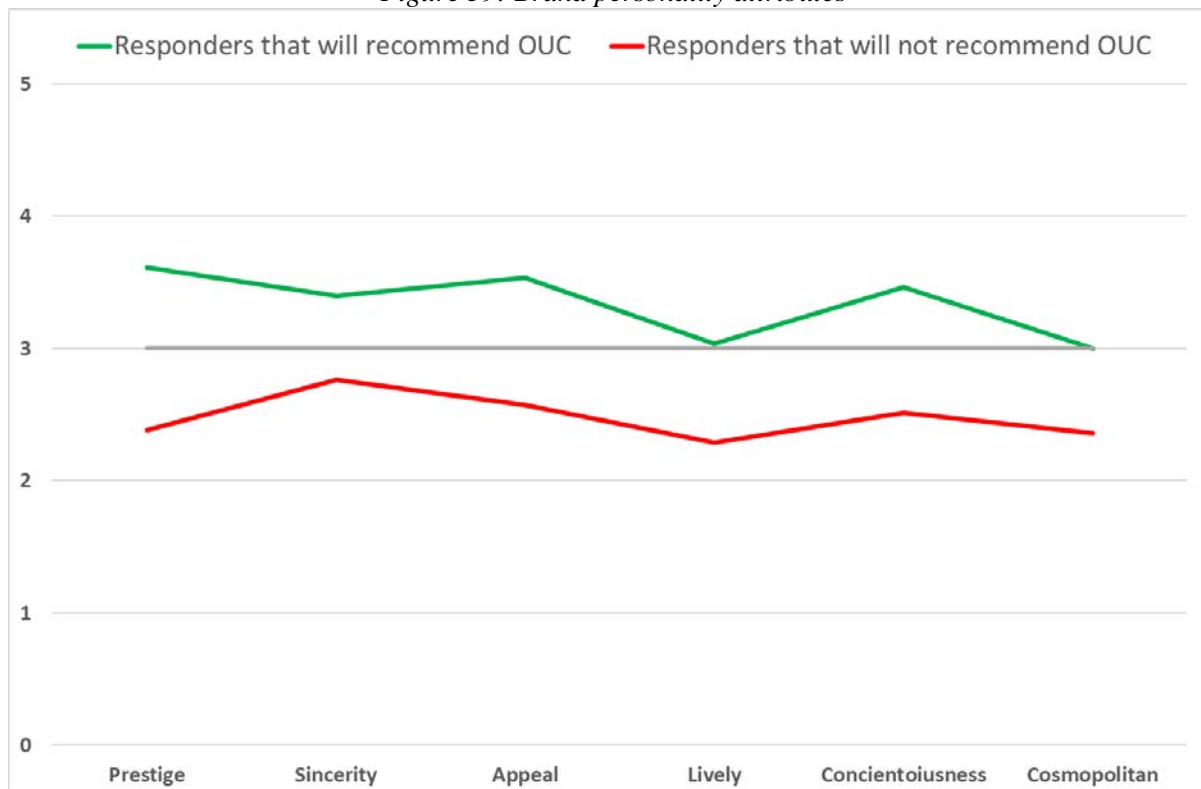
If we compare for each of the groups, the employee responds versus the student alumni response (*Figure 40*) the interesting result comes from the "Would recommend OUC" group. In this group it can be clearly notice that even though employees rate OUC positively, the students/alumni group rate is higher. This result further emphasizes the need for a change in internal culture, to aligned it with the strategy, goals and brand of the University. Other actionable steps to be recommended towards administration in order to improve employee moral are (Dickson, 2019; Anon., 2019):

1. Recognize and Reward valuable employees
2. Cultivate strong relationships
3. Embrace and inspire autonomy but also collaboration.
4. Strengthen honest communication
5. Embrace transparency
6. Encourage teamwork

Figure 40: Brand personality attributes Employees Vs Students/Alumni

"Would not recommend OUC" group | "Would recommend OUC" group
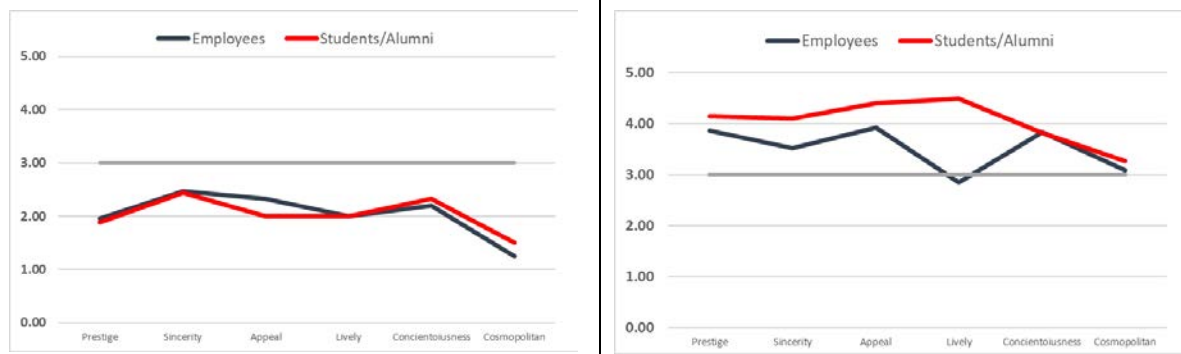
On further analysis, it can be clearly seen that those that have a positive aspect of all attributes, a total of 67% of responders, rated 5 out of the 6 attributes above the average, whereas those that had strong negative feelings towards the University (19%) rate all attributes below average (*Figure 41*). All groups should be the targeted of a branded marketing strategy, as only with a continual improvement of all attributes can OUC achieve a high valued Brand Equity.

Figure 41: UBPS Scale Vs Willingness to recommend OUC
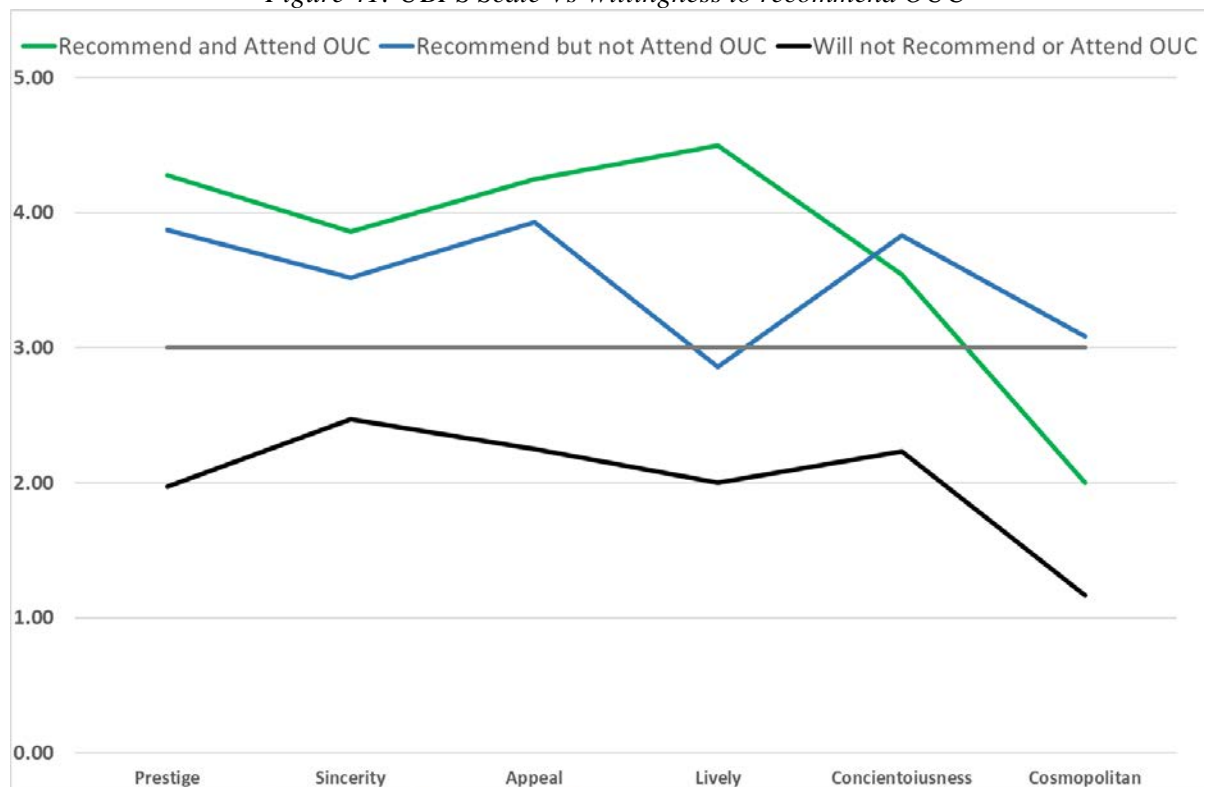
4.3.4.8. BRAND LOYALTY – REASONS FOR STUDYING AT OUC

As previously stated, 35% of the responders are associated with OUC, of which19% stated that they would not recommend OUC to others and also had no intension in attending OUC in the case of a hypothetical future degree. Whereas 81% said that would recommend OUC, with 83% of those replying positively in the case of a hypothetical future degree (*Table 16*).

Table 16: Would you recommend and would want to attend OUC?
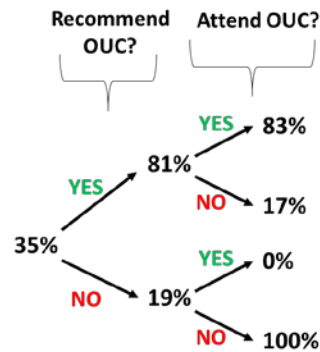
When asked whether they would attend OUC in the case of a hypothetical future degree, out of the 35%, 68% were positive and 32% were negative. All were asked to give reasons for their choice, those colored green are the positive choice, and those colored red are the reason given by the responders that exhibited negative associations with OUC (*Figure 42*).

Figure 42: Negative and positive associations with OUC
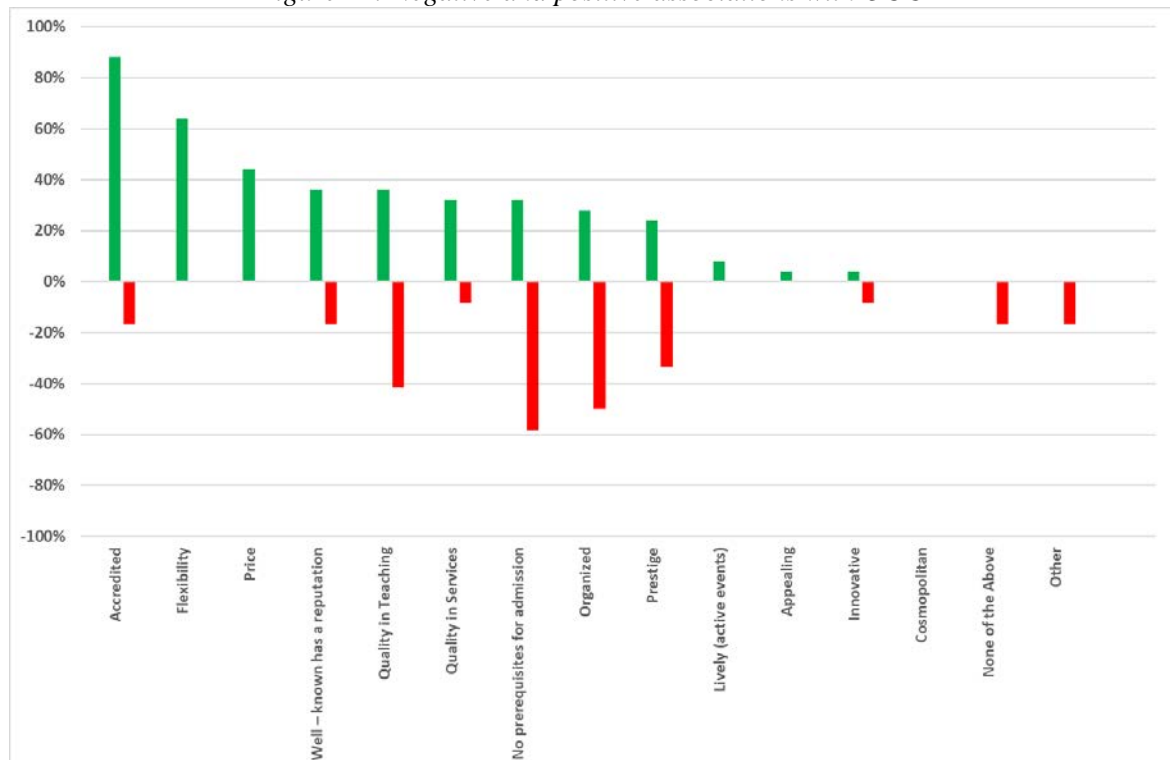
The Fisher Exact test was used to analyze the data and test whether these two groups gave statistically significantly different replies for each of the attributes (*Table 17*).

Based on this analysis overall the two groups are significantly different in regards to the Brand Personality Dimensions, but if we look at each one separately, one can see that only 2 of the 6 dimensions show significant difference between the two groups of responders; prestige and sincerity. These two groups mostly disagree in the following attributes:

Table 17:Statistical Analysis of UBPS Scale Results

Attributes	Fisher Exact Test	
Prestige	**0.033**	**Significant Difference**
Imposing	0.026	Significant Difference
Leading	0.034	Significant Difference
Reputable	0.036	Significant Difference
Sincerity	**0.038**	**Significant Difference**
Humane - Helpful	0.487	Non Significant
Friendly	0.073	Non Significant
Trustworthy	0.003	Significant Difference
Appealing	**0.102**	**Non Significant**
Attractive	0.031	Significant Difference
Productive	0.314	Non Significant
Lively	**0.816**	**Non Significant**
Dynamic	0.816	Non Significant
Conscientiousness	**0.058**	**Non Significant**
Organized	0.287	Non Significant
High Teaching Quality	0.034	Significant Difference
High Service Quality	0.156	Non Significant
Administrative Personnel Exhibits Excellent Behaviour	0.008	Significant Difference
Academics Exhibit Excellent Behaviour	0.034	Significant Difference
Cosmopolitan	**0.055**	**Non Significant**
Networked	0.030	Significant Difference
International	0.115	Non Significant
OUC Important Attributes	**0.021**	**Significant Difference**
Price - Cheap	0.296	Non Significant
Flexible - meets your needs	0.011	Significant Difference
Diverse Range of Courses Offered	0.150	Non Significant
Excellent Educational Material	0.029	Significant Difference
Overall	**0.036**	**Significant Difference**

1. Imposing
2. Leading
3. Reputable
4. Trustworthy
5. Attractive
6. High Teaching Quality
7. Administrative Personnel Exhibits Excellent Behavior
8. Academics Exhibit Excellent Behavior
9. Networked
10. Flexible - meets your needs
11. Excellent Educational Material

With "Trustworthiness", "Administrative Personnel Exhibits Excellent Behavior" and "Flexible - meets your needs" having responses at the two extremes, "Agree" from one group to "Strongly Disagree" in the other group. These are the attributes that OUC's marketing and management teams should first aim to change within the University

4.3.4.9. SUGGESTIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS TO OUC FROM RESPONDERS

A portion from this group of responders, also made suggestions / recommendations in regards to improvements they believe have to be made by OUC administration (*Table 18*). As this group

of individuals were associated with OUC, with the majority of them being employees, their recommendations should be taken with great gravity.

Table 18: Suggestions / recommendations to OUC from responders

Employee (Administrative and Academic) appraisals: from students, collaborators and from each of the different departments. Based on their qualifications, their work contribution, their ability to cooperate and the progress of their assigned projects.

As an OUC alumni, I still have not decided to apply for a Master's degree due to OUC's expensive tuition, it is double the price of OUC's bachelor degree (which I attained at OUC). Furthermore, I do not receive marketing email with Master suggestions from OUC, whereas other Universities not only send dozens of emails, but also contact me via phone, even though I have never provided them with my phone number. My suggestion is for OUC, to find a way to communicate with its alumni, for an example through a phone application from which the University can keep its alumni informed.

To identify the true educational needs of its employees, especially in the 25-60 age group.

To remain as an Open University, target to its vision and to the society. Especially towards those that ABSOLUTELY need an open, flexible and accessible education (special group of people).

Recognize, appreciate and reward employee's work. Make employees fell important and appreciated and this will lead to a better service, behavior towards the customer.

Better Organization

Improve the website

The module (thematic units) to become accessible, appealing and friendlier towards the student.

Newsletters, updating in regards to OUC events and open days etc.

Better communication with the students

Better organized academic calendar. Keep constant dates.

Better service (improve e-mail response) - Fewer bureaucracy (systems should allow students to print certificates / certificates rather and not to be send by e-mails) - Academics should become more familiar with distance methodology (in many cases they behave as if they are in a conventional classroom, or they their lessons are very boring and you cannot follow the lesson, they simply read their presentation, some need training on the subject of distance learning to learn how to engage students and make teaching-presentation more interesting)

An academic institution must follow the market but also be able to compete. It cannot remain stationary, and be complacent because it is a public university. Developments are running and OUC is far behind in terms of marketing and establishing itself. It is unacceptable that OUC is now 10 years in operation and most citizens of the Republic of Cyprus confuse it or even connect it with the University of Cyprus.

4.4. OUC's Market Share

Through publicly available statistical data, one can estimate OUC's market share. In total there are 51,086 students studying in Cyprus, 22,507 Greek-Cypriots and 22,756 foreigners. From which 38,997 attend public and private Universities and 12,089 attend tertiary non-University institutions (CYSTAT, 2019). Based on the same report published by the Ministry of Education on 11/7/2019, 14,418 study through long distance courses (*Table 19*). According to this information and on OUC's publicly available records, it can be calculated that OUC has 8% of the total market share (between both public and private universities) and unfortunately only 28% of the long distance courses market share. As the only public University dedicated to open and long distance teaching, it should own a higher market share. This further emphasizes the need for some aggressive changes.

Table 19: CYSTAT 2019 data on long distance education

Program of Study	Cypriots		Europeans		Other Countries		
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Total
Bachelor	304	345	577	659	16	13	**1914**
Master	422	773	2464	8034	468	278	**12439**
PhD	20	24	10	10	1	0	**65**
Total Students	**746**	**1142**	**3051**	**8703**	**485**	**291**	**14418**
	1888		**11754**		**776**		

4.5. OUC's Social Media Presence

Lastly, OUC's social media presence was estimated by recording its Facebook community and comparing it with that of its competitors. The first thing one might observe is the difference between the private and the public Universities. The European University and the University of Nicosia, two private Universities that greatly invest in brand marketing have more than 200,000 followers, whereas public Universities have communities of less than 40,000. This shows the importance of brand marketing in action as based on official records on the site QS Star University Ranking (https://www.topuniversities.com/), the University of Nicosia has a total of 3,525 students with 396 Academics, while the European University has 5,300 students with 500 Academics, both are in the range of OUC's student and academic communities. However, OUC's social media community is only 7% compared to these two Universities (*Figure 43*).

Figure 43: Facebook Community of each University
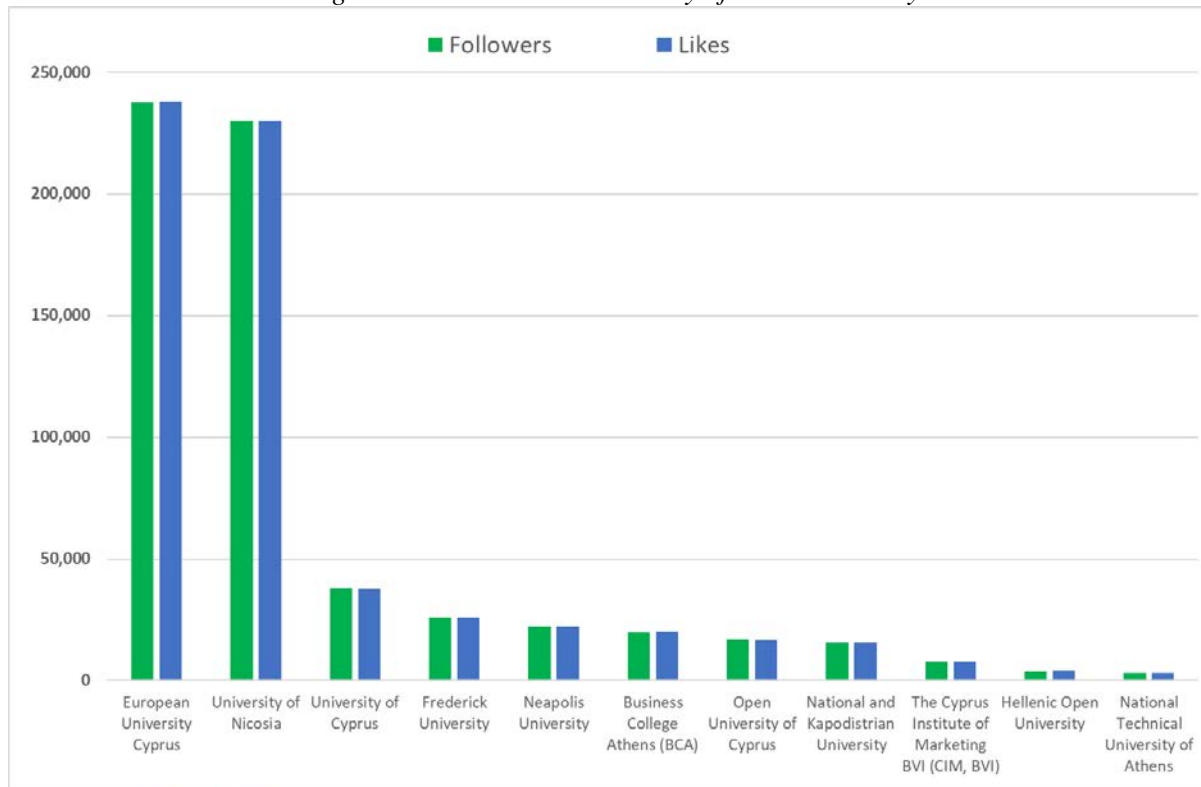
An effective and free marketing tool is the use (intense use) of social media in order to reach customers (students). Through the use of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram the Brand Awareness of an organization can be enhanced, by posting regularly events, news, discussions, etc on a public timeline.

Chapter 5
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the current thesis examines OUC's Brand Personality and Brand Equity. OUC's management can utilize these findings while they should continue investigating OUC's branding activities and brand marketing. Within this study, even though the sample included students, alumni, OUC administrative and academic personnel, potential students and the general public, the sample was small. If this study is repeated it should be aimed to gain a larger sample, especially individuals from Greece.

The questionnaire used for this study assessed behaviorally related constructs e.g. Word-of-Mouth, the psychological relationship between students/alumni and employees with OUC (Brand Love) and alumni support (Brand Loyalty). In total there were 105 responses, 35% of which were associated with OUC, being either an Employee (Administrative or Academic), alumni, student or a combination of all three. In summary the results of the study were the following:

- Brand recall questions, emphasize the necessity for further research and more aggressive marketing strategies, as only half of the Cypriot residents and only 25% of the non-Cypriots recalled OUC. This suggest that OUC's popularity and brand recognition, thus, degree of influence, lags compared to other Universities. Furthermore, these numbers indicate the necessity for advertising not only abroad, but also in Cyprus. This is further emphasized from the University Ranking question where OUC was ranked 6th by the general public and from the "Have you heard of OUC before" question, on which 20% responded no. These results emphasize the necessity of a more aggressive marketing strategy as 12% out of the 20% that had never heard of OUC are Cypriot Residents.
- Brand Image was also investigated. One of the questions concerned OUC's logo, from which 58% had negative feelings associated with it, while almost two thirds of those are associated with OUC. Furthermore, those that came across the logo for the first time,

71% associated it with negative feelings as well. As already mentioned this is further negatively impacted by the fact that a similar logo is used by a local village council.

- Another Brand Image question was concerned with OUC's self-descriptive characteristics, and recorded the beliefs and the perceptions of individuals both associated or not with OUC. Based on this data, the perception of the general public in regards to OUC needs to be improved for all characteristics. Additionally, through proper marketing it should be aimed to decrease the percentage of those that selected "None of the above" and "I don't know". The most worrying response recorded is that 11% of those associated with OUC, selected the option of "None of the above", this indicated low satisfaction and consequently a decrease in loyalty. Fortunately, 54% to 32% believe in 4 of the 11 self-descriptive characteristics (54%, 54%, 51% and 32% respectively). Before aiming for the brand to be associated with these characteristics by the general public, they must be believed and embraced by OUC's administrative and academic societies. One of the most important factors in brand marketing is for the organization's team to believe in its vision and pass this belief and love to the customers.

- Another question investigating Brand Image was "Who do you think attends OUC?". Both groups of responders, associated or not with OUC, classified "Business man and woman" and "People with busy lives" as their first choices. This promotes a positive image for the University as it helps customers better fit into an esteem social group and improves the way they would be perceived by others.

- Another important criterion to determine the organization's Brand Equity is whether its stakeholders know OUC's status, as the name is very similar to the conventional University of Cyprus. The question asked was whether OUC was an independent University or part of the University of Cyprus. Unfortunately, 17% of responders actually believed that OUC is part of the University of Cyprus, with more than half already being familiar with OUC, while two of them being a current student and an OUC alumna.

- Another disappointing result came from the question "Do you believe OUC's degrees are equivalent, accredited and trustworthy?" where 69% of those not associated with OUC and 16% of those associated with the University gave a negative reply or were not sure. With the majority (78%) of this group of responders stating that would not consider OUC for a future hypothetical degree.

- Then the responders were prompt to identify OUC's logo, where only half were successful, this is consistent with the percentage of people that believe OUC is part of the University of Cyprus.

- This study also investigated the method by which responders had come to know OUC. The majority (61%) replied that they know OUC through word-of-mouth, which emphasizes the importance of delivering a high quality of service and teaching, as this can increase peer recommendation and loyalty.

- To test Brand Loyalty, responders were asked if they would recommend OUC to others. Eighty-one percent replied yes, while 19% replied no. From the last group 16% are employees (with one third of them also being a current or a former OUC student) and the 3% being OUC alumni. These responders also stated that they were not equally satisfied from the services of all OUC department, thus they would not consider OUC for a future potential/hypothetical degree. Individuals with such beliefs could affect OUC's reputation and thus damage its Brand Image. Thus, it was suggested to examine how to improve the internal culture of the University and aim for a high standard of quality in all services offered. Peer recommendation is one of the most important factors for a solid and positive brand, and thus customer and employee satisfaction should be a priority.

- Brand Loyalty and intention to support the University was also evaluated by giving a list of positive arguments and prompting the responders to choose the phrases that express them. Even though no one chose the phrase "Overall, my feelings towards OUC are positive" and 14% chose "None of the above", the rest of the responders responded positively to this question. Forty-sex percent showed willingness to help, whereas 30% choose phrases that showed loyalty. These beliefs and attitude expressed should be further cultivated and strengthened.

- Question 24 examined the UBPS scale, and it was clear that those that had expressed intension in recommending OUC graded each of the attributes positively except dimensions "Lively" and "Cosmopolitan". Whereas the group that had no intention in recommending OUC grading all of the dimension below the average. Nonetheless, all groups should be the targeted for a branded marketing strategy, as only with a continual improvement of all attributes can OUC achieve a high valued Brand Equity. With "Trustworthiness", "Administrative Personnel Exhibits Excellent Behavior" and "Flexible - meets your needs" having responses at the two extremes, "Agree" from one group to "Strongly Disagree" in the other group. These are the attributes that OUC's marketing and management should first aim to change within the University. Furthermore, when employee responses were compared with those of students and alumni it became evident that even though employees rated OUC brand positively, it was not as positive as the rating given by the students/alumni group. This result further

emphasizes the need for a change in internal culture, to aligned it with the strategy, goals and brand of the University.

- Finally, when those associated with OUC were asked if they would recommend OUC, 19% replied no, most of which said that the 4 main reason for their negative attitude towards the University was the fact that there are no prerequisites for admission, lack of organization, poor quality of teaching and low prestige degrees.

A number of responders, also made suggestions / recommendations in regards to improvements they believe have to be made by OUC administration and academic sections, these are given in Chapter 4 sections 4.3.3.4 and 4.4.7.

Despite literature on Higher Education Branding, one must be realistic and have in mind that University Branding is too complex to express in a concise brand scheme. The issues, arise due to the University's culture, lack of marketing financial resources, conventional brand management techniques that may be inappropriate for long distance universities and the fact that OUC, as all universities, has multiple stakeholders (Jevons, 2006). Especially in the case of OUC, a long distance University, has stakeholders in a wide range of countries, ages and ethnicities. In addition, OUC's employee personnel (administrative and academic) may have limited commitment, due to the fact that it is a public organization, and this can potentially damage OUC's brand. Personnel is the most crucial key for transmitting the Universities message to its students (customers), to becoming known to prospective students, to increase its market share, to create a unique Brand Identity and Image and to compete with other Universities. If a student is satisfied with OUC's services, they will speak positively about the University to others, thus increased peer recommendation, or even reapply for additional qualifications. Whereas if they receive poor service or are not satisfied they will turn to competitor Universities or speak poorly of OUC to others. OUC management must take this into consideration and firstly aim in the satisfaction and commitment of its personnel, before attempting to building a strong Brand Identity.

5.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this study a number of recommendation have been given and discussed under the analysis and discussion chapter (Chapter 4) and are again summarized in this section. First and most importantly this study should be repeated with a wider and larger sample of responders, with perhaps introducing an interview section. In addition, the Brand Images of

competitive Universities should be investigated and compared with OUC's, as the brand image of one organization is always relative to the brand images of its competitors.

The next priority would be the initiation of and investment to an awareness program in the market in order to create and enhance OUC's Brand Equity. This is crucial for marketing success and consequently profit increase. This program could include the increase of electronic/social media use, the increase in advertisement campaigns, adopt more and better promotional stages to occupy an appealing space on the mind of potential students, implement several, synchronized promotional activities. The aim would be to carry out an aggressive marketing campaign using all means of advertisement on a large scale in order to have a substantial impact: internet (social media), promotion, radio, TV, billboards, word of mouth, newspapers and any other mean available, in order for OUC to become visible via all means of publicity. However, this entails time and money and unfortunately OUC will face challenges due to the lack of resources both in terms of personnel and finances.

Meanwhile a survey investigating market educational needs should be carried out, in order to create a new set of programs of study based on the outcomes, consequently increasing student registration. This market survey should be contacted every few years, so to follow educational and professional trends.

Another important area to emphasize on is customer retention and increase in peer recommendation. This can be achieved through: improvement of the quality of services offered (administrative and academic), improvement of communication systems and flow of information between the University and its customers (students and alumni), by conveying a positive message of the Brand Attributes (e.g. reliability, consciousness, pricing, flexibility, efficiency, sincerity) through every channel (advertising and other types of communications) and last but not least through offering of scholarships, discounts, further training programs, carrier oriented courses and work placements. One of the most important factors necessary to increase peer recommendation and customer retention is to take quick and proper action on customer complain and queries. Employee training, development and satisfaction is also key in reaching these goals, as previously explained.

Last but not least, apart from adopting a branding strategy, OUC should also conduct regular surveys concerning student behavior and market needs, in order to ascertain the effectiveness of their branding strategies over time. From research it has been observed that Branding

influences the process of learning, the creation of beliefs, the formation of attitudes and thus has a great impact on customer decision-making process for any type of purchase. However, for the most effective Branding marketing strategy, it is recommended to ensure that it is targeted at specific behavior types (customer groups), in addition to identifying what factors influence these behaviors.

These and many other recommendations, such as those given by the responders of this study's survey are in the disposal of OUC's management in order to re-strategize its marketing policy and start to strongly consider Branding strategies in order to stay afloat under this intensely competitive market.

Chapter 6
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Chapter 7
APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1
QUESTIONNAIRE ANALYSIS AND REASONING FOR EACH QUESTION

Question Number	Type of Question	Question	Reasoning, Brand Dimension or Influencing Factor Measured
1 to 5	Closed-ended, single choice from multiple answers	This set asked responders for their gender, where they live, their age, educational level and professional status	To determine demographics
6	Closed-ended, Multiple choice from multiple answers	Which of the following Universities do you know or recognize?	Measure Competition and Responders Awareness, through measuring responders' attitude (preference/liking) towards different Universities (from section 1.2.4. – listed alphabetically). To determined OUC's Brand Awareness.
7	Closed-ended, had to rank 11 Universities	Can you rank these Universities, based on your own perception, against each other? Please respond to this question as if you were considering attending one of these Universities for a long-distance degree? (Ranking only 5 of them- 1 being the best!)	
8	Closed-ended, single choice	Have you heard of OUC before?	This measures how effective OUC marketing strategy is. Based on the answer he or she is directed to another section.

Section 1

Question Number	Type of Question	Question	Reasoning, Brand Dimension or Influencing Factor Measured
9	Closed-ended, Multiple choice from multiple answers	How did you come to know OUC?	To investigate the sources from which respondents became aware of OUC
10	Closed-ended, single choice	Is it an independent University or is it the long distance part of the University of Cyprus (UCY)?	To measure brand awareness, to discover whether the responders know OUC. Measure Brand recognition
11	Closed-ended, single choice from multiple answers	Can you identify OUC's logo?	Q:11 Besides measuring Brand Awareness, this question also investigates Brand Image, as the logo is a University's symbol in the market, in addition to communicating the University's identity
12	Closed-ended, Multiple choice from multiple answers	If this, is OUC's logo, then how do you feel about it?	To define OUC's status, Brand Image, Awareness, prestige and marketing strategies.
13	Closed-ended, single choice	Do you believe OUC's degrees are equivalent, accredited and trustworthy?	
14	Closed-ended, Multiple choice from multiple answers	Which type of people do you think attend OUC?	
15	Closed-ended, single choice	If you were going to start a degree would you apply to OUC?	To measure the level of responders' trust towards OUC and whether OUC's image is reliable
16	Closed-ended, Multiple choice from multiple answers	When selecting a University what do you look for?	Decision-making influencing factors
17	Closed-ended, Multiple choice from multiple answers	Do you believe the OUC self-descriptive characteristics found on OUC website are TRUE? Which ones?	To measure the level of responders', trust towards OUC and whether OUC's image is reliable. To find out which attributes the respondents link to OUC
18	Closed-ended, single choice	Are you associated with OUC?	Categorizes responders according to their association with the university. If the response selected no, then the responder was directed to the last question.
	Question 18 can lead to Option 1 or 2 depending on the responder's answer. Option 1 if they answer Yes and Option 2 if they answer No		

Option 1 of Section 1   If the responder chose **Yes** in question 18

Question Number	Type of Question	Question	Reasoning, Brand Dimension or Influencing Factor Measured
19	Closed-ended, Multiple choice from multiple answers	How are you associated with OUC?	Categories responders according to their association (stakeholder status) with the University (employee, alumni, student or all three).
20	Closed-ended, single choice	How many degrees have you acquired from OUC?	Measures Brand Loyalty
21	Closed-ended, single choice	Would you recommend OUC to others with positive descriptions?	To record alumni/student/employee support, brand loyalty, word-of mouth

22	Closed-ended, Multiple choice from multiple answers	Which of the following are TRUE?	Measures Brand love
23	Closed-ended, single choice	Is it easy to go through the processes of the University?	Measures satisfaction
24	Closed-ended, rank each attribute from 1 to 5	Rank the following Brand Personality attributes from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) based on your personal believes in regards to OUC	Determine OUC's brand personality based on the UBPS Scale. Investigates the respondent association with the University and investigate OUC's Brand Image.
25	Closed-ended, single choice	If you want to do another degree would you choose OUC again?	Measures Brand Loyalty.
	Question 25 can lead again to two Options A or B depending on the responser's answer. Option A if they answer Yes and Option B if they answer No		

Option A of Option 1 under Section 1 — If the responder chose **Yes** in question 25

26	Closed-ended, Multiple choice from multiple answers	What are the reasons for your positive answer in the previous question?	To identify the reasons that are important in selecting OUC, and give it a competitive advantage. Recording deciding factors and evaluating Brand Image.
27	Open-ended question. Long answer allowed. Not mandatory	Do you have any suggestions / recommendations for improvement of any the services provided by the Open University of Cyprus.	Freely express themselves using their own words and express their own believes in regards to what OUC needs to improve

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Option B of Option 1 under Section 1 — If the responder chose **NO** in question 25

26	Open-ended question. Long answer allowed. Not mandatory	Do you have any suggestions / recommendations for improvement of any the services provided by the Open University of Cyprus.	Freely express themselves using their own words and express their own believes in regards to what OUC needs to improve

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Option 2 of Section 1 — If the responder chose **No** in question 18

19	Open-ended question. Long answer allowed. Not mandatory	Do you have any suggestions / recommendations for improvement of any the services provided by the Open University of Cyprus.	Freely express themselves using their own words and express their own believes in regards to what OUC needs to improve

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Section 2

	The responders are given a small paragraph regarding the Open University of Cyprus (OUC), before moving on with the questionnaire		
9	Closed-ended, single choice	Is it an independent University or is it the long distance part of the University of Cyprus (UCY)?	To measure brand awareness, to discover whether the responders know OUC. Measure Brand recognition
10	Closed-ended, Multiple choice from multiple answers	If this, is OUC's logo, then how do you feel about it?	To define OUC's status, Brand Image, Awareness, prestige and marketing strategies.
11	Closed-ended, single choice	Do you believe OUC's degrees are equivalent, accredited and trustworthy?	
12	Closed-ended, Multiple choice from multiple answers	Which type of people do you think attend OUC?	

13	Closed-ended, Multiple choice from multiple answers	When selecting a University what do you look for?	Decision-making influencing factors
15	Closed-ended, single choice	If you were going to start a degree would you apply to OUC?	To measure the level of responders' trust towards OUC and whether OUC's image is reliable

Question 15 of Section 2, can lead to Option 1 or 2 depending on the responder's answer. Option 1 if they answer Yes and Option 2 if they answer No

Option 1 of Section 2   If the responder chose **Yes** in question 15

16	Closed-ended, Multiple choice from multiple answers	Do you believe the OUC self-descriptive characteristics found on OUC website are TRUE? Which ones?	To measure the level of responders', trust towards OUC and whether OUC's image is reliable. To find out which attributes the respondents link to OUC
17	Open-ended question. Long answer allowed. Not mandatory	Do you have any suggestions / recommendations for improvement of any the services provided by the Open University of Cyprus.	Freely express themselves using their own words and express their own believes in regards to what OUC needs to improve

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Option 2 of Section 2   If the responder chose **No** in question 15

16	Open-ended question. Long answer allowed. Not mandatory	Do you have any suggestions / recommendations for improvement of any the services provided by the Open University of Cyprus.	Freely express themselves using their own words and express their own believes in regards to what OUC needs to improve

SUBMIT FORM

APPENDIX 2
QUESTIONAIRE

<u>**Questionnaire on the Brand Personality of a Higher Education Institute**</u>

Dear friend,

This questionnaire was developed in the framework of a University MBA thesis on the topic of "Brand Personality of a Higher Education Institute". This survey is for academic purposes and all the responses will be recorded anonymously and treated with the strictest confidence. However, 5 sets of personal data are recorded (Gender, Country of Origin, Age, Occupation and Education). These set of data will be securely store for 3 months only, after which only statistical conclusions will be submitted for the fulfillment of my MBA master degree requirements. By filling out this questionnaire you agree that we will process your anonymous set of data for academic purposes.

The survey will take from 3 minutes to 8 minutes, depending on your answers. In total it contains 16 to 27 questions again depending on your answers. Please choose the answer that truly reflects your opinion, perspectives, liking and disliking, on the scale from 1 to 5 or from the options given. There is no right or wrong answer, all that we are interested in is your opinion.

Thank you for your participation and remember your answers will be anonymous!

Demographics (*Mandatory questions)

1. Gender? *
   - ☐ Female
   - ☐ Male
   - ☐ Prefer not to say

2. Where do you live? *
   - ☐ Greece
   - ☐ Cyprus
   - ☐ Other ……………………………………..

3. Age? *
   - ☐ Under 18
   - ☐ 18 - 24
   - ☐ 25 - 34
   - ☐ 35 - 44
   - ☐ 45 - 54
   - ☐ 55 - 64
   - ☐ 65 and above

4. Educational level? (Select the highest)
   - ☐ Elementary School
   - ☐ High School Graduate
   - ☐ Associate/College degree or technical training degree
   - ☐ Bachelor's degree
   - ☐ Master's degree
   - ☐ Professional degree
   - ☐ Doctorate Degree (PhD)

5. Are you….
   - ☐ Unemployed
   - ☐ Student
   - ☐ Employed in the public sector
   - ☐ Employed in the private sector
   - ☐ Retired
   - ☐ Housekeeping/ Housewife/ Stay Home Husband

Main Body of Questions (*Mandatory questions)

6. Which of the following Universities do you know or recognize (Choose more than one if applicable)? *****
   - ☐ Business College Athens (BCA)
   - ☐ European University Cyprus
   - ☐ Frederick University
   - ☐ Hellenic Open University
   - ☐ National and Kapodistrian University
   - ☐ National Technical University of Athens
   - ☐ Neapolis University
   - ☐ Open University of Cyprus
   - ☐ The Cyprus Institute of Marketing BVI (CIM, BVI)
   - ☐ University of Cyprus
   - ☐ University of Nicosia

7. Can you rank these Universities, based on your own perception, against each other? Please respond to this question as if you were considering attending one of these Universities for a long-distance degree? (Ranking only 5 of them- 1 being the best!) *

	1	2	3	4	5
Business College Athens (BCA)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
European University Cyprus	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Frederick University	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hellenic Open University	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
National and Kapodistrian University	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
National Technical University of Athens	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Neapolis University	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Open University of Cyprus	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The Cyprus Institute of Marketing BVI (CIM, BVI)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
University of Cyprus	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
University of Nicosia	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

8. Have you heard of the Open University of Cyprus (OUC) before? *
   ☐   Yes – **Continue to Section 1**
   ☐   No – **Continue to Section 2**

Section 1

How did you come to know OUC? (Choose more than one if you want) *
- ☐ Word- of- Mouth, from a friend or family member
- ☐ While searching for a University
- ☐ TV or Radio
- ☐ Advertisement (Road Signs, Newspaper or Magazine)
- ☐ Online Advertisement
- ☐ I am an employee or a student or an alumni of OUC

Is it an independent University or is it the long distance department of the University of Cyprus (UCY)? *
- ☐ Independent University
- ☐ Part of UCY

Section 2

First read this information about the Open University of Cyprus (OUC)

The OUC is entirely dedicated to open and distance education. During the 2018-2019 academic year it offered twenty-six (26) programs of study in 'classical' and contemporary scientific fields in both Greek and English at the Undergraduate, Master and doctoral level. OUC has no age limit, financial or social preconditions in accepting students, thus, it encourages all individuals to pursue a higher education degree or complete their education (OUC, n.d.).

Is it an independent University or is it the long distance department of the University of Cyprus (UCY)? *
- ☐ Independent University
- ☐ Part of UCY

Can you identify OUC's logo (Open University of Cyprus)? *

 ☐

 ☐

 ☐

 ☐

 ☐

 ☐

 ☐

 ☐

 ☐

 ☐

If this, is OUC's logo, then how do you feel about it? (Choose more than one if you want) *

☐ It's hard to link it with a University
☐ Nothing positive
☐ Friendly
☐ Creative
☐ Energetic
☐ Artistic
☐ Intellectual
☐ Flexible
☐ Adaptive
☐ Other: ……………………………………………

If this, is OUC's logo, then how do you feel about it? (Choose more than one if you want) *

☐ It's hard to link it with a University
☐ Nothing positive
☐ Friendly
☐ Creative
☐ Energetic
☐ Artistic
☐ Flexible
☐ Adaptive
☐ Other: ……………………………………………

Do you believe OUC's degrees are equivalent, accredited and trustworthy? *

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Do not know

Do you believe OUC's degrees are equivalent, accredited and trustworthy? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Do not know

Which type of people do you think attend OUC? (Choose more than one if you want) *

- ☐ Business men and women
- ☐ 18-year-old students
- ☐ People with high salary
- ☐ Unemployed
- ☐ People with busy lives
- ☐ People that do not have any other qualification

Which type of people do you think attend OUC? (Choose more than one if you want) *

- ☐ Business men and women
- ☐ 18-year-old students
- ☐ People with high salary
- ☐ Unemployed
- ☐ People with busy lives
- ☐ People that do not have any other qualification

When selecting a University what do you look for? (You may choose more than one if you want) *

- ☐ Accredited
- ☐ Well – known, have a reputation
- ☐ Prestige
- ☐ Lively (active, events)
- ☐ Appealing
- ☐ Organized
- ☐ Cosmopolitan
- ☐ High teach quality
- ☐ Flexibility
- ☐ Other: …………………………………………

If you were going to start a degree now would you apply to OUC? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

When selecting a University what do you look for? (You may choose more than one if you want) *

- ☐ Accredited
- ☐ Well – known, have a reputation
- ☐ Prestige
- ☐ Lively (active, events)
- ☐ Appealing
- ☐ Organized
- ☐ Cosmopolitan
- ☐ High teach quality
- ☐ Flexibility
- ☐ Other: …………………………………………

Do you believe the OUC self-descriptive characteristics found on OUC website are TRUE? Which ones? *

- ☐ Inspiring
- ☐ Innovating
- ☐ Open to all – no prerequisites
- ☐ Flexible
- ☐ Adaptable
- ☐ Stimulating
- ☐ International
- ☐ Modern educational systems
- ☐ Outstanding teaching
- ☐ Supporting
- ☐ Career-oriented
- ☐ None of the above

If you were going to start a degree now would you apply to OUC (Open University of Cyprus)? *

- ☐ Yes – **Continue with next question**
- ☐ No – **Continue to the last question**

Do you believe the OUC self-descriptive characteristics found on OUC website are TRUE? Which ones? *

- ☐ Inspiring
- ☐ Innovating
- ☐ Open to all – no prerequisites
- ☐ Flexible
- ☐ Adaptable
- ☐ Stimulating
- ☐ International
- ☐ Modern educational systems
- ☐ Outstanding teaching
- ☐ Supporting
- ☐ Career-oriented
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ I do not Know

☐ I do not Know

Are you associated with OUC? *
☐ Yes – **Continue with next question**
☐ No - **Continue to the last question**

How are you associated with OUC? (Choose more than one if applicable) *
☐ Alumnae
☐ Student
☐ Employee – Administrative or Academic
☐ Other: ………………………………………

How many degrees have you acquired from OUC? *
☐ 0
☐ 1
☐ 2 or more
☐ Did only modules, no degree

Thank you for your time and effort. This question is not mandatory. If you do not want to make any suggestions you may submit your anonymous answers, by pressing SUBMIT.

Do you have any suggestions / recommendations for improvement of any the services provided by the Open University of Cyprus?

………………………………………………………….
………………………………………………………….
………………………………………………………….
………………………………………………………….
………………………………………………………….
………………………………………………………….

SUBMIT FORM (Version 1 and 2)

Would you recommend OUC to others with positive descriptions? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Which of the following are **TRUE**? Choose as many as you want. *

- ☐ If I can support OUC or its students or its employees in any way in the future, I will
- ☐ I expect that OUC will be a part of my life for a long time to come.
- ☐ If OUC would go out of existence, I would feel anxiety.
- ☐ Being a student/alumnae/employee at OUC makes my life more meaningful.
- ☐ I feel emotionally connected to OUC.
- ☐ Overall, my feelings towards OUC are positive.
- ☐ None of the above

Is it easy to go through the processes of the university? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Depends on the Department / or Service
- ☐ No

Rank the following Brand Personality attributes from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) based on your personal believes in regards to OUC. *

- ☐ Prestige - Imposing
- ☐ Leading University
- ☐ Reputable
- ☐ Humane - Helpful
- ☐ Friendly
- ☐ Trustworthy
- ☐ Appealing - Attractive
- ☐ Productive
- ☐ Lively - Dynamic
- ☐ Organized
- ☐ High Teaching Quality
- ☐ High Service Quality
- ☐ Administrative Personnel Exhibits Excellent Behaviour
- ☐ Academic Exhibit Excellent Behaviour
- ☐ Networked
- ☐ International
- ☐ Price – Cheap
- ☐ Flexible – meets your needs
- ☐ Diverse Range of Courses Offered
- ☐ Excellent Educational Material

If you want to do another degree would you choose OUC again? *

- ☐ Yes – **Continue with section 3**
- ☐ No – **Continue with section 4**

Section 3

What are the reasons for your positive answer in the previous question? *

- ☐ Price
- ☐ No prerequisites for admission
- ☐ Accredited
- ☐ Well – known, has a reputation
- ☐ Innovative
- ☐ Prestige
- ☐ Lively (active, events)
- ☐ Appealing
- ☐ Organized
- ☐ Cosmopolitan
- ☐ Quality in Teaching
- ☐ Quality in Services
- ☐ Flexibility
- ☐ None of the Above
- ☐ Other:………………………

Section 4

What are the reasons for your negative answer in the previous question? *

- ☐ Price
- ☐ No prerequisites for admission
- ☐ Accredited
- ☐ Well – known, has a reputation
- ☐ Innovative
- ☐ Prestige
- ☐ Lively (active, events)
- ☐ Appealing
- ☐ Organized
- ☐ Cosmopolitan
- ☐ Quality in Teaching
- ☐ Quality in Services
- ☐ Flexibility
- ☐ None of the Above
- ☐ Other:………………………

Thank you for your time and effort. This question is not mandatory. If you do not want to make any suggestions you may submit your anonymous answers, by pressing SUBMIT. Do you have any suggestions / recommendations for improvement of any the services provided by the Open University of Cyprus?

……

……

SUBMIT FORM (Version 3, 4 and 5)