Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) have changed not only the way we communicate, but also the entire context and nature of the exchange. Boundary-crossing options for teaching and learning mean institutions must compete globally for students. Those students are accustomed to a world where decisions of all kinds are based on connections and relationships. They do not simply buy products based on what is seen or felt in a store, but on the perceived relationship with the company and other customers. Instead of trusting advertising messages or even professional ratings, they trust the judgments of other customers—regardless of the fact that they are unseen, unknown strangers. Companies such as Amazon.com have successfully leveraged this potential for company-customer and customer-customer relationships and customer reviews, ratings or lists. Such companies set Internet users’ expectations for highly interactive, relational information and experiences.

In this milieu, institutions of higher education must rethink the ways they relate to prospective students as well as current students the institutions aim to engage and retain. Yet there are many unknowns about the extent to which consumer attitudes and social behaviors extend to choices for a life-changing potential of education as compared to a short-lived, often disposable product.

The two IJTEM special issues on Higher Education Marketing present a range of thinking about these new questions. In addition to this issue, which focuses on the use of social media technologies to recruit new students, a second issue will look at a wider range of research on emerging practices for marketing in higher education.

This issue begins with a study by Chris Chapleo, “What is the Secret of Successful University Brands?” It explores a broad question about university branding and corporate branding, and asks how the concept of brand “adds value to organizations beyond the usual focus of consumer product marketing.” Brand is undeniably central to the way Facebook and other social media sites have built large memberships. The following three articles look variously at social media in higher education marketing. In “The Use of Facebook as a Marketing Tool by Private Educational Institutions in Singapore” H. K. Leng explored Facebook in particular, and its potential for engaging participants and inviting them to contribute content to generate “shared cultural meaning” of the brand. Natalia Rekhter’s study, “Using Social Network Sites for Higher Education Marketing and Recruitment,” Constantinides and Zinc Stagno’s article “Higher Education Marketing: A Study on the Impact of Social Media on Study Selection and University
Choice” look not only at different types of social media, but also varied ways and levels of participation and their implications for higher education marketing.

Higher education institutions do not stop marketing once students have enrolled. They want to retain students (and build, yes, brand loyalty that may result in loyal and generous alumni!) The final article “You Name It: Comparing Holistic and Analytical Rating Methods of Eliciting Preferences in Naming using Ranks as a Concurrent Validity Criterion” by Roszkowski and Spreat, explores ways to solicit and analyze student ratings and perspectives on programs and faculty.

Nearly every article in this issue includes a caveat along the lines of this point: there is little extant research that offers relevant foundations for understanding the dilemmas at hand. With this given, we hope the studies described here will become, respectively, foundations for further research.

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