

# Poles reversed: An exploratory buyer behavioural profile of the European Erasmus 2.0 generation study-abroad student market

*Keith Coman*

*Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology, New Zealand*

*Linda Liddicoat*

*Independent Business Researcher, Tasman, New Zealand*

## Abstract

The purpose of this research is to explore the European Union Erasmus 2.0 student cohort from a buyer behavioural perspective with the aim of deconstructing surface evidence to reveal underlying patterns in student decision-making when choosing to 'study abroad' outside of Europe. This paper uses a consumer profiling approach to extract a diversified mix of student clusters that are differentiated one from another in terms of the relative strength of reference group, motivational, involvement and attitudinal vectors. The findings of this investigation show that Erasmus 2.0 students form a distinctive consumption sub-culture having little shared commonality with international students from elsewhere in the world, and within themselves they display a marked degree of variety in their expectations and perceptions. The outcome of this exploratory research is intended to assist higher-education marketing departments in honing strategies to appeal to European students.

**Keywords:** Erasmus 2.0, European study-abroad, buyer decision-making, higher education.

## Introduction

In today's world, knowledge transfer in the higher education sector is an internationally traded service offering. Global growth in the demand for work-ready graduates has combined with domestic funding constraints to fuel competition between institutions, and their respective marketing departments are required to attract and retain international students in sustained and viable numbers (Pfeffer & Fong, 2004). For at least 20 years, higher education institutions in English-speaking countries have targeted

international students in developing regions such as Asia-Pacific, the Middle East and the Indian sub-continent.

This paper takes a different perspective to this mainstream market scenario by focusing on the “Erasmus 2.0” student cohort originating in Western Europe who are commonly expected or required to satisfy a study-abroad component of their undergraduate programmes whereby they attend a host institution for a period ranging in time from a few weeks to a semester or longer.

### **Rationale for the study**

Effective marketing of an overseas higher institution to members of the European Millennial cohort requires a depth of insight into the not only their criteria for destination selection but the underlying decision-making processes employed. The study forming the basis of this paper arose out of a marketing knowledge gap between macro-market statistics and the in-classroom experiences over a number of years when working with European business degree students. We knew the size and trends within this market and we understood the qualities and dynamics European students brought to our classes, but what intrigued us most were their antecedent host institution selection processes. This paper seeks to narrow this gap for higher education marketers.

### **The Erasmus programme and Erasmus 2.0 students**

Established in 1987, the Erasmus Programme is an entrenched feature of contemporary European Union tertiary education and represents a considered response to economic deregulation and globalisation forces energising a demand for internationally-savvy graduates possessing the skills to contribute to multicultural project teams, global management and entrepreneurialism (Wiers-Jenssen, 2011). With a 2017 budget of nearly 7 million Euros, the Erasmus Programme funds a broad spectrum of education initiatives for schools, higher education, vocational education and training, adult education, and includes study-exchanges, study visits, research and networking opportunities (European Commission, 2017).

Viewed in the round, the term “Erasmus 2.0 Generation” colloquially refers to recent European graduates and students who have, or shortly will,

experience studying and working in foreign countries. As a Millennium socio-demographic cohort, Erasmus 2.0s are the first generation to grow up without national borders, they were born with the internet, are multilingual and inculcated with a “Unified Europe” ethos. At the same time their general outlook has been heavily affected by Western Europe’s ongoing economic contraction and dislocation in the years since 2008.

In common with any mass-consumption market, Erasmus 2.0 students present themselves as a highly attractive target group for overseas tertiary education providers. However, as any seasoned marketer knows, it is a myopic delusion to view any mass market as homogeneous and undifferentiated. In this paper, we therefore espouse the fundamental marketing assumption of consumer heterogeneity; namely, Erasmus 2.0s are a highly differentiated market possessing considerable variation in composition, technical and linguistic abilities, expectations and learning preferences (Levine & Dean, 2012; Sigalas, 2010).

## **Methodology**

In an attempt to throw light on the needs, wants and decision-making priorities associated with Erasmus 2.0s when embarking upon their study-abroad ventures, we employed a consumer profiling approach (Caddick & Dale, 1987) to isolate salient buyer behavioural attributes employed to select a host country and institution, and the criteria used to evaluate service quality perceptions.

Operationally, this study employed self-reported experiential feedback obtained in 2016 and 2017 from participant observation and discourse involving approximately twenty young people pursuing a three-and-half year trinational business degree program in France, Germany and Switzerland. Parallel fact-finding involved a content analysis of study-abroad promotional websites suggested by students, and a consumer-behaviour literature review.

## **Erasmus 2.0 students: a distinct market**

Erasmus 2.0 students display all the qualities of a consumer ideology that cultural theorist Bocoock (1993) described as imparting meaning to life by “buying things and pre-packaged experiences” (p.50). In other words, in

exchange for two, three or more years of their lives, students expect a tertiary provider to deliver a service offering that will challenge them, help them grow as individuals and graduate as better persons than they were when they first enrolled. The student-consumer is offered a bundled service experience that includes an academic major, recreational and sporting activities, new friendships and innovative life experiences. At a deeper motivational level, these service attributes translate into an expectation of tapping into new ideas that will mould not only a secure adult identity but an enhanced ability to pursue life-goal ambitions. Erasmus 2.0 students thus equate to what Aaker (2005) defines as a value-seeking product-market.

Erasmus 2.0 students constitute a valuable market segment for overseas higher education institutions. They inject a stabilising element into a host institution's student enrolment picture – and thereby its financial position. This is especially so in the case of countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, having whole or partial user-pays fees policies for domestic students, capped tertiary education funding from central government and static-growth youth population demographics. Faced with these realities and the need to maintain the viability of their tertiary education providers, national governments and domestic providers endorse in-bound study migration, bearing in mind that international students often pay premium fees, carry their own living costs while stimulating tourism and regional economies generally (e.g. Education New Zealand, 2016).

On the supply side, the impetus behind the Erasmus Programme enjoys long-term support. Tertiary education is viewed by European Commission policymakers as a platform for promoting a progressive socio-economic change agenda, nurturing not only long-term economic growth and enhanced employment outcomes, but also intercultural tolerance as per the EU's motto of "United in Diversity" (European Commission, Erasmus+ Programme Guide, 2014). In regard to this latter social goal, the Erasmus Programme's promotion of study-abroad accords with Allport's contact hypothesis (1954) whereby interaction between students from different cultures is posited to improve intergroup attitudes and reduce negative stereotyping (Messelink & ten Thije, 2012).

Consistent with this vision of tolerance and cultural diversity, the European Union's active promotion of study-abroad programmes implicitly acknowledges the five operant conditions identified by Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern (2002) as critical success factors to any cross-cultural experiment: equivalence of status, shared goals, intergroup cooperation, institutional support and a favourable value-judgment assessment of the experience. In other words, study-abroad students will move towards enhanced intercultural understanding *only* if the overseas experience reaches out to accommodate them. Note that all five conditions are critical, and because an Erasmus 2.0's judgment is likely to be a product of these factors and not a sum, the likelihood of a positive assessment of an overseas experience may drop to zero if any one of these variables is perceived to be gravely deficient. For example, a study-abroad student experiencing partial exclusion due to a lack of language proficiency, silent discrimination, irreconcilable timetable clashes or mismatched course-entry prerequisites will experience a sense of disappointment, if not outright service quality dissatisfaction.

### **Choosing a study-abroad destination**

How do Erasmus 2.0 students make their study-abroad choices?

On the surface, European undergraduates can pick and choose from a plethora of study-abroad host institutions located within Western Europe and further afield in the Americas and Australasian/Asia-Pacific region (Bolen, 2001). These home and foreign host institutions will have in place reciprocity and articulation agreements based upon cognate study programmes, levels of curriculum alignment and mutually acceptable academic quality criteria.

However, at a personal level young people aspire to do cool things and amass great stories in exotic locations while spending a semester or two abroad. A review of study-abroad promotion materials and websites targeting European students revealed five generic marketing themes: youthful adventure, self-worth enhancement, fun, and safety all embodied in exciting foreign locales. Great use was made of trigger words such as *confidence, participation, experiential education, self-reliance, personal growth, communication skills, landing a dream job, bilingual* and *self-assurance*. In

contrast, dry (but no less important) logistical and practical considerations involving academic approval and cross-credit arrangements typically appeared as qualifiers requiring the student to consult with their host institution's curriculum advisor.

This created an uneasy sense that marketing strategies targeting Erasmus 2.0 students may be inclined to adopt a one-size-fits-all promotion approach. It also gave added impetus to our desire to drill more deeply into the buyer behavioural dynamics of this consumption sub-culture.

### **Social influences**

In this section, we examine student decision-making within a social group context and how outer-directed feedback informs study-abroad choices. Here, we also demonstrate how reference groups and the quest for a coherent social identity leads to affirmation and reassurance.

### **Reference groups**

Buyer behaviour has long avowed the profound significance of social group influence over the individual consumer's purchase decision-making and product usage (Canniford & Shankar, 2011; Quester, Pettigrew, Kopanidis, & Hill, 2015). In particular, social identity theory states that a consumer's personal salencies are often defined by connections to and relationships with other people existing in the consumer's reference groups. As is the case with any other consumer facing high levels of perceived risk, Erasmus 2.0s contemplating study-abroad must be expected to seek approval and insight from reference groups comprising people holding emotional and expert-value significance, the most obvious of whom are family and close friends, opinion leaders such as senior students, faculty, and "expert" informants with compelling stories to tell on social media (Goldsmith, Flynn & Goldsmith, 2003; Sirgy, Rahtz & Portolese, 2017).

Nodes of reference group influence do not enjoy equivalence, nor are they unbiased. For example, the advice and support of a respected faculty member may prove decisive in a student's selection of an overseas study host on academic grounds, whilst family members can mediate country-of-

choice on considerations of safety, accommodation and access to an overseas support network such as relatives and close family friends.

Due to the complexity of feedback from diverse reference group sources, we suggest that many Erasmus 2.0 students resort to “thin-slicing” their judgements by placing high levels of reliance upon information received from a small number of decision-critical informants (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992). An overseas higher-education institution seeking to attract Erasmus 2.0s would thus need to push its way to the forefront as a source of reference group influence. One way of doing this aligns with Felson & Reed’s (1986) argument that alumni associations constitute a powerful source of opinion leadership whose regular celebrations and communications act as status personalities and reinforcement vectors of self-worth and aspiration. Moreover, providing junior students with direct access to credible opinion leaders in the form of senior students, past graduates, faculty and one-to-one mentors can be expected to accelerate the thin-slicing process (Valente & Davis, 1999). The positive impact of credible opinion leaders upon study-abroad student decision-making should never be underestimated. Their words and insights imbue the overseas study experience with substantive meanings that transcend conventional advertising messages (Beech, 2015).

### **Social identity**

Social identity informs the student’s decision-making processes and fuels an appetite to study abroad. The concept of the “extended self” is a key factor in consumer behaviour whereby individuals consciously and unconsciously make important purchase decisions based upon the identity they wish to project of themselves to others (Phillips, 2003).

Educational achievement possesses great symbolic power, through which individuals convince others of who they are and where they fit into a social hierarchy. The selection of a particular study programme is profoundly important to many students because it forms a basis of how they will be judged by others, most notably prospective employers in the time immediately after graduation. Such fundamental job interview enquiries as an applicant’s alma mater, subjects studied, grades achieved, time spent overseas, and foreign language proficiency go right to the heart of an

ambitious student's quest for a coherent social identity (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Hickman & Ward, 2007; Hoyer, MacInnis & Pieters, 2008).

Study-abroad is thus an important personal development milestone in the journey towards programme completion and graduation. Completing a study-abroad programme demonstrates achievement and stands as a rite of passage and an expression of independence (Allen, 2010). It follows therefore that highly motivated Erasmus 2.0s will prove to be discerning consumers when exercising their study-abroad choices. For example, summing up the long-term impact of their immersion in French studies, Canadians Jordana Garbati and Natalie Rothschild (2016) concluded that their study abroad experiences "directly shaped our decisions about education and careers ... and led to the development of our identities." (paragraph 78).

### **Psychological influences**

In the second part of our buyer-behavioural review, we examine Erasmus 2.0 student study-abroad motivations, attitudinal values and the question of decision-making importance as determined by student involvement. The discussion is divided into sub-sections enabling insight to be reached despite a multiplicity of psychological variables.

### **Motivation**

Motivation is an energising force that triggers behaviour and provides it with purpose, direction and momentum. Study-abroad becomes a focused motive when Erasmus 2.0s progress to a point where this requirement looms up on their medium-term study horizons (Rani, 2014).

Apart from its mandatory course-completion compulsion, a parallel question is to ask why Erasmus 2.0s are *really* disposed towards spending up to a year away from their home institution, with many electing to travel outside of Europe to English-speaking host institutions in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Many buyer behavioural theories exist to explain how motives influence choice behaviours in high-involvement purchase decisions. For the



purposes of this paper, we adopt a perspective aligning with Asoodar, Baten, Van Maele and Vassilicos (2014), who reported that the main motivations for enrolling on a tertiary education programme, regardless of type, is a quest for self-actualisation as it pertains to the pursuit of personal growth, independence, financial security, self-confidence and knowledge. But how is the concept of Erasmus 2.0 student “self-actualisation: operationalised? As consumer marketers, we elected to make recourse to McGuire’s (1976) well-known taxonomy of buyer behavioural motivations, and suggest there are four primary factors in play.

### *Exploration*

This includes seeking stimulation through experiencing new events, to test oneself in novel situations, to lift the lid on curiosities and satisfy an itch to step outside a comfort bubble. Exploration also appears to mesh quite well with Millennial Generation values prizing access over ownership, and experience over possession (Morgan, 2015).

### *Attribution*

Studying abroad promotes a deeper understanding of one’s own attitudes. This enhances critical thought and enables the wearing of “cultural spectacles” to gain insight into why people of other cultures behave the way they do. “If you want to understand how to get things done in this country, you must not only speak the language but understand all the subtle nuances of everyday life that team members, customers and suppliers carry with them. You can’t come crashing in and expect to succeed if your point of reference is fixed in Chicago, London or Stuttgart. Cultural flexibility is key.” (P. van Rensburg, personal communication, June 8, 2017)

### *Self-Expression*

Outer-directed personalities garner feelings of self-worth and social acceptance on the basis of how others view them. Mastering another language (particularly English) and displaying cross-cultural comfort can be leveraged to express their identity and enhance their employability in a tight job market. “So many times I see university graduates here in Lisbon who claim to speak English, but when I try to engage them in conversation

it's plain they simply haven't got beyond the level of ordering something in McDonald's." (F. Fonseca, personal communication, June 10, 2017).

### ***Assertion***

Studying abroad is an assertive act of personal independence that can filter through into peer-approval and stand as positive evidence of a job applicant's self-confidence and moral fibre. "It's further evidence. This person has put down the gaming console, got off mum's couch, stepped outside their comfy little safety bubble and challenged themselves ... actually done something useful that wasn't in the course prescription." (R. Skae, personal communication, June 12, 2017).

In motivational terms, we suggest Erasmus 2.0 students' conscious motivations revolve around a suite of salencies that are close-coupled to cognitive and affective growth with a central pivot provided by improved foreign language fluency and the integration of practical life-work experience (Wallace & Etkin, 2017). In terms of motivational goals, these translate into enhanced self-actualisation and improved first-job prospects after graduation.

### **Attitudes**

It is a grave mistake to view consumer decision-making as an entirely rational process (eg Perner (2017), Schmitt (2010)). It is well known that consumers selectively distort information to conform with preconceived beliefs and affectations and higher education choices are no exception (Wilson & Gilligan, 2013). In this regard, a leading perspective in contemporary buyer behaviour is the premise that human beings are powered by emotion and not exclusively by reason (Sheehan, 2013). This suggests addressing a marketing appeal to Erasmus 2.0s exclusively on objective cognitive grounds (such as an institution's pedagogical expertise and academic track record) may prove only partially effective. Rather, it is useful to include affectively-rounded promotion themes such as adventure, intimate experiences, mystery, and pride (Roberts, 2010).

What specific attitudes might exist among Erasmus 2.0 students?

According to Goulet's (2015) research, the European students he investigated search for material, spiritual and self-indulgent meanings in their tertiary education studies and this gave rise to a mix of four cognate attitudinal clusters. It is important to note that Goulet contended that while students are sensitive to *all four clusters*, individuals will combine these constituents in personally integrated ways. Consequently, each student will place a premium on at least one attitudinal driver with the residual-others occupying positions of lesser, auxiliary status. Although Goulet focused on university students drawn from the tri-state region of Alsace, German-Rhine and Switzerland, we contend that his findings, or at least his four-factor rubric, can be plausibly extended to Erasmus 2.0s as well.

### ***Posited Erasmus 2.0 attitudinal clusters***

#### ***1 Material outcomes***

Education, including study-abroad, is a pathway to materialistic payouts which include better job opportunities, faster income progression and an enhanced standard of living. Goulet wrote that this attitude spoke to a "Me first" desire for financial security and an inner-directed quest for personal success. Erasmus 2.0 students emphasising this attitudinal cluster thus place a high premium on educational outcomes calculated in terms of delivering upward social mobility, financial security and a self-judgment that the student has the potential to become a future leader, entrepreneur or top executive. To this end, studying abroad is an indispensable component of a 'good degree' (Wiers-Jenssen, 2011) because how else is it possible to enter the job market armed with a wide circle of high-value personal contacts, English language fluency and the necessary social intelligence to behave appropriately in different cultural contexts?

#### ***2 Spiritual outcomes***

In direct contrast to the above quest for material success, Goulet asserted that students in Cluster 2 pursue an educational experience for its intrinsic spiritual outcomes expressed through a quest for engagement with a future world that Vertovec (2007) described as post-multicultural and "super-diverse". Students scoring highly on this factor regard a degree education, including study-abroad, as a means to acquire humanistic soft skills such as tolerance, open-mindedness and a deep understanding of different cultures. Spiritual outcomes translate into feeling at home in the super-diversity, displaying high levels of cultural flexibility and possessing a

situationally effective social intelligence suited to diverse languages and cultures. In many ways, Erasmus 2.0s espousing this attitude can be said to exemplify young adults who have fully internalised the European Union's "One World" ideal.

### *3 International aspirations*

The third attitudinal cluster identified by Goulet comprises what he called "aspirations internationals". These are students marching to the tune of a motivational ambition centred upon *global* entrepreneurialism, management and political leadership. This "citizen-of-the-world" value explicitly rejects parochial national and regional perspectives and embraces the stereotype of a global operator who is effective on a world stage almost regardless of location (Jacobone & Moro, 2015). Students displaying an above-par sensitivity to international aspirations embrace study-abroad as a keystone component of their study programme; not excluding using their time in an overseas country to "look-see-decide" about emigrating after graduation (Kritz, 2006).

### *4 Self-gratification*

Finally, Goulet detailed a student cluster characterised by self-gratification, recreation, tourism and, above all, fun. A semester abroad is seen as a "study holiday" and "the time of your life"; a European version of the American "Spring Break" phenomenon. It is a personal-time interlude linked to social adventures with other young people and takes place in exotic and adventurous locations. Of note here is the notion that hard work and study success are the *least* important considerations within this cluster. Extracted from their usual environments, far away from everyday friends and family, all the normal social, formal and informal controls are lifted and these "student tourists" can be whoever they want to be and do whatever they want to do. That said, they often discover themselves in other ways and develop the maturity that comes from confronting novel challenges, meeting new people and discovering problem-solving aptitudes they never knew they had. On returning home, they might also later reflect that they are now more interesting people, with a self-identity enriched by this wayfaring experience.

## **Involvement**

Involvement is commonly defined as the amount of time and effort a consumer invests in a purchase decision-making process (Quester et al., 2015). Involvement is highly situational including, but not limited to, the personal interest in and importance of the decision, its associated risks and costs, prior experience with similar offerings, and the social visibility of the product purchased (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel, 2012).

Choosing an overseas host institution satisfies all the normal criteria of a high-involvement purchase decision: it is unfamiliar, takes place in an open market with a multiplicity of choices, bears the consequences of risk and reward – of bad and good outcomes. An Erasmus 2.0 student electing to study a long way away from home in Canada, the United States, Australia or New Zealand will not approach this purchase decision with the same casual attitude as buying a one-week budget holiday in Ibiza off a website.

Due to the generous financial assistance available through the Erasmus Programme, European students do not experience anything close to the financial risk borne by foreign students originating in countries such as China and India. However (Dooley & Rouse, 2009; Garbati & Rothschild, 2016; Thompson, 2016) speak of Erasmus 2.0s' sensitivity towards real and perceived difficulties associated with the challenge of "learning-to-learn" in a strange land and foreign institution, especially when facing new pedagogical styles, vastly different assessment regimes, and the urgent need to master the soft skills of colloquial language, social navigation and cultural comfort essential to success in an overseas academic milieu. Consequently, Erasmus 2.0 students can be expected to narrow their overseas search criteria and home in on a foreign country and educational provider's status, reputation, safety, cultural magnetism, acceptability, image and emotional appeal (Peter & Olsen, 2010).

In light of contemporary global security realities, personal safety in a foreign country cannot be excluded as a marketing consideration. Home faculty advisors, students and family members will decide for themselves if a study-abroad destination satisfies an acceptable standard of safety and security. In this regard, social media sources, opinion leaders and market mavens will be actively consulted for advice, information and feedback.

## Discussion and analysis

The Erasmus Programme has made an indelible impact upon European education undergraduate attitudes. Whether or not it has actually served to narrow historical differences between European countries and regions remains moot (Todorov & Bracher, 2008); however what is beyond dispute is the significance of the Erasmus 2.0 student market opportunity to overseas higher-education institutions.

The marketing problem of attracting a viable stream of international students is a vexed one, much debated in tertiary education marketing circles due to the complex diversity of overseas markets. In this paper we introduced the notion of using a consumer profiling approach as a tool to understand the decision-making processes used by Erasmus 2.0 students when considering study-abroad destinations.

As we have seen, Erasmus 2.0s are likely to possess distinct attitudes that inform their motivations and expectations across a wide front. Motivational forces include strong tangible elements of “what’s in it for me?” co-existing with subtle and non-specific influences creating perceptions of enhanced self-actualisation, personal growth and aspirations of some form of global citizenship. Fundamental, of course, is the need for higher education marketers to remind themselves that this is a market of young adults, undergraduates, for whom many things outside their direct experience remain conditional on the classic marketer’s dilemma of target consumers “not knowing what they don’t know”. However, information gleaned from the internet, opinion leaders, advertising material, peers and the like, may be incomplete, misleading and subject to wishful thinking and over-simplified thin-slicing.

When viewed not as new enrolments but as long-stay guests, European students abroad can be expected to want to immerse themselves as experience-seeking tourists who are eager to participate in cultural adventures and entertaining opportunities outside of the classroom. Indeed, we go so far as to argue that, because the Erasmus Programme pays for practically all of students’ course fees, many European students place foreign academic study in the back seat and expect to participate in a rich banquet of extramural experiences in their chosen host country. Well might study-abroad translate into a motivational latency of a signing up for

a fun “study holiday” containing merely a nominal academic kernel. Where it is discovered that this is *not* the case, some Erasmus 2.0 students experience dissatisfaction and dissonance following their exposure to such unexpected realities as mandatory class attendance, a grinding stream of back-to-back assessment deadlines, boring small towns, and domestic classmates and other foreign students who eschew having fun in favour of part-time employment or studying hard in order to stay on top of their workloads because of student loan commitments, relationship obligations and financial sacrifice – including family indebtedness to usurers (e.g. Fuligni, 2001; Ho, 1994; The Wireless, 2016).

These differing nodes of expectation and perception create all the preconditions for a sequence of service quality failure (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985). From experienced shortcomings in basic hygiene factors such as uncongenial living quarters and poor transport access, through to misfiring achievement in more ego-threatening processes such as overcoming homesickness, making new friends, acquiring confidence in linguistic discourse and adjusting to foreign teaching styles, well might conflicted Erasmus 2.0 students blame their overseas host institutions for over-promising and under-delivering.

However, to avoid throwing the baby out with the bathwater, because study-abroad is closely linked in the student’s mind to attaining valuable personal goals (notably self-actualisation and employment prospects), Erasmus 2.0s may be expected to exercise a latitude of tolerance (Johnston, 1995; Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman, 1996) towards unforeseen mismatches between what was originally expected and what they actually experienced. Provided their study-abroad institution delivered on *most* of its material outcomes, they passed their courses and the overall experience was not fatally flawed, there is a good chance that they will return home believing that, on balance, it was a worthwhile experience (Liljander & Strandvik, 1993). Nevertheless, this in no way absolves overseas higher-education marketers from configuring their promotion messages, enrolment processes and motivating for adjustments to teaching programmes with academic departments to better meet Erasmus 2.0s’ expectations.

### **Marketing strategy and research policy implications**

It is essential for higher education marketers to deep-mine Erasmus 2.0s' reference groups, motivations, attitudes and involvement vectors. This is the only way to develop targeted marketing strategies keyed to specific points of competitive difference having relevance to this valuable consumer market. For example, marketing strategies calculated to resonate with Erasmus 2.0 business students might include offering programmes key-noting: a high-profile two-month internship (e.g. at Google Australia); a semester partially devoted to some worthwhile social project (e.g. Habitat For Humanity); apprenticeship roles within the orbit of leading decision makers in the field of global enterprise; or, not the least, an outright "study holiday" offering a vacation experience interspersed with short, sharp self-development projects ranging from Outward Bound-type courses through to setting up pop-up businesses.

Finally, this research demonstrates the opportunity to extend a marketing-focused exploration of student buyer behaviour beyond Erasmus 2.0s into an institution's more traditional markets and catchment areas. True to the fundamental marketing principle of understanding one's customers, there is no substitute for undertaking reflective depth interviews and means-end-chain analyses, and using this information to fine-tune curricula and programme delivery. Looking to the future, for as long as the Erasmus Programme continues in its present format, European students will participate in the study-abroad market, and in an environment where real-time social media word-of-mouth narratives unfold, the importance of understanding European students' attitudes in their widest sense will remain a key marketing success factor in this education market segment.

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