

IDENTIFYING PATTERNS OF ALUMNI COMMITMENT IN KEY STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIP PROGRAMMES

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In the last decades, higher education institutions (HEIs) worldwide face drastic changes due to diverse reasons such as demographic factors, financial crisis, globalisation, and international rankings, which are forcing these institutions to rethink their management practices and to adopt new approaches towards their stakeholders with an attentive focus on students as the main customers. Later on, the enhancement of long and lasting relationships with alumni as true partners becomes a new challenge; they thus use marketing strategies that highlight relationship marketing to develop strong bonds with alumni based on commitment.

Fostering relationships with alumni has consisted of framing strategies to increase competitiveness amongst HEIs in Europe and particularly in Portugal. This paper's purpose is to clarify the acquisition of accurate information, allowing the efficient use of scarce resources through alumni segmentation and identification of patterns in commitment relationship.

The work was developed at the University of Algarve through quantitative research method using a database resulting from an online survey and information provided by academic services about academic issues. In order to recognise the profile of the alumni willing to commit, segmentation was conducted on a dataset of 1,075 individuals who assert an intention to collaborate with their alma mater. Segments were formed using a hierarchical method based on the commitment relationship and a logistic regression model was run to identify determinants of intention to collaborate.

Both techniques revealed the decisive role of HEI commitment in the process. Alumni stressed their intention to recommend, share their experience with current students, and give their help when it is necessary as ways to give back. Furthermore, they also recognised the importance of benefits and advantages in this relationship. Five segments of alumni were identified through clustering analysis, revealing valuable information for decision-making, particularly regarding an expressed willingness to participate in fundraising campaigns, which is relevant in a context where these campaigns are not very common. To predict collaboration, the logit model showed sociodemographic items like gender, marital status and volunteering work as significant. Concerning academic experience, the predictable variables were affiliation in sororities/fraternities and participation in extracurricular activities. The findings provided clues to support strategic relationship programmes based on consistent marketing campaigns, while bringing value to the literature in the European context, where alumni culture requires real insights to evolve.

Keywords: Relationship marketing; HEI; alumni; commitment-relationship; clustering; binomial logit