

# Cyprus and the U.K.: delivering nutritional advice services through digital technology

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## Cyprus and the U.K.: delivering nutritional advice services through digital technology

This extended abstract summarises a research proposal which aims to investigate a potential move into the international delivery of specialist nutritional advice on behalf of a consortium of independent nutritionists based in Cyprus.

The consortium operates out of a medical centre based in Nicosia, Cyprus. The nutritionists who are organised into the consortium are well qualified and experienced in their professional field and they offer specialisms within the general area of nutrition but they are confronted by a degree of market saturation for nutritional advice services in Cyprus. One logical response to this situation might be to extend the service into the international market through the use of digital technology. Such a service could be delivered on an individual basis via Skype or similar platforms.

As the consortium members are fluent in Greek and English opportunities may exist in market expansion into Greece and the United Kingdom (U.K.). The purpose of this particular research project is to undertake exploratory research into the potential U.K. market for Cyprus based nutritional advice.

The research question is, 'To investigate the potential for the delivery of nutritional advice via digital technology between Cyprus and the U.K.'

The proposed research can be termed marketing research as it is intended to inform business development.

A mixed method approach will be adopted involving questionnaires and a small number of online interviews. The approach will derive from the interpretivist tradition and will be broadly inductive in nature as such an approach is consistent with the use of a mixed-method approach (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). The proposed research can aptly be termed applied research (Easterby-Smith et al, 2012).

A report by the Health and Social Care Information Centre ([content.digital.nhs.uk](http://content.digital.nhs.uk)) states that obesity is a major public health problem in the U.K. due to its association with type 2 diabetes, hypertension and hyperlipidaemia which are all serious chronic diseases. The document reports that in 2014, 58% of women and 65% of men were overweight or obese in England. Poor diet and nutrition have been recognised as major risk factors for ill health and premature death ([content.digital.nhs.uk](http://content.digital.nhs.uk)). This suggests that there is a compelling need for appropriate nutritional advice in England and the U.K.

Exactly comparable data from Cyprus is not available but according to the World Health Organization, estimates suggest that in 2008, 58.8% of the population was overweight and 25.5% were obese ([euro.who.int](http://euro.who.int)). The prevalence of being overweight was higher amongst Cypriot men at 66% than amongst Cypriot women at 52.1%.

These figures suggest that although the prevalence of being overweight or obese may be lower in Cyprus than in the U.K. (given that directly comparable figures are not available from the same year), nutritionists in Cyprus are likely to have experience of treating consultees facing similar challenges to those in the U.K.

Accurate comparative figures for the number of practising nutritionists and dieticians in the U.K. and Cyprus are also difficult to obtain. The London based Association for Nutrition, which is the custodian of a voluntary register of Registered Nutritionists and Registered Associate Nutritionists listed some 1970 registrants at the time of writing although some 10% of this number are thought to be overseas practitioners ([associationfornutrition.org](http://associationfornutrition.org)). The Association of UK Dieticians has 9,000 members ([bda.uk.com](http://bda.uk.com)). There are thought to be 500 nutritionists and dieticians in Cyprus but not all of these are registered with the appropriate body. The U.K. population numbered approximately 65 million in 2015 ([ons.gov.uk](http://ons.gov.uk)). By contrast the population of the Republic of Cyprus was approximately 848,000 in 2015 ([cyprusprofile.com](http://cyprusprofile.com)). Even allowing for considerable error these figures suggest that there are many more nutritionists and dieticians per head of population in Cyprus than there are in the U.K. Therefore, the principal 'push' factor operating in favour of a move into international markets is saturation in the home market.

Cyprus is associated with the Mediterranean diet which has been linked with good health and a healthier heart ([nhs.uk](http://nhs.uk)). Cyprus based informed nutritional advice related to the Mediterranean diet could offer valuable health and other benefits to U.K. nationals and this research seeks to investigate whether there is a demand for such a service. This may provide a 'pull' factor which for the delivery of nutritional advice services to the U.K. market.

The research will utilise both primary and secondary sources. Secondary research will draw upon resources such as Mintel and Keynote which are both collections of market research information.

Niche marketing is an appropriate strategy for smaller organisations entering into international markets and several U.K. market segments may be worthy of investigation.

These are Cypriot nationals living in the UK or those of Cypriot origin, people who have holidayed in Cyprus or who intend to holiday in Cyprus and young professionals in demanding jobs seeking nutritional advice on what kind of food to eat to reduce tiredness and increase work performance.

Another segment which may have an interest in pertinent nutritional advice is U.K couples planning to marry in Cyprus. The U.K. has witnessed dramatic growth in the number of couples who elect to marry abroad and Cyprus is a key destination for overseas marriages.

A 2013 survey by Liverpool Victoria (lv.com), the U.K.'s largest friendly society and a leading financial mutual organisation, reported that one in six British weddings now take place abroad. The survey found that 280,000 people had married abroad in the previous five years and that this represented a 20% growth rate over the previous decade. Cyprus was the fourth most popular destination for an overseas wedding after the U.S.A., Spain and Italy. The survey established that 3.7 million Britons (8% of the total population) had attended a wedding abroad in the previous 5 years and a further 11% had received an invitation to a future wedding. Overseas weddings tend to cost less than those conducted in the U.K. although the cost to wedding guests may be considerably greater. However a recent fall in the value of sterling versus the U.S. dollar and the euro may have impacted on the number of destination weddings.

Opportunities to add value to the nutritional advice service could be offered through packages which allowed couples (and/or their guests) to gain hands-on experience in the preparation of traditional Cypriot foods in atmospheric environments.

The proposed service delivery mechanism (Skype or similar) is likely to appeal to those who are comfortable with this technology.

Those who grew up with digital technology are known as 'digital natives' and those adults who have adopted new technologies as they have emerged are known as 'digital immigrants' (Prensky 2001, cited in Colbert, Yee and George, 2016). Both these groups are heavy users of technology and they are increasingly au fait with emerging technology and reliant on what it can deliver. Very large numbers of digital natives and digital immigrants are present in the U.K. and these groups are likely to be receptive to real-time communication platforms which permit consultations across international borders.

Although there is widespread familiarity with digital technology in the U.K. the delivery of nutritional services via face-to-face online communication is a relatively new and innovative concept which may provide a competitive advantage for the Cypriot consortium. However as Doole and Lowe (2012) observe such a competitive advantage may be transient as competitors may be forced to offer a similar service. This process through which this can occur is illustrated in the diagram below.

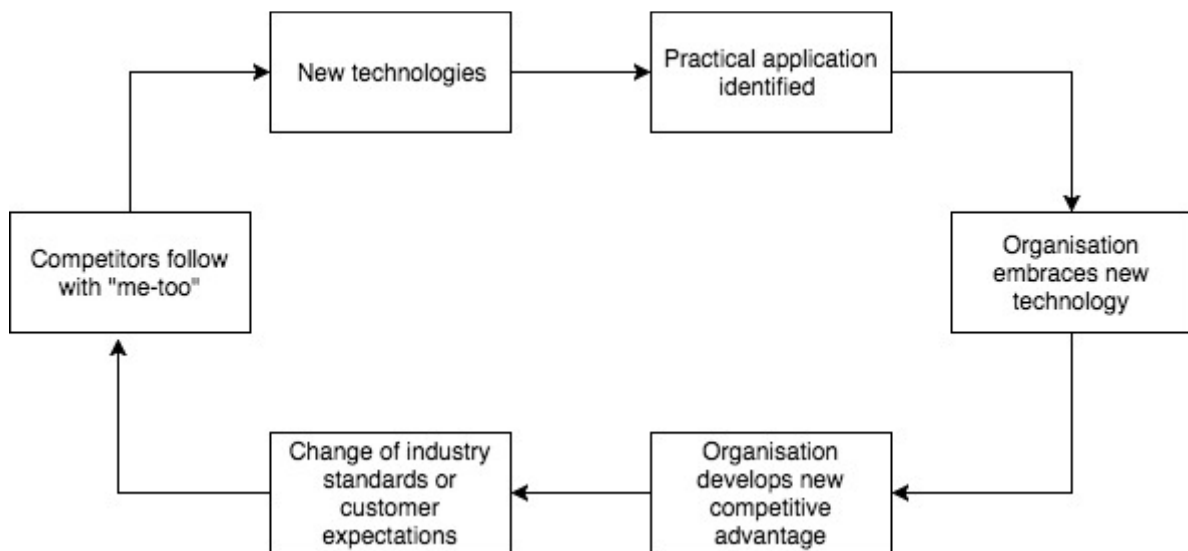


Figure 1 Innovation and competitive advantage (after Doole and Lowe, 2012)

Facebook Business will be used to survey samples of the identified target audiences initially through the use of an online questionnaire. By using Facebook Business it will be possible to segment the audience by location, demographics, interests (based on the interests, hobbies and pages they 'like' on Facebook). Other information may be drawn from the samples' interests, activities, education and job titles, from their online purchasing behaviour, device usage and other activities. For instance, partner categories such as 'health and fitness', 'destinations' and 'weddings' could be selected under behaviours. It will then be possible to overlay additional targeting options such as men or women aged between 20 and 40 years of age.

Using this approach it should be possible to assess demand for an international nutritional advice service with some accuracy. In addition to asking questions designed to assess demand for the service the questionnaire will also seek to gauge attitudes towards remote face-to-face nutritional consultations. Once the preliminary data has been obtained the intention is to conduct semi-structured online interviews with a small purposive sample of informed individuals in the U.K. In parallel with the online research a series of nutritional consultations will also be carried out with a U.K. resident via Skype as a pilot study.

The research is expected to contribute principally to practice but it may also contribute in developing theory related to the entry of micro and small businesses into international markets.

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