INTERNATIONAL STUDENT RECRUITMENT TECHNIQUES: A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Around the world, these educational institutions focus their efforts on recruiting talented students, particularly from foreign countries. However, while well-established universities in developed countries can produce successful international recruitment campaigns, emerging universities still need assistance in producing a successful international recruitment campaign. In order to determine successful recruitment for emerging universities, articles were gathered on the recruitment and outreach techniques of universities in the most economically successful countries in the world. While certain themes were distinct for universities in certain countries, four major steps in the recruitment process were gathered from these secondary sources: funding the recruitment process, developing an international recruitment team, creating targeted advertising related to university specialty programs, and creating a multicultural atmosphere. Limitations related to the analysis included the use of secondary sources and the lack of primary data testing. In conclusion, emerging markets can create an international recruitment process following the four themes identified in successful international student recruitment.

Introduction

Starting at the end of the 20th century, services marketing became the forefront topic in marketing and advertising studies. Businesses began changing their models from strictly production to more of a customer oriented, service atmosphere. Other organizations, like non-profit organizations, and groups, also began utilizing services marketing in order to increase their reach. One of the major services that has evolved because of the service century was higher education (Cubillo et. al., 2006, pg. 3). Universities and colleges specifically began testing, producing recruitment, and advertising campaigns to attract the most eligible applicants to their campuses.

As the global market expanded, universities in the United States and the United Kingdom started recruiting international students. Countries with growing economies, like Japan, India, Australia, and China, also began intensely researching and developing methods to attract talented students from the international pool (Mazzarol, 1998, pg. 163).

As universities began developing methods for recruiting international talent, a pattern of criteria that foreign students considered vital in college academics began to emerge among universities in the developed economies of the world.

The purpose of this study is to determine what emerging universities can learn from the successes of international student recruitment. This includes what factors international students consider when looking at a university, as well as the key methods universities use to attract international students. The first portion of the study focuses on listing and describing the top economic countries and their international recruitment methods. The second portion of the study will seek to determine the similarities, if any, between the methods of recruitment used by universities. Also, what universities in emerging markets and areas can learn from the success stories of world-class global universities.
International Student Recruitment Techniques: A Preliminary Analysis

The World’s Largest Economies

As the world grows and develops, so does the world economy, and the economies of the countries whose influence has the greatest pull on the world economy overall. With the rise in demand for students to study abroad, a number of secondary factors including safety, economic prosperity, and quality of living are of making process to study abroad (Cubillo et al., 2006, pg. 3). In order to determine the universities with beneficial conditions for international students, each country’s economic situation must first be considered. Ten countries currently hold a place as having one of the top ten economies of the world.

Of the top ten economies, the United States reigns as the largest economy in terms of nominal GDP, reaching $17.41 trillion in 2015 (Bajpai, 2015). Following the United States, China has risen from the tenth largest economy to the second in the last 25 years (Bergmann, 2005). Coming out of a small, closed economy in 1970s, China now has an economy reaching $10.35 trillion (Bajpai, 2015). China now has the greatest pull on the world economy overall. With the economies of the countries whose influence can be seen by exploring what specifically attracts international students to these countries for higher education.

United States

For the United States, educational advertising focuses more on actions than on themes. Since most universities in the United States function on their own, even when government owned, they typically have free reign on how to recruit international students to their campuses. A study done in Incarnate Word University, tried to determine which methods of international student recruitment were most effective when used by United States institutions. The researcher gathered the names of the top 40 U.S. universities in international recruitment, and then surveyed them on their top used recruitment and retaining methods (Özturgut, 2013, p. 5). According to this survey, eight methods of recruitment were identified above all others. Providing academic support and utilizing campus resources, attending and participating in international recruitment fairs and events, partnering with other organizations in recruitment efforts, using passive marketing such as online web-based advertising or brochures, utilizing alumni in recruitment methods, utilizing recruitment agents, and word-of-mouth (Özturgut, 2013, p. 6).

After determining these eight methods, Özturgut (2013) then went on to determine which methods were used most in practice (p. 8). Of these eight methods, universities in the United States mostly employed five of the eight methods. Attending international recruitment events and fairs was mostly utilized by students, both in person and virtually, around the world (Özturgut, 2013, p. 8). Providing academic support and utilizing campus resources was the second most utilized. University found that this worked best when a staff specifically for international students was selected, and when scholarships were provided for international students (Öz-
turgut, 2013, p. 8). The third most utilized technique was using alumni, specifically international alumni (Özturgut, 2013, p. 8). The fourth and fifth methods included using “passive” marketing and staff recruitment (Özturgut, 2013, p. 8). These methods, according to Özturgut (2013), showed that universities received more positive feedback when they utilized alumni who were familiar with the local area, when the university placed advertisements in the local media, and when there was a full-time international affairs director at hand (p. 8). The other methods, collaborating with the inside organization, utilizing agents, and word-of-mouth advertising, were not as heavily utilized as the other five techniques (Özturgut, 2013, p. 8).

China

China, on the other hand, has utilized a different system of international recruitment. Because of China’s highly government regulated past and present, a majority of universities in China are not permitted to recruit international students (Huang, 2006, p. 524). Over time, this number of approved universities has expanded and currently, China has approximately 400 or more universities with permission to recruit international talent to their student bodies (Huang, 2006, p. 524). Exhibit 3, see appendix, is a chart that lists the eight methods of the utilization and a description on how they work in international recruitment.

Overall, the analysis of international recruitment practices in United States universities shows an overarching theme in the use of the major method of the eight methods, five of the ones most utilized, allow universities to go physically to the recruitment location they target. Whether through local advertisements, or participation in recruitment events, the ability for universities to introduce themselves in the area, make an effect on the student body, has been vital to all the recruitment techniques utilized.

Japan

International student recruitment in Japan is far more difficult compared to any other Asian Pacific country. Because of Japan’s culture and history, a majority of the country was closed off to foreigners prior to the last few centuries. In the past, foreigners could not even enter the country, and currently only 2.8% (Brender, 2002, p. 57) of students in Japanese universities are international, with a majority coming from other Asian Pacific nations.

Despite this strong ethnic exclusion, a few universities in Japan have started seeking international talent from around the world, especially the United States. Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, for example, is an offshoot university of Ritsumeikan University. Originally a Japanese student only university, Ritsumeikan has recently sought to establish itself as a multicultural educating body for all students (Brender, 2002, p. 57). In order to grow the international student experience, the university established its first bi-lingual and multicultural branch, which happened to be the first of its kind in Japan.

The attraction of this university is the need for multiculturalism in education. For international students, the appeal of the university comes in the form of the higher education level in a highly multicultural atmosphere. Not only did Ritsumeikan recruit aggressively in multiple countries, like Australia, Indonesia, India, and the United States (Brender, 2002, p. 57), but it also designed a multicultural curriculum around both the Japanese and English language. All students are required to take courses...
both in English and in Japanese. Students are not permit-
ted to graduate if they have only taken courses in one of
the two languages (Brender, 2002, p. 57). The university has
also recruited professors from multiple countries and
backgrounds, including six American professors (Bren-
der, 2002, p. 57), to increase the multicultural atmosphere of
Ritsumeikan. This attracts students, both foreign and
Japanese, who are interested in experiencing various cul-
tures during the university experience.

Along with the multicultural atmosphere offered, Ritsu-
meikan also marketed aggressively through recruitment
offices and incentive programs in various countries. Be-
cause the university is private, it does not have the same
brand recognition as a larger university such as the Uni-
versity of Tokyo. Therefore, the best solution would be
to go directly to foreign high schools to recruit and offer
incentives internationally. Ritsumeikan also went to high
school both in and out of the Asian Pacific region to
recruit international students. It also offered students
incentives like scholarships and guaranteed admission if
they applied and agreed to attend Ritsumeikan (Brender,
2002, p. 57). These admission process and the possibility
of a multicultural education, was what attracted an almost
equal balance of 1,500 domestic and 1,200 international
students (Brender, 2002, p. 57) to Ritsumeikan Asian Pa-
cific University.

Smaller EU Nations (Germany, France, Italy)

Unlike Japan, nations of the European Union have long been
recruiting students from foreign countries to in-
crease their international talent. In fact, studies have shown
that 41% (Hugo, 2009, p. 390) of the graduate
students in the top European universities are composed of
international students. In undergraduate programs, the
percentage of international students is much smaller, with
approximately 16% of students being from outside of the
country (Hugo, 2009, p. 390). In order to attract these in-
national students, the recruitment methods that the
universities focus on is advertising specific educational
programs. For example, most of the major universities in
Europe top-level scientific research programs. Certain
countries like France and Germany have a long history of
economic and educational success. In the past year, the United Kingdom came in sixth in the
United Kingdom (p. 1005). Because of this expansion in
the field of education, both universities and their home
country’s governments are making an effort to recruit not
only local, but also internationally from students around
the world. In the United Kingdom, a majority of this pub-
lic recruitment is done through the British Government
and Council. The British Council has been around for
over 75 years, and has collaborated with numerous United
Kingdom universities to increase the amount of interna-
tional applicants (Hemsley-Brown, 2012, p. 1006). Along
with this partnership, universities and governments have
also reached out through new forms of media, like the
Internet and websites, in order to deliver information on
higher education colleges to international and domes-
tic students (Hemsley-Brown, 2012, p. 1008). However,
studies have shown that specific criteria, whether empha-
sized by governments or universities, have had a signifi-
cant influence on the choices of international students
choosing to study abroad in the United Kingdom.

In past studies done by researchers, seven themes have ap-
curred as the cause for university choices by international students: suitability, reputation, future career prospects,
international administrators, staff, and professors in the
universities. While not as clear of a correlation as the em-
phasis on university specialties, studies have shown that
students who have a strong international presence in their
staff and administration tend to have a more cul-
turally aware and internationalized campus. The average
percentage of international students in specific University
prominent European universities is 27% (Hugo, 2009,
p. 392). This shows that universities are more globally
conscious. Universities also acknowledge the need for a
universal method of engaging and communicating with
all students, mainly through the English language. Since
English is one of the most widely spoken languages in the
world, it can be used to offer graduate and undergraduate
level courses to students from different countries (Hugo,

Another prominent factor related to the internationaliza-
tion of the European universities is the influence of the
state and government on international recruitment. A
majority of universities in Europe rely on their govern-
ments, both through funding and advertising, in order to
recruit international students. Proper state funding and
backing for a majority of these universities is critical. Ac-
tording to studies, only the government can provide the
proper backing to maintain the global ranking of univer-
sities in these countries (Hugo, 2009, p. 403).
However, this is rapidly changing with the increase in Brazil’s economic role in the world, the higher education system is Brazil has developed alongside the country. For example, as of 2013, approximately 58% of universities and programs in Brazil, specifically in Brazilian business programs, have an advisor or team responsible for the internationalization of the university (Sarfati et al., 2013, p. 10).

Similar to other emerging markets, not much research has been done on the recruitment of international students to Brazil and Brazilian universities. With other major universities in South America taking precedence, and with many Brazilian students leaving to study outside the country, only a minimal amount of information can be gauged about the situation.

India
India comes in ninth in the overall world economy, with a nominal GDP of $2.04 trillion as of 2015 (Bajpai, 2015). This lower ranking in the world’s top ten economies reflects itself on India’s current recruitment practices for international talent. In 2014, India officially expressed interest in improving recruitment techniques for international students in Indian university campuses. With approximately 700 universities and 35,539 colleges ("India Wants To Break Into The Global Higher Education Market," 2014, p. 16), India’s beginning attempts at international student recruitment hope to push the country’s educating bodies into the top 180 universities worldwide.

Like many other top economies, India recognizes that in order attract international students to local universities, their recruitment materials should focus on what specialty skills students can gain from attending a specific Indian university. According to Cudmore (2005), a technology focused university in Ontario sought out international students because it believed its specific skill training would attract students seeking to learn these technical skills (p. 52). These Canadian universities also began establishing international student recruitment offices in order to attract students to their programs. Again, the university completely self-funded this method of recruitment (Cudmore, 2005, p. 52). However, despite the lack of financial support, the offices have proven successful. The organization has returned almost ten times its budget through international student recruitment and retention, specifically in the form of international student tuition and fees (Cudmore, 2005, p. 52).

The universities in Canada had two major benefits going for them in terms of international student recruitment. The first of these was education and technical knowledge. According to Cudmore (2005), these universities have highly trained professors who educate students on technical skills related to the students’ field of study. The second major benefit going for the Canadian universities is their highly diverse and ethnic background. Canada as a nation has a diverse population of peoples from all over the world. In the study, international students were more drawn to universities in cities that had people from a similar country or ethnic background (Cudmore, 2005, p. 53–55), which was possible thanks to Canada’s openness to foreigners. Canada’s strong support of multiculturalism, skilled training, and safety, says Cudmore (2005) lend itself to attracting international students to its universities (p. 55).

What Emerging Universities Can Learn From This
The study done above takes the top ten economies of the world and focuses on their recruitment methods for international students and the successful internationalization of their universities. By reading through the information gathered, certain elements and themes relating to international student recruitment appear and reoccur among universities throughout the world. In an attempt to educate emerging universities on a successful process for international student recruitment, these themes have been composed into a number of processes that would hypothetically allow a university to achieve internationalization and international recruitment.

In order to begin the international recruitment process, a university must determine where funding for such a project is coming from and how to budget that funding. As seen in various successful universities in certain nations, for example the United Kingdom and Canada, a university cannot begin to recruit international students without the proper funding or budget to put a plan into motion. As a result, the university must first determine how it will fund the international recruitment process. There were three primary methods illustrated among the countries researched in the study. The first is that the program be government funded such as the state run advertising done for universities in the United Kingdom. The second method would be similar to the Canadian method, in which universities use the tuition and payments from recruits to continue to fund the recruitment program personally. The third method would be similar to the United States, which use both a mixture of government funding and private investment in order to fund its international student recruitment.

Once funding is acquired and budgeted, the next step in the international student recruitment process would be to create focused advertisements on the particular benefits of the university. As a result, the university must first determine where funding for such a project is coming from and how to budget that funding. As seen in various successful universities in certain nations, for example the United Kingdom and Canada, a university cannot begin to recruit international students without the proper funding or budget to put a plan into motion. As a result, the university must first determine how it will fund the international recruitment process. There were three primary methods illustrated among the countries researched in the study. The first is that the program be government funded such as the state run advertising done for universities in the United Kingdom. The second method would be similar to the Canadian method, in which universities use the tuition and payments from recruits to continue to fund the recruitment program personally. The third method would be similar to the United States, which use both a mixture of government funding and private investment in order to fund its international student recruitment.

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With the development of the international recruitment team, the next step in the recruitment process would be to create focused advertisements on the particular benefits related to the university. Being in an age of specialization, future students are looking to attend a university that fits their plans and needs. By tailoring recruitment materials, advertisements, outreach events, and other recruitment programs to the university’s specialty, international students will be attracted to the university whose program best fits their needs. Examples of this can be seen throughout the universities studied in the top ten economies of the world. Universities in Europe, particularly in France and Germany, focus their advertisements to international students on their strong scientific research departments. Technical schools in Ontario, Canada also emphasized their strong skill driven curriculum to students seeking to study in a technical field in order to attract international talent. Even universities in emerging markets like India are planning to focus on the innovations and skilled education they can provide in order to further their international student recruitment. Tailoring international recruitment materials to the universities’ strengths not only attracts more international talent, but also brings in a student body that would benefit the universities future curricular plans.

The final step in the international recruitment process would be to develop or have a multicultural atmosphere, which would include elements like classes, professors, and curriculum. The universities in Canada are known for their multiculturalism, and thrive on learning about new cultures and new environments. Instead of simply developing an international curriculum, universities should focus on inviting their international students into their culture to develop a multicultural atmosphere in the university. When the curriculum attempts to segregate local students and international students, it can cause students seeking out the ability to study with and engage in the local students and local culture. For example, in China when international students were segregated from the local students, they did not wholeheartedly adopt the multicultural curriculum because of the desire to study in a multicultural atmosphere. Another example was in Japan, when students did not engage in the multicultural curriculum, including professors from different regions of the world, and an English-Japanese bilingual study program that...
was required of all students. The world is moving towards further globalization, and universities should incorporate that desire to be multicultural into their curriculum in order to attract more international students to their campuses.

Limitations

The primary limitation to this study exists in the data collection method. The issue with the study is the use of secondary data analysis. While a legitimate method of data gathering, secondary data holds far less legitimacy than primary data. The reason for this is that secondary data is not specialized to the specific topic being studied; instead, it simply takes data from different studies to try to study a theory or concept. In this study, multiple reports on international student recruitment were reviewed. Then, the results of these studies were compared to determine what emerging universities can learn from these successful international student recruitment techniques. If we attempted to justify this study, primary research would have to be conducted by testing the themes suggested on emerging universities in different cultures to determine the possibility of success. This way the elements the were deemed successful could be tested instead of simply being assumed.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, there does appear to be a pattern between world-class countries’ successful recruiting techniques for international students. Whether in the United States, or across the globe in Japan and China, universities that successfully recruit international students typically follow a similar, systematic marketing strategy, which typically involves international student outreach and marketing materials focused on the university’s specialty. Emerging universities with weaker international recruitment strategies can incorporate the four recruitment steps discussed in order to further their international recruitment campaigns.

Some recommendations to further this study would be to conduct a primary data analysis, using the recruitment themes demonstrated. The process would involve sharing the techniques with a handful of test emerging universities and asking them to implement the strategy. From there, the researcher can study the development of these universities’ recruitment plans. That way it can be determined whether the methods identified through secondary data analysis can be used to develop a successful recruitment strategy for any university around the world.

References


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**Exhibit 2**

*Özturgut, 2013, p. 8*

**The Summary of the Responses from Baccalaureate Institutions Listed in the Order of Utilization**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruitment Method</th>
<th>Examples from the Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attending and participating in international education</td>
<td>- Attending international student fairs in different countries with members of enrollment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fairs and recruitment events</td>
<td>staff (including the Dean for Admissions and the Director)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Making trips around the world at least twice a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Meeting with college officials, non-academic organizations, and consultants in different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Participating in virtual fairs in different regions around the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing academic support and utilizing campus</td>
<td>- Professional staff specifically for international student recruitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>resources</td>
<td>- Provide scholarships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilizing international alumni</td>
<td>- Engaging international student alumni, parents of international students and alumni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Alumni served as part-time recruiters in several countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing (Online, brochures and booklets, etc.)</td>
<td>- Placing advertisements in local media (international locations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilizing staff and faculty</td>
<td>- Participating in virtual fairs in different regions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Full-time director of international student recruiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnering with other organizations</td>
<td>- No Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilizing agents</td>
<td>- No Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowballing</td>
<td>- No Response</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exhibit 3**

*Huang, 2006, p. 524*