

Huong Vo

**The Role of Student Ambassador in Oulu UAS's Marketing activities and
Vietnamese Applicants' decision-making process**

Bachelor's Thesis

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Degree in International Business

Oulu University of Applied Sciences

ABSTRACT

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Degree in International Business

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Title of Bachelor's thesis: The Role of Student Ambassador in Oulu UAS's Marketing activities and Vietnamese Applicants' decision-making process

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The thesis attempts to clarify Student Ambassador program's contribution in Oulu University of Applied Sciences' marketing activities and the role of this program in Vietnamese students' decision-making process. The research is commissioned by Oulu University of Applied Sciences with the aim of being used as a reference in content strategies and resources allocating of Oulu University of Applied Sciences' advertising products.

The research provides systematic material covering the theoretical framework of international education, marketing-mix in higher education institutions and decision-making process. References for the research are retrieved from the official statistics of Vietnam and Finland such as CIMO and other academic articles. The practical part examined Vietnamese prospects' decision-making process and the role of Student Ambassador in this process. Qualitative research method is utilized to conduct interviews on three different groups.

The thesis may provide a multifaceted view of the Vietnam current market situation and expose Oulu University of Applied Sciences' existing marketing and promotion activities especially those which contributed by Student Ambassador program. To achieve the goals, opinions from educational experts, Vietnamese students and parents are analyzed.

The research also incorporates suggestions from interviewees for Oulu UAS to improving future marketing activities.

Keywords: Student Ambassador, Marketing Mix, Decision-making process, Vietnamese students.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Studying abroad has become a megatrend nowadays. As a result, the international education market has significantly developed. Concretely, comparing between two years 2017 and 2018, the number of inbound students most increased in Canada by 18,8% and 13,5% in Australia while it slightly dropped 1,0% in Finland and 1,9% in New Zealand (The Institute of International Education 2018, cited 13.03.2019). People, especially the young keep nourishing the intention to experience outside the borders. The countries having the potential to offer an international education take advantage of this opportunity to professionalize their educational products, thereby attracting a force of learners, workers, researchers from abroad. This movement does not only help the countries promote cultural images, but also diversify human resources. Thence, the market shares become more competitive for the heavyweights as the US and the UK and other countries started to gain the ground. By the end of 2018, the total number of students in top host countries self-increased more than twice over two decades. Particularly, the US and the UK markets are seen to narrow which has made room for other Canada, Russia, Australia and other host destinations (The Institute of International Education 2018, cited 13.03.2019). Being aware of this fact, each country, region, institution plan their own strategies to expand the market. Oulu University of Applied Sciences is obviously no exception. The university has gradually been improving and developing to become an ideal international education environment.

As a Vietnamese student studying at Oulu University of Applied Sciences, I look forward to having an impact on the future of Vietnamese student recruitment of my university, which served as the main purpose of the thesis. In the current market competition, it is better to build an effective launch pad for qualified products. Seeing that the thesis is going to be utilized as a reference in content strategies and resources allocating of Oulu UAS's advertising products, the development process is expected to provide systematic material covering the theoretical framework as well as actual implementation results. Possibly, the thesis may provide a multifaceted view of the Vietnam current market situation and expose Oulu UAS existing marketing and promotion activities especially those which contributed by Student Ambassador program. On that account, the main research questions are:

How Student Ambassadors program contribute to Oulu UAS marketing activities?

What are the aspects that Vietnamese students and potential applicants take into account as they consider Finland as a country for international education?

The purpose of the thesis is to clarify Student Ambassadors' contributions and limitations. In addition, the audiences will have a deeper understanding of the intended orientation of both Vietnamese applicants as the consumers and Oulu UAS as the seller. In a word, Oulu UAS acts as a commissioner in the research and development work.

The theoretical part of the research is focusing on international education as a service of Oulu UAS and Student Ambassador program as a part of Oulu UAS marketing activities. Besides, this part is also conducted referring to the decision-making process of Vietnamese students applying to Oulu UAS. Based on the data retrieved from the official statistics of Vietnam and Finland such as CIMO and other academic articles, the theories are aggregated and systematically restructured to give readers the essential concepts before transitioning to the practical session. The empirical part of the study is carried out by qualitative studies involving experts, Vietnamese current students of Oulu UAS as well as their parents. Moreover, a qualitative research method is utilized to conduct interviews with the group of experts, parents and students. The full questionnaire can be found in appendix.

The structure of the thesis was examined to best approach the research problems. Following the introduction, the second chapter discusses on the international education in the world, in Finland and in Oulu UAS. The third chapter gives a theoretical point of view on how international education can be marketed then provides real-life situations in the US as well as in Oulu UAS. It also introduces and analyzes about Student Ambassador program as a part of Oulu UAS's marketing activities. In the fourth part of the work, decision-making process of buyers in general and students considering studying abroad are interpreted in five stages. Research techniques used for the thesis are represented in chapter five accompanying data collecting and analyzing methods. Research subjects and procedures are also listed in this chapter. Readers will find the results of the research in chapter six and chapter seven is the last discussion on research process as well as the findings.

2 INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION MARKET

This chapter will provide a closer look on international education from the formation, development and current situation. Specifically, it will generalize international education in the world and focus on Finland and especially in Oulu UAS. The author aims to describe international education as a service of Oulu UAS in the context of a broad market picture.

2.1 International education in worldwide

Globalization is transforming the world education system. Students around the world progressively seek themselves the higher education opportunities outside their territory. Overseas study is considered to be an effective and legal stepping stone for permanent residency. Seeing the benefaction in being the possessor of a large group of international students, such as cultural exchange and financial support, authorities facilitate international students' arrivals by adjusting visa procedures and other conducive policies (Wikipedia 2019, cited 22.03.2019).

Each country has its own distinctive values and attributes as culture and language. Therefore, the outlooks, ideas and lifestyle are always diverse. International education is considered an efficient tool to promote and strengthen international cooperation. In 2015, the United Nations Member States adopted an urgent call for action by all countries in a global partnership which is known as the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations 2019, cited 22.03.2019). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) contains 17 global goals where education is cited in the Goal 4: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations 2019, cited 22.03.2019). Notably, international education is highly promoted by defining these targets (United Nations 2019, cited 22.03.2019):

- "By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity, and of culture's contribution to sustainable development" (Target 4.7)
- "By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and

African countries, for enrollment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering, and scientific programs, in developed countries and other developing countries” (Target 4.B)

- “Volume of official development assistance flows for scholarships by sector and type of study” (Indicator 4.B.1)
- “By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States” (Target 4.C)
- “Proportion of teachers in: (a) pre-primary; (b) primary; (c) lower secondary; and (d) upper secondary education who have received at least the minimum organized teacher training (e.g. pedagogical training) pre-service or in-service required for teaching at the relevant level in a given country” (Indicator 4.C.1)

Besides, economic policies and education policies are mainly issued and enforced by a central entity The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) which is composed by several developed countries in the world. The policies implemented contribute to the shared targets with mutual benefit. They jointly implement the common standards and features in education system to easily exchange and transfer among themselves. As a typical example, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) was established to measure the current state of education internationally.

Over the last decades, the number of university students studying overseas has dramatically grown (Icef Monitor 2019, cited 08.03.2019). Specifically, each nation has distinct populations and conditions, hence viewing the data as ratios will provide a multifaceted look. The figure 1 provides the updated data on the proportion of international students of total higher education in selected countries by 2018.



Figure 1. International students as percentage of total higher education (Project Atlas 2018, cited 08.03.2019)

In comparison to the total higher education populations, Australia, the UK, Canada and New Zealand lead the list by hosting the largest shares of international education. Student mobility has been shifting from a largely unidirectional east-west flow to a multidirectional movement and encompassing non-traditional sending and host countries (International Trends in Higher Education 2015, 6).

The number of outbound international mobility has increased after a decade in every region. Outbound mobility of students from nine different regions of the world are depicted in figure 2.

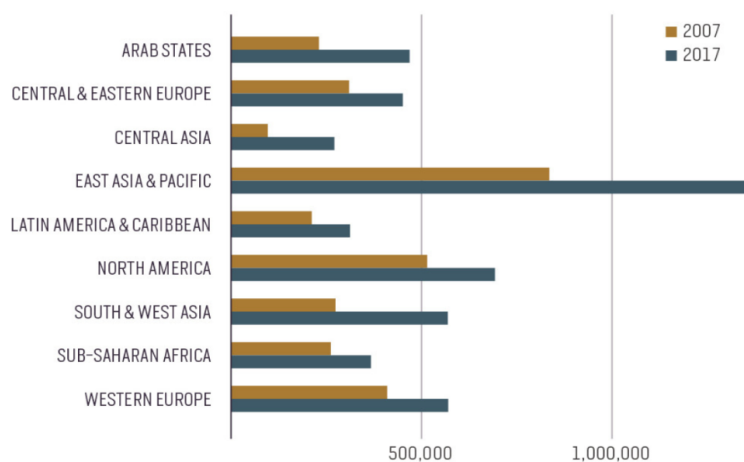


Figure 2. Outbound inter-nation mobility by region, 2007 & 2017 (Project Atlas 2018, cited 08.03.2019)

The statistics were conducted in Arab States, Central & Eastern Europe, Central Asia, East Asia & Pacific, Latin America & Caribbean, North America, South & West Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and Western Europe. By 2007, the mobility from East Asia & Pacific was approximately 800,000 whereas the number did not exceed 500,000 in the rest areas. Particularly, Sub- East Asia & Pacific region has indicated the highest amount of outbound international mobility among remaining regions as of the same period in 2017.

2.2 International Education in Finland

Finland became the European Union member since 1995. As a member of the EU, Finland enjoys common interests from while complying with the regulations and legislations in order to reach the mutual development evenly throughout the Union. When it comes to EU, cannot fail to mention Erasmus+ program – a funding scheme to support activities in many fields especially education. Finland has spent EUR 80 million from national budget on the program between 2014 and 2016.

Erasmus+ in Finland
Total of approx. 80 million € (2014–2016)
Average of over 1,100 organisations / year
Approx. 18,300 people in 2016
Erasmus+ 2014–2020
14.7 billion €
125,00 organisations
4,000,000 people

Figure 3. Basic information on the Erasmus+ program excluding global mobility (Eronen, Haila & Lahtinen 2017, 11)

As listed in figure 3, in 2014 and 2016 there over 1,100 organizations are Erasmus participants per year with 18,300 people activating by 2016. Eronen, Haila & Lahtinen pointed out the effects of the program as below:

- better understanding of partners due to the exchange process
- development of pedagogy, increased knowledge on the markets of international education joint education models and modules that meet the needs of European education
- embedding internationality in the organizations
- enhancing European identity

- improving the attractiveness of the organizations

The Erasmus+ National Agency in Finland had been CIMO (Centre for International Mobility) until the end of 2016 before it was merged to Finnish National Board of Education. Since then, it is renamed as Finnish National Agency for Education (Eronen et al. 2017, 11).

The government of Finland itself has a great voice in its own international education operations by enacting education-related policies or providing funds. As specified in the “Strategy for the Internationalization of Higher Education Institutions in Finland” published by the Ministry of Education and Culture, to make Finland a genuinely international higher education community, the higher education institutions offer high-quality education focused on their fields of expertise in foreign languages. Likewise, in higher education institutions (HEIs), the international connections and experience ideally improve the quality of education and research as well as the support for international students. Moreover, higher education institutions in Finland actively use opportunities of internationalization with cooperation within EU and in Nordic countries (Ministry of Education 2009, 26). Undergoing education restructure, a group of polytechnics became Universities of Applied Sciences. Previously, the two sole teaching languages were Finnish and Swedish. As a consequence of globalization and competitions in international education market, English has become the major teaching language in Universities of Applied Sciences (Study in Finland 2019, cited 10.03.2019). In Finland, the concepts of University of Applied Sciences were introduced since 1990’s. No sooner had the former post-secondary schools merged with 25 multidisciplinary higher education institutions than the models of UAS were practiced. To this day, Finnish UAS has been providing more than 100 bachelor’s degree programs which are pursued in English. (Vanhanen, Kitioja & Holappa, 2013)

Finland has the strategic plans to perfect their international education services. As previously mentioned, since spring 2017, the government of Finland no longer allocate their budget to offer free education. The number of foreign students was shortly measured thereafter, i.e. in 2018, CIMO Facts Express 9B has provided the data on the most common nationalities among foreign students. Figure 4 will indicate this statistic from 9 nationalities.

	Universities	Universities of applied sciences	Total higher education
Russia	846	1714	2560
Vietnam	616	1831	2447
China	1083	526	1609
Nepal	309	801	1110
India	666	104	770
Estonia	265	426	691
Pakistan	542	136	678
Bangladesh	424	193	617
Germany	373	244	617

Figure 4. The most common nationalities among foreign students (Finnish National Agency for Education, 6)

Vietnam is outstanding in the list and has the highest number of students in Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences with 1831 individuals. It is followed by Russia (1714), Nepal (801) and China (526). The remaining countries are Estonia (426), Germany (244), Bangladesh (193), Pakistan (136) and India (104).

Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland with over 40 bachelor's degree programs taught in English have unified and together established the Finnish Network for International Programs (known as FINNIPS). One of the most crucial tasks of FINNIPS is to systematically organize the entrance examinations in alien countries. In addition, the organization actively take part in study fairs held in other countries not only to promote the image of Finnish international education products, but also to learn the market with massive competition. Along with that, many projects have been conducted to attract international students and marketing plays a key role in bringing products closer to customers.

2.3 International Education in Oulu UAS

2.3.1 Overview

Oulu UAS (In Finnish: Oulun ammattikorkeakoulu) is one of the biggest universities of applied sciences in Finland. It was established in 1996 with the vision of being the leading, multidisciplinary and international university of applied sciences in Northern Finland. To achieve such targets, OUAS has focused on renewable teacher training; services and technology promoting health and well-being; energy-efficient construction for northern climate and multidisciplinary business and entrepreneurship abilities. The university offers not only competent education but also conducts active research and development. It is seen as the most attractive higher education in Northern Finland as well as an active organization in creating new vitality to the region. Oulu UAS has provided both bachelor's and master's degree studies, pedagogic studies and supplementary training. It includes three campuses served for these fields of Business, Engineering, Health and Social Care, Information and Communication Technology, Media and Performing Arts or Natural Resources. It is estimated that Oulu UAS contains 8,500 students with 583 foreign students per year. There are hundreds of students and staff members mobility annually. Furthermore, Oulu UAS is a sustainable development actor of the North. Staffs and students at Oulu UAS are aware of ecological, economic and sociocultural responsibilities. The university is committed sustainable development principles in actions such as education supply, research, development and innovation work (Oulu University of Applied Sciences 2019, cited 22.04.2019).

Even though OUAS does not provide accommodation, international students can easily find themselves an apartment on private housing market. Depending on the size, location and conditions of each apartment, the rent fee may range from EUR 150 to EUR 420. After students are confirmed the study place, they can contact PSOAS to apply for an apartment (Oulu University of Applied Sciences 2019, cited 22.04.2019).

2.3.2 Education quality

In Oulu UAS, the curriculum meets the needs of working life both in Finland and internationally. The Bachelor's studies normally last from 3.5 years to 4 years. During the progress of studies, students are supported by study counsellor to develop and facilitate personal study plan. All of

OUAS's Bachelor's degree programs are on European Quality Framework and Other Learning standard on level 6 (Oulu University of Applied Sciences 2019, cited 22.04.2019). As stated in Descriptors defining levels in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), education institutions must have the qualifications illustrated in table 1.

	Knowledge	Skills	Responsibility and autonomy
	In the context of EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual.	In the context of EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).	In the context of the EQF responsibility and autonomy are described as the ability of the learner to apply knowledge and skills autonomously and with responsibility
The learning outcomes relevant to Level 6 are	Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialized field of work or study	Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts; take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups

Table 1. European Qualifications Framework (European Commission 2019, cited 22.04.2019)

Oulu UAS has thereout been audited regarding the quality system by The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre System twice in 2012 and in 2018 which they both critically passed. The quality label is valid for six years (22.3.2018 - 22.3.2024). All of HEIs having the valid audit labels are listed in the FINEEC audit register (Oulu University of Applied Sciences 2019, cited 22.04.2019).

2.3.3 Degree programs

There are two English teaching Bachelor Program: Bachelor of Engineering (BEng) and Bachelor of International Business. The duration of Engineering program is 4 years (240 ECTS) and students are provided with good skills in web programming, mobile applications and databases. After graduation students are able to design and program internet services and applications for mobile environments. The program contains 180 ECTS of basic studies and professional studies (including 30 ECTS company-based product development projects for 30); 15 ECTS of free-choice studies; 30 ECTS Practical training and 15 ECTS for Bachelor thesis. The curriculum is promised to meet the needs of future employment. Graduates have numerous career opportunities from Web Developer or Programmer, Web Designer, Web Application Developer, User Interface Designer, Project Manager to Senior Software Engineer or Entrepreneur.

Bachelor of International Business lasts for 3,5 years, it covers Basic studies, Professional studies, Free-choice studies, Practical training and Bachelor thesis. After graduating, Business Degree students have opportunities to work as Account Manager, Marketing Managers and Assistance, Marketing Coordinators, Customer Service Agents, Sales Managers and Negotiators or Purchasing Managers.

Furthermore, students in Oulu UAS's degree programs are able to apply to a Double Degree program which Oulu UAS partners with universities in Netherland and Germany. Specifically, by studying in the partner universities within a certain period, students have a chance to receive degree diploma from both Oulu UAS and the partner institution. For students who wish to spend a part of their curricula outside Finland, taking part in exchange program is an ideal option. Oulu UAS has partners in different continents such as Asia, Europe or the North America. The agreements signed with partner institutions ensure that the host universities will create such experiences regardless of which destination you choose (Oulu University of Applied Sciences 2019, cited 22.04.2019).

3 MARKETING OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

In this chapter, the significances of marketing elements in profit organizations will be considered. Accordingly, the information will be analyzed and synthesized based on the theory of Services Marketing Mix. Author will clarify the concepts followed by their real-life implementation at Oulu UAS. With theoretical sources referenced from international journals, researches and Oulu UAS's performances, readers will acknowledge the approach of Oulu UAS to practice those marketing elements and how they develop and improve their marketing activities.

3.1 Methods of Marketing in International Education

Marketing is conspicuously necessary in HEIs since it defines not only market-oriented but also quality education system which provide an appropriate for social benefit. However, because of the specific state regulations across areas, marketing activities in educational system are controlled and evaluated under a mechanism of accreditation. To best complete the missions and visions, an organization should coordinate the challenges as well as smoothly operate the marketing management. In particular, to satisfy customers across regions, a company must adapt their products in to those regions. For example, if the lower prices are necessary, a company must reconsider and design to achieve lower manufacturing costs (Sarathy &Terpestra 1997, 6-7) . In this case, knowing what customers need is the primary step to initiate a foundation from a marketing plan. The various elements of marketing are regarded as the aspects to best satisfy customers. Marketing mix is also known as an effective coordination of several marketing functions such as place, price, product, process and promotion. In this case, education is seen as a service rather than product. Thus, physical evidence, process and people should be also taken into account. There are profusely influencers in each element as listed below in figure 5.

SERVICE	PRICE	DISTRIBUTION	PROMOTION
Physical good features	Flexibility	Channel type	Promotion blend
Quality level	Price level	Exposure	Salespeople
Accessories	Terms	Intermediaries	Advertising
Packaging	Differentiation	Outlet location	Sales promotion
Warranties	Discounts	Transportation	Publicity
Product lines	Allowances	Storage	Internet/Web strategy
Breeding		Managing channels	
PEOPLE	PHYSICAL EVIDENCE	PROCESS	
Employees	Facility design	Flow of activities	
- Recruiting	Equipment	- Standardized	
- Training	Signage	- Customized	
- Motivation	Employee dress		
- Rewards	Other tangibles:	Number of steps	
- Teamwork	- Reports	- Simple	
Customers	- Business cards	- Complex	
- Education	- Statements	Customer involvement	
- Training	- Guarantees		

Figure 5. Expanded Marketing Mix for Services (Jelena 2012, 31)

The core that should be considered throughout the marketing mix operation in educational institutions is to whom and which and services to be offered. The customers can be students, partners or other public with various products in each line of services. To give an illustration, educational programs may consist of classes, library and information services, computer room or laboratory, recreational programs is provided with athletic facilities, film series and dances club. When it comes to personal-growth programs and services, counseling center or advisors are offered. Furthermore, career counseling and placement services are parts of future-planning programs and services (Jelena 2012, 32).

In view of price as a marketing mix instrument, economic aspect needs to be evaluated, not to mention psychological factor. Economically speaking, price determines income and profit while it psychologically determines the values of a product or a service. Administrators in HEIs should be highly aware that the price from EI does not cover the general cost for users. Insights into the following figure will name some other costs as well as benefit attached.

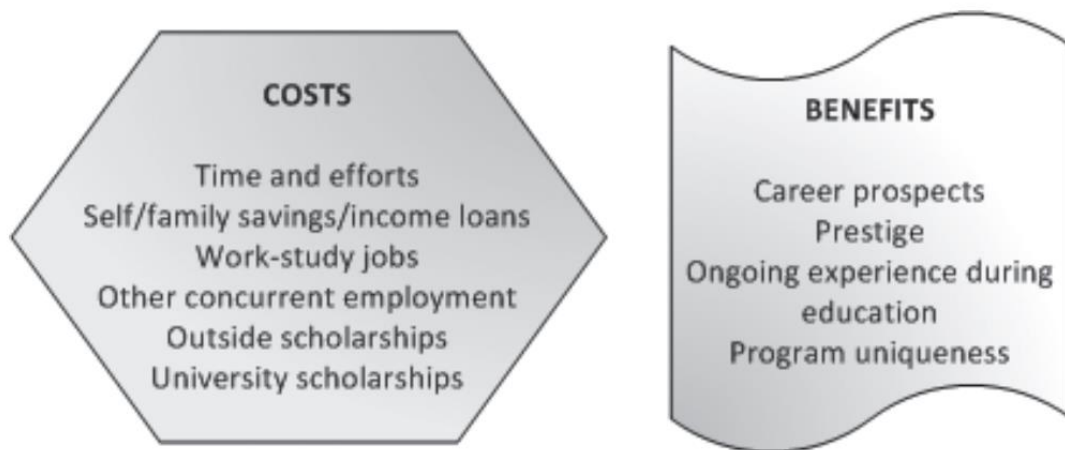


Figure 6. The consumer's costs and benefits (Jelena 2012, 33)

Other than monetary price, there are time, effort and other costs that users have to face. The effective price is the net amount actually paid after financial assistance and other discounts are subtracted. Pricing decisions should reflect the institution's mission, goals, and priorities (Jelena 2012, 33).

Distribution of educational services can be understood as the delivery of products and services. The two crucial elements in the delivery of educational services is accessibility and acceptability. In terms of location, there comes different meanings. It may refer to the physical area where the institution is located, or it can be viewed by where current and future students or high school students live. Moreover, increased convenience and quality may include implementation of distance education and/or the advancement of technologies. Institutions should pay effort on improving tangible property including appearance, signage and functionality. Furthermore, the atmosphere and the messages that the building as well as surrounding environment deliver to the public and students are of equal importance (Jelena 2012, 35-36).

In HEIs, promotion is seen as communication with target market. The main aim of this process is to convey positive messages which may possibly create good attitude on services. Primarily, university's understanding on students' needs and expectations can form an effective communication. The communications planning chain starts from learning target audience to the work backward the communicator. There are essential steps for planning decisions which are sufficient for almost all types of communications such as advertising, marketing publications and public relations (Jelena 2012, 33-34):

1. identify the target audience,
2. clarify the sought response,
3. develop a message,
4. choose the medium or media,
5. select source attributes, and
6. collect feedback.

Besides, facilities also play a certain role in marketing for HEI. Students' decisions depend on physical environment. That is the reason why some institutions offer future users a closer look on the environment via virtual tours. Furthermore, universities nowadays can present that experience to make their service more familiar to users with support from internet as websites and social medias, thus convey the marketing messages simultaneously. Physical evidences can be seen in three types in figure 7 as below:

Facility exterior	Facility interior	Other tangibles
Exterior design	Interior design	Business cards
Signage	Equipment	Stationary
Parking	Signage	Billing statements
Landscape	Layout	Reports
Surrounding environment	Air quality/temperature	Employee dress
		Uniforms
		Brochures
		Web pages
		Virtual servicescape

Figure 7. Element of Physical Evidence (Jelena 2012, 40)

Service management requires a comprehension on the students and formulate channel distribution strategies. In other words, information technologies play a role. Aside from services directly contact with the users, there are diverse services processed outside that direct contact. Service users is an integral part in the institutions through interacting with other parts of a coherent process.

Thanks to the development of the search engine in recent years, HEIs can take advantage of technology system as an effective online marketing tool. Some typical tools are clarified as below:

- Web analytics: This tool helps sum up the statistical number of visitors and detect their behavior on websites as well as page views. Thus, the efficiency of campaigns will be

monitored. According to Hanover research 2014, the users can optimize the marketing campaigns based on the data of web analytics.

- Responsive website design: This technique allows users to visit the page by any devices.
- CMS and CRM systems: While Content Management System enables to create, edit organize and publish content, Customer Relations Management tracks full history of communications, meetings and shared files which helps marketers understand the channels of prospective sales. (Hanover Research 2014, 6)

The US has always been at the forefront of international education marketing and attracting international students. In the US, there are several new trends in marketing for higher education. These following higher education marketing trends in the US are believed to help universities have some ideas to increase their enrollments (LinchpinSEO 2019, cited 13.05.2019)

1. Video Advertisements are far more impactful than written Ads

65% of the US population can learn information better by seeing images than reading words. Universities can post video advertisements on their own website, YouTube or any other intermediary web.

2. Personal voice assistants are revolutionizing how universities advertise

By 2016, it is estimated 55 % of US households used voice assistant which usually recite the first search result. To benefit from this technology, universities should not take lightly of their website ranks on search engines.

3. University websites are becoming mobile-friendly

Since 60% of total internet traffic comes from mobile devices, universities have to ensure that their website is well-adapted on this popular device.

4. Universities promote themselves on social media

Nowadays, Social medias are utilized by billions of people. They have been an effective marketing approach for universities these recent years. This is predicted to remain on-trend in upcoming years.

5. Universities pay more attention to their websites' search rankings

93% of people surf the web by using search engine. As a result, search engine optimization became one of the most effective tools of marketing for universities. Some typical search engine optimization strategies that universities are likely to take advantage are keywords; Meta descriptions and quality of content.

6. Lectures are also considered as a marketing tool

Oxford University, for instance, live stream their lectures and event which allow thousands of people to view. Universities offer lectures with appealing and specific topics to attract potential applicants.

7. Let prospective enrollees chat with representatives of university online

Live chat features are no longer new for website users. Universities are using it to let people speak with a representative of the university. This allow university to directly answer questions from future students, visitors, students' parents and partners.

8. Great apps can make a university more popular

Studies has shown that mobile users have an average of 26 apps on their phones. Universities have designed their own apps because it offers numerous features that may not be enabled on the laptop version. The university apps make it easier and quicker for users to access and seek for information.

3.2 Oulu UAS's marketing activities

Oulu UAS has many marketing activities to promote its image. Both physical-based and digital-based activities are taken into account. Oulu UAS has participated in study affairs, visited high schools and organized campus tours. There are approximately 30 school visits per year. Normally, high school counselors invite Oulu UAS to come and present about all or some specific degree programs. The group of participants in each visit includes the students from degree programs, one admission person and employees from vocational schools. The purposes are to expand relationships, attract more applicants and popularize Oulu UAS's image. Besides, there are study affairs organized in and outside Finland that Oulu UAS has joined to introduce current degree programs. Saint Petersburg have been a familiar place in few years where the university can come and attract Russian applicants. Last year, Oulu UAS assumed the role of FINNIPS representatives in education events held in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city in Vietnam. This was an opportunity for Oulu UAS to promote studying in Finland and especially in Oulu UAS to Vietnamese applicants. With the participations of Oulu UAS's Vietnamese alumni, visitors and potential applicants had a chance to hear about the life in Oulu city and studying in Oulu UAS. In the future, Oulu UAS is expected to constantly join more education events. By the beginning of Jun 2019, Oulu UAS will have a marketing meeting to discuss on upcoming plans for the next year (Pusula, interview 21.05.2019).

On the other hand, thanks to the development of digitalization nowadays, digital-based activities have become the helpful marketing tools. The web page of Oulu UAS is developed and designed

to enable students to access the necessary official information. The content is thematically arranged from studies information, application process, exchange opportunities, research and development, about Oulu UAS and the city of Oulu to staff contacts and other categories. Four languages available on website are Finnish, English, Russian and Chinese. For the applicants 2019, Oulu UAS offers a guide which fully covers information about degree programs, instructions to apply, the university, general admission criteria and master's degree. In an attempt to renew and upgrade the marketing styles and messages, Arilyn app is implemented to make the paper version of the guide become more vivid. It is an updated technology that allow readers to watch the videos even when they read the guide. This app helps audiences explore the augmented reality and experiences in Oulu UAS simply via cellphone cameras (Pusula, interview 21.05.2019).

As aforementioned, using social medias as a marketing tool have been efficient since there are billions of social medias users in the world. Oulu UAS quickly seizes this trend by running various social media campaigns to reach for more new followers in different sites. Accordingly, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Snapchat, VK, and Weibo have been active to tell the story about the university and strengthen its image. Each of them serves for specific purposes. For instance, while student ambassadors keep providing materials for Snapchat about their study days at school before and during the application period, Instagram and Facebook are regularly updated focusing on the university's activities and achievements, statistics or scientific articles. Additionally, Google AdWords is used to grow VK to reach more Russian speaking audiences and Weibo are dedicated for Chinese. Two Russian student ambassadors are responsible for continuously updating VK while two Chinese student ambassadors take care of content on Weibo (Pusula, interview 21.05.2019).

Not only by promoting, Oulu UAS's international education has been marketed by its own services, prices, distribution and other aspects. Oulu UAS provides services and products such as student and trainee mobility; teacher and staff mobility; development of curriculum and teaching; international degree programs; research and development activities in interaction with international partners and enterprises. Additionally, there are more than 100 research and development projects with the whole volume of EUR 11,9 million (Oulu University of Applied Sciences 2019, cited 22.04.2019).

Referring to the costs, tuition fee is the most visible cost and it is sometimes the first consideration of customers. In Finland, international students from 2017 onwards are required to pay an amount of money as mandatory tuition fee. Oulu UAS has an average requirement in tuition fees comparing

to other Universities of Applied Sciences. In OUAS, although non -EU/EEA students are required to pay the tuition fee of EUR 8000, they are offered the scholarships of EUR 4000 in case they get 55 ECTS credits within an academic year. This policy is to encourage students in their studies. Besides, OUAS annually awards students who has competitive academic performance, hard work or outstanding contributions (Oulu University of Applied Sciences 2019, cited 22.04.2019). The following table provides figures on tuition fee at Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences in 2019:

Tuition fee (€)	Names of the UAS
N/A	Åland, Centria, HUMAK
4,000	Diaconia, VAMK
4,300	Saimaa
5,000	Savonia
5,500	Karelia
6,000	Arcada, Kajaani, Novia, XAMK
6,800	Seinäjoki
7,000	Novia, Satakunta
7,900	Lahti
8,000	JAMK, Lapland, Laurea, Oulu
8,500	Haaga-Helia
8,700	HAMK
9,000	Turku
9,500	Haaga-Helia
9,800	Tampere
10,000	Helsinki Metropolia
12,000	Helsinki Metropolia

Table 2. Tuition fee for non -EU/EEA students (Finnish UAS 2019, cited 22.04.2019)

It is noticed from the data that Oulu UAS has the average tuition fee among all. In comparison to the highest tuition, Oulu UAS accounts approximately 67% while requires twice as much as the lowest ones.

To best distribute the services, Oulu UAS divide studies places into three campuses, all of which are close to city center. Each campus not only offers its own library with essential course books related to study majors but also provides interesting materials in other different fields. Libraries periodically organize book exchange events where students and staffs are free to leave their finished books and pick the new ones from others. Equally important, students are enabled to access to fast wireless connected computer equipment in all three campuses. Apart from that, cafeterias and restaurants are always available for students and staff members (Oulu University of Applied Sciences 2019, cited 22.04.2019).

In addition, Oulu UAS see “people” as a foundation element to reach the targets set in the strategy. The “people” goal is to have both professional competence and good morals. Accordingly, competent personnel, talented students, renewable teacher-ship and teacher training are the cornerstones of the Oulu UAS’s strategic operations (Oulu University of Applied Sciences 2019, cited 22.04.2019).

Lastly, physical capital of Oulu UAS has also been taken care of and invested. Oulu UAS studies buildings are built based on a unified architectural model. Furnitures and facilities are synchronized following the design and the main colors to create a characteristic interior layout. In addition, Oulu UAS continuously edit new brochures continuous as well as update reports on web pages. Uniforms, stationary and souvenirs have been designed and produced with high quality.

In short, it can be seen that physical-based marketing activities or digital-based ones play an equally important role. It is Student Ambassador program that supports both types of activities. To explore how this program is organized and what it has been contributed as part of Oulu UAS’s marketing activities, let’s move to the next part.

3.3 Student Ambassador program

The term of ambassador was originally understood as a diplomat who represents a country. Nowadays, the title is widely used in business, finance, charities and several other fields. While business ambassadors represent government to promote businesses, help small and medium-sized enterprises within a country, brand ambassadors embody the company by their values, ethics, demeanor, and appearance increase brand awareness (Market Business News 2019, cited 10.03.2019). Likewise, student ambassador represents an institution and play a role in promoting the image of the institution and convey its message to others.

Current situation

For the past few years, the “Student Ambassador Program” has become more popular in Finland. Previously, institutions referred the role of representatives as “Student Tutor”. Because there came more specialized demands and tasks, universities systemized and develop the program to professionalize the role of representatives. This new name itself also helps attract more people to participate in the program. There are many students who show interest in being a student ambassador and act as a face of that particular university.

Oulu UAS’s Student Ambassador program was established since 2016 as there were emerging needs in interacting with future applicants. Aspiring student ambassadors first apply Video CV and the selections is implemented based on certain criteria. The number of participants gradually increased after each recruitment. By 2019, the total number of Student Ambassadors (SA) has reached 25 people. The team is diverse in regions and degrees and Finnish is the biggest group who take care of domestic activities. The rest mainly come from countries with high number of native students studying at Oulu UAS such as Russia, Kazakhstan, Vietnam, China and Nepal. After being selected, new members will attend the meeting with the communication and marketing team, admission services officers and the experienced student ambassadors. The meeting takes place occasionally to summarize activities or outline plans for upcoming projects. Prior to each task, Oulu UAS student ambassadors will be trained to ensure successful completion of assigned tasks. Since student ambassadors and future applicants are almost at the same age group and share the identical languages, they have higher success rate in communication and interaction. In addition, it is Oulu UAS students who directly witnessed the studying environment in the degree programs and thus, are able to share their university life and experiences. As a result, Oulu UAS

benchmarked the University of Oulu and some other higher education institutions and came up a program perfect for the needs.

Activities

The work tasks' frequency depends on the time of the year. Normally, student ambassadors will be assigned tasks on a monthly basis. However, during the application periods or other special occasions, student ambassadors might contribute materials every week. One of the main tasks of Oulu UAS's student ambassador is high school tours in which they prepare to present about their university. Besides, for international market, Oulu UAS student ambassadors take part in interactive sessions using native languages to communicate with applicants in the most inspiring way. Apart from participating in events, contributing materials for publications, writing articles, Oulu UAS student ambassadors also support the team by cultural guide when it comes to their native country. Vietnamese ambassadors help the team in understanding how Vietnamese youth behave in social media and find the right channels to reach them (Pusula, discussion 20.03.2019). One of the activities of Student Ambassador is webinar which is summarized in table 3.

Task name	Webinar
Student Ambassador	3 rd year student – International Business
Task job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct a seminar over Internet - Tell story in mother tongue about studying at Oulu UAS - Answer questions of comments
Tool	Facebook Go Live
Achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Duration: approximately 30 minutes - Reached 2,700,000 views - 40 Facebook shares

Table 3. Student Ambassador's task on webinar

Impact on Student Ambassador

Like other universities, for those who are interested in being a part of Student Ambassador Program, Oulu UAS promise to help them improve their interpersonal skills. By undertaking the tasks, Oulu UAS student ambassador have a chance to improve their communication ability,

practical skills of teamwork, leadership and management. This not only enable student ambassadors to expand their network but also potentially strengthens their self-confidence which directly have a good impact on their future working life.

4 DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The previous sections of the thesis have given a look at the sellers and products. In order to complete the panoramic problem, this chapter will clarify the Vietnamese market, which in this context, represents the buyers. Specifically, it is analyzed based on a theoretical framework of five stages of decision-making process by Cox, Granbois, and Summers in 1983.

4.1 Five stages of decision-making process

Consumers' decisions form and progress as a complicated process. Each individual takes action in different contexts having different opinions. There are many factors and conditions involved to implement this process. If companies are able to understand the process, they can generate and develop an effective marketing plan as well as communicating strategies to access target customers. Thus, researchers for ages have built several models and theories to describe this process. One of the most trusted models was proposed by Cox, Granbois, and Summers in 1983 which is called The Five Stage Model. The model defines decision-making process from the early stage of need recognition, information search and evaluations of alternatives to purchase and post-purchase evaluation (Dudovskiy 2013, cited 06.02.2019). This process is illustrated in figure 8.



Figure 8. Five stage model of Decision-making process (Dudovskiy 2013, cited 06.02.2019)

After realizing a problem or demand, consumers start to recognize what product can meet the needs. There come internal and external stimuli taking part in this stage. It is said to be a crucial stage because consumers basically would not progress to the followed stages if they fail to perceive a need. Human needs are classified into two categories. The first category is psychological needs, which are the results of the emotional feelings of the customers. The second category is functional or physical needs, which are the outcome of necessity. Nevertheless, sometimes the customers might not be aware of their needs until they encounter the products in various circumstances (Dudovskiy 2013, cited 06.02.2019).

The second stage is information search which has become easier than ever in this technology era. Thanks to the development of internet, there are multiple channels and means that users can self-search information related to products or brands. Reviews forum and rating online communities are, for instance, a reliable source of information. Additionally, it is stated that colleagues, peers, friends and family members can be considered as another primary source (Dudovskiy 2013, cited 06.02.2019).

The step of Evaluation of Alternatives is the third stage in the process where consumers start comparing as well as evaluating all the available options. Hence, this is not only the most time-consuming stage but may also be the most stressful. Based on information gathered and analyzed from previous stages, consumers take additional aspects into account such as prices, quality, brand or size (Dudovskiy 2013, cited 06.02.2019).

It is easily noticed that reaching the stage of Purchase Decision significantly takes time. There are three types of purchase: planned purchase, partial purchase and impulse purchase. Correspondingly, there are several visible factors influencing the purchase decision such as pricing, product placement, packaging or reputation (Dudovskiy 2013, cited 06.02.2019).

Lastly, the final stage is called Post-purchase evaluation which is equally important as the aforementioned. Although this stage happens to affect consumers in their future decision, many companies tend to underestimate it. The consumer decision-making process is a repetitive action where a good experience might reduce uncertainty when deciding to purchase the same product or service the next time. Customers would maintain loyalty in future in case they are satisfied with previous purchases. On the other hand, if they experience such dissatisfaction, then they might stop buying the same product from that seller or even stop buying that product (Dudovskiy 2013, cited 19.02.2019).

4.2 Decision-making process in studying abroad

As other kind of purchases, buying international education takes a full process of making decision. Due to integration, people started searching for opportunities for themselves to globally experience. This trend has been early seen since the years of World War 2. For instance, Vietnam back then had a strategy to send talented young people to foreign countries to study cultivate experience. It was an effective way for Vietnam to improve the quality of human resources who returned to help the country especially in the period of hard wars. In the peace time, Vietnamese government has improved the quality of education in the country, but the number of qualified university lecturers has not kept pace with the increase in accession. That explains for 53,546 Vietnamese students studying universities abroad by 2015 (GConnect 2018, cited 09.04.2019).

Students have certain expectations when deciding to study abroad. Expectations of international students can be divided into five themes: Cultural bound expectations, Language based intercultural contacts, Personal investment, Language improvement & Social Problems and Changes (Hellsten 2019, cited 10.04.2019). Studying abroad is one of the most proper ways for students to improve can global skills and professional opportunities. University System of Georgia assessed that students who used to study abroad had 17.8% higher 4-year graduation rate than those who did not. SAGE Research Project analyzed 6,000 alumni over 50 years and showed that studying abroad has not only a long-term impact on individuals' career paths but also on global engagement. Furthermore, studying abroad experiences are highly valued by employers. The 2011 QS Global employer surveyed on 10,000 HR managers and CEOs in 116 countries and found that 60% of them confirmed that they do value an international study experience. Besides, IES Abroad showed that 90% of study abroad alumni found the jobs within six months after graduating (The Institute of International Education 2019, cited 19.05.2019).

There are two types of approaches to search for problem solutions: internal approach and external approach. Internally, consumers identify alternatives from their memory by where the sellers are not able to involve (Boundless Marketing 2019, cited 24.05.2019). For high involvement products or services as education place, consumers are likely use external searches. These searches may come from word of mouth, media, virtual visit or trials. As information communications massively developed, one click can lead a huge amount of information about a product. Nowadays, admission

networks, universities, study agencies or international student communities utilize internet as platform to exchange and searching for information.

There are many things to consider and evaluate before buying international education. Studying overseas means committing yourself in an unfamiliar country. Destination selection normally entails many variables as academic considerations, day-to-day life, environment, employment opportunities, culture, weather and speaking languages. Students have to be sure what aspects they want to focus on among academics, foreign languages, personal growth, additional costs and schedules. Each region or university has a rank and its own strength and weakness that buyers can evaluate and consider (Best Colleges 2019, cited 25.05.2019).

In three types of purchase: planned purchase, partial purchase and impulse purchase, buying international education may fall into one of the first two types. By this stage, are influencers that can decide the purchase such as the university's reputation, tuition fee, living cost or regional characteristics. After confirming admission, students are then at the final stage of the process. Their satisfaction and success are the most valuable form of marketing. The satisfaction of a student is sometimes the attraction for applicants. On the other hand, as the experienced users, they have a certain voice in the community which affect other potential customers' decision-making process.

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Technique

Before developing appropriate research designs, the most vital thing is understanding the goals, intentions and implications. Qualitative methodology is a combination of philosophy, concepts, data-gathering procedures, and statistical methods. It provides the totally elaborate basis for systematic examination of human perspicacity. Additionally, it takes advantage of the leverage power of sophisticated statistical procedures which usually reveal patterns among subjective perspectives that will be unnoted by even the foremost sensitive and discerning eye. Qualitative research is designed to learn human factors of a given topic, where specific methods are to examine how people see and experience a phenomenon. Qualitative research is effective in addressing why questions when researchers develop their projects. Typically, qualitative approaches help researchers explore new phenomena and to apprehend individuals' thoughts, feelings, or interpretations of meaning and process. Qualitative methods are primarily conducted in different fields such as education, anthropology, information studies, social sciences, nursing, sociology, humanities and health sciences (Given, Saumure et al. 2008, 699-701)

Qualitative research is not expected to count, measure or offer statistical validation. For instance, this method is not suitable in determining best product concept or price point. However, in business, qualitative research ideally help researchers in understanding feelings, values and perceptions which directly affect consumer behavior. Besides, using qualitative research not only help identify customer needs but also capture their perceptions on marketing messages. Accordingly, results of the studies will contribute to strategic branding directions and support product improvements. One of the most typical situations where qualitative research is used is studying reactions to advertising or public relations campaigns and other marketing communications (Qualitative Research Consultants Association 2019, cited 08.05.2019)

Data collection

Data collection is an essential component to conducting a research. In qualitative research, there are many methods to collect data, including observations, textual or visual analysis, interviews. Therein, interview is a key data collection method which is best used in attaining highly personalized

data or probing to get underlying factors. When there are limited respondents and good return rate is important, interview is a viable option. Especially, interviews are useful in gaining insight and context into a topic. However, there are some risks of interview that researcher have to face. Firstly, interviewing can be susceptible to a certain level of bias. For instance, interviewer can direct an interview which best suits their world view and it may affect the validity of results produced. Bias can also be seen due to fatigue over involvement of participants. Secondly, interview is time-consuming because the typical planning processes from arrangements for visits, seeking necessary permission, confirming arrangements to problems arising (Munyaradzi 2016, cited 08.05.2019). Thus, being a reliable interviewer with reasonable schedule arrangement plan is a way to avoid those risks. There are unstructured, semi-structured and structured interviews. The author of this thesis organized semi-structured interviews with the lists of close-ended questions and open-ended questions which provides opportunities for both interviewer and interviewee to discuss some topics in more detail. Interviewers can encourage the interviewee if they are looking for more information or they are interested in what interviewees are saying (McLeod 2014, cited 08.05.2019)

Data analysis

Data analysis process will go through at least 5 steps. The first thing to do is reading the transcripts carefully and make notes on impressive details or information. The next step is labeling relevant words, phrases, sentences. Things that are repeated in several places or stated as important by interviewee should also be coded. Thirdly, researcher decide which codes are the most important and crate categories by combining several codes. After that, researchers label categories, choose the most relevant and describe how connected they are. At the fifth step, researcher have to evaluate and decentralize categories' importance and draw figure to summarize results (Löfgren 2013, cited 22.05.2019). The author of this thesis applied and adhered to the above five steps to analyze the data.

Procedure

In fact, it was challenging in selecting interviewees as well as identifying their reliability and relevance to the topic. Because it is challenging to conduct interviews on a large scale of Vietnamese applicants, the author selected objects who have experience working and witnessing the decision-making process of Vietnamese applicants planning to study abroad. Besides,

interviews are carried with Vietnamese parents whose children are planning to study in Finland and those students themselves. The list of interviewees includes Deputy Head of Talented Science Bachelor Training System (Vietnam National University), Union Secretary (Hanoi High School for Gifted Students), Study Affairs Planning Officer (Oulu University of Applied Sciences), 10 parents of Vietnamese students planning to study in Finland, 8 Vietnamese students studying in Finland and 5 potential applicants (See Appendix 4).

All of the interviews took place in May 2019. They are organized by video call, using online communication applications and interviewers takes note to store the data. The data extracted according to participants is clean and free from favoritism.

6 RESULTS

6.1 Interview with educational experts in Vietnam

In this part, interviews are conducted on two educational experts. They are both working at Vietnam National University (VNU), Hanoi and have many years experiences working with students. The aim is to learn Vietnamese applicants' decision-making process from perspectives of educators. Vietnamese application Zalo was used as a form of communication. Each interview took nearly 60 minutes to complete 6 main questions (See Appendix 1). The first question was about the current actual demand for studying abroad of students in their institutions. The second question related to outside agencies and their activities in the institutions. The next two questions were expected to explore what kind of information that students mainly look for. Question 5 & 6 were focused on the role of Student Ambassador in students' decision-making process. The last two questions asked for their advices on interacting and attracting Vietnamese students.

The first interview was made with Assoc. Prof. Dr. Quynh, Deputy Head of Talented Science Bachelor Training System, Vietnam National University. The system was established since 1997 with three goals: attracting outstanding students, creating a breakthrough towards international quality in Vietnam education and building a new model in young talent training in Vietnam. Students of the system are invested nearly 4 times more than standard students; have the best support of facilities, lecturers (Vietnam National University Hanoi 2019, cited 17.05.2019). During six years of this position, Dr. Quynh has worked with generations of students as well as witnessed students seeking opportunities to study abroad. The other person interviewed was M.S. Hoang, Union Secretary, Hanoi High School for Gifted Students. High School for Gifted Students is a specialized public high school directly under Hanoi University of Science. The school is also recognized as the most successful high school in Vietnam in terms of the number of medals as well as the awards achieved in the International Olympic competitions (Wikipedia 2019, cited 19.05.2019). While Dr. Quynh undertakes educational work with undergraduate students, M.S. Hoang has many years of contacting and understanding high school students. The information obtained from both interviews will be arranged and summarized in the same topic in order to see the correlation between the two opinions.

According to Dr. Quynh, the quality of education in Vietnam has been improved, but the number of qualified university and lecturers has not kept pace with students' increasing demand. As a prestigious university in Vietnam, VNU so far has established cooperation with 135 universities and educational institutions around the world and many of those are world's top universities. Particularly in Europe, the university has 18 partners from the UK, Germany, Netherland, Hungary, Norway, Russia and Belgium. The scholarships and exchange opportunities offered by university are always very competitive, wherefore students themselves are always looking for opportunities from outside.

For high school students, M.S. Hoang specified that study abroad workshops and educational events always attract their attentions. The school has accepted invitations from study agencies which are mutually beneficial. While agencies can promote their products and overseas study opportunities, students are able to have more information approaches. It is undeniable that using the agent's service is a quick way for host institutions to be more visible to students. However, students also search for opportunities by themselves through the internet, social networks, teachers and fellows, in which internet and social medias are the most preferred ones. He also said that students have been seen to verify information themselves and actively diversify their sources of information.

The information that students primarily look for about studying abroad are the training majors as well as types of expenses they have to pay. Dr. Quynh said that as a result of professionalism in labor, every student wants to become specialized in his chosen field. Meaning, the choice of a country or an institution academic depends on the specialization and majors that universities provide.

Besides that, M.S. Hoang mentioned that young people are dependent on financial support from their families which sometimes limit their aspirations and interests. The last of the three main things students search for is the admission criteria that host institutions require. There are universities requiring international English certification (IELTS, TOEFL or TOEIC), while others require SAT

certification. Sometimes in the same admission system, each institution requires different certification levels. Students have to make sure that their abilities and competencies can meet with admission criteria.

When asked about the role of student ambassadors, Dr. Quynh indicated that this program is no longer new in Vietnam. Due to lack of investment and training resources, the results are sometimes not as expected. He suggested that this program should only be operated when the student ambassadors were well-trained. For foreign universities, it is helpful to have a Vietnamese student ambassador, but not necessary.

Meanwhile, M.S. Hoang's viewpoint is that this program can have certain impacts on students' information searching. A Vietnamese-speaking student ambassador can smoothly and quickly convey the marketing messages to Vietnamese students. Students from host universities are the proper ones to provide detailed, authentic and up-to-date information especially some specific information that not available or published on university sites. Meaning, communicating with student ambassadors may help students in screening information to evaluate alternatives.

To successfully interact with Vietnamese students, M.S. Hoang recommended that Oulu UAS should focus on two points: Social networks and language. For instance, the Facebook group "Welcome to Finland" is forum connecting Vietnamese students applying to and studying in Finland which contains 19.229 members. This is the main channel where Vietnamese students exchange information and experiences in enrollment as well as their lives in Finland. All forms of advertising are excluded from this group. However, this is where the students' aspirations, problems and situations are most clearly seen. By this online communication, it is not difficult for Vietnamese students to connect with undergraduates studying at the Finnish universities they want to apply to. On the other hand, in attracting Vietnamese students, Dr. Quynh mentioned again the three aspects that students consider as the key for Oulu UAS to appeal them. Expressly, considering professional major training orientation, cutting down cumbersome procedures, lowering enrollment criteria, reducing tuition fees are the most practical way to attract Vietnamese students.

To conclude, the results of these two interviews are summarized in table 4:

Issues	Findings
Vietnamese students' demands for studying abroad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of education in Vietnam has not kept pace with students' increasing demand. • The scholarships and exchange opportunities offered by university are competitive, wherefore students keep looking for opportunities from outside.
Study agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study abroad workshops and educational events always attract high school students' attentions. • Using the agent's service is a quick way for host institutions to be more visible to students.
Students' information search and concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students also search for opportunities through the internet, social networks, teachers and fellows • Internet and social medias are the most preferred sources. • Students verify information and actively diversify their sources. • The information that students primarily look for the training majors, expenses.
Student Ambassador	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This program should only be operated when the student ambassadors were well-trained. • For foreign universities, it is helpful to have a Vietnamese student ambassador, but not necessary. • Student ambassadors from host universities are the proper ones to provide detailed, authentic and up-to-date information especially some specific information that not available or published on university sites.
Advices for Oulu UAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To interact with Vietnamese students, Oulu UAS should focus on two points: Social networks and language. • To attract Vietnamese students, Oulu UAS should consider professional major training orientation, cutting down cumbersome procedures, lowering enrollment criteria, reducing tuition fees.

Table 4. Findings of interviews with educational experts in Vietnam (Vo, 2019)

6.2 Interview with Vietnamese students

The group of students is an important group because among three groups, they are the only subjects that directly and really experience the education products. This group includes 8 Oulu UAS current students and 5 of those who are considering studying in Finland. Thirteen Vietnamese students participated in the semi-structured interviews, each of which lasts from 45 minutes to an hour. Some of the interviews were face-to-face while others were run by online communication via Messenger, Zalo and Google Hangouts. 18 open-ended questions were (See Appendix 2) posed based on stages of decision-making process where all five stages are examined.

Need recognition

The questions in this stage revolve around the needs to study abroad and Finland. 47% of students first knew about Finland from internet and social medias. This is illustrated in figure 9.

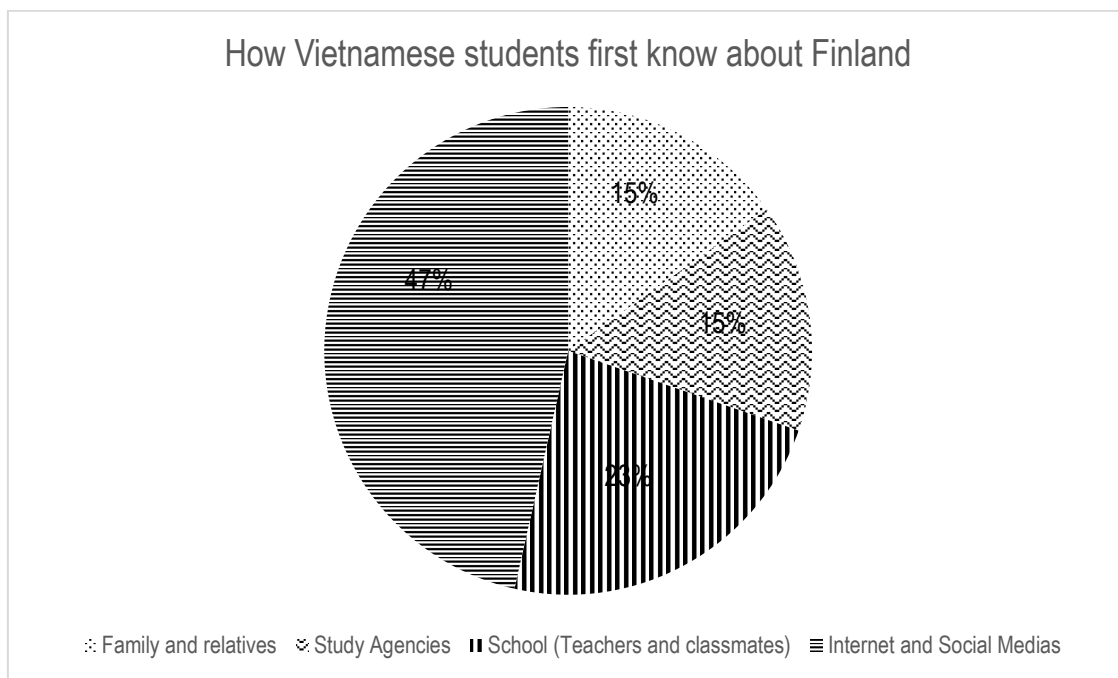


Figure 9. How Vietnamese Students first know about Finland (Vo, 2019)

According to the findings, initial sources of information that reach students are diverse. Almost half of the students first knew Finland thanks to Internet and social networks, the other half includes three sources of information: Study Agencies (15%), School (23%) and Family (15%). It can be seen that the efforts in promoting Finnish education of Finnish institutions has brought results. The last question at this stage studied on things that Finland attract Vietnamese students. In other

words, it provided the reason why they chose Finland as a study place. The reasons gathered are distributed into 4 main influencers as below:

- Education factors (Finnish top-notch education, interested degree programs, Finnish good education system): Mentioned by 92%
- Living environment factors (high quality services, friendly and helpful people, clean environment, beautiful nature): Mentioned by 61,5%
- Expense factors (Inexpensive costs, scholarships offered, low tuition fees): Mentioned by 69%
- Other factors (New experience desire, family or friend reunion): Mentioned by 23%

The results showed that three main factors that attract students are education, living environment and affordable expenses, in which the reasons relating to education convinced almost all the respondents.

Information Search

At the first question, interviewees were asked about issues that students are concerned for when making decision to go to Finland. 69% of respondents worried about the difficulties in integrating into the new community, including cultural differences, language barrier and communication issues. Next, living cost is another main concern which was specified by 53% of students. They said that the part-time job opportunity is a plus when they consider among the destinations and the possibility of not able find a part-time job also worried them. Because Vietnam is a tropical country, climate and weather differences in host countries is also a preoccupation of 38%. The minority of the group are uneasy about their mental health in a foreign country. This 23% mentioned isolation, loneliness and depression as the problems that they need to take precautions.

Regarding to the official site of Oulu UAS, oamk.fi, 2 students said that they have never visited this website. Among those who already interacted with oamk.fi, 30% of them actively searched for it on search engines while the rest found it through other websites such as studyinfo.fi and finnips.fi. The majority agreed that the content is useful, and vividly illustrated. However, 36% found the website structure and order were hard to get used to.

When it comes to the role of student ambassador at this stage, the studies showed that nearly 77% of students have never interacted with student ambassadors. It implied that the visibility of Oulu UAS's student ambassadors is poor which is illustrated in figure 10.

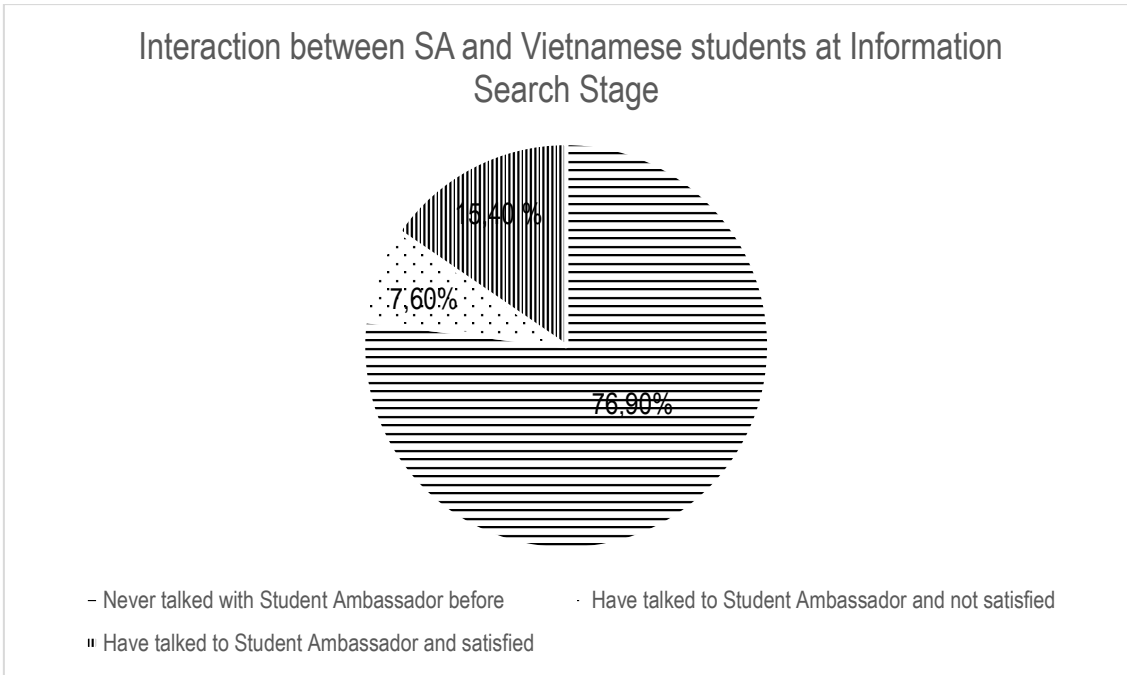


Figure 10. Interaction between SA and Vietnamese students at Information Search Stage (Vo, 2019)

Only 3 individuals among 13 interviewees have talked to student ambassadors and 2 of them found the supports helpful. Notwithstanding, 84% of respondents said that would be easier and more comfortable to talk to a Vietnamese student ambassador for which they preferred over reading info online. The information that they expected a student ambassador to provide are students' life, living expense, local entertainment, transportation, healthcare services and job opportunities.

Alternative Evaluation

This section studied on how Vietnamese students compare Finnish UAS and showed the criteria that drive their decision. Among thirteen interviewees, three students chose Oulu UAS as the first choice for low living cost, specialized major in Engineering Degree and family reasons. The following are criteria established by students to consider Finnish universities of applied sciences. There is a total of 8 criteria that students set out to collocate their choices of universities. Each student was asked to indicate three criteria that they prioritized. Responses were listed and summarized in table 5.

Criteria	Prioritized by
Degree program availability	9/13
Expenses (Tuition fees, living costs, ...)	8/13
Admission requirements (Certification levels, temporary certificate acceptance, ...)	7/13
Student support (Student Counsellor, Study Psychologist, Student healthcare, ...)	5/13
Big city-based	4/13
Professional job opportunities	3/13
Extracurricular activities/ events (Dance club, social events, student union activities, ...)	2/13
Part-time job opportunities	1/13

Table 5. Vietnamese students' criteria in selecting Finnish UAS (Vo, 2019)

The four most preferred criteria are Degree programs, Expenses, Admission requirements and Student support. The students then asked about the role of Student Ambassador at this stage, 100% of responses showed that SA were not seen at this stage.

Post-results

At this stage, students who used to interact with SA are asked about the credibility of the information provided by SA. Two-thirds of them said that the information was reliable. The last questions examined customer satisfaction after purchasing the products and services. 9 students who have experienced studying in Oulu were asked on their expectations before applying to Oulu UAS as well as how reality was similar to their imagination. Students evaluated reality on a scale from 1 to 5: 1 = disappointed, 2 = neutral, 3 = not bad, 4 = rather similar to expectation and 5 = completely similar to expectation. The ratings were summed and divided by average, now showed in table 6.

Expectations	Reality
Student support	4/5
Friendly and kind people	4/5
Local events	4/5
Safety and peace	4/5
English improvement	3/5
Extracurricular dance/sport activities	3/5
Professional knowledge cultivation	3/5
International connection expansion	2/5

Table 6. Correlation of Vietnamese students' expectations vs Reality perceived in Oulu UAS (Vo, 2019).

Vietnamese students have expectations of Student Support, kind people, local events, safety and peace, English improvement, extracurricular activities, professional knowledge cultivation and international connection expansion. Oulu UAS was rated to well meet the Vietnamese students' expectations of Student Support, kind people, local events and safe environment. However, "International connection expansion" gets the lowest rating on the list. The remarkable findings in this chapter is epitomized in table 7.

Issues	Findings
Acknowledgement of Finland	Internet and social networks, Study Agencies, School, Family.
Reasons for studying in Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education factors • Living environment factors • Expense factors
Student Ambassador	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visibility of Oulu UAS's student ambassadors is poor • The information that they expected a student ambassador to provide are students' life, living expense, local entertainment, transportation, healthcare services and job opportunities
Criteria to evaluate and compare UAS	Degree program availability, expenses, admission requirements, student support, big city-based, professional job opportunities, extracurricular activities.
Reality compared to expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Support, kind people, local events and safe environment are highly rated • International connection expansion" gets the lowest rating on the list

Table 7. Findings of interviews with Vietnamese students (Vo, 2019)

6.3 Interview with Vietnamese parents

A qualitative survey was conducted by the author on a group of 10 parents who have been considering Finland as a studies destination to send their children to. Being proceeded in form of online communication, the semi-structured interviews were conducted via different application: Messenger, Zalo and Viber. Each subject was asked a group of open-ended questions regarding to their consideration and information seeking before letting their children study in foreign countries, particularly in Finland.

The author posed questions based on five stages of decision-making process: Problem Recognition – Information Search – Alternative Evaluation – Purchase Decision – Post Purchase.

The purpose is to investigate the aspects that Vietnamese parents take into account when consider study places for their children, at the same time explore the role of student ambassador in that process. Because parents are not really consumers of international education products, questions were focused on stages 1, 2 and 3 (See Appendix 3). The responses received are reported and summarized as below.

Stage #1: Problem recognition:

By this stage, prospects were made aware of international education in Finland. They were mainly asked on reasons for their children studying abroad and studying in Finland. Most parents share a common belief that studying abroad is a good chance for their children to experience and grow up. 60% of the respondents supposed overseas studies may improve job opportunities and advancement in future careers, while the rest stated that studying abroad is the best way to cultivate language competence. Among 10 parents, 6 first know Finland from family, the others were acknowledged about Finland by both colleagues and internet.

The reasons they chose Finland:

- High-quality education: mentioned by 8
- Affordable total cost: mentioned by 7
- English-teaching degrees: mentioned by 3
- Safe environment: mentioned by 4

Sending children to Finland, here are what respondents are concerned about:

- Weather problems: mentioned by 7
- Cultural differences: mentioned by 6

Stage #2: Information search:

The questions at this stage are to explore how prospects search for information, particularly on which sources of information they seek for or from whom they asked for advices. The two main information about Finland that sought by parents are education quality and living environment. The 60% of parents first decided to discuss with family, relatives, co-workers then engage online information, in which 20% looked to Study agencies as an information source. The remaining 20% entirely trust on the information from their children. The majority agreed that Student Ambassador is a reliable source because they are the eyewitnesses who can objectively tell a true story about student life and living environment in host country. 70% of parents think that talking with Vietnamese student ambassadors is more comfortable than reading info online while the others

are of the opinion that Student Ambassadors are simply doing advertisement, they therefore are not credible.

Stage #3: Alternative evaluation:

At stage 3, potential customers have the comparison among alternatives. Notable points of the interviews at stage 3 will be clarified in table 8.

Desired countries	Most influential source	Prioritized criteria	Ultimate factors
USA	Family	Availability of study	Children's
UK	Colleagues	majors	aspirations
Germany		English-teaching	
Australia		degrees	
Singapore		Affordable cost	
Japan			

Table 8. Interview with Vietnamese parents on stage 3 of decision-making process (Vo, 2019)

Nowadays, there are many countries provide international education and customers have more options than before. Potential customers establish criteria and determine their priorities to choose among host countries, as well as factors driving their final decision. For Vietnamese parents, they mainly consider the US, the UK, Germany, Australia, Singapore and Japan as the alternatives Finland. Vietnamese parents expressed the desire for children to have the opportunity to practice their language skills, especially English. Hence, apart from children's major aspirations and their financial capacity, English-teaching degrees offering is a plus. Highlights of the interviews with Vietnamese parents will be summarized in table 9.

Issues	Findings
Reasons for children studying abroad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studying abroad is a good chance for their children to experience and grow up. • Improve job opportunities and advancement in future careers • Cultivate language competence
Acknowledgement of Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family • Colleagues • Internet
Reasons for choosing Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-quality education • Affordable total cost • English-teaching degrees • Safe environment
Concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weather problems • Cultural differences
Information search	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss with family, relatives, co-workers • Engage online information • Study agencies as an information source.
Student Ambassador	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Ambassador is a reliable source because they are the eyewitnesses • Student Ambassador can objectively tell a true story about student life and living environment in host country • Talking with Vietnamese student ambassadors is more comfortable than reading info online
Alternatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the US, the UK, Germany, Australia, Singapore, Japan, ...

Table 9. Findings of interviews with Vietnamese parents (Vo, 2019)

7 CONCLUSION

After Vietnamese students get used to the tuition fee, strengthening the brand image of Oulu UAS is a must. Marketing is a process involving many factors, none of those should be taken lightly. The two main purpose of this research was understanding the role of student ambassador in Oulu UAS's marketing activities and in Vietnamese students' decision-making process. The role of student ambassador was learnt from interviews with experts while Vietnamese students' decision-making process was examined by the different influencers.

The theoretical part of this research is based on the theory of marketing mix and decision-making process while the empirical part was carried out by qualitative method researches. The researchers have made different researches focusing on three target groups: Educators, Oulu UAS's Vietnamese students and their parents. The research outcome provided deep insight into the role of student ambassador in doing marketing activities and attracting Vietnamese students, as well as Vietnamese applicants' decision-making process.

In brief, the first research question can be answered as follows. Student Ambassador program has had positive contributions to Oulu UAS's marketing campaigns in both digital-based activities and physical-based activities. Nonetheless, this program has played meager role in Vietnamese applicants' decision-making process up to this point. Regarding to the second question, the aspects that Vietnamese students consider when they consider studying in Finland are major training, admission criteria and tuition fees. Besides, weather problem and culture differences are concerns of the majority of Vietnamese parents. To compare among UAS, Vietnamese students establish criteria such as Student Support, friendly & kind people, local events, safety & peace, English improvement, extracurricular activities, professional knowledge cultivation and international connection expansion. Based on these results of practical researches from experts, Vietnamese parents, students and applicants, together with the gathered theory, thesis writer proposed the plan for Oulu UAS to effectively interact and attract Vietnamese applicants as table 10.

Issues	Solutions for Oulu UAS
Interacting with Vietnamese applicants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and reinforce Facebook channel because this is the most popular media used by Vietnamese students. • Besides Russian and Chinese, Vietnamese language should also be offered on Oulu UAS's official website (oamk.fi)
Attracting Vietnamese applicants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and diversify degree programs • Cutting down cumbersome procedures • Lowering enrollment criteria • Reducing tuition fees.
Students' satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote strengths in Student Support, kind people, local events and safe environment • Continually absorb and work on students' feedback to improve services • Provide soft skills training courses for students to integrate more quickly with the community
Marketing message conveyance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce story-telling videos instead of letting applicants read information only

Table 10. Proposal for Oulu UAS to attract Vietnamese students (Vo, 2019)

Besides problems that can be improved, weather and culture are the inherent characteristics of Finland that Oulu UAS can hardly change. However, these concerns of Vietnamese potential customers are not impossible to solve. Undergoing a process of six months of thesis researching and two years of working as a Student Ambassador, the author suggested the solutions to innovate and improve operational efficiency of Student Ambassador program. The recommendations are encapsulated in table 11.

Issues	Suggestions for Student Ambassador
Preparation work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Ambassador should be well-trained before interacting with the prospects • Update information before answering and providing them to customers
Information provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share to prospects about students' life, living expense, local entertainment, transportation, healthcare services and job opportunities • Emphasize on Oulu UAS's strength • Share personal experiences to ease customers' concerns • Provide tips for getting used to the cold weather • Share know-how to integrate and make friends with international students • Remind applicants about cultural differences, make comparisons between Finland and Vietnam • Let students know how to avoid cultural conflicts and misunderstandings.
Other points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Ambassador should first have good academic performance • Student Ambassador should be those who are satisfied with studying experiences in Oulu UAS • In the selection criteria, personality should be the most prioritized • Student Ambassador must be honest, helpful, friendly and trustworthy.

Table 11. Suggestions for Oulu UAS's Student Ambassador program

8 DISCUSSION

This research process has had several difficulties. Two of the most challenging parts are screening references and analyzing data. The initial intention was to conduct interviews on three experts. However, one of them then refused to participate in the interview. In an attempt to solve this unanticipated situation, I tried to find a replacement, for which I failed. In order to ensure the quality of practical parts, I have increased the number of survey subjects in other groups.

However, that was unlikely to be a perfect solution. It is this change that made the data collection process consume much more time than scheduled. The content would be interesting to have further insights from one or two more educational experts. These issues might have been resolved if I had backup plans before. This is a lesson for me to be well-prepared in doing research.

Another limitation of this study is the sample size. In this case, generalizations should not be assumed since the number of respondents is small as a sample compared to the total number of Vietnamese students studying in Oulu UAS or applying to Finland. Even though, the questions are prepared and ordered with the aim of obtaining good quality information.

Although there have been emerging problems in planning the schedule, directing the topic and researching, it has been a valuable experience that nourished and enriched my skills as an aspiring marketing researcher.

For further research, it is suggested to carry out research relating to plan on training and recruiting Student Ambassador. On the other hand, based on this research, future studies should be performed regarding to social media content to boost the interactions with prospects, thereby attract more students applying to UAS.

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10 APPENDICES

10.1 List of question for expert group

1. Is studying abroad common among the students in your institution? Do students actively looking for studying abroad opportunities or does the university have any exchange programs to offer to your students?
2. Do you have outside agencies come to your university to promote their study abroad programs?
3. What do you think is the main information that the students look for when they come to these events?
4. When students gather information from other sources such as online, what do you think what is the important information that they look for?
5. Do you think interacting with a SA will help the students with their decisions?
6. What do you think that students look for when they are reaching out to a SA if they want to study in Finland? Do you think the nationality of the student ambassador matters?
7. What do you think is an effective way for Oulu UAS to interact with Vietnamese students?
8. What is the proper way for Oulu UAS to attract Vietnamese students?

10.2 List of question for student group

1. Why don't you study in Vietnam?
2. How did you first find out about Finland? (source of information: Internet, agency, relatives, ...)
3. Why did you choose Finland as an overseas destination?
4. What do you concern when going abroad? (Money/health...)
5. Did you visit oamk.fi? How did you find it? Is the content useful? Is there anything missing?
6. What info do you look for and who do you want to talk to when consider Finland as a study destination?
7. Do you find Student Ambassador helpful?
8. How can they improve their jobs?
9. Do you think it is easier to talk to a Vietnamese student ambassador?

10. What info you look for when you talk to them? Do you think they have a positive impact on your decision?
11. Do you find it more helpful to talk to student ambassador than reading the info online?
12. Did you choose Oulu UAS as the first choice?
13. Which of the sources you mentioned above was the most influential in driving your decision?
14. What criteria did you establish to compare the universities of applied sciences? And which one do you prioritize?
15. Who else was involved in the final decision? What role did SA play in this decision?
16. What are your expectations when you come to Finland?
17. Compare your expectations and reality?
18. Did you find the information obtained from SA credible?

10.3 List of question for parent group

1. Why don't you let your children study in Vietnam?
2. How did you first know about Finland? Which was that source?
3. Why did you choose Finland as a study place for your children?
4. What are you concerned about when sending them abroad?
5. What was the first thing you did to find information about going to Finland? How helpful was this source?
6. What info do you look for and who do you want to talk to when consider Finland as a study destination?
7. Do you find Student Ambassador helpful? How can they improve it?
8. Do you think it is easier to talk to a Vietnamese student ambassador?
9. What info you look for when you talk to them? Do you think they have a positive impact on your decision?
10. Do you find it more helpful to talk to student ambassador than reading the info online?
11. Besides Finland, which country have you considered for your children?
12. Which of the sources that you described above was the most influential in driving your decision?
13. What, if any, criteria did you prioritize when comparing between countries?

14. What factors ultimately influenced your final purchasing decision?

10.4 List of experts interviewed

1. Study Affairs Planning Officer of Oulu UAS: Sanna Pusula
2. Deputy Head of Talented Science Bachelor Training System (Vietnam National University):
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Thanh Quynh
3. Union Secretary (Hanoi High School for Gifted Students): M.S. Minh Hoang