Higher Education Marketing to International Students

An Advice Plan for the International Master Program in Governance of Complex Networks

Master thesis

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Abstract

Due to the fact that, for long, higher education institutions did not have to engage in applying corporate strategies like marketing, the need for academic research into the field was low. However, through several developments in politics, society, and within organizations, higher education marketing has become increasingly important. Additionally, the increased levels of internationalization in higher education and the pressure from a European level and national level to increase this even further, have led to the development of more international education programs throughout the Netherlands. The Erasmus University in Rotterdam is one of those universities prioritizing internationalization, and consequently, many new international study programs are being developed. Currently, the Department of Public Administration of the Faculty of Social Sciences is in the process of developing a new international master program to be launched in the academic year of 2015/2016. A combination of the rise of higher education marketing, an increase in importance of internationalization in higher education, and the development of the new master program at the Department of Public Administration led to the formulation of the following research question that was central to this thesis:

> *What marketing tools can the Department of Public Administration at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Erasmus University in Rotterdam use to attract international students for its new international master program?*

Through exploring the context of the field by looking at trends and developments that have taken place in the sector over the past years; the discussion of theoretical models and their implications for marketing to international students; and the conduct of qualitative expert interviews and focus group discussions with students, it was possible to formulate an advice plan with a set of practical marketing tools for the case program. Central to this plan is the distinction between applying transactional marketing theories in the stage identified as the student recruitment stage, and applying relational marketing theories in the stage identified as the student/alumni retention phase. The tools and ideas that were formulated for each stage can be used by the new international master program of the Department of Public Administration at Erasmus University in the run up to the launch of the program, and once the program has started.

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1. Introduction

In July 2013, the European Commission launched a strategy document focused on how European higher education institutions can position themselves better in the world market. The strategy document states how “action is needed […] within the individual higher education institutions, on national and at European level. Member States and individual higher education institutions are encouraged to develop their own internationalization strategies, adapted to their own situations and needs and taking into account different aspects of international mobility and cooperation” (European Commission, 2014). In its strategy document, the European Commission has indicated that it will also look at possibilities to reform certain policies to facilitate internationalization processes, and funds will be made available for institutions to develop comprehensive strategies and to encourage knowledge exchange. The intentions formulated in the strategy document have not gone by unnoticed in the Netherlands. On the 15th of July 2014, a letter was published written by the Dutch Minister for Education, Culture and Science and addressed to the Dutch House of Representatives. In this so-called vision letter, the Minister expresses the vision of the Ministry concerning internationalization in higher education for the coming years. She states that, in her eyes, “internationalization is crucial for the acquisition of knowledge, skills and professional competencies. At the same time, internationalization is also very valuable for the personal development and the shaping of identity of students. There are interesting overlaps between this and other policy areas of this ministry focusing on promoting citizenship, human rights, emancipation and international awareness” (The Dutch House of Representatives, 2014). The letter was written on the basis of several researches conducted by Dutch institutions that involve themselves with internationalization in Dutch higher education, such as the Dutch Organization for Internationalization in Higher Education (Nuffic) and the Dutch Association of Universities (VSNU). These researches show that, even though the Netherlands scores relatively high in terms of attracting international students and the amount of international programs offered, when compared to other countries in the region, there are still a lot of opportunities for Dutch institutions to market themselves better worldwide (VSNU, 2014).

Against the backdrop of these developments on E.U.-level and national level, universities in the Netherlands have started to prioritize internationalization as well, for example through developing more international programs. Whereas 7% of university-level bachelors and 64% of university-level master degrees were international in 2009, these numbers have grown to 24% and 80% respectively in 2013. In line with these results the Erasmus University in Rotterdam (EUR) has also experienced an increase in international programs offered and it has seen the amount of international students enrolling in its programs grow. Especially on a master-level, EUR scores relatively high compared to other universities in terms of the amount of international students it attracts; it holds 35% of the market share. However, there are still certain aspects of the university and its programs that could be marketed better (Van de Braak, 2013). Consequently, marketing is slowly but steadily becoming part of the organizational and managerial process of higher education institutions in general, and EUR in particular. To match the internationalization priority of the university, the Department of Public Administration of the Faculty of Social Sciences is aiming on launching a new international master program in the academic year of 2015-2016. Keeping in mind the strategic plans of the European Commission, the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and all affiliated organizations concerned with internationalization, and the goals of the university itself, it would be beneficial to look at possibilities in terms of marketing this new program to international students. As such, this thesis will aim to answer the following research question:

> *What marketing tools can the Department of Public Administration at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Erasmus University in Rotterdam use to attract international students for its new international master program?*

To answer this question as thoroughly as possible, the following sub-questions have been formulated:

- *What are current marketing tools used nationally and on an institutional level at EUR?*
- *What aspects of the program would be appealing for marketing to international students?*

- *What do international students expect in the communication of universities?*
- *How can these expectations be translated into practical ideas for marketing?*

By answering these questions, an advice plan for marketing can be developed for the new international master program of the Department of Public Administration. In order to be able to provide a context of the field, this thesis will first look at trends and developments that have been taken place in the sector. Then, it will discuss theoretical models and their implications for marketing to international students, which will result in a framework for developing an advice plan. The subsequent chapter will discuss the research methodology, which is followed by the analysis of the findings. This will result in a one-page advice plan on which all findings are categorized and accumulated. The last chapter will discuss the conclusions of this thesis, including limitations and implications for further research.

2. Literature review

This chapter aims to provide a contemporary context of the concepts central to the research question through the description and analysis of developments and research previously conducted in related fields. By looking at trends that have taken place in the public higher education sector over the past decades, it provides insights in the factors that have influenced a movement towards the need for more corporate strategizing in higher education institutions. Next, it will describe the factors underlying the emergence of higher education marketing, which will identify existing gaps that legitimize the research conducted in this thesis. This will result in the description of a focus for the following chapters in this thesis.

2.1 – Developments in public higher education

New public management in higher education

Up until the 1980s, the practice of innovation of organizational processes was mainly linked to corporate organizations, as innovation was considered a way to stay ahead of the competition and increase revenue streams – considerations that were not relevant for public organizations. However, several external developments taking place in politics and society, but also internal developments taking place within organizations have led to an increased importance for public organizations to innovate and use more business-like work processes to become more goal-oriented and effective (Bryson & Roering, 1987), coined as the concept of New Public Management. Such developments also took place in the public higher education sector – which can be defined as those institutions that are "controlled and managed directly by a public education authority or agency, or controlled and managed either by a government agency directly or by a governing body (Council, Committee etc.), most of whose members are appointed by a public authority or elected by public franchise" (OECD, 2003). Examples of such external developments are "[e]conomic crises, privatization, budget cuts, the continuing evolution of e-government and increasing scrutiny from citizens" (Borzo, 2005, p. 3), of which public higher education institutions are mostly affected by increased public scrutiny, financial crises and budget cuts. Firstly, the public is becoming increasingly skeptic about the value of degrees and accountability has become increasingly important for higher education institutions (The Economist, 2014). On top of that, due to the rise of technology, the public has more access to information about global developments and reputation management has become more important, the effects of which will be explained more thoroughly in the next paragraph. Secondly, the financial crisis has affected higher education institutions in several ways. As many governments have had to cut budgets, higher education institutions have to deal with reduced support from their government. Governments of mainly Eastern European countries, but also for example the United States have announced a decrease of financing and budget allocation for higher education institutions (PWC, 2014). Additionally, indirect causes such as a decline in contributions of third parties and the losses taken from investments into ventures that have been directly affected by the financial crisis have been identified as reasons that higher education institutions have less budget to spend and are facing severe downsizing (Varghese, 2010).

Developments taking place within organizations that have had an influence on public organizations' needs to innovate have been identified as engagement in political initiatives, new leadership, organizational crises, the use of new technologies and/or an inability to reach their target audiences (Borins, 2001). Higher education has been most affected by new technologies and relatedly by the (in)ability to reach their target audience. They have been successful in using new technologies within the organization by transitioning to ICTs to process information and radically by introducing possibilities for distance learning (Parr, 2014). However, higher education institutions are struggling with the more systematic innovations that have a more long-term effect on the sector (Mulgan & Albury, 2003) in order to continue being attractive to their target audiences and to gain access to new audiences. Because of disruptive new technologies, prospective students are not only far more informed about what there is on offer and what the possibilities are (The Economist, 2014), they also use many different information channels that higher education institutions need to use to reach them. Several universities have started using social media platforms such as Facebook (Mack et al., 2007) or even Tumblr (Feeney, 2013) to reach potential students. Many of them have also stepped in to offering Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) through popular platforms like Coursera, as it initially seemed like these courses formed a direct threat to education institutions. Research shows, though, that despite the popularity of MOOCs, participation and completion rates are very low compared to those of traditional forms of education, and participants usually already have a degree – showing that MOOCs are not able to replace traditional education institutions (The Economist, 2014).

Globalization and competition in higher education

These developments exemplify another factor influencing institutions' needs to innovate, namely the effects of increased globalization and internationalization on competition in higher education (The Economist, 2014). Higher education institutions have been moving along with globalizing trends, diminishing borders and global partnerships. Nowadays, the sector can be characterized by a combination of three levels: "(1) global flows and networks of words and ideas, knowledge, finance, and inter-institution dealings; with (2) national higher education systems shaped by history, law, policy and funding; and (3) individual institutions operating at the same time locally, nationally and globally" (Marginson, 2006, p. 1). These developments have had an effect on the practical processes within universities, such as standardization of degrees and titles, and the possibility of transferring credits (Reynolds, 1998), but have also led to the development of an international character of universities. An exchange of students, staff and practices is becoming more common, leading to growing internationalization in higher education (Van der Wende, 2007). Several international associations such as NAFSA have been established to foster internationalization, but these developments have also led to the challenge of increased competition between higher education institutions. The number of students enrolling in higher education is expected to double in the next decade, to an estimated 262 million by 2025, and although students still generally study at an institution in their home country (Marginson, 2006), the number of students choosing to study abroad is expected to triple and reach over eight million by 2025 (Maslen, 2012). Thereby, the group of international students is expected to be the fastest-growing group. This increase can be assigned to the growth of students in emerging markets such as China and India, along with a less steep growth of students in developed countries (The Economist, 2014).

The fact that more institutions compete with one another on a global scale has resulted in the need for a stronger image of institutions to reach potential students (Marginson, 2006). As a result, “universities are eager to raise their global profile to ensure their long-term financial viability and create a sustainable businessmodel. Public institutions that once relied on government funding and tuition hikes for revenue now are turning to social media, online learning and new credentials to make their mark with international students” (The Economist, 2014).

2.3 – The emergence of higher education marketing

Marketization of education

Along with the development of new public management in the 1980s came the marketization of education, and the move towards using marketing and communication strategies. At the time, Kotler & Fox (1985, p. 6) defined higher education marketing as “the analysis, planning, implementation and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with a target market to achieve organizational objectives”. Before their emergence in the education sector, marketing and communication strategies were never a necessity for higher education institutions. The market was mostly supply-oriented, meaning that universities offered education to those students who met certain qualifications, and these students wanted to attend university. Institutions did not have to put in too much effort to attract students through marketing or advertising. But, due to the consequences of the aforementioned developments in society and within organizations, this supply-market changed into a demand-market, and institutions are now looking for students instead of the other way around. Hence, students have become customers, education has become a service, and education institutions are now sellers of this service in a competing market (Reynolds, 1998).

Research gaps in higher education marketing

At the core of successful marketing lies the marketing plan or strategy, which “includes the formulation of marketing aims and the positioning of the organization, i.e. a strategy for a product or service to occupy a clear, distinctive and desirable place relative to competing products in the mind of target consumers” (Oplatka &

Hemsley-Brown, 2004, p. 383). In higher education institutions, the development of marketing plans is not a common practice. It is more likely that institutions develop several separate points that direct them to focus areas for their marketing efforts, but they hardly ever develop and implement long-term plans (Foskett, 2002). To change this, Maringe (2004) states that university professionals and academics should no longer consider higher education marketing as an incongruous concept coming from the corporate world, but as a way to strategize within a sector that needs to appeal to both national and international audiences.

The lack of thoroughly developed and implementable plans has also had an effect on the research conducted in the field. Despite the substantial literature on the topic of higher education marketing since its emergence in the 1980s, Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka (2006, p.318) argue that existing research is mostly "incoherent, even inchoate and lacks theoretical models that reflect upon the particular context of [higher education] and the nature of their service […]". Existing literature has mostly focused on how to transfer marketing ideas from other sectors to the higher education sector, instead of focusing on developing ideas for higher education specifically. Also, there are several research gaps in identifying the effects and importance of certain marketing methods (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). One such example is the gap in researching the effects of word-of-mouth marketing, while this form of marketing has become increasingly important in service organizations with the emergence of social media, as social media offers a great platform for communicating to a large audience (Blazevic, et al., 2013). Hence, Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka (2006) argue that the research field of higher education marketing is currently still at the initial stage, and there is ample opportunity to further research the topic from both a problem-solving approach and a strategic-executive approach.

Marketing to international students

The market segment of international students was previously established to be one of the fastest growing segments in the sector, making it an increasingly attractive group for universities in particular, and countries as a whole. This is not only due to the growth in this segment. In Europe, for example, non-EU international students do have to pay full tuition fees and are therefore an interesting source of income for universities. As such, there are more international programs being developed and accordingly, the development of specific strategies and policies to compete for international students is becoming more prominent in many countries (Becker & Kolster, 2012). This happens on a university level, where specific strategies are being developed to reach international students, but also governments are occupied with the formulation of policies to strategize recruiting in this segment. For example, the United Kingdom is setting up an Education UK Unit strategizing to attract international students (HM Government, 2013). Currently ranking second place in share of international students (12%), it has formulated several policy goals to ensure its leading position in the future. The Dutch ministry of Education, Culture and Science has also formulated a broad strategic agenda for quality control in universities, specifically for improving competitive advantage for international students. This broad agenda does put emphasis on the need for universities to fill in their own strategies. Because of increasing attention and competition for this market segment, countries that are now attracting many international students cannot expect that their leading position will remain the same. For example, although the United States currently ranks as the number one country with the amount of international students it attracts, this is mostly due to its size – per capita its share is rather modest. This can most probably be ascribed to the fact that the United States has no explicit policies formulated for attracting international students (Becker & Kolster, 2012), which illustrates the need for every country to put particular focus on the market segment of international students. “Continued efforts to recruit and attract students are necessary, as are high-quality education programs and support mechanisms for international students, since student choices for study destinations are based on the perceived added value of studying abroad in a particular country/at a specific destination” (Becker & Kolster, 2012, p. 5).

2.3 – Focus

This chapter has provided an overview of the concepts central to the research question through the description and analysis of research previously conducted in related fields. It has found that, since the emergence of New Public Management in the 1980s, public organizations have been more prone to using corporate strategies in their organizational processes, but generally have difficulties finding support for these new processes within the organization. The higher education sector has experienced these developments as well, as societal developments and organizational developments have forced them to innovate. Moreover, it has become more important for them to compete on both a national and international level, which has given them reason to apply corporate strategies. This has led to the emergence of marketing in higher education. For long, the use of marketing and communications was not necessary because the education sector was supply-led, but this has become a demand-market in which students have become consumers and education institutions the providers of a service. Especially the development and implementation of marketing plans, which lie at the core of successful marketing, is a practice commonly neglected by education institutions. Moreover, what can be drawn from the literature discussed thus far, current empirical research draws on marketing strategies for institutions as a whole, empirical research for specific programs does not exist. This can be problematic as target audiences are different for every program and determining the right strategy thus becomes difficult. Overall, the field of research in higher education marketing is still in its initial stages and many gaps exist, especially when it comes to the development of strategies for the education sector specifically. Consequently, there is a call for more research into this field, especially in terms of strategic/executive application. International students are one of the fastest growing groups in higher education across the globe. As such, there is increasing competition for reaching, attracting and recruiting this group and universities are recognizing the need to develop strategies for this. Similarly, governments are more and more concerned with developing policies and strategies to make countries more attractive to this market segment. As such, the practice of developing an advice plan specifically for marketing international programs to international students will fill one of the research gaps in higher education marketing.

3. Theoretical framework

It has been established that the aim of this research is to fill a gap in scientific literature by developing a marketing strategy for international programs in higher education in order to reach the market segment of international students. Therefore, this chapter will discuss theories and models on consumer behavior of international students and marketing to international students. The chapter will conclude by providing a practically applicable framework for developing the marketing strategy in subsequent chapters.

3.1 – Theories of consumer behavior of international students

The Synthesis Model

Research looking at the factors that influence international students focuses on two aspects: the motivation for students to study abroad, and the decision-making process of students when choosing a country and/or institution. The decision making process of students going abroad has often been explained by the original Push-Pull Model developed by Lee (1966) for theories on migration (e.g. Cummings & So, 1985; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). In this model, the push factors are explained as the factors in the home country that lead to a student's decision to go abroad. Such factors can be positive, such as an economic environment allowing for studying abroad; or negative, such as poor quality education in the home country. Pull factors are the factors attracting the student to the host country. These are mostly positive, and are dominant in the decision making process. However, in contemporary research, the Synthesis Model by Chen (2007) has gained most face-validity (Becker & Kolster, 2012) (visualized in Appendix 1.1). The Synthesis Model builds on the Push-Pull model by identifying the same two stages in the decision-making process, namely: 1) the predisposition stage, in which the decision is made to study abroad; and 2) the search stage, in which information is gathered on a possible host country and institution and the decision to apply is made. Then, it adds a third stage to explain international students' decision-making process, namely 3) the choice stage. This is because the Synthesis Model is a dynamic model that assumes interplay between choosing institutions and countries, and expects students to apply to several different institutions for the same academic year. Hence, in the choice stage, all offers of institutions to which students have been accepted are reviewed and a final choice is made. Within the Synthesis Model, there is a distinction between internal and external influences on student choice. The internal influences are personal factors that a student takes into account in the decision-making process, such as personal characteristics or the opinions of others in the environment. External influences draw back on push-factors from the home country and pull-factors from the host country. These internal and external influences play a role in the first two stages of predisposition and search. In the predisposition stage, internal influences are made up of the student's personal socioeconomic status, characteristics and academic ability, and those of close family members, friends, teachers and/or employers. The external influences, being the push-factors in the home country as well as the pull factors of the host country, can be both positive and negative factors. In the search stage, a division is being made between these internal and external influences on a country, city and institutional level. The third stage, focusing on choice, is also divided in country, city and institutional factors but disregards internal and external influences, as these have already been identified in the search stage (Chen, 2007).

Choice factors

When identifying abstract examples of push and pull factors, Becker & Kolster (2012) have compiled an extensive list. They have followed the Synthesis Model of Chen (2007) and also divide push factors into personal factors and environmental factors. They state that personal factors are difficult to determine, because the segment of international students is very diverse and it is difficult to generalize personal characteristics. However, they have found that research on push factors for domestic students shows that the parents' socio-economic position and level of education and the own academic ability can be identified as personal push factors (Vossensteyn, 2005). Especially if family or friends live abroad or have studied abroad, they can be of influence on a student's choice to study abroad, depending on the student's nationality (Becker & Kolster, 2012), which touches upon the idea that word-of-mouth is an important factor. Additionally, Chen (2007) identifies the personal desire to obtain a degree, the wish to learn a foreign language, the importance of a degree for obtaining a certain salary level in the future, and the value of having a degree from a Western university as personal push factors. Environmental push factors, on the other hand, may include (Becker & Kolster, 2012):

- The lack of access to advanced education and research facilities in the home country
- A difference between the value of a degree from a national institution and the value of a degree of a foreign university on the national labor market
- A mismatch between the skills obtained in a degree at a national university and the skills necessary to enter the labor market
- Bad reputation and/or low quality education at national institutions
- Cultural, historical, economical, political and/or social ties to another country and/or institution that facilitate or encourage studying abroad
- Both high performing (available financial means) and low-performing (shortage of jobs) economies in the home country.
- The difference between tuition fees at domestic universities and foreign universities
- The availability of information on possibilities to study abroad in the home country
- Favorable policies in the host country in terms of scholarships and facilities for immigrants

When boiling these down to the most important ones, McMahon (1992) has suggested that a combination of lower quality education, lower prestige of education institutions and that desirable programs are unavailable in the home country are crucial push factors. Then, when looking at pull factors, the most important factors have been described as follows (Becker & Kolster, 2012):

- Proactive promotion and recruitment, with a link to the amount of information on the host country that is available
- The reputation and perceived quality of education of institutions in the host country (e.g. through rankings)
- Recognition of degrees between home and host country
- Tuition fees, scholarships and the cost of living in the host country

- The way higher education is governed in the host country (public and private education systems)
- The degree of internationalization in a country (number of international students, expats, teachers, availability of programs, policies on immigration)
- The living and working environment of a country (factors such as safety and discrimination, but also climate, employment opportunities and regulations for immigrants after finishing studies)

These factors broadly apply to host countries, as well as to cities and institutions. Of these factors, the high quality and reputation of the education institutions in the host country, and the availability of information dissemination leading to a student's awareness and knowledge of the facilities were identified as the most important ones.

Information seeking

Gomes & Murphy (2003) and Gray, Fam, & Llanes (2003) found that the most important source of information in the decision-making process of international students is the internet, logically, because they do not have access to offline information outlets of the host country, city or institution as easily as they have online access. Through surveying students, they found out that most of them arrived on an institution's website through a search engine, while only a few of them used promotional information provided by institutions. This implies that Search Engine Marketing (SEM) is an important strategy to influence consumer behavior. Moreover, they found that only 5% of students felt like they could find sufficient information on the institution's website, indicating that there is a mismatch between the kind of information students are looking for and the kind of information provided on the website. Thus, there is a misunderstanding on the institution's side of what are the most prominent pull-factors influencing students and information appearing online is not in line with these pull-factors. This is underlined by the findings of Baldwin & James (2000), that there is a gap between the importance that students give to certain factors and their knowledge about these factors concerning certain institutions. Apart from the internet, communication with teaching staff members is also a very influential method to reach prospective students (Chen, 2007). Through internationalization processes, such as giving guest lectures in other countries or meeting students at international conferences, teachers can establish a relationship with prospective students that can influence their competitive advantage.

Choice factors for individual programs

Please note that, within the Synthesis Model, the focus is more on countries and institutions than on programs specifically – which has been previously established as one of the gaps in research in higher education marketing. Baldwin & James (2000) have, despite their focus on a solely domestic market, identified the marketing of specific programs as a separate field of study. They argue that “the most useful information [about programs] would be meaningful explanations of the particular approach taken to teaching and learning in that program of study” (p. 146). They found that respondents could find little information about possible career opportunities after graduation, learning and teaching approaches, student satisfaction with courses, etcetera. However, they did have knowledge about factors that they considered less important, such as the facilities on campus. As such, programs should provide prospective students with a better imaginative (Baldwin & James, 2000) insight in what studying in their chosen course is like, what they will experience and what they can expect after graduating.

3.2 – Theories of higher education marketing to international students

Social and service marketing

When higher education marketing emerged, it was defined as “the analysis, planning, implementation, and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchange of values with target markets, to achieve institutional objectives. Marketing involves designing the institution’s offerings to meet the target market’s needs and desires, and using effective pricing, communication and distribution to inform, motivate and service the markets (Kotler & Fox, 1985, p. 7). The initial practice of developing theories for higher education marketing relies mostly on comparative analyses of practices in social en services marketing. Filip (2012) explains that a social approach to higher education marketing defines marketing objectives in terms of the social responsibility universities have to citizens. This means that universities should market themselves on the basis of stating that they can increase education levels, and provide citizens with fundamental knowledge and skills needed for social integration and entry to the labor market. In other words, the role of educational marketing is to ensure harmonization between the individual interests on training and learning with the collective needs of the society, as a whole" (p. 914).

The service marketing approach to higher education has generally been given more recognition. The idea that education is a service, not a product, was only recognized later in the 1990s and this significantly changed approaches to higher education marketing, as the marketing of a product is different from the marketing of a service (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). This approach states that there are four well-established characteristics that distinguish services from products, namely intangibility, inseparability, perishability and heterogeneity (e.g. Nicholls et al., 1995; Kottler & Armstrong, 2003; Filip, 2012). Firstly, consumers cannot properly evaluate an intangible service offering because a service cannot be "touched, tasted or possessed" (p. 32). Secondly, the service provider and the service itself are inseparable; provision and consumption take place at the same time. Perishability focuses on how a service can, in most cases, not be stored and used later. Lastly, heterogeneity means that a service cannot easily be standardized, so determining and controlling quality is difficult. The fact that these four aspects apply to educational institutions has implications for the applicability of traditional marketing models to higher education marketing. This means that "the relationships between those outcomes and the characteristics of curricula and teaching methods which produce them are infinitely complicated by the diversity of the 'inputs'—the range of student abilities, interests and approaches" (Baldwin & James, 2000, p. 142). Moreover, it makes it far more difficult to determine what factors on the university's side – the supply side – are best for marketing without taking into consideration what students – the demand side – want to see. For products, this is all entirely different, and this distinction can therefore also explain why marketing was long ignored in service-organizations in general, and the education sector in particular (Mazzarol, 1998).

The marketing mix for service organizations

The most well-known and widespread marketing model in the business world that emerged in the 1960s is the marketing mix by McCarthy (1960), also known as the 4Ps of marketing: price, product, promotion and place. The idea is that marketers can use these four parameters to show a consumer the value of the product they are selling. As services are different from products, the applicability of these four Ps to service organizations has been questioned. Kotler & Fox (1995, as used in Filip, 2012) have revisited the 4Ps and have proposed a marketing mix of 7Ps that better suits service organizations: program, price, place, promotion, process, physical facilities, and people. Filip (2012) has found that it is possible to apply these seven aspects to higher education marketing. Their theoretical and practical applicability can be described as follows:

- Program: the identity of higher education institutions is formed on the basis of the quality and nature of the programs offered, and to what extent the program differs from that of direct competitors. It is therefore important to increase the tangibility of the program so that students can identify these distinctive features easily. This can be done through explaining specifically what sets apart the study program, and by making sure that the link with the labor market is explained and emphasized.
- Price: tuition fees are the most common source of revenue for universities, but on the other hand it is the most considered expense for students. For students it is an important criterion for selecting what higher education institution to go to, and institutions can tap into that by offering scholarships and/or discounts, or establishing relationships with businesses to attract more (promising) students. Communicating the presence of such scholarships, discounts and relationships can thus be an immediate attractor for students.
- Place: the aspect of place has changed significantly over the last years. Initially, a building was the place through which institutions could distribute their service and it offered a location for students to receive this service. Nowadays, the internet provides a new platform to

distribute the service through, or to support this distribution with. E-learning has become a way to increase an institution's market share and to reach a larger part of the target consumers. Institutions can attract students with this depending on the degree to which they actually offer these services and communicate about them.

- Promotion: the promotion aspect can be used to communicate with everyone affiliated with the education institution: (prospective) students and their relatives, staff, stakeholders, etcetera. Institutions can use different channels to communicate through, and determining what the right channels are to reach the target audience can lead to more efficient marketing.
- Process: the consistency of organizational processes – such as management techniques, enrollment processes, teaching and learning methods, assessments, and activities – are very important in service organizations. Quality in these processes needs to be continuously measured, which can be done through continuous assessment and communication with existing students.
- Physical facilities: these facilities include everything that has to do with the physical environment, from textbooks to computer rooms to infrastructure at campus. Not only are these facilities important for the support of teaching and learning methods, they are also the most tangible and visible aspects to students. Therefore, they are important handles for students to choose an institution on, even though it has been previously established that campus environment is not the most important pull factor for students.
- People: all people through whom universities offer their services and can build relationships with account to this aspect. That means, students and their relatives, former students, all staff, stakeholders, etcetera. By determining what the most important people within an educational program are for students, institutions can use people to improve their brand image. Because of inseparability, the teachers' degree of professionalism and their skills are very important for service

assessment, so they are expected to be the most important group of people. As with processes, continuous assessment is important to measure quality in this category.

Relationship marketing

The marketing mix model is an example of a transactional marketing model, meaning it relies on the transaction of a product (or service) from supplier to consumer – in which the product or service is central. Another way service or higher education marketing has been approached is on the basis of relationship marketing, which focuses on the relationship that is established between supplier and consumer. This relationship would be the bases on which the product can be marketed, meaning, through commitment and word-of-mouth. In this sense, relationship marketing in higher education does not focus solely on the recruitment of students, but also on student retention during and after their study program. Strategies for such inclusive relationships have also been coined as Institutional Advancement strategies (Gallo, 2012). With increased competition in higher education institutions, the retention of and relationship with students has become increasingly important, as it ensures that the student does not switch to competitors easily, and it is more likely that they will advise others to study at the institution they have a relationship with (Raciti, 2002). Moreover, retention is also important for determining those aspects of a study program that are successful, and those that need improvement. Raciti (2002) found that the relationship between students and lecturers plays the most important role in the time of a student's enrollment, followed by the relationship with administrational staff and other students. This relationship can be fostered through one-to-one attention and communication. Institutions can also encourage their students to be more involved in activities organized by the institution to increase their connection with the institution during their study time (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). Raciti (2002) has described a conceptual framework for researching relationship marketing in higher education (visualized in Appendix 1.2). In this model, "the antecedent variable was identified as relationship desire. Relational benefits, relationship satisfaction and relationship strength are the mediating variables. The outcome variable was identified as relationship-based retention intentions" (p. 1443). In terms of measuring the mediating variables, it is explained that students benefit from positive relationships with staff in the sense that they are more motivated and participative in class, learn more and perform better, feel more included, and were more confident in applying their knowledge in practice. Relationship satisfaction can be explained through how students do not necessarily expect to establish positive relationships with staff, but are pleasantly surprised when they do. Relationship strength is measured through the degree of honesty between staff and student, the degree of trust between staff and student, the personal rapport in terms of willingness for having a relationship, whether the relationship is supportive from staff to student, and whether there is a lot of communication and a steady information stream. If all these factors are present, students experience a positive relationship and their retention intention can be expected to be significantly higher than when no positive relationship was established (Raciti, 2002).

This retention intention can then be translated to the next step in the process: whether or not the institution is actually able to keep the student, either for continued studies/PhD, or by keeping them connected to the institution after graduation – meaning, maintaining alumni relations. Gallo (2012) comprises four stages of the benefits of maintaining such relationships through the Alumni Relationship-Building Cycle Paradigm (visualized in Appendix 1.3). These stages can be explained as follows:

1. Affiliation: simply by attending a program at a specific institution, alumni will have some sort of affiliation with the institution. Affiliation with an institution in itself is not positive or negative – it just means that the student will always have some sort of relationship with the institution. By segmenting students into categories (e.g. cohort, study subject), it will become easier for institutions to keep oversight of exactly how students are affiliated with the institution.
2. Affinity: the experience the student had at the institution will determine whether the student has affinity with the institution. This affinity can be established in the alumni's time as students through maintaining positive. By continuing communication with alumni about the processes taking place at the institution, a sense of belonging can be inspired and/or renewed with alumni. In that

sense, institutions can use continued communication efforts to steer the perception the alumnus has about the institution.

3. Engagement: in this stage, two-way communication efforts and relationship building start. During this stage, certain social activities take place such as drinks with former classmates or networking activities with a larger network of alumni and staff. Alumni might disengage at this stage for various reasons, and the institution can start fostering meaningful relationships with the remaining alumni.
4. Support: this stage is the preferred situation for institutions, as the alumnus will start supporting the efforts of the institution in this stage. This support can be in the form of alumni helping in marketing efforts, being able to rely on alumni for program content, or even receiving philanthropy.

Hence, the ability to rely on alumni for marketing efforts requires a strategy starting at the point of student enrollment. Positive relationships throughout the student's enrollment will affect retention intention and affinity with the institution, which in return can lead to a meaningful relationship between the institution and alumni, where the alumni can support the institutions efforts in several ways.

International branding strategies

The fact that the market segment of international students is so diverse, however, does lead to a problem in identifying marketing objectives for each of the 7Ps. Because higher education institutions often aim to attract international as well as domestic students for international programs, it is important to distinguish certain factors that appeal to the domestic market from factors that appeal to the international market, and factors that appeal to certain groups within the international segment more than to others. One way to do this it by following approaches to international branding strategies. This approach relies on the identification of four levels that classify international branding strategies on the basis of standardization in offering the product:

"1. Standardized brand (core and augmented components tailored to domestic market, but have global appeal).
2. Adapted brand (core components standardized, but augmented components

adapted to local legal and market components).

3. Customized brand (core and augmented components tailored to international target markets).
4. Globalized brand (compromise brand incorporating attributes of previous varieties, with standardized core and attributes added on to meet unique country or regional requirements and expectations)." (Gray, Fam, & Llanes, 2003, pp. 108-109)

Because of the recruitment of both international and domestic students, and to diminish the chance of inconsistent communication, higher education institutions would be expected to adopt standardized and adapted brand strategies. Gray, Fam, & Llanes (2003) found that a certain degree of standardization in the marketing strategy for higher education is indeed possible, but emphasize that cultural values of students need to be taken into account. It is therefore helpful to determine distinctive features in the marketing strategy for different geographical areas, and consequently an adapted brand strategy is most suitable for higher education marketing. However, extensive cultural-specific market research would be needed for developing such a marketing plan, which is not possible for this research due to time constraints. Hence, this research will not develop culture-specific strategies, but will solely focus on brand strategies appealing to international students worldwide and will not look at any implications of these for attracting the domestic market. It will thus assume a standardized brand for the international market.

3.3 – Marketing strategy framework

Combining the previously described theories and models, they form a framework for a marketing strategy for international study programs. Push and pull factors form strong implications for whether or not prospective international students might consider studying in a certain country and at a certain institution. Even though prospective students are definitely affected by both internal and external push factors, institutions have little influence on these, as they are too diverse and too difficult to identify. Hence, institutions should focus on pull factors of the country they are in, the institution itself, and of individual program aspects. Knowledge on such pull factors and ways to adequately apply them to student recruitment can lead to more effective recruitment strategies and a more concise marketing strategy.

When looking at the described marketing models, one can see that relationship marketing focuses on emotional ties, while transactional marketing strategies like the 7Ps model focus more on economical benefits. Therefore, these approaches have generally been researched separately (Filip, 2012). However, this thesis does not assume that transactional marketing and relationship marketing are mutually exclusive. Rather, from theory it can be assumed that the pull factors and 7Ps offer a valid framework for student recruitment, but become less important once the student has enrolled – then, relationships become increasingly important and remain important for benefiting from alumni. Similarly, establishing a meaningful relationship with potential students would not be considered effective, which is why relationship marketing does not suffice for student recruitment. A combination of both approaches would thus lead to a more long-term marketing approach that includes every stage of a student's cycle within an institution. Moreover, including relationship marketing strategies in the marketing plan offers more possibilities of measuring the success of marketing efforts, because current students and alumni will be able to provide valuable insights into how they experienced their time at university in relation to the applied marketing strategies. As such, this research will focus on developing a strategy applying a combination of the pull factors, the 7Ps marketing model and relationship marketing strategies as previously described. Consequently, for this thesis, two stages in higher education marketing can be identified in which different factors and models have most relevance: (1) the student recruitment stage, and (2) the student/alumni retention stage. Within the student recruitment stage, in which the 7Ps marketing mix can be applied, there is some overlap between some of the 7Ps. For example, institutions can use staff, students and alumni to help market the product, in which case they fall into "Promotion" as they are being used as a channel, but institutions can also use the reputation and successes of staff, students and alumni to market their program, in which case they fall into "People". Moreover, when experiences of staff, students and/or alumni are being used to explain the program and its practical sides, and thereby make it more tangible for students to find out what their study program entails and can do for them, this falls into "Program". Similarly, there is some overlap between stages. Linking the content of the study program with the labor market has been categorized as a "Program" aspect in the recruitment stage, but when institutions offer their students and alumni a platform on which they can actually look for positions in the labor market in terms of career services, this falls into the student/alumni retention stage. Still, career services could be advertised as a "Physical facility" once installed. Additionally, establishing relationships through student retention, which leads to alumni engagement and perhaps support, is necessary in order to be able to use students and alumni in "Promotion". This shows how the second stage affects possibilities in the first stage, which emphasizes the importance of employing strategies in both stages alike. As such, it is important to separate these in the process of developing an advice plan for marketing, but one should keep in mind that they are mutually strengthening.

Student recruitment

The first stage in higher education marketing is the recruitment of students. In this stage, institutions focus on how to reach their target market segment, how to be attractive to that segment, and on turning the interest of a student into an application. In this stage, thus, the pull factors are applicable as they form a basis on which institutions can attract students. The pull factors can be categorized in the 7Ps model, and all of the 7Ps are important mechanisms for attracting students in this stage. Relationship marketing is less important in this stage, as there is no affiliation yet, and the institution cannot be sure that their investment in a relationship will not be wasted on a student that will turn to a competitor. Consequently, in this stage, the marketing strategy revolves around determining the best aspects of the program for each of the 7Ps, and the incorporation of pull factors on a country/city, institution and program level.

Student/alumni retention

The second stage in higher education marketing is the student/alumni retention stage. In this stage, students have already enrolled and the pull factors and 7Ps are thus no longer that important. This stage focuses on retention through the establishment and maintenance of positive relationships, through for example personal communication with staff and engagement in activities. As such, for this stage, the marketing strategy should revolve around determining ways to establish mutually beneficial, satisfying and strong relationships with existing students, which can be translated into affinitive, engaged and hopefully supportive relationships with alumni. Both student and alumni relationships can then be used in the 7Ps model, as they can be of benefit in the program, promotion and people aspect.

3.4 – Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical findings, certain assumptions can be made in relation to the research questions formulated in Chapter 1. These assumptions have led to the formulation of the following hypotheses:

- Pull factors can be applied to several factors in the marketing mix
- There are discrepancies between what programs use as pull factors, and what students consider as pull factors
- International students are looking for imaginative insights in terms of practical content in the information they receive from universities
- International students are interested in seeing personal examples of people within study programs for imaginative insights
- Employability is an important pull factor for international students and takes shape through offering insights into the labor market
- Transactional and relational marketing models can be combined in the development of marketing plans
- International students expect to develop a relationship with their study program
- Establishing positive relationship between international students and their study programs will give them an incentive to support the program
- Establishing positive relationships can happen through engaging in personal communication
- For a large part, international higher education marketing efforts need to take place online

4. Methodology

This chapter will describe and substantiate how empirical research in the form of expert interviews and focus group discussions have led to the development of a marketing strategy for each of the stages in higher education marketing. As such, it will explain the most applicable research design, chosen research methods and data collection, the chosen participants, interview questions and the framework for analysis.

4.1 – Research design

Qualitative research

Perry (1998) states that, when researching new fields of marketing, research is generally conducted qualitatively by the primary use of either of two major approaches: testing existing theories deductively, or building new theory inductively. In the case of deductive testing, existing paradigms are tested to develop a new, more applicable theory to a specific research subject. Inductive development often happens in the case of relatively new research fields for which little theory has been developed. These approaches are not mutually exclusive; deduction generally leads to alterations in existing theories, and there is often some reliance on existing theory from other fields in inductive development. The goal of this thesis is to develop an advice plan, which can be understood as a process of transmitting information between who advises, and who needs to be advised. In developing advice, De Zeeuw (2009) identifies the importance of two parts in developing advice: (1) the reliance on existing knowledge, and (2) the development of action designs to implement new knowledge. As such, this thesis follows a deductive design in the sense that the described theory has offered valuable insights that led to a focus for research and a set of hypotheses that, when tested, in its turn can have implications for theory and can develop standardized practices for future research (Kellstedt & Whitten, 2009). However, it is not aiming to test the theory as such, but more its applicability to a specific situation as a basis to develop action designs on. Secondly, due to the contemporary nature of the research, it is possible that certain findings will lead to new insights for theory, which is why the development of advice plans for marketing international higher education programs can, in some ways, be compared to the development of a theory in the sense that it can provide a model on the basis of which future research can be conducted. As such, this thesis takes both a deductive as an inductive research approach. Still, as stated, because the research field is relatively new, a qualitative research design is preferred (Perry, 1998).

Case studies

It has often been argued that case study research in marketing, in which inquiries are made that revolve around describing, understanding, controlling and/or predicting certain entities (Woodside & Wilson, 2003), is only applicable to exploratory research in which the approach is to describe a phenomenon rather than prescribing preferred choice models for the chosen case (e.g. Perry, 1998; Shavelson & Townes, 2002). Although the research question can be considered descriptive, as it aims to describe possibilities in terms of marketing, it is also somewhat prescriptive as it aims to formulate advice. However, Yin (2012) argues that case studies have proven to be able to be applicable to non-descriptive situations as well, and that, when conducting research in contemporary and new fields, case studies are very applicable (Yin, 2003). This is because case studies provide thorough descriptions and insights into a subject matter in comparison to other research methods, and by using case study research it is easier to evaluate results (Yin, 2012).

Yin (2003) identifies four types of case studies, differentiating between studies that focus on single or multiple cases, and studies that make use of single (holistic) or multiple (embedded) units of analysis. In general, the multiple embedded case study approach is considered to be the most valuable, because it researches a phenomenon on multiple levels. Consequently, the single case study is considered less robust because it tests one case for one unit of analysis and therefore provides the least extensive insights. However, in developing marketing plans, it is preferable to tailor the plan to the specific target audience of the organization it is being developed for, as this could give the organization more competitive advantage (Joseph, 2014). As individual study programs are the unit of analysis for this research and the content of one study program always differs more or less from that of the next, each study program would require a different marketing plan to a certain extent. Therefore, for this thesis, it is not preferable to look at multiple cases, as each case would then require the development of an entirely unique marketing plan and this practice would be too time costly and would also not give comparative insights per se until the plan is tested. It is, however, useful to distinguish theses between single cases, as marketing generally focuses on different audiences and target markets. Consequently, the single embedded case study is the most applicable type of case study for this thesis, of which this thesis will present one single study for the case. The implications this has for the validity and reliability of the research will be discussed further on in this chapter. Important to note is that, in case study research, it is advised to also look at the contextual features in which the case is located (Yin, 2012). In this case, it is thus important to look at (inter)national and institutional developments as well.

Case selection

Because of the novelty of this research subject in higher education, case selection cannot be based on theoretical findings or existing comparisons. Any international study program would offer a suitable case for this thesis. Moreover, it has been said that a certain degree of familiarity with the case on the researcher's side will enhance insights (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Hence, due to time constraints and factors of familiarity, proximity and accessibility, this research will take place in the Netherlands at the Faculty of Social Sciences of EUR. As said, the Department of Public Administration is currently developing a new international masters program in the field of Governance of Complex Networks, which will be launched in the academic year 2015/2016. To complement strategizing efforts in this process, the development of a marketing plan for this program specifically has been chosen as case.

Challenges

Conducting case study research proposes a few challenges that need to be overcome in order for the research to be considered meaningful. First of all, it has often been expressed that case study research lacks credibility because of the high potential for research bias. However, in contemporary case study research, this challenge is overcome by ensuring systematic procedures within the research, which this thesis has set out to do through the application of established theoretical models (Yin, 2012). Then, for any type of scientific research, reliability and validity are said to be two very important concepts to keep in mind. Generally, quantitative research designs incorporate these concepts by installing design tests in the research. For qualitative research approaches, this is not common practice.

Specifically for marketing research, Riege (2003) explains how reliability and validity in case study research can still be ensured. He states that, in qualitative research, reliability and validity revolve mostly about ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. To ensure construct validity, which revolves around providing operation able measurements for variables in research, he suggests that researchers need to make sure they do not incorporate subjective judgments, or that they incorporate insights from different sources to increase objectivity. Internal validity generally refers to the way a causal relationship is established throughout the research – qualitative research designs often research the effect of one variable on another variable. This is not the case in case study research, which is why internal validity needs to be construed through providing sufficient contextual information and through highlighting the differences and similarities between respondents' claims. External validity then refers to the transferability of research results to a larger population, which quantitative research methods can ensure through providing statistically significant results. This is not the aim in case study research, where the focus lies more on achieving analytical transferability; this can be done through "the comparison of initially identified and/or developed theoretical constructs and the empirical results of single or multiple case studies" (Riege, 2003, p. 81). Additionally, Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that when wanting to undertake some sort of action, as is the case with the development of an advice plan, it is more useful to look at the deeper causes and their implications, than it is to describe how comparable a phenomenon is.

Reliability refers to whether or not it can be ensured that for research using the same procedures, the results would be comparable. This is difficult for case study research, as it does not rely on static measurements. Riege (2003) claims that this can be overcome by stating that, in case study research, it is the differences that can be identified that can provide valuable sources of information in a field of research. Flyvbjerg (2006) subscribes this by stating that, whereas it is often argued that case studies are too context-dependent and reliant on practical knowledge more than on theoretical knowledge, this is exactly what lies at the heart of a learning process and is best for developing expertise. Moreover, because this thesis relies on established models in theory, it might be that specific outcomes would differ, but using the same models for the development of an advice plan for a different international study program would lead to the same identification process of objectives and opportunities/challenges.

4.2 – Research method and sampling

Dual research method

For case study research, conducting open-ended interviews is one of the most common ways for data collection, as it allows for most contextual insights. Also, in case study interviews, the researcher has the opportunity to include different sources for gathering evidence, which helps in gaining the most thorough and in-depth insights into different sides of the subject matter (Yin 2012). Therefore, a dual open-ended interview method was chosen for this research to gather different perspectives the objectives and opportunities for marketing the case program in order to be able to answer the aforementioned research questions: expert interviews and focus group discussions with students. The specific methodological traits and implications of each of these methods are described in the following sections.

Expert interviews

In qualitative research, interviewing is considered to be a very good research method to gain in-depth insights into a specific subject matter. It is however necessary to find a way to guarantee the quality of the data that is generated through interviewing. On the basis of the analysis of several theoretical conceptions of qualitative interviewing, Roulston (2010) describes how this quality of research results can be guaranteed. She states that it is important for the researcher to be guided by the theory throughout both the interviewing process and the analysis, to ensure the results can be explained through theoretical conclusions. In conducting qualitative interviews, the respondent is generally aware of the fact that they are participating in research, which may cause changes in the respondent's behaviors and attitude. This so-called reactivity can lead to altered answers, which in turn may lead to unreliable results. Hence, it is important that the researcher makes the respondent feel comfortable and that the interview seems like a natural conversation and exchange of information, even though it is a conversation clearly guided by the interviewer. This can be achieved through conducting semi-structured interviews, where there is no pre-established set of questions used in each interview, but where the questions depend on the expertise of the specific respondent. For this, the researcher needs to make sure they have the right knowledge available to provoke the right questions to focus on areas that are of relevance to the respondent's expertise. It is therefore argued that the researcher does not appear to be too knowledgeable on the subject, so that the respondent does not omit certain information because it is expected that the researcher is too aware of the details. Moreover, as the time in which interviews are conducted is often limited, the researcher needs to make sure that questions are concise and clear, so that the respondent has as much time as possible to speak (Babbie, 2008).

For this research, the decision was made to conduct interviews with people "who are particularly competent as authorities on a certain matter of facts" (Deeke, 1995, p. 7, as used in Flick, 2009) and who have "high insight in aggregated and/or specific knowledge" (Audenhove, 2007, p. 5). People who classify as such can be called experts. Because of the need for practical knowledge in order to answer the research questions, the decision was made to interview practitioner experts and not necessarily experts in theory. The research thus called for a non-probability purposive sampling method where the respondents are selected based on their knowledge of the different aspects of the research topic (Social Research Methods, 2006). Hence, the interview respondents were selected on the basis of their knowledge of contemporary trends and developments in higher education marketing and internationalization, and the opportunities and challenges specific to EUR and/or the objectives applying to the case program. There was some overlap in this, as some experts had knowledge of both, but in general a distinction could thus be made between marketing/recruitment experts and case program experts. As such, nine interview sessions took place between the 21st and 31st of July, 2014, with the following ten experts:

Marketing/recruitment experts:

- Philippe Taza, CEO of Higher Education Marketing Consultancy (working with e.g. Wageningen University in the Netherlands)
- Ties Dams, Policymaker at the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science for the Directory of Internationalization
- Ellen Ruijfrok, Communication Advisor for the Directory of Media, and Noor Groenendijk, Communication Advisor for the Directory of Positioning at the Dutch Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education (NUFFIC)
- Jurgen Rienks, Director for International Relations at the Dutch Association of Universities (VSNU)
- Karin van de Braak, Senior Advisor Higher Education Marketing at the Department of Marketing and Communications, EUR

Case program experts:

- Renata Minnibajeva, Head of the International Office at the Faculty of Social Sciences, EUR
- Petra van Olsthoorn, Marketing and Communications Officer at the Faculty of Social Sciences, EUR
- Prof. Dr. Erik Hans Klijn, Program Director for the chosen case, the International Master in Governance in Complex Networks, EUR, and
- Dr. Frans van Nispen, Co-Founder of the Master in International Public Management and Policy at the Faculty of Social Sciences, EUR

In conducting expert interviews it is important to realize that the expert's knowledge cannot be considered completely neutral. Experts are biased based on their background and position in relation to the others who are being interviews. It is also possible that interview respondents withhold information that they consider to be sensitive, which might lead to biased results. It is therefore necessary to select experts on different levels of organizations and expertise, to ensure a broad perspective that can be considered as neutral as possible (Audenhove, 2007). Because of the non-probability sample, reliability is not necessarily guaranteed, but validity is supported through the diversity in backgrounds and positions of experts (Babbie, 2008).

Focus groups

Focus group research can be defined as the conduct of a “carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (Krueger, 1994, p. 6, as used in Massey, 2010). Focus groups are generally composed of six to twelve respondents and one moderator, and conversations last about two hours. These conversations are guided by the moderator and focus on pre-established topics. It is said that the results of a focus group offer a “robust alternative to more traditional survey methods when absolute numbers of respondents are less important than is a rich investigation of content” (Massey, 2011, p. 21). As the researcher has the ability to also let the respondents engage in conversation with each other without the researcher’s involvement, respondents might come up with information that other respondents had not yet considered but can still confirm or attest to. To thoroughly investigate student considerations, choice methods and preferences, the focus group method is thus more applicable than individual interviews, as some students might consciously apply certain strategies that others applied unconsciously.

To ensure valid and reliable results, a heterogeneous group of students was desired. As such, it was chosen to conduct one session with students that chose to study in the other international master program in public administration offered at the Faculty of Social Sciences at EUR, and one session with students that did choose to study at EUR but not at the Faculty of Social Sciences. In the week of August 4th, 2014, the following two groups of students participated:

International students/alumni of the master program in International Public Management and Policy:

- Gender: four males / three females
- Nationalities: Bulgaria, Greece, Germany, Kazakhstan, New Zealand, Spain, Venezuela
- Academic career: four MSc alumni/three MSc upcoming graduates

International students/alumni of other faculties at EUR:

- Gender: four males / two females
- Nationalities: Botswana, Germany, Poland, Singapore, The Ukraine
- Academic career: three MSc alumni (of which one PhD student)/two MSc upcoming graduate/one BSc upcoming graduate staying for a MSc program

4.3 – Conversational framework

For the interviews as well as for the focus groups, the choice factors in consumer behavior, the 7Ps, and the relationship between university and student/alumni will form the guideline for the conversation, to ensure all topics as identified in the theory are covered. The following section will describe how the interviews and focus groups were structured in a way that all topics could be covered.

Interviews

All except two interviews were conducted in Dutch, the other two were conducted in English. One interview was conducted over phone due to distance. As stated, the topics discussed in the expert interviews deliberately differed per respondent, because the aim was to make use of their specific knowledge as much as possible. Moreover, the choice was made for semi-structured interviews, in which there is room for the respondent to elaborate on subjects that they consider of relevance to the topic, even if the researcher did not consider them for the interview initially. Therefore, it was difficult to establish one set of questions applicable to all interview respondents to be presented here. Still, following the research questions and the hypotheses that were previously established, it was possible to create a conversational framework to address certain key topics throughout all interviews. In the interview process, a slight distinction was made between (1) respondents with general international higher education marketing experts, (2) interviews with experts in higher education marketing for EUR, and (3) interviews with experts with specific knowledge on the case program, in terms of questions asked. Please note that there is some overlap in this as well, as some experts could be considered knowledgeable in more than one area. As a result, the following conversational framework was established for the expert interviews:

(1) Interviews with experts in higher education marketing/internationalization:

- How are you involved in, or have relevant knowledge of, higher education marketing to international students?
- Do you believe universities meet the expectations of students in their communication efforts? Why?
- Where do you see possibilities for higher education marketing to international students? Can you name examples?
  - In-depth discussion covering the theoretical aspects of both stages, with a particular focus on the imaginative insights, practical approaches employability, and the development of relationships
- What are often-made mistakes by universities in their marketing efforts?

(2) Interviews with experts in higher education marketing at EUR:

- How are you involved in, or have relevant knowledge of, EUR's marketing practices to international students?
- What do you believe are the strongest points of EUR? Why?
- How are marketing strategies to reach international students currently being formulated at EUR?
- Where do you see possibilities for higher education marketing to international students? Can you name examples?

- In-depth discussion covering the theoretical aspects of both stages, with a particular focus on the imaginative insights, practical approaches employability, and the development of relationships

- What are problems you face in executing marketing strategies at Erasmus University Rotterdam? Why?

(3) Interviews with experts with specific knowledge on the case program:

- How are you involved in, or have relevant knowledge of, the development of the new MSc program?
- On the basis of what gap in the education market has this study been developed?
- Have you formulated specific objectives for reaching international students?
- What are the strongest aspects of the program, according to you? Why?
- Where do you see possibilities for the program to market itself to international students? Can you name examples?
    - In-depth discussion covering the theoretical aspects of both stages, with a particular focus on the imaginative insights, practical approaches employability, and the development of relationships
- What do you think will be the biggest challenges in reaching international students? Why?

Focus groups

The focus group discussions were conducted in person and in English. Again, by following the formulated research questions and according hypotheses, the discussions followed a certain order of topics being discussed. Firstly, the discussion focused on determining what the search process is for the respondents specifically and what they pay attention to. Secondly, based on the findings from the expert interviews, certain perceived pull-factors have been formulated for each of the two stages that fit within the possibilities of the study program. As a result, the discussions were guided by posing the following questions:

- Can you tell me something about your background (e.g. nationality, academic career, practical experience, etc.)?
- How did you find out about your study program, and what did you pay attention to in your search?
- What eventually led you to choose the program you enrolled in?
- What did you know about the Netherlands/EUR/your faculty or department before coming here?
- Can you tell me if and why you find the following aspects important?:
    - In-depth discussion covering the theoretical aspects of both stages, with a particular focus on students' expectations concerning imaginative insights, practical approaches employability, and the development of relationships
- Do you believe your program communicated those aspects that are important to you before you enrolled? What was missing?

4.4 – Analysis

In the next two chapters, the findings from the interviews and the focus groups will be described and analyzed according to identified categories and related themes. The analysis will start by explaining the specific objectives and characteristics of the case program, to ensure the inclusion of contextual information. It will then describe findings and according recommendations for each of the 7Ps in the student recruitment stage, and the findings and recommendations for each phase in the student/alumni retention stage. The themes discussed in this stage have been determined by the assumption that, by identifying possibilities for universities to establish meaningful relationships through student retention, the affiliation and affinity stages of the alumni cycle have been fulfilled. Hence, for alumni, findings are divided into alumni engagement and support strategies. Again, to provide contextual insights, each section will make a distinction between findings concerning higher education marketing on a national level, an institutional level, and a program level. The following scheme presents the identified categories and themes for the findings of the expert interviews:

Categories	Themes
Case program objectives and characteristics	
Student recruitment	- Program - Price - Place - Promotion - Process - Physical facilities - People
Student/alumni retention	- Student relationships - Alumni engagement - Alumni support

Due to the wish of some of the respondents, in the expert interviews as well as the focus groups, to remain anonymous, quotes have not been labeled with the respondents' names. Hence, for practical reasons, findings from the expert interviews will be described as results coming from either marketing/recruitment experts or case program experts, and findings from the focus groups will be described as results coming from students. The findings as presented in the next chapter will lead to the subsequent chapter in which an overview of the recommendations is visualized for each of the stages.

5. Analysis

This chapter will discuss the findings derived from the expert interviews and focus groups according to the previously identified categories and themes, by looking at how specific factors on a national level, an institutional level and a program level relate to the theory. As such, it will start by discussing the case program's objectives and characteristics as currently known. It will then discuss the findings of current marketing efforts and tools on a national level, a city/institutional level, and a program level, separately for each of the 7Ps in the recruitment stage and the phases in the student/alumni retention stage. Each section will conclude with a set of recommendations for the case program.

5.1 – Program objectives and characteristics

Through conversations with the case program experts and derived from notes made during a session on how to position the program, several objectives of the case program can be identified, which have implications for whether current efforts on a national and institutional level are can be of benefit to the case program.

The case program will cover complex problems in public administration and governance, in which it will focus on teaching students both analytical and managerial skills. As such, it will invite practitioners to tell about their experiences and problem-solving approaches in relation to specific courses and subjects (Van Dongen, 2014).

The case program experts state that the ambition is to reach 20 students in the first year, but to reach a break-even point in terms of costs, the program will need to grow to at least 30 students per academic year. Of these students, at least 50% should be international and preferably more. The countries that have been identified as target countries are Eastern European and Scandinavian countries, Germany and hopefully also the United Kingdom. There is no faculty-wide approach to identifying target countries in the Faculty of Social Sciences (Van de Braak, 2013-2), which means that it is difficult to determine if there are other programs for cooperation in this respect. One marketing/recruitment expert also points out that, internationally, students from the United Kingdom are very popular for recruitment because they generally have all basic entry requirements, and many countries assume that they form an easy target because study programs in the United Kingdom are so expensive. Reaching British students is therefore very difficult, because there are so many countries trying to reach them already.

The Faculty of Social Sciences is burdened with severe austerity measures and needs to do more with less staff. Study programs need to cover costs quicker and more thoroughly, so there is pressure from a faculty-level to attract more students, but there are less contact hours for teaching staff to guide these students in and there are major cuts on hours and personnel available for support tasks. To facilitate marketing efforts in this situation, case program experts see room for cooperation and knowledge exchange between faculties to improve the way they use pull factors to attract international students:

> "Is there overlap and can we cooperate on those things? Faculties with less budget available can try to combine efforts between programs in the faculty, to see if they can address international markets together, or programs can ask other programs to incorporate them when informing universities abroad."

Cooperation between universities is not considered valuable in this context; this currently mostly takes place in research, not in teaching. Marketing/recruitment experts emphasize that it is important to keep in mind that marketing is a long-term investment that does not yield results immediately in most cases. However, without this investment, the possibility to grow decreases significantly.

5.2 – Student recruitment stage

Program

(1) National level

Within the 7Ps marketing mix, the function of marketing the study program is to increase tangibility through the quality and competitive advantage of the education program (Filip, 2012). This does not only apply to individual programs; there are also several characteristics of the national education system in the Netherlands that can be used for marketing quality and competitive advantage. The Netherlands scores high on quality in education and research (Becker & Kolster, 2012), which is being communicated to a certain extent. However, experts indicate that all surrounding countries claim to offer this as well, so it is difficult for the Netherlands to set itself apart in this. For students in the focus groups, the quality of education in the Netherlands was always considered relatively to their perception of quality of education in the home country. By linking quality to reputation more, which is considered one of the most important pull factors for attracting international students (Becker & Kolster, 2012), this issue might be resolved. One marketing/recruitment expert states that:

> "Dutch people often believe something is evident too easily. Dutch universities are high up in the international rankings, 12 out of 14 universities are ranked in the top-200, as compared to for example 20 out of 120 universities in the UK. We should exploit this more, make it more visible."

This proves that the Dutch education system performs comparably well in terms of rankings, which can affect the perception of reputation and thereby also quality and competitive advantage.

As identified, establishing a link between the study program and the labor market creates imaginative insight, which is currently one of the missing factors in communicating program features to students but is a useful way to increase tangibility as well (Baldwin & James, 2000). One way that experts see to establish this link is through offering internships, as it makes the idea of what a study program can do for the student's career less abstract. Moreover, as students will be able to get practical experience in their time of study, it can increase the their chances on the labor market. In focus group discussions, students emphasized how they missed internship opportunities in their programs and how they think it would definitely be of value to the appeal of the program. Therefore, the inclusion of internships in a master program could serve as a strong marketing tool. However, the Dutch system offers some challenges in offering internships, particularly for international master programs. Dutch master programs – research masters excluded – usually take only one academic year, limiting the time that can be dedicated to internships. As such, doing an internship would lead to study delays in many cases. Additionally, it is especially difficult for internationals to find internships in the Netherlands, and having them relocate to yet another country just for doing an internship will increase the chance of delays even further and would decrease the chance of developing a relationship with the student.

(2) Institutional level

On an institutional level, the results of EUR in rankings can serve as important factors to increase competitive advantage of the institution as a whole. In terms of the reputation and perceived quality of the university, EUR ranks quite high in international rankings such as the Times Higher Education World University Rankings (#73 out of 400 in 2013-2014 – THE, 2013) and the QS World University Rankings (#92 out of 700 in 2013-2014 – QS, 2013). These results are of importance, as students state that they indeed looked up university rankings after considering one of the programs offered by the institution, also in comparison with other universities in the region. However, students were aware of the fact that these rankings were mostly influenced by the high status of the Rotterdam School of Management (RSM), which is one of the most renowned business schools in the world, from the beginning on. They do say that this knowledge did not influence their choice process negatively: the strong reputation of RSM contributes to the overall reputation of the university, which is considered a plus.

At the institutional level, another pull factor influencing the marketing of the Program-aspect comes into play, namely the degree of internationalization. In general, the international classroom environment seems to be an important selling point of international study programs. EUR advertises with offering a multicultural environment, which, according to the university, creates a so-called flywheel effect: “International students are attracted by EUR’s strong multicultural character. They bring with them motivation, insights and experiences to enrich the education program. The program then becomes even more attractive for ambitious Dutch and international students. The ability to work alongside students and staff with different perspectives and worldviews prepares students for a modern career on the international job market. EUR already has a diverse and heterogeneous student and staff population" (EUR, 2014, p. 12). The beneficial aspects of the international classroom can best be marketed on a program level because this is where students will actually experience it, but the fact that the institution as a whole identifies as being international helps the legitimacy of claims made about the degree of internationalization by the program.

(3) Program level

There are also several possibilities to identify distinctive features in terms of quality and competitive advantage specifically for the program. For the case program, a competition analysis performed by the marketing department of the university has indicated that there are no direct competitors in the market, meaning there are no other international programs that focus on governance of complex networks in the same way as the case program. However, it must be taken into account that competitive advantage is also dependent on demand in the market, and the program's developers have chosen not to do market research to investigate whether there is a demand among students or employers for a master program in this field. Meaning, the competitive advantage is only established in terms of offer and not demand, and it is therefore difficult to determine what the actual competitive advantage of the program really is.

In terms of creating imaginative insight through linking course content to practice, students think this is only to be expected of a study program:

> "It shouldn't be too difficult, they're preparing you to enter a job market, right? […] So if my course content is not applicable to any practice [other than academia], then why am I studying it?"

The core of the program is said to be that students are taught a combination of analytical and managerial skills, which enhances the possibility for establishing a link with practice. Experts involved in the development of the program explain that the managerial skills that will be taught in the case program will take shape through the use of real-life cases and problems that students will need to solve in class. The idea is to involve practitioners from the field in these cases, so that students can immediately see how the case relates to the labor market. Students state however, that the presence of practitioners alone is not enough to convince them about their value to the content of the program, there needs to be some sort of proof that the practitioner is indeed knowledgeable and can be of relevance to the program. Additionally, the intention of the case program is to include examples of possible jobs in their communication to prospective students.

Showing student satisfaction with courses is also considered to be a very important tool for creating imaginative insight (Baldwin & James, 2000). In the focus group discussions, students indicate that they would have been interested in seeing how students who studied their programs experienced the courses.

As stated, an international classroom shows the degree of internationalization in a program, which both experts and students consider to be a distinctive quality of international programs that needs to be fostered. In practice, this means that teaching staff needs to use examples and cases that are relevant to the student body, by being up-to-date about the issues and developments in the prospective students' home countries related to the content of the course. In this way, teachers and students can learn from each other and different perspectives to one issue are considered equally important. Moreover, students can use their experience in the international classroom as an addition to their CVs, as they can show that they have experience in a high-level multi-cultural environment. This, in turn, again strengthens the link between the program and the labor market.

(4) Recommendations

It is difficult to compete with other institutions or programs on the basis of quality of education, as many institutions claim that their quality is high. On both a national and an institutional level, however, the quality and competitive advantage of education is confirmed by the high position in international rankings, which not all institutions can state. Even though on an institutional level, the high rankings mostly come from the reputation of RSM, this still strengthens the reputation of EUR as a whole. Considering that the case program does not have a reputation on its own to rely on yet, it can rely on the reputation of the Dutch education system and that of EUR, which is why their positions in rankings need to be communicated explicitly. This will increase the value of the very influential pull factor of quality and education of research (Becker & Kolster, 2012). In doing this, it is important to show how the rankings relate to those of surrounding countries and/or competing institutions and programs. This will make the information more tangible for students. Besides this, the current competitive advantage of the case program is solely based on the fact that there are little comparable programs on offer, but there is no insight into whether there is a demand among students or employers for the program. The case program has chosen not to conduct market research, but it can still try to strengthen its competitive advantage by investigating whether there is a demand in the labor market for graduates from the program by talking to organizations that would possibly employ the program's graduates, which is less extensive to conduct than a demand analysis among students. In case of confirmation, this information could be used in communication to support claims made about employability. By doing this, demand among prospective students for the case program can be created.

In terms of creating imaginative insight, which is done through establishing a link between program content and practice/the labor market (Baldwin & James, 2000), marketing/recruitment experts indicated that internships are a good way to offer the students insights in what the labor market has to offer in their field of study. As such, offering internships is appealing to prospective students. However, policies on and characteristics of the education system on a national level make it difficult for international master programs to offer internships without significantly increasing the chance on study delay. On an institutional level, therefore, it is not common to offer internships in international master programs, which affects the possibility of creating imaginative insight negatively. Students in focus groups also believe that this is a major weakness in the Dutch system. The suggestion is made one of the case program experts that the department changes the default graduation date to be in September instead of August – which would not have any implications for the academic year the student graduates in. This way, students could have time during summer to connect their thesis to an internship or finish the thesis and do a summer internship. One way in which the case program already offers a way to overcome this problem is by aiming to link content to practice through inviting practitioners to speak in the program. In focus groups, however, students indicate that the mere presence of practitioners in a study program does not necessarily prove anything. As such, the case program should increase the imaginative insight even further by showing why the practitioner is relevant to the program in general, and/or the course he/she will speak in specifically. By offering testimonials of practitioners on the website, in which they provide information on their experiences and careers, and why this is relevant for the study program – but also why the study program matters in his/her field of work – the added value of these practitioners can be proven to prospective students. Secondly, students in focus group also indicated that finding out about former students' experiences with courses would help them understand what they would be doing in the study program and perhaps also what they could do afterwards. Consequently, an added value to having the course descriptions online for prospective students to read would be through using testimonials of students, in which they state what they liked about the course and how they feel the course has benefited their knowledge of the field. In this, they would not mind seeing some points of critique on the course either, because this makes it more credible sometimes. As the case program does not have any existing students or alumni yet, it is difficult to obtain this information. However, there is a Dutch version of the master program, so the case program can ask students of this program to write an English testimonial. Additionally, the case program has the intention to include descriptions of possible jobs in the field. Again, just hypothetical descriptions will not add much to the imaginative insights for students. Students subscribe the added value of this unanimously: having real life examples of people working in the field is more valuable than abstract ideas of where might be able to end up working. As such, this thesis advises the case program to provide real-life cases. Especially because social sciences are not hard sciences and employability is horizontal, as explained by one case program expert, example cases are all the more important as there is high diversity in possibilities, one expert explains. The case program can potentially use the practitioner testimonials for this. To enhance the imaginative insight of the international students specifically, it is important to include showcases from the job market in the home countries of students (or at least in other countries than only the Netherlands), because it will validate the degree on an international level. Last, this thesis advises the case program to showcase contemporary international examples of the program content in order to show the internationalization pull factor (Becker & Kolster, 2012)

Price

(1) National level

Tuition fee is one of the identified pull factors in terms of price (Becker & Kolster, 2012), and it has been established that tuition fees are the most considered expense in students' choice processes. Furthermore, one of the identified push factors in terms of price is the difference in tuition fees between universities in the home country and the host country (Filip, 2012). Compared to other E.U. countries, including those identified as target countries for the case program, the tuition fees in the Netherlands are relatively high for E.U. students as well as non-E.U. students (Study in Europe, 2014; Becker & Kolster, 2012). During focus group discussions, however, students stated that they do think that the tuition fees in the Netherlands are according to the quality of the degree they get in return and that they do not think the fees are out of proportion. The 7P marketing mix suggests that a good way to compensate part of the costs is by offering scholarships (Filip, 2012), but there are very few scholarships offered in the Netherlands (Becker & Kolster, 2012). The Ministry has recognized this problem and the Minister's letter states that by 2015 a scholarship program will be installed for students from countries outside of the E.U (The Dutch House of Representatives, 2014). Among other things, this program will focus on increasing incoming mobility from students from non-E.U. countries. Related to this is the possibility for institutions to emphasize the fact that students can obtain a master degree in only one academic year. As on a global scale, master programs often take two years, students would save a year of tuition fees by coming to the Netherlands for a master program.

Another way of looking at scholarships is in terms of push factors. It has been established that favorable conditions in the home country in terms of offering

scholarships are factors that push international students to study abroad. For this, Nuffic offers a so-called 'Grant Finder' that students can use to see if there are any scholarships offered in their home countries.
According to the 7Ps marketing mix, and the explanation of using price as a pull factor, another important aspect of price is the costs of living in the host country. The Netherlands is among the more expensive countries in terms of living costs when compared to other European countries (European Commission, 2014-2). However, for international students who have a work permit – which applies to students from most countries within the E.U. – there is a possibility to work during their studies. This will not only provide them with a salary, but (under certain conditions) will also make them eligible to receive study financing and loans offered by the government.

(2) City/institutional level

EUR does not offer any scholarships to international students, so the institution cannot attract students by that aspect of price. In terms of living costs, especially the cities in the Western part of the Netherlands, which are often considered most appealing to live, study and work in, are considerably expensive. Rotterdam is one of those cities. The living costs for international students in Rotterdam are set to be €1.000 on average (EUR, 2014-2), which is on the higher end of average living costs for international students in the Netherlands (Study in Holland, 2013). However, of these cities, Rotterdam is the cheapest one in terms of rent. In Rotterdam, students can get the most out of their money in terms of price per square meter (Zech, 2014).

(3) Program level

Due to policies concerning tuition fees and scholarships at a national and an E.U.-level, it is difficult for individual programs to market themselves through price. However, one expert states that offering imaginative insight and labor market outlook can diminish the role of price, thereby increasing the importance of marketing through using Program:

> "Price matters less if you can show [students] what they are investing in. If students feel like their outlook after the program is worth it, the investment becomes less important."

(4) Recommendations

Due to policies on a national and city/institutional level, it is difficult for the case program to use the pull factor of Dutch tuition fees and scholarships as a marketing tool (Becker & Kolster, 2012), which can be a weakness in the marketing process. The new scholarship program developed by the Ministry only focuses on incoming international students from non-E.U. countries, thereby excluding those students from the case program's target countries. Therefore, the case program needs to look at other options to make the price of studying more attractive. This thesis advises the case program to investigate the scholarship possibilities on a global scale, and those within target countries specifically, and communicate these to prospective students in order to make the price more attractive. Moreover, investigating the price of comparable programs and communicating those prices that are higher to prospective students can make the price of the case program more attractive. Additionally, promoting the fact that the program will only take one year, whereas globally, most master programs take two years, can increase the attractiveness of the price for students.

In terms of living costs, the Netherlands and Rotterdam are relatively expensive places compared to other countries and their major cities in the area (Study in Europe, 2014; Becker & Kolster, 2012). The only factor that Rotterdam scores well on, is on its comparably low rents for student housing within the Netherlands, which the case program can communicate explicitly. Additionally, the case program can inform prospective students about the possibility to work during the study program, if the student has a work permit. This would provide the student with a salary, but also with the possibility to apply for government study finances, which could lessen the burden of the tuition fees and living costs.

Place

(1) National level

Originally, marketing the factor of Place revolved mostly around the physical place where the university building could be found – among which the country in which it is located. The amount of information made available about the host country through proactive promotion and recruitment is one of the most important the pull factors (Becker & Kolster, 2012), also applying to this aspect of the 7Ps marketing mix. On a national level, it is said that the Netherlands as a country has many selling points, but these are not being used sufficiently to market education in the Netherlands to students in other countries (e.g. Dutch House of Representatives, 2014; Becker & Kolster, 2012). To improve this, Nuffic has started a program called Study in Holland, which focuses on marketing education in the Netherlands as a whole. It accumulates all relevant information about the Netherlands in general (Study in Holland, 2014).

Relatedly, another selling point of the Netherlands relates to the pull factor of degree of internationalization. One expert highlights this:

> "The Netherlands has 2300 international study programs, making it a market leader after those countries in which English is the first language. But other countries are catching up, so it is becoming more important for all institutions to emphasize the benefits of studying in the Netherlands."

In comparison to other countries in Western Europe, the Netherlands receives a relatively high number of international students, especially students from within the E.U. (Van de Braak, 2013). The degree of internationalization within the country in terms of student population, therefore, can be considered high. The degree of internationalization also goes beyond education, as the Netherlands in general is known for having a multicultural society, in which most people speak English (Study in Holland, 2014).

Another pull factor relating to Place is that of the living and working environment of a country in terms of e.g. safety. The Netherlands as a country is generally seen as a safe society that is open and tolerant (Study in Holland, 2014), which also reflects upon the education system. Students indicate that they thought their teachers were very approachable and open to insights from people with different backgrounds

(2) Institutional level

On an institutional level, the aspect of place takes shape in two ways. Firstly, it concerns the actual building of the university: the campus (excluding specific facilities, these come forth in another factor of the marketing mix), which can then be positioned within the city. The campus of EUR has been under construction for the past couple of years. With the new buildings at the heart of the campus, they have tried to increase the community feeling at EUR, and everything is far more up-to-date and focused on the demands of students. Additionally, the university has stated that the entire campus is built upon the premise of being sustainable (EUR, 2014). In the focus groups, students state that for the time in which the campus was under construction, they felt like university was distant and they had no home base there. Those students who are familiar with the campus as it is now, state that it is a great improvement and they believe it looks and feels a bit of how they imagine a campus in the U.S. might be, with places to gather and a lot of open space. They also feel as if the campus fits the corporate image of the city.

The prior knowledge about Rotterdam among international students seems to be limited, most of them only knew about Amsterdam and students indicated they had no prior knowledge of Rotterdam, other than the Port and perhaps the soccer club Feyenoord. All students said they had never heard about EUR before looking up potential study programs. However, Rotterdam is growing in popularity:

> "For a certain type of student, the dynamics of the city of Rotterdam are very attractive and it is becoming more attractive every year. The Netherlands is considered to be entrepreneurial, but Rotterdam specifically is known for its entrepreneurial spirit and the business-side to every aspect of daily life."

Several media have also reported on this growing popularity. For example, Rotterdam was listed as #10 in the New York Times' list of 52 places to visit in 2014 (New York Times, 2014), #8 in the Rough Guide's list of 10 places to visit in 2014 (The Rough Guide, 2014), and the Lonely Planet listed five reasons to visit Rotterdam (The Lonely Planet, 2014).

In terms of marketing the pull factor of living and working environment (Becker & Kolster, 2012) in the city, one of the experts connects this to the degree of internationalization and clarifies that the city as well as the institution sees room for improvement:

> "Rotterdam is an international city: there are many internationals, there is a big international port, but there are not that many international jobs. There is a working group in which the City of Rotterdam is talking to several organizations, among which the university, about possibilities and opportunities to create more international jobs."

The university has set internationalization as one of its strategic goals until 2018 (EUR, 2014), in which all faculties are participating. The efforts of the general marketing department of the university in this respect have been directed towards the marketing of the international environment throughout all aspects of the university. As such, the marketing department is developing a corporate campaign in which EUR is going to be positioned as a brand in an international market, particularly focused on international master students.

(3) Program level

By linking the content of the program to the place in which it is taught, a certain degree of legitimacy to study the field specifically in this place is created. As such, the program can show how developments in Rotterdam relate to the subject matter.

Beyond physical place, nowadays, another factor of place is the decreased need for a university building, due to the rise of online education (Filip, 2012). Worldwide, an increasing amount of study programs moves parts of their curriculum online, sometimes even entire programs are now taught online. However, for this program, the strongest point in content is considered to be the link to practice by inviting practitioners and much of the engagement with such practitioners would be lost if the program would be taught online. Moreover, offering parts of a program online does not necessarily decrease the costs, as there still need to be lectures and tutorials for the students who are present and material needs to be developed for online education. Offering part of the curriculum online, however, could help increase the tangibility of the program as seeing lectures online beforehand would offer prospective students an insight into what they would be studying. When asked, students are dispersed in terms of what they believe the added value of watching lectures online before starting the program would be, so the benefits of doing this are uncertain.

(4) Recommendations

Place takes shape through both the physical place in terms of country, city, and campus, but also through the diminished role of place and the rise of online education (Filip, 2012). For the case program, online education is not desirable, because the combination of analytical and managerial skills makes it important for students to be physically present. Students' opinions about seeing lectures online beforehand are dispersed. As such, the role of the physical place remains important and marketing its characteristics should be of focus to the case program.

In terms of proactive promotion of the information available on the country, which is considered one of the most important pull factors (Becker & Kolster, 2012), Nuffic has an extensive website available accumulating all information relevant to international students which the case program can refer to. The prior knowledge of students about Rotterdam is limited, so the case program needs to ensure that prospective students see the added value of the city in relation to studying and to the program as a way of proactive promotion (Becker & Kolster, 2012). The city is growing in popularity and the case program can make the city a more attractive place to study in by referring to popular media sources that promote Rotterdam as a city. By linking program content to the city, for example through the use of local examples and cases of the subject matters (in combination with international examples to promote Program), the case program can also legitimize why Rotterdam is a valuable place to study the program in. Moreover, Rotterdam is an international city, and the program aspires to create an international classroom experience, which fits with this image. The degree of internationalization in the city can thus complement the degree of internationalization within the content of the case program as described in Program, and the case program can communicate this explicitly by showing statistics about the international student population in Rotterdam and the amount of international citizens in the area.

EUR's campus has been under construction for the past years, which was considered to be a weakness to international students for that time, but now that it is (close to) done, students experience a strong campus feeling. They compare it to campuses in the United States and see this as a positive thing. As such, the case program can communicate this campus feeling when it describes the study environment to prospective students. In its strategy document, EUR (2014) also points out the fact that the campus was built on the premise of sustainability, but none of the experts or students mentioned anything about this, or anything concerning sustainability at all during the interviews and focus groups. Theory does not include sustainability as such in the marketing mix either. The importance of this aspect thus needs to be investigated further, to determine whether it can be used for marketing reasons.

Promotion

(1) National level

Under Promotion, all channels used to communicate with everyone affiliated to the institution are accumulated (Filip, 2012). Especially within the recruitment stage, channels to reach prospective students can be considered most important for proactive promotion and recruitment (Becker & Kolster, 2012). It has been established that international students start their search process online (Gomes & Murphy, 2003; Gray, 2003). In terms of channels that are used on a national level to reach potential students, the aforementioned website of the Study in Holland-program developed by Nuffic can be considered a national channel for the pull factor of proactive promotion (Becker & Kolster, 2012). The Study in Holland program does not only use online channels to inform prospective students about the Netherlands. For this program, they have also installed several Netherlands Education Support Offices (NESOs) around the world, in countries that are of special strategic interest to the Netherlands and/or have high demand in the education that is on offer in the Netherlands. These are the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China), Korea, Indonesia, Mexico, Thailand and Vietnam, none of which are of target interest for the case program. Through the NESO offices, Nuffic tries to increase the presence of the Netherlands on the international education market, by creating proximity, thereby being even more proactive.

(2) Institutional level

Channels created on an institutional level to reach international students are fairly limited, as explained by one marketing/recruitment expert:

> "There are a lot of activities for prospective students that are physically present, but there are not many opportunities for internationals to engage in activities hosted by the university."

The university has a website and engages in SEM, but does not offer any additional channels for international students. As such, the degree of proactive promotion and recruitment on a university level exists but can be improved. One such example is offered by the idea of the University of Applied Sciences in Amsterdam (HvA) to have a virtual open day (Van de Braak, 2013). They were able to target this to specific markets and reach those students that they believed would be interested in studying at HvA. Reports do note that, when engaging in such a virtual open day, it is important to include several links for students to engage in requesting information, so-called Calls to Action. EUR is also in the process of developing a corporate video that can be used as promotion material, but this video has not yet been released (Van de Braak, 2013).

An offline option that is addressed by a marketing/recruitment expert is offering summer schools, which is a very popular method of increasing visibility of departments and programs nowadays. The potential of this is underlined by two factors brought up by experts, namely that students who engage in any form of education abroad for a given period of time are more likely to do so again later on in their student life; and by spending this time at a specific university, they will already establish some sort of connection to that department, which already initiates some form of retention. It will also cause for an opportunity for staff members to engage in personal communication with prospective students, which is considered an important factor for marketing (Chen, 2007).

(3) Program level

In relation to students' search behavior mostly taking place online, it has also been established that engaging in Search Engine Marketing can provide valuable leads, as most students find their study programs through a search engine (Gomes & Murphy, 2003). The students in the focus group discussions subscribe this claim. Most state that they determined the field in which they wanted to study first, and then went on to find institutions that offered programs in those fields. They did so by googling what they were looking for, and by looking at websites that accumulate international master programs (e.g. the MasterPortals website). As such, they have already determined that they want to study in a specific field, and will search online by using specific terms they think will describe the field. One of the marketing/recruitment experts points out that it is important to consider whether the benefits of taking a faculty-wide (or department-wide) approach to SEM exceed the costs, as an integrated strategy would benefit each individual program and increase visibility of the faculty overall.

It has been established that online education as a whole, and offering lectures online specifically, is not necessarily considered beneficial in marketing the program. Still, another opportunity can be identified for the case program to engage in online education. Many of the experts confirm how MOOCs/online courses can serve as branding tools. One marketing/recruitment expert tells how Leiden University experienced this:

> "Leiden started a MOOC that ended up getting 60.000 participants. It offers a taste of what you do at the university, it positions your university, and can be used as a magnet to attract students."

Hence, even though the benefit of online education in terms of profitability in the business model of institutions has not yet been identified exactly, MOOCs do offer a valuable branding tool, if executed well. Additionally, MOOCs can be used as recruitment tools in the sense that institutions can see how certain students perform and basically hand-pick who they think would be suitable to take the entire program. One marketing/recruitment expert shares the success case of this from Delft University:

> "An Indonesian guy took over his father's company in water management. His father never got the chance to study, but the guy had the capacity and the means to do so himself and wanted to deepen his knowledge about water management. He found out that the best place to study water management was in Delft. He took a MOOC from the program and finished it with distinction. Delft offered him a scholarship to take the entire program, online, and graduated with distinction again."

Marketing/recruitment experts indicate that not many study programs are currently engaged in MOOCs in a strategic way, which means providing content online could increase the program's competitive advantage significantly. In response to this, students in the focus groups state that they do look at websites offering MOOCs regularly and they believe that if study programs offer a MOOC, it enhances their credibility.

The fact that most students found their programs online does not take away the fact that institutions should still engage in promotion through offline channels. As stated, theory described that personal communication with staff is also a very influential method to reach prospective students (Chen, 2007). Therefore, the people affiliated with the program can serve as promotion channels. The way this can take is elaborated on in the People-factor of the 7Ps marketing mix.

(4) Recommendations

As international students start their search process online (Gomes & Murphy, 2003; Gray, 2003), the first focus of the case program should be to increase visibility on those channels used by its target students. Efforts made on a national or institutional level in this respect are less useful for the case program, as it has been established that, when they start searching for possible study programs, students already know the field in which they want to study. The general information about institution and country therefore only becomes important after the initial search. Also, the tools that are being developed on an institutional level that could be useful for the case program are not yet finished. For SEM efforts, this means that the case program should identify those terms that best describe the program, which students would use to search for it. They can ask for input from students in the Dutch master program to find those key terms, but based on content, it can be expected that it is important to invest in SEM for terms such as ‘international master’, ‘governance’, and ‘management’. To increase visibility in search engines, the case program can determine whether it is useful to combine efforts with other programs within the department. Moreover, the case program will have to get listed on master portal websites, on which students can search for master programs by field and sector. Social media platforms might also offer valuable channels to reach potential students on. This thesis advises the case program to identify any social media platforms that are used specifically in the target countries (e.g. Xing in Germany) and create a presence on there, to increase visibility through those country-specific platforms.

Another channel that can be used for online promotion is the development of a MOOC. MOOCs create competitive advantage, showcase the content of a study program, reach a larger student population, and profile the program to students in a credible way. This thesis therefore advises the case program to think about the possibilities for developing a MOOC, which represents the content of the study program as much as possible. This also offers the study program to test its content to a larger population and identify potential prospective students among those who perform well in the MOOC. As the development of a MOOC can be compared to the development of a study program in a way, and theory does not incorporate MOOCs specifically, it is difficult to determine exactly what factors need to be kept in mind. This would need further research.

Process

(1) National level

Process looks at ways to promote e.g. management techniques in education (Filip, 2012). In this respect, it is useful to look at the pull factor of the way higher education is governed in the host country (Becker & Kolster, 2012). There are not many specific characteristics in the Dutch education system in terms of for example public/private education that are relevant for the case program. However, the application procedure for international students has been made easier over the last years. On a national level, visa procedures have been simplified to facilitate international students upon arriving. Moreover, certain developments have taken place, which facilitate the process of entering the labor market for international students. Besides the fact that E.U.-residents oftentimes already have a work permit for the Netherlands, government has facilitated the application process for work permits for non-E.U. residents. As such, non-E.U. graduates from study programs in the Netherlands can now extend their residence permits by one year in order to look for employment, and once contracted, they are eligible for an employment visa for the longer term (Becker & Kolster, 2012).

(2) City/institutional level

On an institutional level, processes take shape through recruitment and enrollment processes (Filip, 2012). As stated, proactive recruitment is one of the most important pull factors (Becker & Kolster, 2012), which in turn can lead to applications and enrollments. Although the EUR as a whole is concerned with internationalization, faculties are still responsible for the strategies for and recruitment of international students on their own. This exemplifies the problem posed by the degree of bureaucracy in the university, one expert points out:

> "A university is centralized and decentralized at the same time, which makes it difficult to ensure prospective students find the right person in their communication."

Especially within the Faculty of Social Sciences this can be problematic. Nobody has been given the direct task to market to international students. Officially, the marketing department of the faculty focuses on marketing to Dutch students, and the International Office has the task to accommodate and inform international students, not necessarily to market the faculty to them. People are working ad-hoc, which increases bureaucracy and thereby the chance that programs lose students in the first stages of recruitment. Especially because ad-hoc strategies oftentimes do not incorporate measurement techniques, so it is difficult to determine what leads are actually translated into applications. Such bureaucratic communication processes are also perpendicular to the claims made about the importance of personal contact in the recruitment phase (Chen, 2007). This also has implications for the enrollment process, as it influences the speed of following up on leads, which is considered very important for the recruitment and the enrollment process according to marketing/recruitment experts:

> "EUR is mostly concerned with generating leads, not with follow-up. But the longer the communication process takes, the more students you lose. If you follow up in a timely manner and are concerned with the steps of the choice process of those students that reach out to you, you will get the better students to apply."

The case program experts indicated that this has indeed been a problem; in their experience, the time between a prospective student's inquiry and their answer is increased because the question has to pass through several levels of the organization before arriving at the right person. However, none of the students brought up any negative experiences in their application process, which indicates that the bureaucracy might mostly have a negative effect on staff.

(3) Program level

Teaching methods are the factor of the Process-aspect of the 7Ps marketing mix (Filip, 2012) that is considered particularly important for marketing individual programs (Baldwin & James, 2000). The combination of theoretical and practical approaches that make up the core of the program therefore also comes back in this aspect, as this does not only have an effect on the content of the program, but also in the execution of courses. The fact that a practitioner looks at real-life cases with students during the courses means that the program can advertise with the fact that there is a dual approach in teaching methods, of which the practical approach is considered important for creating imaginative insight (Baldwin & James, 2000). In this respect, one of the case program experts also mentions that if a program is advertised as being small-scaled, this contributes to the positive perception of quality.

Apart from teaching methods, approaches to assessment are another factor in the Process-aspect of the marketing mix (Filip, 2012). However, in the focus groups, students stated that they were not interested in seeing assessment criteria in terms of what they would be graded on in courses. The term assessment might then also apply to how strict the admission criteria are – meaning, the assessment criteria that apply to prospective students. Admission criteria can be used as a way to market the program as being exclusive and hard to get into. Some programs use this strategy to increase the perception of quality, as stated by one of the case program experts. However, marketing/recruitment experts indicate that for new programs, this is not advisable as there is no established name or brand yet on which the program can position itself as exclusive. Having strict admission rules, therefore, is not advisable.

Another way to facilitate processes is by installing a dual degree agreement with some institutions abroad, one of the case program experts explains. In these agreements, a university in another country offers its students a master program in which the students get a degree that is specifically adapted to meet the eligibility criteria of the particular master program of a second country. As a part of obtaining that degree, their students will enroll in the master program abroad. This system will also secure a steady income of students. However, establishing such dual degree agreements are long-term investments that generally only get established after a certain amount of years and are therefore difficult to realize for programs that do not exist yet. Moreover, due to the fact that the countries in which these types of agreements are popular are not identified as target countries for the Netherlands, EUR in general nor for the program, it is unclear whether this strategy will yield the best results.

(4) Recommendations

Concerning the pull factor of the way education is governed on a national level (Becker & Kolster, 2012), the Dutch government has simplified visa processes and the process of obtaining a work permit for international students from outside the E.U. This proposes a strong point in the process of coming to the Netherlands. On an institutional level, however, there are several weaknesses mainly retaining to the pull factor of proactive recruitment (Becker & Kolster, 2012), which the program needs to overcome, as this is one of the most important pull factors for international students. The proactive recruitment is mostly obstructed by the fact that communication within EUR and within the faculty is rather bureaucratic; it is not easy for students to find out whom to ask their questions to, as several people are responsible for different aspects. This has a negative effect on following up leads and enrollment processes within the institution in general. This challenges the Faculty of Social Sciences even more due to the austerity measures it has to deal with and the consequences for time spent and personnel dedicated to these processes. Keeping in mind the importance of personal contact in the communication process (Chen, 2007), this thesis therefore suggests that the case program follows examples set by e.g. RSM in appointing an Admissions Account Manager, who is responsible for answering all inquiries made by students in relation to all aspects – from admission requirements to housing to questions about content. This person would need to be appointed online and should be very visible, also within the organization, to limit the possibility of students directing their questions elsewhere. Practically, this would mean that a prospective student would ask the Admissions Account Manager a question, which they will try to get answered internally, after which they will send the answer to the prospective student personally – instead of referring the prospective student to another person.

Teaching methods are another important way to market Process through, especially on a program level (Filip, 2012; Baldwin & James, 2002). The dual teaching approach of the program, combining analytical and practical aspects in one, is an attractive one considering the importance of creating imaginative insight (Baldwin & James, 2000). The best way to market this has been previously described under Program.

Additionally, theory suggests that assessment is another important aspect of Process (Filip, 2012). However, students indicated that seeing assessment criteria online was not an influencer on their choice process. The assessment criteria programs use to determine a prospective student's eligibility to apply to the program, however, are of importance. Even though a case program expert pointed out how having strict admission criteria can increase the perception of quality and will also affect the quality of students, marketing/recruitment experts indicated that it is not advisable to have strict admission criteria for new programs. Their first priority should be to build the program through creating a student base. As such, this thesis advises the case program to have lenient admission criteria in the first years of the program. After the student base is built up and the break-even point in terms of costs is reached, the case program can revise its criteria and decide whether it should become stricter.

Physical facilities

(1) National level

Physical facilities are the most tangible factor in the marketing mix (Filip, 2012), but according to Baldwin & James (2000), information about physical facilities is not considered that important for international students. Still, on a national level, Nuffic emphasizes the 'connectedness' of the Netherlands in relation to the importance of infrastructure in this pull factor. With this, they mean that it is easy to travel within the Netherlands and between countries in Europe, which allows international students to experience more of Europe than only the Netherlands.

Moreover, the availability of career services can be considered a facility to students, which also relates to creating imaginative insight (Baldwin & James, 2000) and shapes the living and working environment pull factor (Becker & Kolster, 2012). Even though the service itself mostly takes shape in the student/alumni retention phase, the presence of career services on campus is a facility that a program can use in the recruitment phase. Underlined by what is written in the Minister's letter, both marketing/recruitment experts and case program experts admit that this has long been an ignored aspect of internationalization in the country as a whole:

> "Students were screaming for career information. Nuffic now has a career portal that offers practical and more generic information, but the platform does not maintain vacancies or sector-specific information."

Similarly, not much thought had been put into creating alumni facilities for international students staying in the Netherlands or for those who returned to their home countries or moved to other countries.

(2) City/institutional level

One marketing/recruitment expert points out that it is important to keep that international students rank facilities differently than domestic students do, so it needs to be ensured that all facilities are adapted to internationals as well. Also, internationals live on campus more often than Dutch students do, so they would make use of physical facilities more. This means that very practical facilities such as the presence of the supermarket on campus, or the availability to connect to Wi-Fi everywhere on campus are of much more relevance to internationals than to domestic students. Although for Dutch students, the presence of such facilities is considered evident, internationals do not always take them for granted and explicit communication regarding these facilities is therefore advised.

(3) Program level

Case program experts indicated that they have had thoughts about offering career services within the department, but these have never taken shape. Marketing/recruitment experts state that, especially because the program does not offer an internship possibility inherently, career services would be good to offer students. In focus groups, students indicated that they indeed missed the presence of career services and offering such services would diminish the negative aspect of the lacking internship. According to marketing/recruitment experts, this is considered to be the last step in the process of making the content of the program more practical and to promote the fact that there are indeed career possibilities after graduation.

(4) Recommendations

On a national level, the connectedness of the Netherlands is considered to be an important aspect to promote the infrastructure of the country. On an institutional level, the facilities on campus (e.g. the supermarket, Wi-Fi) can offer attractive aspects of the Physical facilities-factor. However, as the importance of these facilities for international students is questionable (Baldwin & James, 2000), the case program does not have to communicate these facilities all too clearly. They should be used to support claims made about e.g. Place, but do not have to be mentioned separately.

On a national level, Nuffic offers practical information relating to career possibilities, but this information does not include field-specific information or concrete links to the labor market in terms of vacancies or networks. The absence of such services is considered a great weakness for which no solution has been developed on either of the levels. This lack of career services and ways to overcome this challenge will be highlighted more thoroughly in the recommendations made for the student/alumni retention stage.

People

(1) National level

The People-factor relates to the marketing of all people through whom universities can offer their services and build relationships with prospective students. The People-factor can take shape through the promotion of people in terms of reputation, accomplishments, experiences, etcetera; but also by promoting the program through people, meaning, employing people affiliated with the program to market the program. On a national level, there are little attempts made for promotion of people within the education sector.

Promotion through people can take place through trade missions occasionally organized by ministries, in which universities are sometimes invited to participate. Through these trade missions, institutions get the chance to approach institutions abroad and establish meaningful relationships with those institutions that have a mutual interest. Additionally, Nuffic has started an Alumni network and through this network it is trying to employ international alumni for recruitment in their home country or for informing prospective students about studying in the Netherlands through the NESOs. Data from this alumni network can also give insights into the overall employment opportunities of internationals graduated from an institution in the Netherlands.

(2) City/institutional level

On an institutional level, no clear efforts to use promotion of people or promotion through people have been identified.

(3) Program level

In the promotion of people, in general, it is considered important and valuable to highlight the diversity of all people involved in the program, meaning, teaching staff, support staff, students and alumni by marketing/recruitment experts, case program experts, and students alike. This supports the pull factor of degree of internationalization (Becker & Kolster, 2012). There are some differences in what is considered diverse, though. As it has been established that, within the People-factor, teaching staff can be considered most important as inseparability causes for teaching staff to be directly related to service assessment (Kotler & Armstrong, 2003), it is useful to look at these differences. Students state that, even though they do consider the different nationalities in student body an important indicator for how international a program really is, thereby making it an appealing factor, this does not necessarily matter for teaching staff. For teaching staff, diversity shows more through highlighting what their international experiences are, both practical and academic, than what their nationality is. One student explains:

> "What is important to me is that they can teach me what I need to know, not really where they are from. If they all have relevant knowledge on a global scale of the subjects we address in their classes, they may all be Dutch, even. But this knowledge does have to come from international experiences, so it would be good to know if they have done anything outside of the Netherlands."

The level of English of teachers is important, though, but students indicate that they have had no trouble with their teachers throughout their study programs. The case program experts also indicate that the teaching staff involved in the case program is renowned in the field and has specific knowledge that can only be found in this department, which can thus be considered as a selling point of the program. In response to this claim, marketing/recruitment experts state that even if teaching staff might be renowned in their field, their reputation is not necessarily known on a global scale. In such cases, marketing through the reputation of the scholars is not very useful, as only a small group of people will know this. Students take this a step further by stating that the reputation of the staff did not even matter to them; they did not look this up beforehand and also would not have considered this appealing information in their choice process. Within the case program, part of the teaching staff will also consist of the invited practitioners. For students, the factor of reputation is different when it comes to the practitioners that will be invited to speak during the program or host workshops. Students do think their reputation is important. If they work for renowned organizations, have roles high up in the organization, or have achieved something very impressive throughout their working life, students consider this to be very appealing information that could influence their decision. Promoting the reputation of existing students and alumni would work along the same lines. Students state that knowing what people that are doing or have graduated from the program have achieved, shows the value of the program in the labor market and providing this information would really set a program apart.

For marketing any of the people of the program, it counts that both statistical data and elaborate descriptions are considered to be appealing types information for students. Statistical data would mean statistics on employability, different nationalities within the program, information about the fields in which scholars and practitioners work, etcetera. Elaborate descriptions would include testimonials of people all throughout the program and/or faculty about what they are doing and how the program has contributed to this in a practical sense. Students state that combination of the two would be a strong influence on their decision making process, they would choose a program that can provide these insights over a program that does not. It is important to keep in mind that, especially with the current labor market, this information should be as much up-to-date as possible.

In terms of promotion through people, when looking at teaching staff, they can engage in giving guest lectures abroad in order to have personal contact with prospective students, which is in line with claims made about the importance of having teaching staff communicate with prospective students (Chen, 2007). Staff members can also employ their networks in the academic world in the time before the launch to spread the word about the program. It is then beneficial to pinpoint specific people at other universities that do not offer a comparable master program, but do have bachelor students that would be eligible for the case program, to establish relationships with. These people can immediately inform their students about the existence of the master program and refer them to the right people within the program with any questions. One marketing/recruitment expert states that having a person with a good and known reputation, not only in the field but also in general and worldwide, linked to the program will ease this process, as they have a more extensive network already and people are more inclined to establish a relationship with such a person. In relation to this, one possibility that is given by one of the case program experts is to have a session with different academics in the global field in the run up to the launch. In this session, the curriculum and other practicalities can be tested, but it will also be an opportunity to start marketing the program internationally. Additionally, it is important to ensure that international fairs are visited and relationships are established with admissions officers and career advisors from other universities, who are also able to inform eligible students about the program (Van de Braak, 2013-2). By doing this, the program can market itself to staff members throughout several layers in other universities.

To enhance imaginative insight (Baldwin & James, 2000), employing students and alumni offers the most credible source of information, as they have experienced the program. It is common practice for universities and programs to employ ambassadors among both students and alumni. These ambassadors serve as the face of the program and experts state that they become increasingly important throughout the existence of the program, because word-of-mouth has become a much larger aspect of marketing (Blazevic, et al., 2013). Generally, ambassadors are used for spreading information on open days and during introduction sessions with prospective students. In focus groups, students deservedly bring up the point that for internationals, as is the case with physical open days, these ambassadors are far less useful because they cannot reach them easily. One student explained:

> "I would have loved to have been able to talk to someone beforehand that I could find on the program´s website. Having to reach out to them on my own makes me feel as if I am interrupting their lives, so being able to talk to someone offered by my university would have been great."

One marketing/recruitment expert also states that, especially for Asian countries, programs sometimes make use of so-called agents to market the program in specific countries. These agents are locals that are hired by a program as an ambassador to market the program to prospective students in that country. However, these agents are by no means affiliated to the program and have not studied in the program themselves, so their benefit in terms of personal communication (Chen, 2007) and their commitment is questionable, according to the expert.

(4) Recommendations

The promotion of people in the Dutch education sector does not take shape on a national or institutional level. As such, the case program will have to rely on the promotion of people affiliated with the program. This starts with marketing the diversity within the program, to showcase the pull factor of degree of internationalization (Becker & Kolster, 2012). This needs to happen through statistics as well as elaborate content. In focus groups, students indicated that there is a difference between student population, staff members and invited practitioners in terms of what type of diversity is relevant. For the student population, students find it interesting to see different backgrounds and nationalities, so this thesis advises the case program to keep track of data concerning these aspects to provide prospective students with up-to-date statistics about this. Additionally, students indicated that they are interested to see what students and alumni have done in terms of extracurricular activities, which can be showcased through elaborate content to enhance diversity. This thesis therefore advises the case program to, besides offering course testimonials of students to market Program, also offer general testimonials of students and alumni in which they describe what they did during the study program, how it benefited them in terms of knowledge and possibilities on the labor market, and where they are now (if graduated). As the case program is new and does not have any existing students or alumni, it is not possible to market them in this way. In the focus group discussions, however, students state that knowing about success stories of students and alumni of the entire faculty and specifically the department is also very relevant to them. Therefore, in the run up to the start, the case program can use stories about students that have done internships at influential organizations and alumni that are working in renowned organizations, and complement these with stories of existing students and alumni once the program is running. For teaching staff, reputation is not considered by students as a very important factor. They are more interested in seeing content about teachers' backgrounds in terms of practical experiences and international experiences. Much like the proposed testimonials of experts in Program, teaching staff should be featured on the website with testimonials regarding these points. The practitioners' reputations, on the other hand, are considered important. Hence, next to showcasing content about their background, this thesis advises the case program to explicitly include information about practitioner's accomplishments in their career in their testimonials.

When looking at possible ways to promote the program through people, it needs to be emphasized that personal contact is most important (Chen, 2007). It has been established that many programs make use of student and alumni ambassadors, but these are not very effective for international students as they are often not available on moments other than open days. For this reason, this thesis advises the case program to take the appointment of ambassadors to the next level, by identifying Student and Alumni Ambassadors 2.0; students that represent the program through online channels and who are featured on the website and all social media channels of the program, including their contact details that prospective students can use to reach out to them. Also, much like existing students can schedule a meeting through the website with for example a study advisor, prospective students could schedule a Skype session with student/alumni ambassadors 2.0. In this way, a program offers prospective students several ways in which they can get in touch with existing students and alumni to ask about their experiences. Again, as there are no existing students or alumni as of yet, the case program can use students/alumni from other programs within the department.

Promotion through staff can take shape through them employing their networks. This thesis advises the case program to pinpoint people at other institutions who are working for bachelor programs of which students would be eligible to study in the case program. By reaching out to these other institutions and offering these scholars an information package which informs them about the program and all its characteristics, and why students of their programs should want to enroll in the case program, the case program can reach students from target countries more easily. Here, the reputation of the teaching staff does come into play, as scholars with a stronger reputation are more likely to yield results from their networks. Related to this, the suggestion was made to organize a focus group session in which scholars from other institutions are asked to assess the case program. Such a focus group session can be conducted with those scholars who received the information package. Hence, after distributing the information package, the case program should do extensive follow up with the scholars and ask them if they would be willing to give feedback in a personal session. This could offer the case program many important insights into the position of the program in an international market, and specifically in the identified target countries. Instead of agents, who have been said to not yield the best results in terms of marketing due to their lack of affinity with the program and institutions, alumni do offer a viable way of marketing the program abroad as alumni agents. Alumni that return to their home country, or that go to another country, who do have an affiliation with the program can market it in target countries and are different than alumni ambassadors in the sense that they are more proactively concerned with marketing the program, instead of offering their time to answer questions. Consequently, this thesis advises the case program to appoint Alumni Agents who could personally market the program in other countries, thereby also tapping into the importance accounted to personal communication (Chen, 2007). This idea, however, would work best if the case program's own alumni are being used for it, and can thus only be implemented after the start of the program.

5.3 – Student/alumni retention stage

Student relationships

(1) National level

In order to increase international students' retention intention, relationships should be established that are satisfying, beneficial and strong. Increasing feelings of inclusion can increase the perception of relationship benefit, and factors influencing relationship strength are, among other things, the willingness of staff to establish a relationship and their supportiveness (Raciti, 2002). All these factors come together in offering career services. On a national level, it has been mentioned before that Nuffic has developed a career portal. They state that the portal “aims to retain international talent to strengthen the Dutch knowledge economy and its international competitiveness. The portal supports students' and alumni’s decision-making processes by providing reliable and up-to-date information. It contains advice on issues such as how to apply for a job in the Netherlands, how to find the right vacancies, what employers are looking for and Dutch business culture” (Nuffic, 2013). The portal does not have any concrete information about sectors or about vacancies, but Nuffic states that it is willing to support institutions’ efforts to further develop career services in this regard.

(2) City/institutional level

EUR has recognized that offering career services can be an important influencer for establishing a beneficial relationship to increase retention intention, especially for international students (Raciti, 2002; EUR, 2014). Not unimportant in this is that the institution finds it important to position its students in the labor market to strengthen the reputation of the institution. It has set the development of career services as a focus point in its strategy, but in this, thinks there in an important role for specific developments on a program-level, as departments and programs have most access to relevant networks. It is looking at opportunities for different faculties and perhaps institutions to exchange knowledge for successful implementation of career services (EUR, 2014). Only one student in the focus groups mentioned the existence of a career advisor that currently works for the entire university, whose advice you would have to pay for, which all students in the group considered to be a negative aspect.

An additional influencer of retention intention has been identified as offering activities for students (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). Some experts from both marketing/recruitment and the case program suggest the idea of a buddy system, where international students are linked to Dutch students to help them through their first weeks in a foreign country. The Erasmus Student Network (ESN) offers such a system for the entire university, but only a few students in the focus groups heard of this system and only one actually took part in it. Most students state that a buddy system is more relevant for bachelor students than it is for master students, as they feel more independent and look for support less.

(3) Program level

On a program level, all mediating variables for retention intention come forth. Firstly, it has been said that students do not necessarily expect to establish a positive relationship with the institution, but are happy when they do, and this makes up for the mediating variable of relationship satisfaction influencing retention intention (Raciti, 2002). Having personal communication with staff has been identified as an important factor in establishing such a positive relationship (Chen, 2007). The aforementioned problem of bureaucracy in communication can therefore also have an effect in the retention stage. Marketing/recruitment experts stated that international students oftentimes are used to more personal guidance than the Dutch system generally offers. As such, having to approach different people for different questions is not something international students are used to as much as Dutch students are. Other programs have solved this by appointing student account managers, one of the marketing/recruitment experts explains:

> "There is one person appointed for students to direct all their questions to. This person deals with their questions internally and gets back to them personally. This approach will increase their sense of belonging."

In focus group sessions, students do not necessarily speak about any negative experiences with this during their program, and do not specifically express that they missed this during their studies. However, students did state that having short communication lines increases the feeling of being taken care of, which is more important for international students than domestic students.

Secondly, to improve the idea of the variable of relationship benefit (Raciti, 2002), some degree of reciprocity should exist, in which the student has the idea that the program is willing to help its students succeed. As the relationship between teacher and students is the most important one in the process of creating retention intention

(Raciti, 2002), it would be beneficial to look at concrete opportunities for teachers to get involved in establishing relationships. Marketing/recruitment experts state that recommendation letters are useful tools for students in the labor market, as they support students' claims of successes. Case program experts indicate that writing recommendation letters is currently a practice that the faculty has no policies on, as the teacher needs to decide whether or not they want to recommend the student and if they have time available for writing such letters, which makes it difficult to monitor this process.

In terms of the third mediating variable for retention intention, relationship strength can be established through the degree of honesty and the degree of trust between staff and student, the personal rapport in terms of willingness for having a relationship, whether the relationship is supportive from staff to student, and whether there is a lot of communication and a steady information stream (Raciti, 2002). One way to establish trust is through offering students the idea that they have some sort of influence on their study program can have an influence on their sense of belonging and thereby on their retention intention. This feeling can be established through the appointment of student ambassadors, who are trusted with the task of representing the study program. Another way to create relationship strength, which taps into ideas of trust, supportiveness and having a steady information stream, identified by the case program experts is by having several opportunities for evaluation. At EUR, each course is evaluated by students at the end, on the basis of a set of questions asked on evaluation forms – this will also happen for the case program. Both of these aspects of relationship strength also incorporate feelings of inclusion, which increases the idea of relationship benefits as well.

As mentioned, offering career services and career fairs also incorporates factors of both relationship strength and relationship benefits. Especially for the case program, as there are no internship opportunities built into the curriculum, one student explains:

> "I want to get the message 'after finishing this master, you are going to be part of our group, you will be part of our family, and we are going to look after each other'. If you send me that message, I want to be part of your club."

Students state that they have no problem picturing their colleague-students helping them in the future, but they do not see how their study program are helping them with their careers without a career service. Finding information about career possibilities is considered to be rather difficult:

> "I could not find anything about what anyone has done during or after my study program. I myself was interested in academia, unlike most students in my program, but even information about that was hard to find."

One case program expert involved in the development of the program states that it is difficult to picture whether international students are interested in finding jobs in the Netherlands, as it is also very imaginable that students prefer going back to their home countries to improve governance processes there. Students, however, state that international students in general always do consider the option of staying if an opportunity arises. And even in case the students do not seem fit for or are not interested in what is offered through career services and career fairs, it would at least give them an idea of where to look for jobs themselves. Also, it would give them the idea that there are indeed employers interested in them, even if it is not employers they would consider themselves. If possible, it would of course only add value to include organizations from other countries in services and fairs. Moreover, as pointed out by marketing/recruitment experts, career services do not only consist of vacancies and potential employers. One marketing/recruitment expert states:

> "The intention does not necessarily have to be to keep the student in the Netherlands forever, so as part of your career services you may also offer trainings in CV-building, writing a motivation letter, or training sessions for job interviews."

This is not an unimportant consideration. Marketing/recruitment experts state that, in their experience, it seems that students return to their home countries by increasing amounts. It is beneficial to offer these students such trainings even if they will not stay in the Netherlands, to ensure they have the feeling they benefited from being in the program even if the career services and fairs are not interesting to them.

A last factor that can influence retention intention can happen through community building during the academic year by organizing several activities, which has been identified as an additional influencer of student retention intention (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). Examples of these are events and field trips throughout the year. One marketing/recruitment expert says that it is best if this starts very early on, preferably in the first week or even on the first day of the academic year. Case program experts pose the question whether these activities always need to be related to the content of the program, or if social activities would also suffice, especially on a master program level as master students are expected to be looking for more serious ways to establish a community. In response to this, some students indicated they had a teambuilding activity on the first day of their programs that was focused on both content and social aspects, and that the social aspect was remembered most strongly. Students also said that the social aspect was relatively short for their liking – only a couple of hours. They also express the desire to have more activities throughout the year, and that it would add value if some of these activities would also include students from other programs/departments and specifically also alumni. They state that this would make them feel more part of the organization and it could also serve as a networking opportunity. Students also speak positively about the content-related field trips and activities that took place throughout the year, and say that for these events, it is not only the social aspect that makes activities useful to them. If the content of such activities clearly relates to the content of a specific course, it shows how the course content relates to practical aspects in the labor market, referring back to creating imaginative insight (Baldwin & James, 2000). If the activity is just to listen to practitioners speak about something that is not related to course content, i.e. about organizational processes of an organization in which students might end up working, this is not considered to have as much value. In those cases, students enjoy the social aspect of the activity more.

(4) Recommendations

Much like the appointment of an Admissions Account Executive, this thesis advises the case program to appoint a Student Account Manager, following successful examples of e.g. RSM. Not only does this adhere to the importance of having personal contact (Chen, 2007), it decreases bureaucracy in communication previously identified as a bottleneck in institutions and also enhances relationship satisfaction (Gallo, 2012).

To increase feelings of relationship benefit, recommendation letters offer a practical tool for teaching staff to show willingness to students. However, there are no policies in terms of providing such letters, and teaching staff does not always have the time or desire to write recommendation letters. To facilitate this as much as possible, this thesis advises the case program to develop recommendation letter templates, in which teaching staff would only need to incorporate certain factors about the student.

To enhance feelings of trust and inclusion, which is important for both relationship benefit and strength (Gallo, 2012), this thesis emphasizes the benefits of appointing student ambassadors. The practical implementation and benefits of such ambassadors have been described in the People-section, but these ambassadors would also feel as if they are trusted and included by the program enough to help represent it, which would thus increase their retention intention. However, only a couple of students at most can be an ambassador for one program at the same time. Strategically, this role can thus best be given to students that seem most promising or most successful. Another way to enhance feelings of trust and inclusion has been identified as the inclusion of evaluation moments. EUR evaluates all its courses through an evaluation form at the end of each course, but these forms are standardized and ignore the importance of personal communication, especially with teaching staff (Chen, 2007). As such, it is advised that there are several moments throughout the study program in which the student is given the opportunity to evaluate the program in person, with preferably teaching staff, such as the program coordinator.

The most important factor for establishing student relationships seems to be the presence of career services and the according organization of career fairs, which is currently mostly absent in the Dutch education system, at EUR and within the faculty.

Nuffic offers the information for the first step in developing career services, by providing practical, general information about application processes and the Dutch labor market through their career portal. However, also to enhance imaginative insight (Baldwin & James, 2000), it is important for the case program to offer more substantial career services. This can be done through the organization of career fairs, where students can meet potential employers and see what the labor market in their field of study is like. Organizing career fairs also taps into the possibility to use activities as a way to increase retention intention (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). However, as a career fair would be a content-related activity and students have indicated to prefer a socially oriented activity for community building purposes, this thesis advises that the career fair should be preceded by a more extensive social event in the first week of the case program. This thesis also advises the case program to organize several events and activities, both solely social and related to content, for community building purposes. Furthermore, this thesis advises the case program to offer a specific online program-related career platform that incorporates the information offered by Nuffic but complements this with field-specific information and vacancies.

Alumni engagement

(1) National level

In the alumni engagement phase, there is two-way communication between alumni and institution in the form of activities and events. The alumni do not necessarily do anything for the institution, but do show willingness to continue a relationship (Gallo, 2012). For internationals, it is not always said that they stay in the Netherlands after graduating – some go back to their home countries or on to other countries, but as stated before, marketing/recruitment experts still believe these alumni are important. It is therefore useful to find ways to bring together the alumni that stayed within the Netherlands and those that left. Nuffic has established the online Holland Alumni Network to do exactly that, bring together alumni abroad and within the Netherlands (Nuffic, 2013-2). This network is also accessible to Dutch education institutions.

(2) City/institutional level

EUR has also recognized the importance of maintaining a relationship with alumni. It offers several ways in which it tries to engage alumni, also mostly focusing on online channels (Gallo, 2012), for example through installing a graduate database and has launched several social media platforms. Moreover, it has developed a bi-annual graduate magazine and a graduate advisory council (EUR, 2014). When looking at possibilities to organize offline events and networking opportunities, students indicate that they would very much like to have this happen on multiple occasions for as long as they are in the Netherlands. This means, events not just in the form of a reunion once every so many years, but perhaps even multiple times a year. It is explained that this can a departmental or faculty occasion, and not something only for alumni of a specific program:

> "I am no longer looking for people with specific information about my study program. Everyone who has graduated from the faculty might have interesting insights into what is happening in the labor market, so for networking reasons, a faculty-wide activity would be useful."

(3) Program level

The use of social media platforms to engage alumni also takes place on a program level. Several programs offer LinkedIn groups or Facebook pages that alumni can become a member of, so they can see where everyone from their year and previous years is working. This is a rather passive form of engagement on the institution´s side, however, as input and content usually seems to come from alumni themselves. One student said:

> "In the LinkedIn group, it seems like only Dutch jobs are posted. That is not the fault of the faculty or department, but it underlines the idea that the international community is not yet a real part of the department and makes the platform less useful for internationals to be a part of."

On a side note, the presence of such a group also offers the program access to simple statistics about what people within the group are doing, which can be used as information for student recruitment.

The desire for networking opportunities also links back to the need to offer career services in order to retain alumni as well. Students indicate that they have no idea where to start looking for a job:

> "I just googled for jobs in the Netherlands and that was it. I had no idea where to start. The faculty needs to hire someone to do that job, to create those links. Someone needs to manage the alumni and connect with them. […] And if these connections already exist during the study program, people will also be more willing to do something back after their studies."

(4) Recommendations

Again, the lack of career services/fairs on several levels shows to be an important weakness for the case program. The possibilities for developing such services have been explained in previous sections. However, what has been established in the support-section, does offer new insights as to what can be done to meet alumni's desires. As a comprehensive idea, combining the presence of career services and the importance of organizing activities, this thesis suggests that the case program organizes a career fair at the beginning of the academic year. With this, the case program can show new students what the possibilities are already at the start of their program, while recent graduates can explore actual opportunities. This also immediately connects alumni to existing students, which is considered beneficial for both parties in terms of networking, being able to exchange experiences, and engaging alumni in the program even after graduation. Students say that this would immediately make them feel as if they were not just part of something for one year. They also indicate that they would be open to attending any other social events that the program organizes for its current students. However, as students do indicate that they are interested in meeting students and alumni from other programs within the faculty as well, this thesis suggests that the case program explores possibilities to combine efforts with other programs within the faculty for offering career services or organizing events.

For alumni who have moved away from the Netherlands, it is also important to find ways to engage with them through online channels. The creation of pages on social media platforms seems common practice, but is a little passive. Actually maintaining such an online platform with content, whether it is with vacancies or informational articles, that are relevant to internationals as well, might engage the international alumni more. This content could also consist of what is happening within the program, or within the field of studies in the direct physical area of the study program, for example projects that deal with issues that were covered in the study program. For this, the program can also make use of the development of the aforementioned online program-related career portal.

Alumni support

(1) National level

Alumni support revolves around the willingness of alumni to support their education programs/institutions after graduating, in terms of supporting marketing efforts, program content or philanthropy (Gallo, 2012). In the People-section of the recruitment stage, it has been described that Nuffic has started an Alumni network, through which they try to employ international alumni for recruitment in their home country or for informing prospective students about studying in the Netherlands through the NESOs. On a national level, no clear attempts are being made to involve alumni in providing program content or philanthropy.

(2) Institutional level

For international alumni, EUR does not have specific strategies to involve in alumni support. In its strategy document, EUR does indicate that the facilities for alumni and the maintenance of the alumni network could be developed further, but it does not mention any specific focus points for this part of the alumni cycle specifically (EUR, 2014; Gallo, 2012).

(3) Program level

The willingness of students to engage in supporting their former study program is definitely present, provided that the study program shows interest, according to students, which is currently not the case:

> "You came, you ate, and you left. Nobody emails you where you are. There goes your incentive to reach back, if they don't seem like they care about you."

Another student explains:

> "Through maintaining relationships with alumni, you will get the chance to fall back onto them for many things. Alumni are the first step in getting ambassadors for your program. I would definitely be willing to help, but nobody seems interested."

This counts for supporting the program in the Netherlands, in the home country, and online. Case program experts explain that they, much like EUR in general, see the need for developing better ways to engage alumni in the program, as these tools are currently lacking.

(4) Recommendations

Many options to make use of alumni support for marketing efforts have been discussed in the People-factor in the recruitment stage. In this section, it has been shown that there are few efforts on a national and an institutional level in terms of alumni support, while students in focus groups have indicated that they are willing to support their study program. These claims legitimize the recommendations made for the People-factor of the marketing mix. As such, programs can ask the support of international alumni through appointing them as Alumni Ambassadors, and having them help market the program in their home countries or by helping to prepare prospective students for their time in the Netherlands as Alumni Agents. Moreover, programs can ask successful alumni to provide a testimonial about what the study program has done for their careers, and how they are using aspects of the program in their daily working life, to make the program more tangible for prospective students. International alumni remaining in the Netherlands can also be invited to open days, to help inform about the program physically, or as guest lecturers within the program. This would also be a form of engagement and making the alumni feel valued. In order to employ alumni at each of these activities and undertakings, it is important to be aware of where they are and what they are doing. This emphasizes the need for retention. Although philanthropy was mentioned in theory, it was not mentioned in interviews and focus group discussions.

6. Advice plan

On the next pages, all of the recommendations that have been discussed in the findings are summarized in one overview. It focuses mostly on those efforts that need to be made by the case program, on a program level. Findings concerning efforts on a national and institutional-level that the program can potentially tap into are mentioned at the end of each section and marked by an asterisk (*).

One can see that the list of practical ideas for the recruitment stage is much longer than the list of practical ideas for the retention stage. However, one should keep in mind that many of the ideas presented for recruitment are in part dependent on the program's success of executing the ideas for the retention stage. Also, there is some overlap in ideas for both stages. For this, one should keep in mind that, in the recruitment stage, these ideas are used as marketing material, while in the retention stage they are used to establish relationships.

Stage 1: Student recruitment

Program

- Investigate demand
- Practitioner testimonials (including job descriptions)
- Course testimonials
- Showcase international content

** Show rankings of NL/EUR relative to other countries/ institutions and consider moving graduation date*

Price

- Identify scholarships in target countries
- Show relative price compared to other programs
- One-year aspect
- Possibility to work

** Show the scholarship program of the Ministry*

Place

- Use articles from popular media to show the city's popularity
- Showcase local examples of content (complementing Program)
- Communicate new campus

** Link to Study in Holland website*

Promotion

- Identify key terms
- Engage in SEM
- Visibility through master portals
- Identify and engage in social media platforms in target countries
- Develop MOOC representing the program content

Process

- Appoint an Admissions Account Manager
- Promote the dual teaching approach (see Program)
- Lenient admission criteria until a few years after the start of the program

Physical facilities

- Create career services and promote these explicitly (see Stage 2 recommendations)

** Connectedness of the Netherlands in terms of infrastructure*

People

- Statistics of diversity for students, staff, practitioners
- Testimonials of students, alumni, staff and practitioners
- Develop information package for scholars
- Invite scholars to focus groups
- Student/Alumni Ambassador 2.0
- Alumni Agents

Stage 2: Student/alumni retention

Student relationships	Alumni engagement	Alumni support
- Student Account Manager - Recommendation letter templates - Student Ambassadors (2.0) - Personal evaluation moments with teaching staff - Career services/fairs - Linked online career platform - Organization of social events - Organization of content-related activities ** Career portal Nuffic, paid career advisor EUR*	- Development of alumni network - Career services and fairs - Organization of a comprehensive career fair at the start of the academic year - Linked online career platform - Create social media pages - Update with internationally relevant and practical information - Update with program-related information ** Holland Alumni Network by Nuffic, explore the possibility to organize faculty-wide or department-wide activities*	- Alumni Ambassadors (2.0) - Alumni Agents - Alumni testimonials - Guest lectures by alumni

7. Conclusion

Higher education marketing can be considered a relatively new field in academic research. This is due to the fact that, for long, higher education institutions never had to engage in applying corporate strategies like marketing, hence diminishing the need for academic research into the field. However, through developments in politics, society, and within organizations, the need for marketing higher education increased and thereby also the need for academic research – especially in terms of strategic and executive approaches. This thesis aimed to fill part of the gap in existing literature by aiming to answer the following research question:

> *What marketing tools can the Department of Public Administration at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Erasmus University in Rotterdam use to attract international students for its new international master program?"*

Based on this question, several sub questions had been formulated in order to arrive at answering the main question more thoroughly. Through providing a context of the field by looking at trends and developments that have been taken place in the sector over the past years; the discussion of theoretical models and their implications for marketing to international students, which led to the formulation of hypothesis; and the conduct of qualitative expert interviews and focus group discussions with students, this thesis has been able to formulate several practical ideas as response to the research questions.

This thesis has found that, on a national and institutional level, several pull factors have been identified and different marketing tools have been employed to market Dutch higher education to international students. These pull factors can be applied to several of the factors in the 7Ps marketing mix, as they can be shown to prospective students in different ways. However, there seems to be a discrepancy between the pull factors that exist, those that are being communicated, and those that appeal to students. For example, students indicate that their prior knowledge of EUR and Rotterdam is close to non-existent, while there are several pull factors indicated on a national and institutional level that should appeal to students. The presented advice plan has aimed to decrease this discrepancy by offering the case program practical ways of showcasing these pull factors; and by showing the possibility of tapping into national and institutional efforts in marketing the case program.

The Synthesis Model and the 7Ps marketing mix were used to identify possibilities for the recruitment of international students. It was established that, in their search to the ideal study program, international students are looking for imaginative insights in several different ways. Firstly, they are looking for practical aspects in a study program, both in terms of content and execution. It was hypothesized that practical content would be important, but the findings showed that showcasing practical relevance of the content of the program is also considered important to create imaginative insights. In this respect, the case program can meet most of these demands of students, but needs to use ways to clearly communicate these aspects to prospective students, for example through offering course testimonials of students or showing the practical relevance of practitioners. This leads to the second assumption involving imaginative insight, which is the importance of showcasing the people within the program. By for example providing testimonials of teaching staff, invited practitioners, students and alumni with relevant content, appointing Student and Alumni Ambassadors 2.0 – who are also approachable online – and using real-life examples, these imaginative insights are enhanced and the link to the labor market becomes more clear. The most important consideration for the case program seems to be to establish imaginative insights in the labor market, especially because of the lack of internship possibilities. A frequently returning subject, in both of the stages of the advice plan, is the presence of career services and career fairs in a study program.

According to relationship marketing theories, marketing higher education to international students does not end with the recruitment phase. Consequently, this thesis included retention strategies as a second stage in higher education marketing. It has confirmed that establishing a meaningful and personal relationship with students, of which the student can also see the benefits, is the start for a fruitful relationship also after the student graduates. To foster such relationships, it is important for the case program to offer students facilities such as career services, but also the development of practical tools like a template for recommendation letters could be of benefit. Additionally, it is important that alumni are involved in activities organized by the program and preferably even the faculty. Investing in the relationship will make it more likely that students are willing to be of support to their study program after they graduate, by for example offering testimonials, becoming alumni ambassadors or agents, or by giving guest lectures during their career.

Eventually, through the analysis of all findings, an advice plan was presented with theoretically substantiated, practical ideas for the case program which answers the main research question of this thesis. One can see that many of the recommendations made focus on the importance of online marketing for international study programs.

Implications for theory and practice

The research conducted for this thesis and the according findings have certain implications for theory and practice. It has shown that it is possible to combine transactional and relational marketing techniques to a single case, by identifying a difference between two stages in the marketing strategy: the recruitment stage and the retention stage. By developing a practical advice plan based on these theories, it has proven that it is possible to apply both theoretical models to the marketing of higher education to international students. Practically, the results imply that the discrepancies between the efforts on a national, institutional and program level are not coherent with what students expect of programs. The content of many programs can be positioned much stronger than is happening now, which would lead to attracting more students. However, this would mean that, within the organization, staff needs to recognize the long-term benefits of marketing their study programs and they would need to understand what is necessary for this growth in terms of staff and processes etcetera.

Limitations

Chapter 4 discussed most of the methodological limitations to this research. Due to the contemporary nature of the research subject, the choice was made to conduct qualitative, non-comparative research.

On an analytical level, only one individual processed results, so there was a lot of room for interpretation. The attempt to decrease this possibility was made through the formulation of clear research questions, hypothesis, interview questions and asking for clarification when necessary in interviews and focus group discussions. Also, this research chose not to take into account several cultural traits, as the constraints on time and budget did not allow for this. Some results might be more effective for certain audiences than for others, but this has not been tested specifically. Last, due to the decision of the people involved in developing the study program to not conduct any prior market research, it was difficult to formulate extensive objectives based on clearly defined results. The lack of this information has influenced the development of very specific and justified results within this study.

Areas for future research

The implications for theory and practice, and the discussed limitations, offer some focus areas for future research. In terms of methodological possibilities, the conduct of quantitative research to support this study would drastically increase reliability and validity of the research. To further extend insights, it is also useful to conduct a comparative study in which another case is researched in the same way. This could also further highlight differences between respondents' attitudes. Similarly, a larger-scale study, in which more respondents are interviewed, could provide those insights as well. In terms of potential research subjects to fill gaps in the field, it would be useful to conduct a more in-depth study into the role of word-of-mouth in marketing higher education on an international scale. Also, identifying cultural traits and their influences on higher education marketing to international students could provide valuable insights in the development of strategies for specific target countries. This thesis also proposes some new gaps in the field. In its strategy document, EUR mentions sustainability as a selling point of its campus, but none of the respondents mentioned this. Researching staff and student attitudes towards sustainability would therefore close a research gap. Similarly, there needs to be more extensive research into the implementation of MOOCs as a branding tool for international programs.

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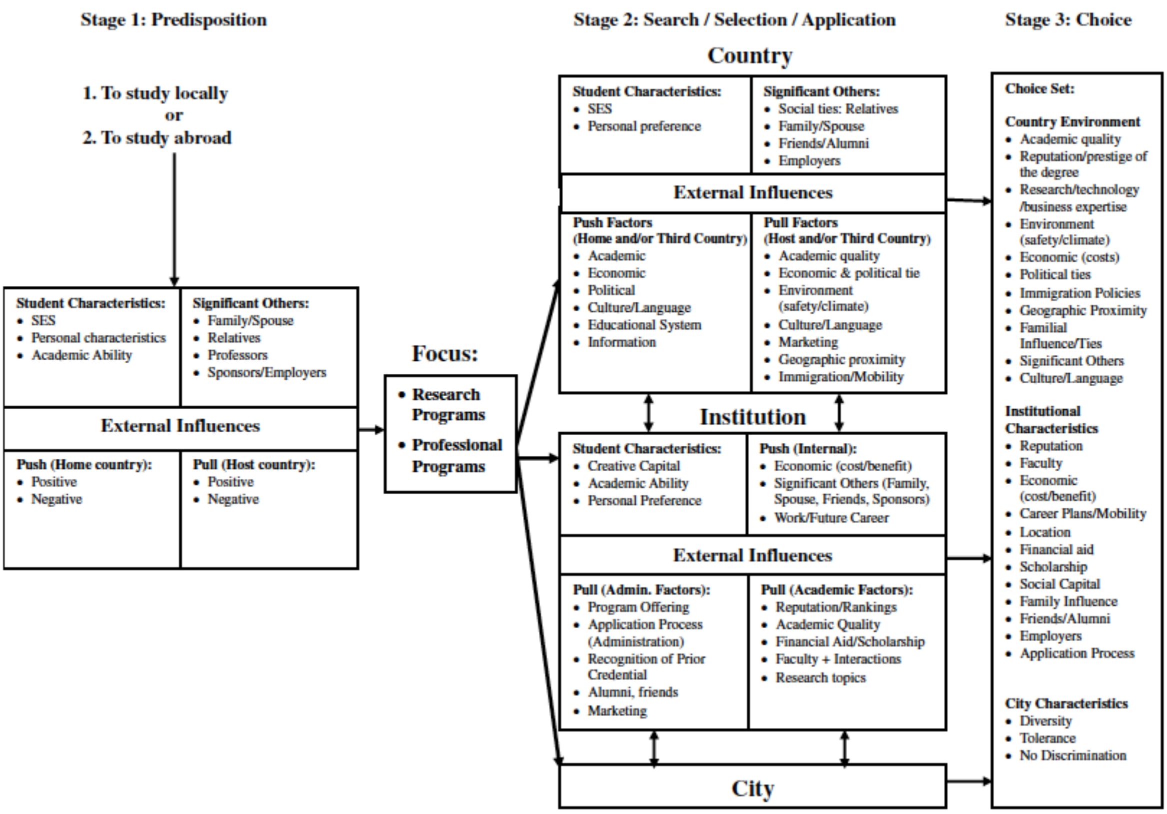
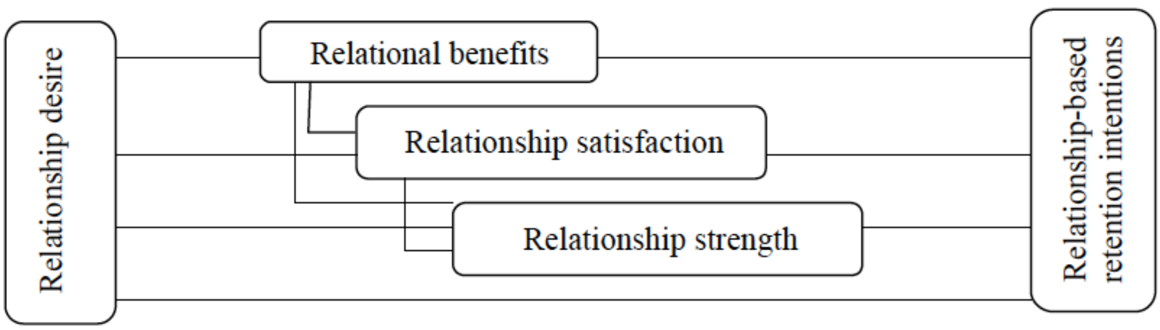
9. Appendix

1.1 – The Synthesis Model on the decision-making process of students going abroad



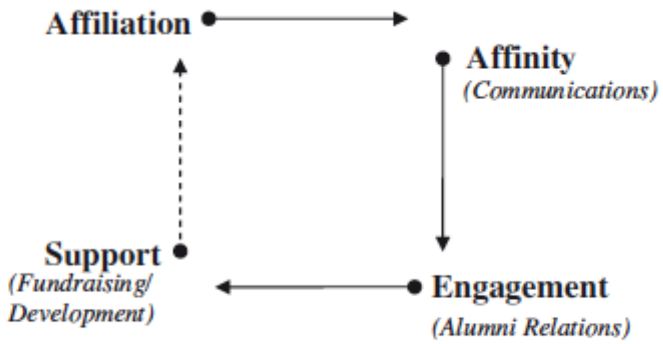
(Chen, 2007, p. 288)

1.2 – Conceptual Framework Relationship Marketing Research



(Raciti, 2002, p. 1443)

1.3 – The Alumni Relationship-Building Cycle Paradigm



( ) term in parenthesis indicates the IA component employed at that stage in the cycle

(Gallo, 2012, p. 45)