

Internationalisation and Marketing of Australian Education in India

Contact details

Dr. H Sharda
Postgraduate Course coordinator
Department of Computer System Engineering,
RMIT University
City Campus
124 La Trobe Street
Melbourne, Victoria - 3000
Australia

Telephone: +61 3 9660 5341

Facsimile: +61 3 9660 5340

E-mail: hemas@rmit.edu.au

Biography

Dr. Hemlata Sharda

Ph.D., (University of Western Australia)

POSITION:

Senior Lecturer, RMIT

Course Coordinator (Postgraduate Courses)

Department of Computer Systems and Engineering

EMPLOYMENT PROFILE:

She is presently working as a senior lecturer in the Department of Computer Systems Engineering. Her other responsibilities involve the postgraduate course coordination and she is also the international coordination for the department of Computer Systems Engineering, at RMIT.

Abstract

Australian Universities have had spectacular success in building and increasing market share in South-East-Asian education market in the last two decades. Today over 70,000 overseas students are studying in Australian Universities, Institutes, TAFE colleges and Secondary schools. Most of these students come from Asian region. Aggressive marketing of education in Asian region has provided substantial economic gains for Australian Universities. The recent downfall in South East Asian economy has resulted in significant decline in overseas enrolments in Australian Universities. Most affected are those who relied on a large full fee paying intake from Malaysia, Honk Kong and Indonesia. Fall in overseas student enrolments from these countries has increased pressure for Australian universities to look at new markets such as India, more favourably now than ever before.

The Indian market offers great opportunity to attract quality full fee paying students especially in the postgraduate area. India also offers great opportunities for mutually beneficial research and education links with Australian institutes and industries. Some of the driving forces for developing stronger ties with India are due to the similarity in the education system of the two countries, as both follow the British education system and the medium of higher education in India is English. The opportunities to collaborate with India have further increased with recent liberalisation of the Indian economy.

Traditional destination for Indian students has been primarily countries such as USA, UK, Canada, France, Germany, Russia and Japan.

To be better known in India as a quality education provider, Australian universities will have to widen their internationalisation strategies, which at present moment are only limited to marketing of their education in India.

This paper proposes that Australian universities should modify their internationalisation strategies for India to capture greater share of Indian market and also highlights the need to promote Australia as a quality education provider in the region. Australia has a potential to become the first choice for Indian students provided Australian universities widen their internationalisation strategies to include mutually beneficial outcome for the two countries.

Introduction

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Traditional destination for Indian students has been primarily countries such as USA, UK, Canada, France, Germany, Russia and Japan. For Indian students USA, UK and Canada continue to be the 'preferred' foreign country for education. Nearly 40,000 students go to North America alone for education from India. These countries had established their linkages with India in the early 50's either through collaborative research or simply by interacting with Indian scientists and engineers while trying to develop education and research infrastructure of India immediately after India's independence. Many Indians had exposure to these countries from the early 50's either as a research trainee or an exchange staff under the Colombo Plan. Also many scholarships were given by the Government and the prominent Universities of these countries to attract quality researchers from India.

Recently these 'preferred' countries have limited the numbers of student visas issued per year, forcing Indian students to look for alternative education providers. In the last five years Australia has emerged as a potential alternative destination for education for Indian students. But inspite of heavy campaigning and advertising by Australian Universities in India, Australia still remains a second choice as an education destination.

This is because Australia does not have the same 'image' advantage like the preferred countries. We are known around the world as a safe tourist destination and a country of friendly people. In India we are also well known as a cricket-playing nation. To be better known in India as a quality education provider, Australian Universities will have to widen their internationalisation strategies, which at the present moment are only limited to marketing of their education in India.

Australia has many natural advantages and it is in a position to establish competitive advantage over the other competing nations. The close vicinity of Australia, good climate, quality of life, cheaper living, and multi-cultural environment are all positive pull factors and can greatly influence the choice of Indian students in selecting Australia as the first choice for education.

Recent informal feedback has shown that word-of-mouth is the most common source of information available to most prospective students. To take advantage of this we will have to give high priority to customer service and satisfaction to our existing students to influence positive campaign. Due to heavy competition in Indian market, Indian, full fee paying students are becoming cautious, choosy and demand educational services, which give the best value for money.

Australian education export is the country's second biggest money earner. It has potential to increase many folds provided we do the right things by our customers. In the light of federal funding cuts this is the major funding resource left for many universities. It will not keep on growing forever, without planning and implementing sound strategies for new markets.

Developing Education Opportunities in India

In order to plan a viable marketing strategy it is important to know why so many Indian students seek education abroad.

Firstly it will be important to understand the demographic differences between the two countries. The population of India is today close to 940 million people as compared to 18 million people in Australia. It is said that with annual population growth rate of 2.1% the population of India increases by the same amount as the total population of Australia each year. The population density per square Km is 257 as compared to 2.2. This statistic helps us to visualise the enormity of human population and the associated problems that occur with large population seeking to educate themselves.

It is estimated that there is a strong 200 million middle class population with disposable income enough to provide for foreign full fee education. It is also said that there are 20 million millionaires in India that again is more than the total population of Australia. This gives us an indication of how big the Indian market can be for Australian education if strategically targeted.

India has world's largest education system with over 200 universities. In addition there are over 500 colleges offering engineering degrees and over a 1000 polytechnics (TAFE equivalent) offering diplomas. Yet with overgrowing population and falling standards in education and poor resources more and more Indian students are looking for quality education opportunities elsewhere. Apart from some elite Indian Institutes majority of the Indian government funded colleges and educational Institutes lack new curriculum, new teaching methods, new educational technology, and require additional infrastructures in order to retain or attract quality students. Given the tight funding in government institutes the Indian parents and students are not too hopeful of any rapid changes in the Indian education scene.

Thanks to the globalisation of Indian economy, the financial situation of the middle class is rapidly improving. It allows Indian parents to think of sending at least one offspring abroad for better education.

The key reasons for studying are many and varied depending on family circumstances. But important reasons tend to be,

*Gain in status and social prestige for parents associated with foreign education of their children.

*Job market in India looks at foreign qualifications favourably. Therefore better job prospects after foreign education is a big motivation for many Indian students, who seek foreign education.

*Prospects of permanent settlement in a Western country also motivates some people to acquire a Western degree.

Choice of a foreign country for education

Many factors determine where the parents want to send their children for education. Countries like UK, USA, and Canada have significant advantage over Australia, when comparing education image (and standards) in the minds of Indian parents and youngster.

US continue to remain the first choice for education for Indian students, as these students have been a part of the American education culture from a long time. This is partly because US educational Institutions regard international students critical to their science and engineering research and commercially important projects. International students also provide low cost labour in the universities undergraduate teaching programs (teaching assistantships), and substantially contribute in enhancing the research profiles of American Universities. This has resulted in a mutually beneficial education environment that makes America quite attractive to Indian students.

Many Indian parents are conservative and over protective about their children's exposure to Western culture. Thus are more than likely to send their children to a country where there is an elder brother, sister or any relative already settled who could act as a guardian especially at an undergraduate level. Here again the UK and North America have an advantage as migration to these countries by Indian professionals started long before Australia. Therefore there is a large Indian population in those countries, which positively influences their siblings, relatives or friends to join them for education opportunities.

Need for a unified internationalisation strategy to increase awareness of Australia in India

Australia will continue to have an image handicap for some more time due to very little exposure to Australian education system by Indian students. Therefore Australian universities will need to integrate their internationalisation objectives and marketing objectives to project Australia as a nation that is committed to internationalisation of education with the prime objective of increasing international competence and global literacy.

We should be able to convince our prospective students that our internationalisation is not solely driven by our 'economic gains'. But is directed at preparing graduates who can accept the challenges of their profession in any part of the world ie., we prepare our graduates to be global engineers, scientists, lawyers, doctors, accountants etc.

The cultural values, traditions and local norms all affect the way one operates in an Asian country, far more than they affect the western world. We may not be able to modify our curricula country specific given the diversity of our customers but we can develop an overall philosophy in our curriculum that emphasises and encourages:

1. Life long learning
2. Global Sharing, and exchange of skills and knowledge.
3. Understanding of economic, technological, social and cultural differences.
4. Need to accept and work with people of diverse cultures and learn to initiate and actively contribute to the maintenance of harmonious relations between nations.

This approach should be clearly visible in our publicity campaigns and reflected in all publicity materials. Cross-cultural awareness programs should form the integral part of curricula for the benefit of both local and international students.

Developing the Internationalisation strategy

Australian universities can develop strategies to capture distinct and discrete markets based on their strengths and capacity to provide quality, innovation and world class education in sought after fields.

Australia should follow the path followed by 'successful countries' like US. Short-term goals should be replaced by a long-term education strategy for India by all Australian Universities. This should be further complimented by Government / Industry liaison with Indian counterparts. This can only happen by frequent report building meetings preferably at three organisation levels: top management of Universities and Industries, followed by academics and administrative level.

The recent New Horizons in Education in Training conference held in India in September 97, was very well received by Australian and Indian participants and was successful in promoting awareness of Australian education, research and training capacity and capability. Such conference should be held from time to time to facilitate links and networking between the two countries. An exchange of cultural /and or a sporting event such as cricket team exchange at university levels can greatly enhance the visibility of Australian Universities in India.

A successful strategy for marketing in India will be to determine what are the sought after fields and disciplines in India. Courses in Information Technology, Telecommunications, Metallurgy, Manufacturing, Chemical and food technology, Hospitality, Fashion design and Management studies are in ever increasing demand.

International strategy development should include the following.

1. A program of educating Australian staff, students and the general community should be undertaken on need for Internationalisation of Australian education. At present there is a substantial level of resentment in the Australian community towards overseas students. They feel the international students are taking places of our local students.
2. Address the issues of how to manage resource and optimise the opportunities of formal exchange agreements. **(Similar to the ones between USA and India)**
3. For full fee paying market, develop a marketing strategy, which is customer focussed and ensures the delivery of quality service. Address the teaching and learning difficulties in the cross-cultural environment. **(Directed at Customer satisfaction)**
4. Highlights the need for internationalisation of curriculum, to course development and accreditation committees. **(Important as many Indians seek job overseas after finishing their studies)**

5. Actively promote the concept of international staff exchange by providing greater support than at present. (**Increase general awareness**).
6. Use alumni in student recruitment and relationship building ventures. (**Add Value to your product**)
7. It should be emphasised that internationalisation of Australian education benefits local staff and students as well as it,
 - Provides an opportunity for local students to achieve international competence through exposure to international study programs, via students and staff exchange, and by studying internationally recognised curriculum, which will lead to understanding and appreciation of different cultures.
 - Creates an opportunity for international level recognition for quality teaching and research for Australian staff.
 - Increases international competence, the ability to understand, communicate and work with people of different societies and cultures, which is emerging need for Australia's future relations with its neighbours.
 - Enhances mobility of staff and students will automatically improve the standing of present international agreements and regional activities, and also the nature of research teaching and trade.

Some recommendations for education marketing strategy development for India

In developing marketing strategy, present purely commercial approach to education campaign must make way for some mutually beneficial education arrangements between the two countries. In the absence of collaborative links with Indian education institutes and industry Australian Universities have been criticised for selling education solely for their economic gains. In the light of such criticism it will be in Australian Universities advantage to strategically plan and develop collaborative links which mutually benefit the two countries.

The Australian degrees are not accredited in India. Therefore obtaining accreditation for all Australian degrees should be given high priority by Universities and the Education Ministry.

At present all different universities, TAFE colleges, private colleges, English language centres are all inventing their own marketing strategies which are focussed entirely on recruiting full fee paying students. Even if only a small percentage of customers believe that Australian education campaign are short term focussed, unrecognised, uncoordinated and unreliable there is a danger that in times to come we may loose potential students. Hence there is an urgent need for a national policy on education marketing for Australia and such policy should clearly spell out do's and don't for all Australian universities, TAFE and private colleges competing for their share of Indian market.

Australian advertisement for education is either through a marketing advertisement in an Indian newspaper or through local private education agents employed by the universities. These approaches of marketing lack the credibility required in the Indian education market. In India one comes across many agents posing to be experts on Australian education and are counselling students without adequate training. Many innocent and unsuspecting students have been the targets of these agents and this has created a very poor marketing image especially for some private and TAFE institutes. This problem should be addressed at a national level.

India is predominantly a postgraduate market. The Australian universities must look at expanding the postgraduate course work offerings in the fields of science, technology, and management. To attract quality students into research program scholarships should be provided or teaching assistantships should be created like in America. Twinning arrangements and offshore delivery should be explored in the disciplines, which are in high demand.

In the specific field of Science and Technology, India offers a vast opportunity for long term collaborations and partnerships for research and industry linkages. However, the success of collaborative ventures depends to a large extent on individuals, their personal commitment, and their capability to adjust to, and accept, the differences in thinking and in conditions of living and working in India.

Some problems are bound to occur initially when an affluent and industrialised West tries to interact with a developing country. India, although highly advanced in technology, still remains complex and diverse for an outsider. One has to realise that problems will initially always arise in negotiations, as different traditions influence the value systems and behavioural patterns of people. Also different economic and social structures determine the requirements to be met by engineers, scientists in their working habits and professional expectations. But given the vast resources of Indian scientists and engineers in Australian Universities the task of setting up mutually beneficial links and education programs for Australian universities can be relatively easy.

Many memorandum of understanding MOU's exist between some Australian and Indian universities and Institutes but the mobility of staff and students remains insignificant in most cases. Some of these links have failed to be productive as these universities and institutes either do not recognise or are ill equipped to tackle the difficulties of cross-cultural relationships. Here again people with existing links with India can advise on protocols for such negotiations.

Australia should be encouraged by the successful bilateral cooperation between India and several other countries such as UK, USA, Russia and Germany continuing from the last 40 years especially in the field of Science and Engineering. The quality of the people at the negotiating end is critical. This can only be improved by frequent rapport building meetings at top levels.

In essence to increase the profile of Australian education emphasis should now be given to

1. Increasing joint teaching and research with sister universities and institutions, before embarking on a full fee paying recruitment of students
2. Seeking international recognition of Australian academic programs and degrees and we should offer only accredited degrees overseas.
3. Employing only qualified education consultants in India. At present there is no control.
4. Participation of academics in education promotions and exhibitions should be encouraged. Indian students want to get the first hand information from the people who are likely to be incharge of their course. A teacher's words are sacred in the minds of Indian people.
5. Promotion of cultural awareness programs in the two countries.
6. Providing scholarships and teaching assistantships to students based on merit.

Conclusion

With globalisation of Indian economy and open trade policy, it should now be possible for Australia to attract many more quality students from that region and successfully negotiate collaborative research and teaching links, which are mutually beneficial.

One should note that the competition in Indian market is on very fast increase, And the range of options to Indian customers is many. Unlike Germany, U.K, USA who have established a global position in offering best science and technical education, Australia is only known for cricket, tourism, and export of wool and some commodities in India. In order to change this non-industrial image Australian Universities will have to give a greater priority for joint research ventures between Australian and Indian education institutes and industry.

In developing marketing strategies Australian Universities have to be aware of not only the internal competition but also the external competition as well. They can increase their market share by providing better educational package than competitors, whether through lower prices or through superior quality services. Australian Universities must offer internationalised curriculum and offer only internationally accredited degrees.

Combined effort should be devoted to enhance education 'Image' of Australia in India in order to become the 'preferred destination' for Indian students. Given the strategic importance of Asia to our national interest a strategy that focuses on overall internationalisation of our education system leading to positive changes and continuous improvement of attitudes, cultural enrichment, better administrative and academic structures, procedures, services and reflection of our mutually beneficial goals is very much desired. It is true that full fee paying students will go to the best university they can find in the world.