Buletinul Ştiinţific al Universităţii Politehnica Timişoara
Seria Limbi moderne

Scientific Bulletin of the Politehnica University of Timişoara
Transactions on Modern Languages

Vol. 25, Special Issue: Language, Communication and Society / 2026

Communicating Universities Internationally: Communication Professionals' Perspectives on Attracting International Students

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Abstract: The internationalisation of higher education has increased the importance of effective communication in attracting prospective international students. This exploratory mixed-methods study investigates how university communication professionals conceptualise communication strategies aimed at international student recruitment. Drawing on survey data collected from professionals responsible for communication, marketing, and student outreach activities in higher education institutions, the study examines preferred communication channels, information priorities, linguistic and stylistic choices, and approaches to balancing institutional promotion with student-centred communication. The findings indicate a strong reliance on digital communication channels, a prioritisation of practical and decision-oriented information, and a preference for clear, accessible, and student-focused messaging. The study suggests that contemporary university communication increasingly combines promotional objectives with student-centred information strategies, contributing to current discussions on educational marketing, institutional communication, and the internationalisation of higher education.

Keywords: university communication; international student recruitment; educational marketing discourse; student-centred communication; digital communication; higher education internationalisation; institutional communication

1. Introduction

The internationalisation of higher education has transformed universities into increasingly global actors competing for visibility, reputation, and student recruitment across national borders. As international student mobility continues to shape higher

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education landscapes, universities are required not only to offer attractive academic programmes but also to communicate their institutional identity effectively to diverse audiences (Marginson 2018; Altbach and De Wit 2020). In this context, communication has become a strategic component of internationalisation, influencing how prospective students perceive universities and make study-abroad decisions.

Digital technologies have further intensified the importance of communication in higher education. University websites, social media platforms, international study portals, and online promotional materials frequently constitute the first point of contact between institutions and prospective international students (Maringe and Gibbs 2009; Royo-Vela and Hünermund 2016). Consequently, universities are increasingly expected to provide accessible, credible, and student-oriented information capable of addressing both academic and practical concerns related to international study.

Existing research has examined various aspects of higher education marketing, institutional branding, and digital recruitment strategies (Hemsley-Brown 2011; Chapleo and O'Sullivan 2017). At the same time, scholars have emphasised the growing relevance of audience-centred communication, highlighting the need for universities to adapt their messages to the informational needs, expectations, and experiences of prospective students (Maringe 2006; Temple and Callender 2012). Despite these developments, relatively little attention has been paid to the perspectives of communication professionals themselves, namely those responsible for designing and implementing communication strategies aimed at attracting international students.

This article seeks to address this gap by examining how university communication professionals conceptualise effective communication in international student recruitment. Drawing on survey data collected from professionals working in international offices, communication departments, and university management, the study investigates perceptions of communication channels, information priorities, communication styles, and institutional positioning in international contexts.

The study is guided by the following research questions: (1) Which communication channels are considered most effective for attracting international students? (2) What types of information are prioritised in international university communication? (3) How do communication professionals describe effective communication styles and linguistic practices? (4) How do communication professionals balance institutional promotion with student-centred communication?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Internationalisation and University Communication

The internationalisation of higher education has transformed universities into global actors competing for students, academic staff, research partnerships, and institutional visibility. International student mobility has increased considerably over the past decades, prompting higher education institutions to develop increasingly sophisticated strategies for engaging prospective students across national and cultural boundaries

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(Altbach and Knight, 2007; De Wit, Hunter, Howard, and Egron-Polak, 2015; Dejica and Stoian, 2018). Within this context, communication has become a strategic component of internationalisation efforts, contributing not only to information dissemination but also to reputation building, institutional positioning, and relationship development with diverse audiences.

Universities are expected to communicate complex information concerning academic programmes, admission requirements, tuition fees, support services, and career opportunities while simultaneously promoting a distinctive institutional identity (Maringe and Gibbs, 2009). As a result, communication activities increasingly intersect with branding, public relations, and strategic marketing practices (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2015; Ciobanu and Dejica, 2025a; Ciobanu and Dejica, 2025b). Effective communication is particularly important in the international context, where prospective students often rely on mediated representations of institutions when making decisions about study destinations (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002).

Recent scholarship suggests that international student recruitment should not be understood merely as a marketing activity but rather as a multidimensional communication process involving the negotiation of institutional values, educational opportunities, and student expectations (Foroudi, Dinnie, Kitchen, Melewar and Foroudi, 2017). Consequently, studies addressing university communication contribute to a broader understanding of how higher education institutions construct visibility and legitimacy in an increasingly competitive global environment.

2.2 Digital Communication and International Student Recruitment

Digital technologies have fundamentally reshaped the ways in which universities communicate with prospective students. Institutional websites, social media platforms, virtual events, and online recruitment campaigns now represent essential channels through which universities establish contact with international audiences (Rutter, Roper, and Lettice, 2016). The growing reliance on digital communication reflects broader changes in information-seeking behaviour, particularly among younger generations who increasingly expect immediate, accessible, and personalised information.

Among the available communication channels, university websites remain central sources of information. Beyond providing factual content, websites function as strategic communication tools through which institutions present their academic profile, values, achievements, and international opportunities (Chapleo and Simms, 2010).

Social media platforms have further expanded universities' communicative reach by enabling direct interaction with prospective students and facilitating the dissemination of both official and user-generated content (Peruta and Shields, 2017). These platforms support more immediate and personalised forms of engagement, allowing institutions to showcase student experiences, campus life, international mobility opportunities, and alumni success stories. Research indicates that

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prospective students frequently perceive social media content as more authentic and relatable than traditional promotional materials (Constantinides and Zinck Stagno, 2011).

At the same time, digital communication entails important challenges. Universities must compete for attention in highly saturated information environments while ensuring consistency across multiple channels and maintaining credibility among increasingly discerning audiences (Foroudi et al., 2017). These developments have intensified the need for communication strategies that are both informative and persuasive without compromising transparency or trust.

2.3 Student-Centred Communication in Higher Education

Recent developments in higher education communication have been characterised by an increasing emphasis on student-centred approaches. Drawing on principles of audience-centred communication and user-oriented information design, universities increasingly seek to adapt their messages to prospective students' needs, expectations, and decision-making processes (Kotler & Fox, 1995; Maringe, 2006).

Student-centred communication prioritises relevance, accessibility, and practical usefulness. Rather than focusing exclusively on institutional achievements, rankings, or promotional claims, such communication provides information that supports prospective students in evaluating educational opportunities and making informed choices (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). Issues such as programme content, admission procedures, tuition costs, scholarship opportunities, accommodation, employability, and student support services are therefore frequently positioned at the forefront of recruitment communication.

The shift towards student-centred communication also has important linguistic and rhetorical implications. Studies of higher education discourse suggest that prospective students respond more positively to clear, direct, and accessible language than to highly formal or bureaucratic communication (Fairclough, 1993; Mautner, 2010; Dejica, 2011). Universities increasingly employ narrative and conversational communication strategies that encourage prospective students to imagine themselves as members of future academic communities. Such approaches contribute to stronger engagement while maintaining the informational function of institutional communication.

At a broader level, student-centred communication reflects changing understandings of the relationship between universities and their audiences. Contemporary communication strategies increasingly balance institutional promotion with responsiveness to student concerns, experiences, and aspirations (Molesworth, Scullion, & Nixon, 2011). This development suggests a gradual shift from institution-centred models of communication towards more dialogic and participatory approaches.

Despite growing interest in university branding, digital communication, and higher education marketing, relatively limited attention has been paid to the perspectives of communication professionals who design and implement these

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strategies. Examining how such professionals conceptualise effective communication for international student recruitment can therefore provide valuable insights into contemporary university communication practices and contribute to ongoing discussions concerning internationalisation, digital engagement, and student-centred communication in higher education.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed an exploratory survey design to investigate how university communication professionals conceptualise effective communication strategies for attracting international students. The decision to use a questionnaire-based approach was motivated by the need to capture both quantitative and qualitative insights into contemporary university communication practices. While previous studies have examined institutional websites, branding strategies, and digital recruitment campaigns (Chapleo & Simms, 2010; Constantinides & Zinck Stagno, 2011), comparatively little attention has been paid to the perspectives of the professionals responsible for designing and implementing such communication activities.

The survey combined closed-ended and open-ended questions, enabling the collection of both descriptive statistical data and qualitative reflections on communication priorities, challenges, and practices. This mixed approach allowed for the identification of dominant trends while also capturing participants' individual experiences and professional judgments.

3.2 Participants

The study involved nine professionals responsible for strategic and operational communication activities in higher education institutions. Participants occupied positions related to institutional communication, marketing, public relations, university management, international recruitment, and student outreach. The respondents represented four higher education institutions: Politehnica University of Timișoara, West University of Timișoara, Romanian-American University, and University of Almeria (Spain). The sample included staff members from international offices, communication and marketing departments, and university management structures, providing a variety of perspectives on communication practices aimed at attracting international students.

Given the target profile of practitioners directly overseeing international recruitment and communication, a purposeful expert sampling approach was adopted across selected public and private European higher education institutions. Considering the exploratory nature of the study and the small sample size (n=9), the findings are not intended to be statistically representative of the higher education sector as a whole. Rather, they offer qualitative and descriptive insights into how specialized communication practitioners currently understand, conceptualise, and execute international student communication within their institutional contexts.

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3.3 Research Instrument

Data were collected through an online questionnaire specifically designed for professionals involved in university communication. The instrument consisted of a series of thematic sections addressing communication channels, information priorities, digital communication practices, communication style, institutional positioning, and student engagement.

Several questions employed multiple-choice formats to identify preferred communication channels and information categories, while others invited participants to provide open-ended responses concerning communication strategies, language use, and perceived challenges in attracting international students. The questionnaire sought to explore not only what communication professionals communicate, but also how and why they communicate in particular ways.

The instrument was designed around four broad areas of inquiry: the effectiveness of communication channels, the importance of different types of information in recruitment communication, the linguistic and stylistic characteristics of effective communication, and the balance between institutional promotion and student-centred messaging.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was administered electronically during the spring of 2026. Responses were collected anonymously and subsequently exported for analysis. Quantitative data obtained from closed-ended questions were analysed using descriptive statistics, primarily frequencies and percentages, in order to identify common patterns across participants' responses.

Qualitative data derived from open-ended questions were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Responses were carefully reviewed and coded to identify recurring themes concerning communication practices, student engagement, informational needs, and institutional positioning. Through an iterative coding process, broader thematic categories were developed and compared across responses.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings provided a more comprehensive understanding of how university communication professionals conceptualise communication aimed at attracting international students. This approach facilitated the identification of both dominant communication practices and underlying professional assumptions regarding effective international recruitment communication.

4. Findings

4.1 Digital Channels as Drivers of International Visibility

Participants identified digital communication as the cornerstone of contemporary international student recruitment. Across the survey responses, social media platforms emerged as the most frequently mentioned communication channel, followed closely by university websites and specialised study platforms such as Studyportals and

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Mastersportal. Traditional communication channels, including brochures, flyers, and education fairs, were also considered relevant by some respondents, although their importance appeared secondary compared to digital communication environments. The findings suggest that communication professionals increasingly perceive international student recruitment as a process that takes place primarily within digital ecosystems rather than through conventional promotional activities (Figure 1).

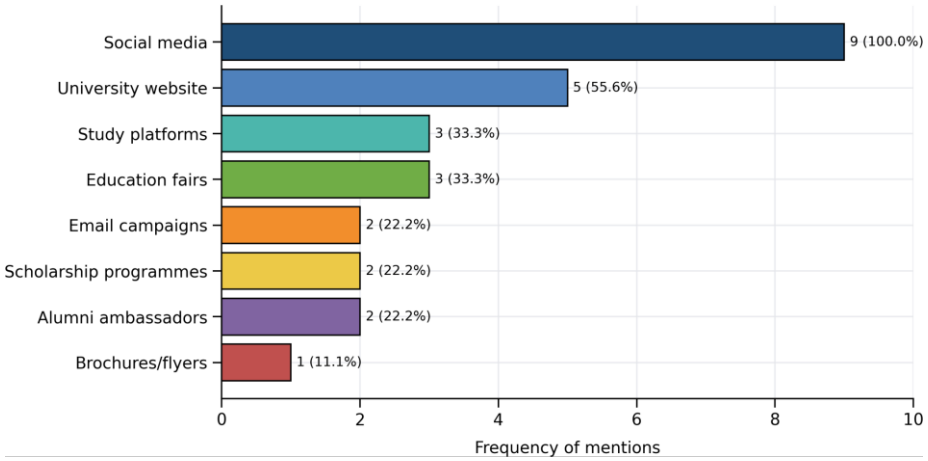


Figure 1. Communication channels perceived as most effective for attracting international students (n = 9).

The prominence attributed to social media reflects broader changes in the way prospective students search for information and evaluate study opportunities abroad. Participants consistently highlighted the capacity of social networking platforms to increase institutional visibility and facilitate direct engagement with international audiences. At the same time, respondents did not view social media as an autonomous communication tool. Rather, it was regarded as part of a broader communication strategy that directs prospective students towards more comprehensive institutional information available through official university channels.

Despite the rapid expansion of social media, the university website retained a central position within international communication strategies. Most respondents considered the institutional website highly relevant for attracting international students, with several participants assigning the highest possible relevance score. The website appears to function as the principal source of authoritative information, providing potential applicants with detailed information about programmes, admission procedures, tuition fees, accommodation, scholarships, student services, and university life.

When asked to identify the most important website sections for international applicants, respondents most frequently referred to admission requirements, tuition

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and scholarship information, programme descriptions, accommodation information, student life resources, and visa-related support services. These responses indicate that communication professionals view the website primarily as an informational resource rather than a branding instrument. While institutional reputation, research opportunities, and rankings were also considered relevant, practical information appeared to occupy a more prominent place in communication priorities.

Specialised study platforms were also frequently identified as effective recruitment channels. Respondents recognised their role in increasing international visibility and connecting prospective students with academic programmes across institutions and countries. These platforms may therefore be understood as intermediary spaces that facilitate access to institutional information while simultaneously enabling universities to position themselves within increasingly competitive global higher education markets.

Overall, the findings reveal a communication environment characterised by strong digitalisation and the integration of multiple online channels. Rather than relying on a single communication medium, professionals appear to favour a complementary approach in which social media enhances visibility, study platforms support discoverability, and university websites provide detailed and trustworthy information. This integrated communication model suggests that digital visibility alone is insufficient for international recruitment. Visibility must be accompanied by accessible, comprehensive, and student-oriented information capable of supporting prospective students throughout their decision-making process.

4.2 Information Priorities in International Student Communication

Beyond the selection of communication channels, respondents consistently emphasised the importance of providing information that directly supports international students' academic and practical decision-making processes. Among the information categories prioritised when presenting universities internationally, admission requirements and tuition fees and scholarships emerged as the primary topics (66.7%), followed closely by programme details and career opportunities (55.6%). Participants also highlighted student support services, accommodation options, and visa-related information as essential components across broader institutional communication channels. Each of the n=9 respondents selected exactly 3 priority categories for international presentation, resulting in 27 total selections (100% baseline calculated with n=9; Table 1).

Information category	Frequency	Percentage
Admission requirements	6	66.7%
Tuition and scholarships	6	66.7%
Programme details	5	55.6%
Career opportunities	5	55.6%

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Graduate success stories	1	11.1%
Rankings and reputation	1	11.1%
Student experience	1	11.1%
International partnerships	1	11.1%
Cost of living	1	11.1%

Table 1. Information Priorities in International Student Communication

A notable finding concerns the apparent convergence between what communication professionals choose to communicate and what prospective international students are perceived to need. Respondents repeatedly stressed the importance of clear and accessible information regarding admission procedures, financial aspects of study, housing opportunities, and administrative requirements. Rather than focusing exclusively on institutional achievements or promotional messages, communication professionals appear to prioritise information that helps students navigate the practical realities of studying abroad.

The responses to the open-ended questions further support this interpretation. Participants reported that international students frequently struggle to find comprehensive information concerning accommodation, scholarships, living costs, visa procedures, healthcare, employment opportunities, and everyday aspects of university life. Several respondents suggested that available information is often fragmented across multiple institutional platforms, making it difficult for prospective students to access reliable and consolidated guidance.

Interestingly, respondents frequently identified practical information as an area where communication efforts should be strengthened. This observation suggests that effective international communication extends beyond institutional visibility and promotional messaging. Visibility may attract attention, but practical information appears to play a decisive role in transforming interest into informed decision-making. Consequently, the findings indicate that international recruitment communication increasingly relies on informational credibility and transparency as persuasive resources.

Taken together, these results point towards a communication model centred on student needs rather than institutional self-presentation. While academic quality, research achievements, and international reputation remain important components of university communication, respondents appear to view practical and actionable information as fundamental to attracting and supporting prospective international students.

4.3 Student-Centred Communication and Linguistic Positioning

The survey also explored how communication professionals perceive the linguistic and stylistic characteristics of effective international communication. Overall, the responses indicate a strong preference for communication practices that place

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prospective students at the centre of the communicative process. Participants generally agreed that communication materials should address students directly and help them imagine themselves as members of the university community.

The responses suggest that successful communication is not solely defined by the transmission of information but also by the creation of meaningful connections between prospective students and the institution. By encouraging students to envision future academic and professional experiences, communication materials contribute to the construction of an attractive and relatable institutional narrative. Respondents therefore appear to regard communication as both informative and experiential.

Open-ended responses provide further insight into preferred linguistic practices. Many participants reported avoiding technical terminology, bureaucratic language, unexplained acronyms, overly formal expressions, and language that may appear inaccessible to international audiences. Several respondents explicitly advocated for clear, simple, friendly, and human-centred communication, emphasising the need to reduce linguistic barriers and facilitate understanding.

The emphasis placed on accessible communication reflects a broader concern with inclusivity and comprehensibility. International student audiences are linguistically and culturally diverse, and respondents appeared aware that institutional communication must accommodate varying levels of familiarity with local educational systems and administrative processes. Consequently, clarity emerges not merely as a stylistic preference but as a strategic communication objective.

The findings therefore suggest the emergence of a communication approach characterised by direct engagement, accessibility, and empathy towards prospective students. Within this framework, language functions not only as a vehicle for institutional information but also as a means of reducing uncertainty and fostering a sense of connection between students and the university.

4.4 Balancing Information and Promotion

A further theme emerging from the survey concerns the relationship between informative and promotional communication. While respondents recognised the importance of institutional reputation and positive self-presentation, the findings indicate a preference for balanced communication strategies that combine promotional elements with credible and useful information.

Participants generally expressed moderate to strong agreement regarding the role of evaluative language in international communication. Terms associated with excellence, leadership, innovation, and prestige were considered relevant by a majority of respondents. At the same time, open-ended responses reveal a degree of caution towards excessive promotional language. Several participants explicitly reported avoiding exaggerated claims or highly evaluative discourse, suggesting that credibility and authenticity remain important concerns in international communication.

This pattern is also reflected in respondents' descriptions of communication focus. Most participants (88.9%) characterised their institutions' communication

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materials as balanced, integrating student-oriented information with institutional achievements and strategic messages. Only a limited number of responses suggested a predominantly institution-centred approach (11.1%), whereas none of the respondents identified their communication as explicitly student-centred (Figure 2).

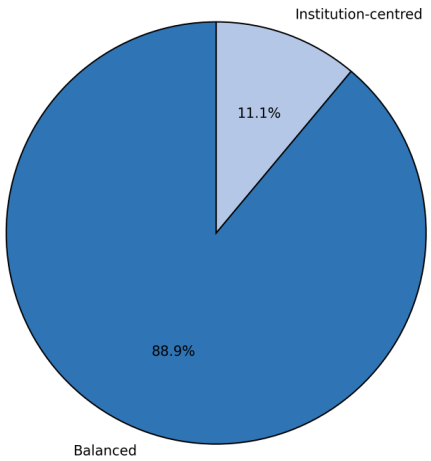


Figure 2. Communication Orientation of Institutional Communication Materials (n = 9)

These findings indicate that communication professionals do not perceive effective recruitment communication as a choice between information and promotion. Instead, they appear to favour an integrated approach in which institutional strengths are communicated through information that is meaningful and relevant to prospective students. Rankings, research achievements, reputation, and international partnerships remain important, yet they are presented alongside information concerning employability, student support, affordability, and campus life.

Consequently, international communication emerges as a process of negotiating institutional aspirations and student expectations. The findings suggest that communication professionals seek to position their universities as attractive destinations while simultaneously maintaining credibility through transparency and informational value.

4.5 Imagining the Future: How Universities Position International Study

The survey further explored the types of futures that universities communicate to prospective international students. The responses reveal that communication materials tend to emphasize future-oriented narratives associated with research excellence (66.7%), student experience (55.6%), and career success (55.6%). These themes were among the most frequently selected by respondents and appear to represent key dimensions of institutional positioning (Table 2).

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Future-oriented narrative	Frequency	Percentage
Research excellence	6	66.7%
Student experience	5	55.6%
Career success	5	55.6%
Innovation / entrepreneurship	3	33.3%
Global citizenship	2	22.2%
Prestige / elite membership	2	22.2%
Mobility opportunities	1	11.1%
Social impact	1	11.1%

Table 2. Future-Oriented Narratives Promoted through International University Communication (n = 9)

Particularly noteworthy is the dual prominence of research- and career-oriented narratives. While research excellence emerged as the single most frequent narrative (66.7%), respondents consistently identified career success and employability (55.6%) among the essential outcomes communicated to international audiences. This emphasis suggests that universities frame higher education both as an environment of academic distinction and as an investment in future professional success.

At the same time, communication professionals described international education as an experience extending beyond purely academic or professional outcomes. Notions such as student experience (55.6%), global citizenship (22.2%), mobility opportunities (11.1%), and social impact (11.1%) point towards broader representations of personal, cultural, and social development. These findings suggest that universities seek to position themselves not merely as providers of qualifications but also as environments that facilitate global engagement and holistic personal growth.

Research excellence (66.7%) and innovation/entrepreneurship (33.3%) also occupied a central place in respondents' representations of institutional communication. Such themes contribute to the construction of university identities associated with knowledge production, technological advancement, and academic achievement. However, these elements were rarely presented in isolation. Instead, they appeared alongside narratives of support, affordability, employability, and student experience, reinforcing the balanced communication approach observed throughout the survey.

5. Discussion

The findings suggest that contemporary university communication aimed at attracting international students is characterised by a gradual shift towards more student-oriented communication practices. While institutional reputation, research

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achievements, and promotional narratives continue to play an important role, communication professionals increasingly emphasise accessibility, practical support, and informational value. This tendency reflects broader transformations in higher education communication, where international student recruitment is no longer understood solely as a marketing activity but also as a process of building trust and facilitating informed decision-making.

5.1 The Rise of Student-Centred University Communication

One of the most notable findings of the study is the prominence of student-centred communication. Respondents consistently highlighted the importance of addressing prospective students directly, helping them imagine themselves as members of the university community, and presenting information in clear and accessible forms. Such preferences suggest a move away from institution-focused communication models towards approaches that prioritise the informational needs and experiences of prospective students.

This shift aligns with previous research emphasising the growing importance of audience-centred and user-oriented communication in higher education (Maringe 2006; Temple and Callender 2012). As international students increasingly rely on digital environments when exploring study opportunities, effective communication requires universities to understand and anticipate the concerns of diverse audiences. Communication therefore becomes less concerned with presenting institutional achievements in isolation and more focused on demonstrating relevance to prospective students' educational and personal aspirations.

The findings also indicate that language plays a central role in this process. Respondents frequently advocated clear, simple, and human-centred communication while avoiding bureaucratic terminology, unexplained acronyms, and excessively formal language. Such preferences demonstrate an awareness that communication effectiveness depends not only on the information presented but also on the linguistic choices through which that information is conveyed. In this respect, communication practices contribute to reducing uncertainty and increasing accessibility for international audiences.

5.2 Information as a Form of Persuasion

A second important finding concerns the relationship between information and persuasion. Traditional perspectives on university marketing often emphasise branding, reputation, and promotional discourse as key mechanisms for attracting students (Chapleo and O'Sullivan 2017; Hemsley-Brown 2011). The present findings suggest a somewhat different picture. Communication professionals repeatedly prioritised practical information relating to admission requirements, tuition fees, accommodation, scholarships, visa procedures, student support, and career opportunities.

These priorities indicate that information itself may function as a persuasive resource. Rather than relying exclusively on claims of excellence or prestige,

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universities appear to strengthen their attractiveness by providing accurate, transparent, and useful information that assists prospective students throughout the decision-making process. The respondents' observations concerning information that students often struggle to locate further reinforce this interpretation. Difficulties associated with housing, living costs, administrative procedures, and everyday student life suggest that communication effectiveness extends beyond institutional promotion towards supporting prospective students in navigating complex educational and social environments.

Consequently, persuasion may increasingly emerge through informational credibility rather than through overt promotional discourse. Universities that successfully address prospective students' practical concerns may be better positioned to establish trust and foster positive perceptions among international audiences. This observation extends existing discussions of higher education marketing by highlighting the communicative value of transparency and informational completeness.

5.3 From Institutional Reputation to Future-Oriented Narratives

The findings further reveal that communication professionals frame international study through a series of interconnected future-oriented narratives. Career success, employability, research excellence, innovation, global citizenship, mobility opportunities, and student experience emerged as recurring themes in respondents' descriptions of institutional communication. These themes suggest that universities increasingly communicate not only present institutional characteristics but also possible futures associated with studying at their institutions.

Such representations are consistent with contemporary understandings of higher education as a transformative experience connected to both professional and personal development (Marginson 2018). By emphasising future opportunities, universities invite prospective students to envision the potential outcomes of their educational choices. Importantly, however, these future-oriented narratives were rarely detached from practical and student-centred concerns. Instead, respondents frequently linked aspirations regarding careers, research, or international mobility to concrete information about support services, affordability, accommodation, and study programmes.

This combination of aspiration and practicality represents perhaps the most significant contribution of the study. Rather than portraying international recruitment communication as a choice between institutional promotion and student support, the findings indicate the emergence of a balanced communication model that integrates both dimensions. Universities seek to communicate excellence and opportunity while simultaneously addressing the concrete informational needs of prospective students. In doing so, they construct communication environments that position international study not only as an academic choice but also as a credible and attainable future pathway.

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Overall, the study suggests that contemporary international university communication is increasingly characterised by student-centred discourse, informational transparency, and future-oriented institutional narratives. Together, these elements point towards an emerging model of international student communication in which persuasion is achieved not through promotional claims alone but through the strategic combination of visibility, credibility, accessibility, and relevance.

6. Conclusions

This study explored the perspectives of university communication professionals regarding effective strategies for attracting international students. The findings indicate that contemporary university communication is increasingly shaped by digital communication environments, with social media, institutional websites, and specialised study platforms playing complementary roles in international student recruitment. At the same time, the results suggest that successful communication extends beyond visibility and promotion, requiring the provision of clear, relevant, and accessible information that supports prospective students throughout their decision-making process.

The study further highlights the importance of student-centred communication practices. Respondents consistently emphasised the value of direct, accessible, and human-centred language, while expressing reservations towards bureaucratic, overly technical, or excessively promotional discourse. Effective communication was associated not only with informing prospective students but also with helping them envision their future academic and professional development within a particular institutional context.

An important contribution of the study concerns the relationship between information and persuasion in international university communication. Rather than viewing promotional discourse as the primary means of attracting students, communication professionals appeared to prioritise transparency, practical support, and informational credibility. The findings therefore suggest that persuasive communication increasingly relies on addressing prospective students' concrete needs and concerns, particularly those related to admissions, accommodation, financial support, employability, and student life.

Overall, the results point towards an emerging model of international student communication characterised by the integration of digital visibility, student-centred discourse, informational transparency, and future-oriented institutional narratives. Within this model, universities seek to balance the communication of institutional strengths with the practical information required by prospective students, thereby creating communication environments that are both informative and persuasive. In this respect, the study contributes to current discussions on higher education communication by highlighting the emergence of a balanced communication model that integrates institutional promotion with student-centred information provision.

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The findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the study is based on a relatively small sample of communication professionals, which limits the generalisability of the results. Second, most respondents were affiliated with Romanian higher education institutions, reducing the geographical diversity of perspectives represented in the dataset. Finally, the study focuses on professional perceptions rather than on actual communication materials or the experiences of international students themselves.

Future research could build on these findings by involving larger and more internationally diverse samples of communication professionals. Comparative studies across countries, institutional types, or regions could further investigate how communication strategies vary in different higher education contexts. In addition, future studies may combine survey data with analyses of university websites, social media content, recruitment materials, and international student experiences in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary university communication practices.

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