

Mozheyevskaya Alisa Evgenyevna

senior lecturer

Maria Khairullina

senior lecturer

South Ural State University (national research university)

Chelyabinsk, Chelyabinsk region

FOREIGN APPLICANTS/STUDENTS INFORMATION SUPPORT IN THE RUSSIAN UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

Abstract: this article is devoted to the question of attracting foreign students to study at Russian universities, which leads to the economic development of the city and region. The article discusses the main channels for presenting information for foreign citizens about education in Russia. The article is studying the role of the official website influencing the interest of foreign applicants when choosing an educational institution. Problems that impede effective information work are considered, and possible ways for their solution are presented.

Keywords: motivation, information support, foreign students, foreign applicants.

Можеевская Алиса Евгеньевна

старший преподаватель

Хайруллина Мария Васильевна

старший преподаватель

ФГАОУ ВО «Южно-Уральский государственный университет

(национальный исследовательский университет)»

г. Челябинск, Челябинская область

ИНФОРМАЦИОННОЕ СОПРОВОЖДЕНИЕ ИНОСТРАННЫХ АБИТУРИЕНТОВ/СТУДЕНТОВ В АКАДЕМИЧЕСКОЙ СРЕДЕ РОССИЙСКОГО УНИВЕРСИТЕТА

Аннотация: статья посвящена вопросу привлечения иностранных студентов для обучения в вузы России, что может привести к экономическому развитию города и региона. Авторами рассматриваются основные каналы

представления информации для иностранных граждан относительно обучения в России. Отражается роль официального сайта вуза, оказываемая на заинтересованность иностранных абитуриентов при выборе образовательного учреждения. Рассмотрены проблемы, препятствующие эффективной информационной работе, и предложены возможные перспективы их решения.

Ключевые слова: *иностранцы студенты, иностранные абитуриенты, информационное сопровождение, заинтересованность.*

Foreigners traditionally intended to get higher education in Russian universities. Over the decades, this trend has become even more global and at the present the goal of attracting foreign students to study in Russia is very significant. At the state level, the export of educational services is determined as a strategically urgent task. Russia is one of the principal states concerning the number of foreign students. The statistics says that the amount of foreign students is steadily rising: in 2019, 298 thousand foreigners studied in Russia, and in 2021 – 324 thousand [10] This is contributed to by the priority project «Development of the export potential of the Russian education system» [4].

Nowadays an important factor of the effectiveness of the university and its academic attractiveness is the presence of foreign students. In addition, the involvement of international students causes an economic effect, which includes not only the growth of direct revenues of the regional budget from the study and residence of foreign students, but also leads to an increase in indirect revenues influencing the regional economy in the long term [5]. Thus, the international direction of universities in Russia is becoming even more relevant.

Foreign students when entering a Russian university and obtaining education face certain difficulties: questions arise about the conditions and rules of admission, paperwork and the possibility of obtaining an education for a foreigner for free or on a commercial basis in Russia. Difficulties to choose the necessary educational institution, get acquainted with educational programs and conditions for entering the university and staying in the country are one of the first. In recent years, due to the prior-

ity of using various Internet resources, information support through the websites of educational companies, websites of universities, social networks has become the main one.

In this work, we will consider the concept of «information support» in relation to foreign students in the educational process of the university.

In accordance with Bogoslovskii V.I., information support of the educational process (ISOP) is a socially, pedagogically and technically organized interaction of participants in the educational process. The main goal of information support is to create favorable organizational and pedagogical conditions that contribute to increasing the efficiency of the educational process [1].

Nekrasova OI, Zlobina OG believe that information support is the provision of full information to foreign applicants with the opportunity to influence their decision to enter Russian universities [3, c. 19].

The team of authors of KFU Vashurina E.V., Vershinina O.A., Eflova M.Yu., Evdokimova Y.Sh., Shakirov A.I., Sabirov R.R. consider information support as an information campaign to promote educational products and services of the university to the world market. The goal of the information campaign to attract foreign students to the university is to form a positive image of Russia, promote the brand of Russian education and increase the number of foreign students at the university and in the country as a whole [6].

There is no doubt that the main function of information support is information and communication, but many researchers claim the image-forming as the first one, so the question of the priority of functions can be considered open.

In the article our own definition of the concept of «information support» in relation to foreign applicants/students was formed.

Information support of foreign applicants/students is a systematic and purposeful process of broadcasting up-to-date information on the process of study and stay in the country through various types of media (Internet, television, radio, etc.), aimed at obtaining this information by foreign applicants/students, as well as at promoting Russian education to the world level.

Following the definition, these objectives of information support for foreign applicants/students are indicated:

- 1) the creation of a positive image of the university abroad and attracting more applicants to the university;
- 2) forming interaction and attracting potential applicants, encouraging admission to a university;
- 3) providing potential applicants/students with the necessary information on the professional activities of the university;
- 4) providing the relevant information on the learning process and stay in the country on a regular basis.

Thus, the content of information support for foreign applicants/students includes:

- keeping information on the websites of educational companies and in social networks relevant;
- forming and distribution of information materials reflecting the content, direction and forms of life of student youth of the university (websites, information stands, newspapers, etc.);
- making conditions for applicants to inform themselves with the peculiarities of the educational process at the university (meetings, conversations, counseling).

Providing foreign applicants with comprehensive information about the university through various information channels can influence the decision not only to study in Russia, but also to receive higher education in a specifically selected educational institution, which will ensure the growth of direct revenues of the university budget and affect the economy of the region in the long term.

The main channels of information support for foreigners on studying abroad are:

- Studyinrussia.ru website – website of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of Russia;
- Websites of private companies (website russia.study);
- Sites of educational institutions (universities);

– Social media (Vkontakte, Telegram, Facebook (принадлежит признанной в России экстремистской Meta), YouTube);

– Alumni Associations

Site Studyinrussia.ru [7]

The site studyinrussia.ru is created for foreign applicants and their parents. Here you can find the necessary information about the system of higher education in Russia as a whole, about the possibilities of studying at universities of the Russian Federation as well as university ratings. Now the site provides information on almost 3,000 educational programs of higher and postgraduate education.

The site has regularly updated pages on the main social networks – Facebook (принадлежит признанной в России экстремистской Meta), Instagram (принадлежит признанной в России экстремистской Meta), Twitter, VKontakte, Google +, as well as a channel on Youtube.

Website of private companies (website russia.study) [8]

The site for the selection of foreign citizens for training in the Russian Federation russia.study presents information about the possibilities of studying at Russian universities. Since 2019, it has been owned by a private company, which previously accepted applications from foreign applicants for scholarships. From 2020 at this site you can send an application only for studying under a contract at a Russian university. All services of the company are paid.

The site has a page on the social network – VKontakte.

Sites of educational institutions (universities)

One of the main sources of information about the university for foreign applicants/students is the official website of the university. Its structure should contain and function sections intended for this category of visitors. And the decision of applicants to choose a university for studying directly depends on the accessibility, structuring, convenient navigation, a correctly working search engine and the completeness of the information presented on the website of the educational institution [2]

The analysis of the websites of Russian universities (BSTU, BelSU, HSE, KFU, NSU, Tyumen State University, SUSU) made it possible to identify the following

components of information support aimed at successfully integrating foreign applicants/students into the academic environment of the university.

The pages on the official websites of universities are created for foreign applicants/students, their parents and contain information in different languages (mainly in Russian, English, Chinese, Arabic), necessary for entering the selected university, studying, staying in Russia, including information about adaptation problems, ways to overcome them and support system.

Information video materials are posted by universities on official websites for foreign applicants/students and include information on living conditions, campus, classrooms, technical equipment of the university.

Programs for the study of the Russian language are offered to applicants/students according to their level of proficiency in the Russian language.

The consulting service helps foreign applicants/students to solve issues of educational, social, cultural and personal nature throughout their stay at the university and in Russia. There one can find cultural and information programs and tours of the city, university, campus, the purpose of which is to introduce foreign applicants/students to vital facilities.

Lecture courses on Russian culture acquaint you with those aspects of the value-regulatory system of Russian culture that foreigners deal with in everyday life: the specifics of academic culture, the specifics of the Russian mentality, behavior, communication. Information about Russian culture is given in comparison with the peculiarities of the native culture of students. Talks, briefings and dating nights provide the most important information about life and study in Russia. Student clubs introduce foreign and Russian students to the cultures of different countries in an informal setting.

Social networks (Vkontakte, Telegram, Facebook (принадлежит признанной в России экстремистской Meta), YouTube, other)

The presence of the university in Russian and foreign social networks Vkontakte, Telegram, Facebook (принадлежит признанной в России экстремистской Meta), Instagram (принадлежит признанной в России экстремистской Meta),

Twitter, YouTube, etc. is a need for Russian universities in modern conditions of the information educational space. With their help, the audience reach is expanding, the number of subscribers and readers is increasing, and this, in turn, contributes to the promotion of the university's brand.

As a rule, on their pages in social networks, universities post the same information as in news feeds on their official websites (duplicate), but in addition, they moderate other topics, forums, depending on the specialization of the network and the preferences of subscribers.

Alumni and Student Associations

The main goals of creating such a public organization are to support foreign applicants/students who are outside the usual living and learning conditions, to resolve issues related to adaptation, study, improving the cultural and intellectual level, medical care, legal and social protection, and strengthening mutual understanding between peoples.

As for SUSU, the official website of the university becomes the main source of information for both a foreign student and a foreign applicant planning to study at SUSU. Information here is available in 4 languages: Russian, English, Chinese and Arabic. The section «International activities» (tabs «Foreign applicants,» «Useful information,» «Entry of foreign students») are the main ones for information support for the integration of foreign applicants/students into the academic environment of the university [9]

The «Foreign Applicants» tab offers step-by-step instructions on how to draw up the necessary documents before arriving in Russia, developed for applicants who are outside of it and plan to enter undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate programs. Applicants in the Russian Federation and applicants entering the preparatory department will find the necessary information on visa renewal, registration and invitation processing.

The section «Entry of foreign students» provides information on the procedure for entering foreign citizens into the territory of the Russian Federation, the medical aspect and admission to classes, issues related to visa application.

In the «Useful Information» tab, foreign applicants/students will find information about the capabilities of the expert center for assessing documents on education, which examines foreign documents on education and advises on the recognition of these documents for use abroad, as well as about the «Translation Bureau» performing translations of special literature, documentation, editing, notarizing documents and issuing an Appendix to the European Diploma.

The section «Testing Center for the Russian Language of Foreign Citizens» offers information on conducting certification exams of different levels of proficiency in Russian as a foreign language, including for entering Russian citizenship. The rules for conducting exams and trial tests are also posted here.

The section «Reception of foreign citizens» contains the coordinates of those responsible for receiving foreign citizens, templates of documents necessary for visiting, the timing of their submission to state structures.

The tab «Association of Foreign Students and Graduates of the Southern Urals» will talk about coordinators (tutors) from different countries who can be contacted by new students and help solve problems and issues related to learning, living and leisure, legal and social protection. Every foreign student can become a member of the Association.

The site has pages in the main social networks – Telegram, VKontakte, Instagram (принадлежит признанной в России экстремистской Meta), etc.

All presented information support channels comprehensively influence the interest of foreign applicants in choosing a country and university for study, as well as influence the support and increased motivation of already studying foreign students. However, in this article, first of all, an analysis of the main channel of information support was carried out, namely the official website of the South Ural State University. As a result, the following problems were identified: lack of usability of content, the presence of irrelevant information on the site and, as a result, the loss of future contingent and finances for the university.

In a detailed analysis of the site, several obvious problems were highlighted that need to be resolved:

1. The «Useful Information» tab on the official website of the university is outwardly little informative.
2. The Foreign Student tab is missing.
3. There is irrelevant information and non-working links, following which the system issues an empty page.
4. The Association of International Students» tab is «hidden» in the «Useful Information» section and is difficult to find.
5. The English version of the site, as the main source of information, is friendlier to the user (diagrams, infographics) at the same time on the Russian-language version of the site the information is presented in the form of large volumes of text, which is less convenient.
6. Updating the current information about the life of the university in the English version of the site lags behind the same process in the Russian version.

The official website of the university is the main and primary source of information for both foreign students and applicants. As mentioned above, one of the functions of information support is image-forming, since it is with the help of acquaintance with the site that the applicant has an interest in a particular educational institution. In view of the leading role of the Internet in communications and the growing competition in the market of educational services, each university should pay great attention to how it is represented in the Internet space, since effective internationalization of the university is impossible without a high-quality English-language site.

At this stage, we highlighted the problems affecting the perception of the university, and all of them require elimination, since the modernization of the site and its content is the first step to improve the image of the university and increase the interest of applicants. In the future, a study will be conducted on the difficulties faced by foreign applicants in the process of acquaintance with the educational space of Russia.

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